

# UNIVERSITY OF NICOSIA

## An Integrated Framework of the Effect of Social Media Usage on Employee Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication in the Hospitality Industry of Cyprus

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PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) in Business Administration

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An Integrated Framework of the Effect of Social Media Usage on  
Employee Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication in the Hospitality  
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## **Abstract**

This Thesis explores the role of employee Social Media (SM) usage on employee electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behaviour. Specifically, this study examines the effect of employee SM usage on workplace bonding social capital ties (social and emotional support) and positive and negative employee eWOM behavior, through employee satisfaction.

Initially, the Thesis undertakes an extensive narrative literature review analysis, identifying extant knowledge and gaps, and culminating in the development of a preliminary conceptual framework that is empirically tested in the Cyprus hospitality industry.

The primary research itself adopts the critical realism perspective and designs and applies a qualitative methodological approach. The qualitative research data gathering technique adopted in this study is that of semi-structured interviews, with the participation of 31 informants. The analysis of the results applies the thematic analysis technique, through the identification of patterns, themes and subthemes. Based on these, and incorporating all critical primary research findings, the final conceptual framework is developed and presented.

The findings of the research highlight the positive effect of employee SM social usage on social and emotional support; themselves associated with many organisational benefits, including that of employee satisfaction. Disadvantages are also identified, but these are limited both in number and effect. Further, it is found that the positive effect of employee SM social usage leads to positive employee eWOM behaviour, with employees acting as online brand ambassadors. Employee dissatisfaction, which is related to the negative effect of employee SM social usage on workplace socio-emotional support, leads to neutral employee eWOM. Finally, particular value stems from the findings' identification of two important factors affecting the examined relationship: the age of SM users and the quality of the workplace face-to-face employee relationships.

Overall, the findings of this research provide significant practical and theoretical insights for both practitioners and academics. In terms of scholarly contribution to knowledge, the empirically tested framework outlines the positive outcomes related to employee SM usage and identifies new correlations among the Human Resources Management and Marketing contexts, with wider and tangible business context benefits. Practically and practicably, it sets the ground for creating internal and external organisational benefits. The former (internal organisational benefits) are

related to the enhancement of bonding ties among employees and the increase of employee satisfaction. Regarding the latter (external), the final framework indicates that employee SM usage can be the ‘driver’ to positive employee eWOM.

**Keywords:** social media, workplace social capital, employee social support, employee emotional support, workplace bonding ties, employee satisfaction, employee dissatisfaction, electronic employee word-of-mouth, employee ambassadorship, hospitality industry.



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## **Dedication**

*To the 'angels' of my life my twin baby girls and my husband.*



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Last but not least, I would like to thank God for guiding me and supporting me through the difficult and demanding times of this experience.

## Declaration

I declare that the work in this Thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Nicosia. This Thesis has been composed solely by myself except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgement. It has not been previously submitted, in whole or in part, to this or any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

Signed .....

Date .....

Georgia Sakka Vronti



## Author's Publications

Chatterjee, S., Chaudhuri, S., **Sakka, G.**; Apoorva, A. (Accepted, 2021), “Cross-disciplinary issues in International Marketing: A Systematic Literature Review on International Marketing and Ethical Issues”, *International Marketing Review*. (Scopus Indexed, 3 Stars ABS)

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## **ABBREVIATIONS INDEX**

CR	Critical Realism
COVID-19	Coronavirus
CTO	Cyprus Tourist Organisation
ESM	Enterprise Social Media
ESM	Enterprise Social Network
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
Gen Y	Generation Y
eWOM	Electronic Word-of-Mouth
HRM	Human Resources Management
RO	Research Objective
RSS	Rich Site Summary
IQs	Interview Questions
RQs	Research Questions
SM	Social Media
SNSs	Social Networking Sites
UGC	User-generated content

# **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

The advent of social media (SM) is taking tremendous dimensions, becoming one of the most common means through which people around the world connect, interact, and socialise with others. According to recent statistics, SM users passed the four billion mark globally (Olafson and Tran, 2021), and through a plethora of SM sites, communication among people has expanded in an ‘online interactivity planetary’ (Nisar, Prabhakar and Strakovaa, 2019). This form of communication has rapidly become integrated into the organisational landscape and has changed communication dynamics in the workplace. Corresponding to this vigorously changing communication era, Human Resource Management (hereinafter HRM) and Marketing scholars have started to empirically examine the negative and the positive impacts of this new phenomenon from multiple perspectives, including those of the organisation, the employees and the customers. In this vein, the present Thesis examines the role of SM usage in the workplace and its positive or negative effect on employee electronic word-of-mouth (hereinafter eWOM) behavior.

Structurally, the Introduction chapter first presents the research background and research problem. It then states the research aim and objectives that lead the research study. Subsequently, it elaborates on the hospitality industry of Cyprus, which is the context of this study. The research’s contribution to theory and practice are then discussed, and the Thesis outline is presented.

### **1.1 Research background and problem statement**

SM has largely changed the way people communicate, collaborate, share, give and receive (Ali-Hassan et al., 2015; Sakka and Ahammad, 2020; Chen and Wei, 2020). Inevitably, this change is reflected in modern workplaces as well. Hence, a rapidly growing body of literature on the topic examines the way employees use SM and the manner in which it affects modern organisations. Specifically, SM studies in the HRM domain have examined in various ways SM usage in workplaces, in order to identify and define both positive and negative implications for employees and organisations. Some of these studies identified negative outcomes, such as misbehaviour at work, online bullying, harassment, and reduced productivity (McDonald and Thompson, 2016; Lam, 2016; Lyngs et al., 2020). Conversely, others identified positive outcomes (Kim et al., 2010; Wickramasingh and Nisaf, 2013; Conner, 2014; Kwahk and Park, 2016; Ewing et al., 2019; Chen

and Wei, 2020), such as positive organisational outcomes and productivity (Moqbel et al., 2013), or benefits related to employee work-life balance (Leidner et al., 2010), increased collaboration, trust and communication among employees (Parry and Solidoro, 2014; Ewing et al., 2019), and even facilitation of knowledge transfer (Nisar, Prabhakar and Strakovaa, 2019) and increased trust (Cao et al., 2012; Kluemper et al., 2016; Yang, 2020).

## **1.2 The knowledge gap**

Consequent to the contradictory nature of the findings, various researchers call for further research on this topic. This is because organisations are called upon to adapt their related strategies to achieve possible organisational and employee benefits and also to minimize workplace drawbacks (Moqbel et al., 2013; Dreher, 2014; Badea, 2014; Schimidt et al., 2016; Kluemper et al., 2016; Men and Muralidharan, 2017; Hanna et al., 2017; Song et al., 2019; Lee, 2020). In relation to this, currently, there is scarce research examining how employee SM usage for communicating among employees affects employee and organisational performance outcomes (Chen and Wei, 2020). As Lee (2020) argued, SM employee behavior has been examined through various perspectives, but limited studies have investigated the effect of those behaviors – negative or positive – on the employee or organisational level.

Corresponding to this gap and considering that this is a research area that is still developing, this study contributes to this domain by examining how employee SM usage affects positive or negative employee eWOM behavior. This is achieved by focusing on the role of workplace bonding social capital, and more specifically by examining how employee SM usage affects the sources forming bonding social capital, which is social and emotional support. This research, thus, contributes to employee SM usage theory by examining the effect of social usage of SM on exchange relationships outcomes (emotional and social) and employee satisfaction, leading to employee eWOM behavior in the workplace settings.

## **1.3 Research focus**

In essence, when employees engage in SM usage to socially communicate and interact with their colleagues, this interaction may influence the way the workplace bonding social capital is formed and developed. Social capital is derived from and develops through the social connections among

individuals in an organisation or a community (King and Lee, 2016). Therefore, social capital is the network of relationships in an organisation, referring not only to the interpersonal relationships but also to the resources forming these relationships (Putnam, 2000; Cao et al., 2016). More specifically, social capital is a complex construct, because researchers have different conceptualisations of the phenomenon. Some of them examine it as an effect, and others as a cause (Sias and Duncan, 2020). However, as it is further clarified in the Literature Review Chapter, this Thesis follows Putnam's view (2000), which identifies social capital as social networks and relationships, but also as the norms arising from them.

The quality of social capital relationships can be either strong or weak. Strong ties are related to emotionally close relationships, like family and friends. These are referred to as bonding social ties. Weak ties are mainly based on useful information exchange or connected with common career interests, and are referred to as bridging ties (Putnam, 2000; Ellison et al., 2007; Bao, 2016; van Osch and Bulgurcu, 2020). It has been suggested that existing studies have not yet investigated satisfactorily how social capital is affected by the usage of SM, and how this develops individual behaviors; similarly limited empirical research has been focused on measuring the social capital ties within SM (Xerry and Brunetto, 2010; Pinho, 2013; Kwahk and Park, 2015; Sias and Duncan, 2020).

Further, it seems that previous literature based on social ties and SM, is mainly focused on bridging social ties, and related literature is questioning if the usage of SM can affect the strong ties – bonding or expressive ties of an organisation (Bargh and Mckenna, 2004; Ellison et al., 2007, Li and Chen, 2014; Neves, 2015; van Osch and Bulgurcu, 2020). Therefore, this Thesis examines only the bonding social capital ties within the workplace, to examine how SM interaction among colleagues, is associated with employee positive or negative eWOM.

eWOM is related to online, informal, but intended communication that enhances the quality of an organisation, a brand, or a service in the eyes of different stakeholders, such as consumers, employees, or customers (Jun et al., 2017). Therefore, eWOM may be related to the thoughts, opinions, and feelings of employees for their organisation or brand, and these are expressed online through online messages, online reviews or posts and comments (Walsh et al., 2016). Recent research (Lee, 2020) also refers to eWOM employee behavior as employees' communicative behaviors (ECB). As Lee (2020) states, limited studies have empirically explained the motivations

behind this behavior. One of those motivations may be the online social capital through employee SM usage (see Huang and Liu, 2017; Lee, 2020). Therefore, this present Thesis seeks to examine and understand if and in what ways the fulfilment of socio-emotional needs of employees, through SM usage, is connected with this behavior.

Previous research on the subject indicated that employee SM usage and expressive ties provide emotional support for innovation (Ali-Hassan et al., 2015). Under the context of this study, innovative job performance is the development of new, creative and useful ideas by employees, implemented at work (Ali-Hassan et al., 2015). More recently also, Lee (2020), discovered that individual, interpersonal and organisational factors are linked with employee SM behavioural intentions. Further, Walsh et al. (2020) tried to measure employees' company reputation-related SM competence and provided some important implications for managers and researchers in order to guide modern organisations on how to pursue positive employee eWOM behavior. This is because, as Huotari et al. (2015) assert, employees could be positive content creators through SM, and companies could consider this as a new marketing opportunity. Potential customers can be the friends or the followers of employees in SM networking, and employees could be the connection to successful reputation strategies (Walsh et al., 2016; Sakka and Ahammad, 2020).

Currently, there is limited evidence on how employees use SM tools in the workplace, and how this affects the organisational and professional networks (Fusi and Zhang, 2020; Yang, 2020). Towards this end, this Thesis investigates the social SM usage among colleagues in the organisational settings of the Cyprus hospitality industry to contribute to the understanding of employee SM usage in association with workplace social capital and employee eWOM behavior. Consequently, the research background of this Thesis lies on three distinctive but, under the concept of this study, interrelated research areas that are employee SM usage, workplace social capital ties and employee eWOM behavior.

#### **1.4 Research aim, objectives and research questions**

Following the problem definition and the presentation of the theoretical background to the three main research fields pertaining to this research (employee SM usage, workplace social capital ties and employee eWOM behavior) the research aim, objectives and research questions (RQs hereinafter RQs) of the Thesis are hereby presented.

The overarching **aim** of this research is to theoretically examine and empirically validate the effect of social media (SM) usage on employee online word-of-mouth behavior (eWOM), in the context of workplace bonding social capital and employee satisfaction within Cyprus's hospitality industry.

More specifically, this Thesis shall:

- a) undertake an extensive literature review of all prominent and seminal extant works that are central or peripheral to its subject, to identify gaps and establish the theoretical foundations upon which the empirical part of the research and analysis shall be performed;
- b) subsequently and consequently develop a (within-focus) comprehensive preliminary conceptual framework to explicitly identify and interrelate the elements and relationships to be empirically tested;
- c) describe the methodology and corresponding philosophy and justification, through which the primary research shall be conducted;
- d) present the results, discussion and findings of the research, and utilize them to refine and finalise the framework, which shall assist in identifying any negative or positive effects of employee SM social usage on workplace bonding social capital and positive or negative employee eWOM behavior in the Cyprus hospitality industry;
- e) conclude with the delineated contributions to theory, the practical implications for management, and the avenues for further research.

The **Research Objectives** (hereinafter **ROs**) of this Thesis are:

RO1: To study the existing theory on SM social capital effects in the workplace and on employee satisfaction and eWOM communication.

RO2: To empirically delineate the way SM social usage influences employee social relations.

RO3: To understand the degree and nature of the effect of workplace bonding ties on employee satisfaction.

RO4: To examine the combined resulting effect of employee's SM usage on eWOM.

RO5: To incorporate the above relationships (RO2, RO3 and RO4) into an integrated descriptive framework by linking employee social usage of SM, workplace bonding ties and employee satisfaction to eWOM.

RO6: To conceptually extrapolate from the above towards a prescriptive development of theoretical propositions and practicable instructions for managerial implementation.

Finally, the **Research Questions** of this study are:

**RQ1: How does employees' SM social usage affect workplace bonding ties?**

RQ1a: How does employees' SM social usage affect workplace emotional support?

RQ1b: How does employees' SM social usage affect workplace social support?

**RQ2: How do workplace bonding ties affect employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction?**

RQ2a: How does workplace emotional support affect employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction?

RQ2b: How does workplace social support affect employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction?

**RQ3: How does employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction affect employees' eWOM behavior?**

## **1.5 The hospitality industry of Cyprus – justification of focus**

This section sets the empirical context of this study and elaborates on the reasons underlying this choice. The study takes place in the context of the Cyprus hospitality industry, and specifically, primary data is collected through informants working at luxury 4\* and 5\* hotels in Cyprus.

The hospitality industry is important at an international level, as it is considered the world's largest-growing industry (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009; Anasori et al., 2021). This is an industry that incorporates a lot of businesses, such as transport, travel companies, hotels, and many more (Lock, 2021). Therefore, it is big and diverse in nature (Stafford, 2020). The importance of this industry also lies in the fact that it affects other markets as well, such as retail and construction (KPMG, 2019). Especially, due to the increase in worldwide travel during the last decade (2009-2019), the hospitality industry in general, and more specifically the hotel's industry market has grown significantly (Statista, 2021). This industry, at an international level, contributes significantly to the gross domestic product (hereinafter GDP) and largely affects economies worldwide (Lock,

2021). Specifically, the total contribution to GDP worldwide for 2019 was over 8.9 trillion US dollars to the global economy in 2019, which represents 10.3% of the world's total GDP (Stafford, 2020). That is why, the World Travel and Tourism Council titled the hospitality industry's importance as the main driver in global value creation (Stafford, 2020).

Looking at other studies that took place in other countries, King and Lee (2016) examined the role of SM in the development of internal communication in the hospitality industry, in South Korea. They discovered that employee SM usage corresponds to employees' personal needs for close relationships, encouragement between colleagues and social ties. When this need is satisfied, employees provide better service quality (Cornelissen, 2014; Lee and Kim, 2020; Anasori et al., 2021). Yang (2020) also investigated the SM friendly usage between colleagues, within the hospitality industry, by examining motivational and de-motivational factors, and found out that there are a lot of advantages related to coworker SM interaction, such as workplace fun. Ewin et al. (2019), examined the role of SM in engaging employees in the United States. They discovered that several internal SM practices are used within this industry, to engage employees and enhance internal communication among employees. Kansakar et al. (2019), examine employee SM usage in the Chinese hospitality industry and identified that employees use SM for seeking and sharing informal knowledge among colleagues. Lastly, Ladkin and Buhalis (2016) therefore, emphasises the importance of an online presence and discusses how SM impact HRM trends nowadays, considering also relevant implications for hospitality employers and employees.

It should be noted that this industry, has been largely affected by the coronavirus ( hereinafter COVID-19) pandemic that appeared in early 2020 (Lock, 2021). Therefore, even though the World Tourism Organisation, projected that tourist arrivals would cross 1.5 billion by 2020 at an international level, due to COVID-19 and the governments' lockdowns, this prediction was altered (Stafford, 2020). Consequently, the contribution of the industry dropped to a 3.7% GDP decline of the worldwide economy in 2020 and 62 million jobs were lost in 2020 globally (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2021). Given also other challenges that the industry is facing, such as the adoption of new technologies and the ongoing changing consumption and travel behaviours (Kansakar et al., 2019), several researchers acknowledge the need for further empirical and rigorous research within this industry (Stafford, 2020).

In addition, only a few business studies have investigated the opportunities of SM usage for the tourism industry (Ladkin and Buhalis, 2016; King and Lee, 2016; Ewing et al., 2019; Yang, 2020). Taking also into consideration the significance of social capital and its impact on organisational performance, the studies of these elements within the hospitality area are restricted (Zhao et al., 2011; Sainaghi and Baggio, 2014; King and Lee, 2016; Yang, 2020). More hospitality studies are needed to link employee SM usage with marketing benefits (Ozgen and Kozak, 2015) in such a challenging industry (Anasori et al., 2021).

Similarly, further research is needed in regards to effective internal communication practices in this specific industry (King and Lee, 2016; Yang, 2020). More particularly, studies that have examined the concept of social capital and employee SM usage within the hospitality workplace are scarce (Zhao et al., 2011; King and Lee, 2016; Anasori et al., 2021). In relation to this, due to the ongoing redevelopment and enhancement of SM tools, new opportunities have emerged for the hotel industry, and updated research and knowledge is needed (Ozgen and Kozak, 2015; Yang, 2020).

Employee eWOM behavior also is considered a very important marketing tool for the specific industry. This is because, informal eWOM actions, are very important for guests' satisfaction, loyalty, and trust (Ozgen and Kozak, 2015). In connection with this, industry customers' experience is extremely important and depends on internal employee communication and satisfaction. In this vein, the framework of this study contributes to the enhancement of workplace social capital of the hotels and identifies new and updated ways and mechanisms for promoting positive employee eWOM behavior via employee SM usage, within the Cyprus hospitality industry.

Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean, and according to Statistical Services of the country and its last updated records, its population at the end of 2019 was 888,000 (Ministry of Finance, 2019). The amalgamation of various positive factors, such as the island's geographical position, the high quality of service, its combination of sun and sea and other natural, and cultural resources attract a considerable number of tourists from various countries from all around the world (KPMG, 2019).

Following the country's official Statistical Service agency, in 2019 almost 4 million tourists arrived in Cyprus (Statistical Service-Republic of Cyprus, 2019). Specifically, according to the

latest statistics between January and December 2019, tourists' arrivals reached the number of 3.976.777, compared to 3.938.625 for the equivalent period of 2018, which is considered a significant increase (Ministry of Finance, 2019). Therefore this is an industry that is characterised by continuous substantial growth and significant increases in revenue terms (KPMG, 2019).

Over the past years, tourism is not only considered one of the most important sectors of the Cyprus economy but the backbone of the island's economy. The economy of the island is largely dependent on this industry, as its contribution to Cyprus GDP is significant (Marneros et al., 2020). Specifically, for 2019 the total GDP contribution of this industry was 13.4% (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2021). Similarly important is also the contribution of this industry to the employment of the country, as one in four new jobs between 2014-2019, were created by the hospitality industry (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2021). However, due to the highly competitive character of this industry, the Cyprus hospitality industry has been facing many challenges, as the market has become saturated and demanding (Marneros et al., 2020). In responding to these challenges in the coming years, new big hotel infrastructures, new marinas and new golf courses are expected to be developed (KPMG, 2019). However, to accomplish all these developments and actions organised by the Cyprus Tourist Organisation (hereinafter CTO) and to sustain growth in the industry, the human resources of this industry must not be overlooked or neglected.

Considering that Cyprus is a major international tourist destination in one of the fastest-growing global industries (Marneros et al., 2020), the findings of this research are of theoretical and practical international worth, as much as they are of local. The Cyprus hospitality industry thus offers an ideal context to investigate employee eWOM behaviour, and the results of this Thesis could be a valuable basis both for making international comparisons and for designing effective organisational strategies and policies at a national and an international level (Marneros et al., 2020; Anasori et al., 2021).

Following the aforementioned factors and concurrent literature gaps, the Cyprus hospitality industry presents a suitable context in which the present Thesis may develop valuable insights at both the national and international levels.

## **1.6 Contribution to theory and practice**

The research contributes substantial new knowledge to both theory (academia) and practice (industry). The subject is, by nature, new and technology-based, and lacks investigation in extant research. The research also presents executives with practicable new descriptive and prescriptive findings that can be applied in the industry. Both the knowledge gaps and the research's contribution towards these are subsequently presented in greater detail (chapters 2 and 5, correspondingly), but are also hereby summarily noted.

### ***Theoretical Contributions:***

This study significantly contributes to existing theory by creating new knowledge for the three involved areas: two HRM oriented areas, which are workplace social capital and employee SM usage in the workplace; and one marketing-oriented area, which is employee eWOM.

Corresponding to the demands of the new digital society, this Thesis contributes to the theoretical domain of employee SM usage in modern workplaces and the related positive and negative effects on both employee and organisational levels. Particularly, through this study new insights have been found into the ways employee SM usage affects the bonding social capital of hospitality workplaces. Concurrently, it adds to the existing workplace social capital theory, as it examines the way employee SM usage affects employee socio-emotional support. Specifically, it indicates updated correlations among essential bonding constructs, such as employee emotional and social support, with employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and explains how these form individual behaviors within the marketing orientation, such as employee eWOM.

In parallel, this Thesis contributes to the theoretical knowledge of employee eWOM in the hospitality industry. According to related literature, eWOM is considered a major source of hotels' information that influences consumers' opinions (Litvin et al., 2018; Yang, 2020). Therefore, from a theoretical approach, this study creates a new framework including a new mechanism that describes how hotels can leverage positive employee eWOM and further enhance their brand's online image and reputation.

This study adds knowledge to various theoretical management domains such as hospitality industry, workplace SM usage, workplace social capital, employee satisfaction, employee eWOM behavior and employee ambassadorship.

### ***Methodological Contributions:***

Regarding the methodological contribution of this Thesis, various researchers have called for further qualitative research in this domain, as the majority of previous research on this topic has been mainly quantitative (see Ali-Hassan et al., 2015; Gonzalez, 2015; Huang and Liu, 2017). Further, face-to-face data-gathering approaches, such as interviews, help the researcher to collect in-depth, rich data and valuable results. Therefore, the qualitative approach assists to theoretically explain employee behaviors in relation to SM usage and defines possible implications for today's workplaces and organisations.

### ***Practical Contributions:***

This study provides both HR and marketing practitioners an understanding of how employee SM usage affects employees' bonding social ties and positive or negative eWOM behavior. Consequently, this Thesis significantly contributes to updating guidelines on how organisations can redefine their strategies and integrate SM into their communication policy. This will help them to reach both internal (such as to strengthen the ties of employees and enhance employee satisfaction) and external organisational benefits (such as to pursue positive employee eWOM). Organisations also must not ignore the Generation Y (hereinafter Gen Y) employees that will dominate the workplaces in a few years (Mehra and Nickerson, 2019). Organisations must comprehend how SM usage affects Gen Y workplace ties and find innovative ways to take advantage of SM to fulfil their needs. This will help them to differentiate and obtain a sustainable competitive advantage in the modern workplace.

## **1.7 Thesis structure**

The Thesis is structured in an orthodox manner and according to the corresponding regulations of the University of Nicosia. It starts with a general introduction, proceeds with the theoretical part of the work, then presents the methodology, the results and discussion, and finally the conclusions and implications. Specifically:

**Chapter 1 Introduction.** This chapter presents the area of research and includes the main aim, objectives and RQs of this Thesis. It also provides important information about the context of this

study in relation to the involved industry. Further, a brief introduction to theoretical and practical contributions is achieved. Finally, the Thesis structure is outlined.

**Chapter 2 Literature Review.** This chapter reviews and summarises existing knowledge and theory related to the phenomenon under investigation. It, therefore, identifies related gaps and inconsistencies in the relevant theory and formulates the RQs. In this way, the preliminary conceptual framework is developed and presented.

**Chapter 3 Methodology.** This chapter clarifies the overall approach this Thesis takes. In the beginning, it states the philosophical positioning of the researcher and defines the research design and the data-gathering technique. Finally, it provides detailed information about the data analysis process and describes how data quality is achieved.

**Chapter 4 Data Analysis and Discussion.** This chapter presents and discusses the primary data that answer the RQs and meet the Thesis objectives. The analysis and discussion of the data are achieved by developing relevant themes and categories.

**Chapter 5 Conclusion.** This chapter presents the synopsis of the main findings for each research question and presents the final conceptual framework. Further, it discusses in detail the contribution to theory and practice, presents the limitations of the study and suggests some opportunities for further research.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced the main subject of this Thesis. It has also presented the study's problem statement, aim, objectives and research questions. Further, it has provided background information in regards to the context of the study, which is the hospitality industry of Cyprus, and has elaborated on the contribution of this work from both the theoretical and the practical approach. Lastly, it has described the structure of the Thesis. The next chapter is the literature review and includes the preliminary conceptual framework this Thesis developed.

**CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND INITIAL  
CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT**

## **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter is a review, examination, evaluation and synthesis of extant empirical and theoretical underpinnings that define the conceptual scope and context of this research and it generally provides an overview of prior research on the interrelated main themes and concepts of this study.

Specifically, this chapter begins with an in-depth analysis of SM platforms, including related terminology, SM characteristics and SM classification. It then elaborates on employee SM usage in the workplace, including the different dimensions of SM usage by employees, and, more importantly, it discusses the positive and negative implications for organisations. Then, it sheds light on the social capital theories from the HR perspective, in an attempt to define and describe the workplace bonding ties and their relationship with employee SM usage. In addition, this chapter thoroughly analyses negative and positive employee eWOM behavior from the theoretical perspective, including employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Finally, the chapter presents the theoretical gap and the Thesis's preliminary conceptual framework.

## **2.1 Social media**

### **2.1.1 Understanding social media**

SM is considered one of the most noteworthy creations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which facilitates a new, virtual way of communicating among people (Bennett et al., 2010; Song et al., 2019). It has influenced the world in an inevitable way, not only at the individual level but also at the organisational and social levels (Ngai et al., 2015; Lam, 2016; Capriotti et al., 2020). This new form of communication has changed the daily life of people and consequently the social relations of employees in the workplace (Wolf et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2016; van Prooijen et al., 2018).

Before analysing SM usage in the workplace settings, it is important to discuss the recent development and evolution of SM platforms and to elaborate on the relevant types of such platforms, which people use nowadays.

### **2.1.1.1 What is social media?**

#### *Evolution of social media*

The World Wide Web (WWW) or web, is a techno-social system based on technological networks and modern innovative technology that facilitates cognition and communication among people (Aghaei et al., 2012; Simon, 2012; Capriotti et al., 2020). The technology of the web was developed in 1989 by Tim Berners-Lee and since then has been developed and has progressed via different phases during the last years (Dhingra and Mudgal, 2019). Web 1.0 was the web of cognition (Aghaei et al., 2012; Briciu and Briciu, 2021), or the web of documents, and it started in 1993 (Choudhury, 2014). It was introduced with the development of the Internet, and it lasted from 1996 to 2004 (Choudhury, 2014; Appel et al., 2020). It created passive users, as people could only access information online (Badeaa, 2014). This is because the role of the web user was ‘to read’ only, and therefore, it is defined as the web of information connections (Choudhury, 2014; Brailovskaia et al., 2020). It is a static environment as the content is static and there is no interaction among users (Briciu and Briciu, 2021).

A few years later, Web 2.0 technology gave birth to a communication revolution (Bolton et al., 2013; Briciu and Briciu, 2021). Web 2.0 the communication web or the ‘web of people’ lasted from 2004 to 2016 (Choudhury, 2014; Capriotti et al., 2020). Web 2.0 lubricated the active users with the advent of SM platforms (Bennett et al., 2010), where active users could create information, share content, and even comment on existing information and content (Wolf et al., 2015; Capriotti et al., 2020). Therefore, two important characteristics of this technology are user-generated content (hereinafter UGC) and the accessibility of different forms of communication between the users (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Rai, 2011; Wolf et al., 2015; Lam, 2016). Consequently, Web 2.0 was the ‘read’ and ‘write’ web (Choudhury, 2014; Briciu and Briciu, 2021).

Web 3.0 is the co-operation web, or the web of data, and it started in 2014 (Choudhury, 2014; Farzad et al., 2019). It is also called the ‘semantic web, because it is mostly based on semantic technologies and social computing or the technology of personalisation (Aghaei, et al., 2012; Jacksi and Abass, 2019). It facilitates the operation of numerous social web communities, automatically manipulates web services and control large scale applications (Simon, 2012; Jacksi and Abass, 2019). It, therefore, enables the operation between human and machines and minimises

in this way, tasks and decisions taken by people (Aghaei et al., 2012). Specifically, the semantic web is a system that facilitates machines to understand and obey human requests (Choudhury, 2014). In light of Web 3.0 innovations, SM has been improved in terms of new tools and features, and employee participation and communication is even further enhanced (Simon, 2012; Farzad et al., 2019). The traditional static web is developing into a new interactive web due to the intelligent machines, which enable users to have a different approach according to their personal preferences (Jacksi and Abass, 2019). It is also empowered by technologies of co-creation, where also people generate their opinion about brands and organisations (Farzad et al., 2019).

Finally, yet importantly, Web 4.0 started in 2015, and it is based on intelligent interactions where the human mind and machines collaborate for the best result (Jacksi and Abass, 2019). This kind of technology is as powerful as the human brain, because its progress is reaching advanced technological innovations, such as nanotechnology (Choudhury, 2014). It is also called the web of integration (Aghaei et al., 2012). It is very intelligent for searching for information and very easy to use (Jacksi and Abass, 2019).

### ***Defining social media***

There is not a common definition for identifying the meaning of SM. Nevertheless, several definitions proposed by the scholarly community, are mainly based on two important constructs: the development of UGC content and the accessibility of different forms of communication between the users (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Rai, 2011; Wolf et al., 2015, Lam, 2016). One of the most widely used SM definitions in literature says that SM is “*a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content*” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). In other words, SM is a group of online (internet-based) sites or platforms, that have been created with the manifestation of Web 2.0 technology (Wu, 2016). These SM sites have enabled people to actively participate in virtual communities, by creating and sharing content, such as photos, texts and links, and to find various ways and tools for interacting online with each other (Doyle et al., 2015; Lam, 2016; Song et al., 2019). It is a range of various Web 2.0 internet-based tools that enable the exchange of information among users (Briciu and Briciu, 2021). Appel et al. (2020,

p.80) argue that “*social media can be thought of in a few different ways. In a practical sense, it is a collection of software-based digital technologies—usually presented as apps and websites—that provide users with digital environments in which they can send and receive digital content or information over some type of online social network*”. SM, therefore, is referred to as updated electronic communicational channels, that are based on a virtual environment. This virtual environment takes the form of blogs, discussion forums or SNSs (Berger, 2008; Lin et al., 2020). In the next section, the SM platforms are classified, and their purpose and various tools are explained.

### **2.1.1.2 Classification of social media platforms**

In general, SM sites may include blogs, SNSs such as Facebook, rating sites, online communities, e-pages, wikis, rich site summary (hereinafter RSS), video sharing sites, private company intranets and photo-sharing sites (Ribiere et al., 2010; Bolton et al., 2013; Conner, 2014). There are various ways to classify SM sites. For example, they can be classified according to their context. Some SM sites are work-related, such as LinkedIn.com, video sharing sites like Youtube, microblogging sites, like Twitter and Facebook (Ellison et al., 2007; Whiting and Williams, 2013; Chen and Wei, 2020). However, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) believed that the large group of SM applications can be separated according to two aspects: media richness and social presence. For example, YouTube could be considered less as reach media, as it enables users to upload and share videos, while Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram encompass additional social interaction and communication tools between users.

Doyle et al. (2015) adopted Haplan’s and Haenlein’s (2010) classification, but, after conducting a literature review on SM, they concluded there are six categories of SNSs: virtual worlds, collaborative projects, microblogs, blogs and content communities. This classification is developed based on the different affordances provided to users, and therefore the different tasks that can be implemented. Below, a brief description is provided for each category. SNS is the most widely used category, while the other types of SM are less used (Sigala and Chalkiti, 2015), and for this reason, more emphasis is given to the category of SNS.

SNSs are divided into two different types, public SNSs and internal SNSs, otherwise called enterprise social media (hereinafter ESM) (Wei et al., 2020) and or enterprise social network (hereinafter ESN) (Chatterjee et al., 2021). Internal SNSs are created and run by individual organisations for different purposes such as to achieve better internal communication for their staff, to connect workers or even to solve problems (Lam, 2016). Internal SNSs can facilitate the sharing of work-related knowledge and expertise among employees (Wei et al., 2020) and enhance business-related informal discussions among colleagues (Chatterjee et al., 2021). A few examples are D Street at Deloitte and Watercooler at HP (Moqbel et al., 2013), and others more recently developed SNSs such as Jive, Chatter, DingTalk, Slack, IBM Connections, and Yammer (Wei et al., 2020).

Public SNSs are organized by commercial providers to be open to the public, but with age restrictions, and they are usually free of charge. Public SNSs is the most popular and widely used category and they are user-friendly interfaces (Rai, 2011). The users are able to create their own profile by including personal information or uploading photos and texts, and inviting other users, who may be friends, colleagues or family, to view this information (Lin and Lu, 2011; Wickramasingh and Nisaf, 2013; Doyle et al., 2015). Therefore, this type of SM enables users to share their feelings, like happiness and anger, with their SNS friends (Rai, 2002). Parallel to this, an SNS is based on the development of online communities of people who share the same interests, activities or even values. In this way, they can present themselves, their interests, knowledge and background, create their private social network and maintain a connection with the members (Lin and Lu, 2011). Specifically, users have different ways to interact with each other (Lu and Yang, 2014) with the help of specific technical tools, such as instant messaging, chat rooms, discussion groups and file sharing (Bennett et al., 2010; Choi and Scott, 2012). Therefore, users create their own social capital network, maintain existing relationships and keep building new connections (Choi and Scott, 2012). A few examples of SNSs are Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and MySpace (Haeger and Lingham, 2014; Kluemper et al., 2016). The most popular SNS, with billions of users worldwide, is Facebook (Lam, 2016). This study includes only public SM and SNSs, because they are accessible, free of charge and open to the public. Further reasons are provided below.

One important reason for focusing on public SNSs is the extensive use of them globally and their substantial ongoing growth that has impacted the way people interact in their life and the way employees communicate, feel and behave in the workplace (Broughton et al., 2010). Since there is the ‘ability to access these sites anytime and anywhere using different and affordable devices (such as mobile phones) offers the potential for even wider use’ (Wickramasinghe and Nisaf, 2013). Users have access to SNSs from computers, tablets, and smartphones at any time of day (Kluemper et al, 2016). Therefore, a lot of researchers propose that future research is needed in this area to fully realize the implications of public SNSs (Bennett et al., 2010; Bolton et al., 2013; Bugsham et al., 2014; Gibbs et al., 2015; McDonald and Thompson, 2016). Secondly, management at some organisations implement internal SNSs to enhance communication and collaboration among employees, however, not all organisations run these kinds of sites. Therefore, this study explores the use of public SNSs that employees use individually either inside or outside of the workplace.

Particularly, SNSs are e-platforms aiming to achieve users’ social participation and interaction (Bao, 2016). Not only do they enable users to connect between themselves and create a profile but also share and seek information, read news and articles, share photos and daily experiences, and view what others share (Lu and Yang, 2014; Bao, 2016). It is even considered as a way of searching for social support online (Bugshan et al., 2014; Lin et al., 2016). Further, SNSs could work as an essential educational or marketing tool not only due to their technological and social capacity but also due to their popularity, and industry can take advantage of SNSs to achieve different benefits (Lu and Yang, 2014). For example, an SNS can be used as a learning platform between colleagues or organisations could use an SNS to promote their services or products, as it could be considered as an operative channel for positive eWOM (Choi and Scott, 2012). Generally, as it is explained at a later stage, organisations can achieve important external and internal outcomes through SNSs (Rai, 2011; Sakka and Ahammad, 2020). Below, a brief overview is presented of the most popular SNSs, Facebook and LinkedIn, according to the literature.

Facebook was created in 2004, with the main purpose to connect and socialise a university’s student population in the United States. Just two years later, it was the seventh most popular site in the United States (Ellison et al., 2007). Since 2015, it has been considered the largest SNS with

around 1.37 billion users worldwide (Lam, 2016) and with 892 million daily users (Gangi and Wasko, 2016). Nowadays, with over 1.8 billion members (active users on a daily basis), Facebook has become the most popular SNS. In relation to this, globally, the majority of Facebook users are between 25 and 34 years old (Olafson and Tran, 2021).

One of the reasons for its popularity is because it provides good technological capacities that can work online or offline (Ellison et al., 2007). Users can create their profile, exchange messages, share pictures and videos, and participate in groups with the same interests or beliefs (Broughton et al., 2010). It, therefore, offers different objects and tools of sociality, while it is always developing and updating tools to offer more interactive options to users (Kietzmann et al., 2011). For example, users can upload a photo and include their location with the help of a GPS tool connected with their devices. Also, users must send a 'friend request' for a relationship to be formally accepted and it evaluates the reputation of videos based on 'likes' (Kietzmann et al., 2011). A typical user is expected to like 12 posts, make five comments and share one Facebook post monthly (Olafson and Tran, 2021). Finally, due to its popularity, Facebook largely affects peoples' social and working lives (Brailovskaia et al., 2020). The literature argues that this is because employees can benefit by using Facebook, as it facilitates social support, enhances the exchange of information, and accelerates real-world interactions (Brailovskaia et al., 2020; Lyngs et al., 2020). Negative aspects however are associated with depression and anxiety, isolation and loneliness (Lyngs et al., 2020).

Facebook Messenger is a messaging application owned by the Facebook Corporation. It was developed in 2008, and it enables direct messaging among users (Gangneux, 2021). By using this application, users can send text or voice messages, create audio and video calls. WhatsApp is a similar application, created in 2009 and acquired by Facebook in 2014 (Gangneux, 2021). People use these applications for arranging meetings, for achieving interaction with their friends and family, and even for using the group chat function, which is very popular (Lincoln and Robards, 2017). Another similar and popular messenger nowadays is Viber. Some of the reasons people use it are because it offers very high-quality video call, voice calling service, and even public chat rooms that enable users to communicate openly, through the form of a hobby group or fans club communication (Sutikno et al., 2016).

In addition, LinkedIn is a SNS that is business-orientated. The purpose of this site is to give the opportunity to users to create and maintain a professional contact network with users from different fields and organisations (Lam, 2016). Users can create their own profile, including information about their educational background, previous experience and generally their employment status. In this way, users can pursue a job by following different companies or other business opportunities (Broughton et al., 2010).

Continuing to the next SM category, virtual worlds are platforms based on a dimensional environment, where users take the role of an avatar and interact with other users like in real life (Doyle et al., 2015). Similar to other types of SM, it is considered as a way for users to share a common virtual space in which they interact and even create friendships (Cao et al., 2016). Next, collaborative projects are platforms created by the content that users upload (Doyle et al., 2015). For example, Wikipedia is an information site, where users upload information on different aspects. This type of SM is based on the notion that a common effort by different users leads to a good outcome (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

The fourth type of SM is microblogs, which enables users to create their own profile, and upload information in the form of photos, links, and text with a limitation on characters (140 to 200). In this way, users can express their opinion and feelings. People prefer this type of SM, because they can get information from others, such as colleagues and friends, and search for their interests (Grant, 2016). Twitter is the most popular example. Twitter was created in 2006. It belongs to the list of the most popular SM (Lam, 2016). Specifically, in 2015, its users were counting to 284 million. Nowadays, most Twitter active users become 353 million globally (Olafson and Tran, 2021). It enables users to publish short messages not more than '270' characters each time, the well-known 'tweets' (Broughton et al., 2010; Lam, 2016). Various devices are applicable to this micro blogging service (Isari et al., 2016). Companies use this communicational platform as a tool in order to enhance communication with customers or to promote their projects (Isari et al., 2016). It is also used to connect employees (Ali-Hassan et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2016). Due to this interaction (between employees, companies, and even business partners), companies have managed to gain considerable benefits and revenue values (Lin et al., 2016).

In addition, blogs and even personal blogs constitute the earliest form of SM, which have existed for almost 20 years. In 2014, the first SM platforms evolved with data platforms that were equipped with various tools (Sponder, 2012). Blogs are virtual places where users express their opinions on products or services. Blogs are mainly text-based and appear in chronological order (Sponder, 2012). On personal blogs, only the authors can upload or modify the content, and others can only read and leave comments (Rai, 2011). Various kinds of information are included in this type of SM, such as information related to hobbies, work, interests and even personal lives (Doyle et al., 2015). It, therefore, enables users to collaborate and form relationships between them, by enhancing knowledge-sharing between users or between professionals (Sigala and Chalkiti, 2015).

Content communities is the last SM type. They allow users to publish content such as photos and videos. In content communities, users are not obliged to create a profile before uploading content. One of the most important roles of content communities is to encourage knowledge enhancement (Rai, 2011). The most popular example of this SM type is YouTube, which today is considered the second most popular SM globally, with more than 2 billion users (Olafson and Tran, 2021).

Finally, it is important to add that during the last three to four years, several new SM platforms have been launched. Especially, in the past year (2020 to 2021), due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the required social distances, new platforms were introduced to enable further communication among people. Particularly, the most popular SM platforms that were recently introduced are TikTok, Club House, Twitter Spaces, Caffeine, Instagram Reels and Houseparty (Bump, 2021). TikTok is becoming a very popular SM platform, especially among teenagers, and its users number approximately 700 million globally (Olafson and Tran, 2021).

After discussing the classification of SM platforms, it is important to explain the characteristics of SM usage.

### **2.1.1.3 Characteristics of social media usage**

This collaborative technology as SM is called by researchers, has specific characteristics. The first one is the ‘social interaction’, which means that users can interact with each other and communicate at any time with the help of SM interactive tools (Su and Chan, 2017). SM users develop personal relationships, which enable them to access social resources, such as friends and

family members (Gango and Wasko, 2016). SM users interact and engage in a virtual world, out of time and place. Therefore, these online social interactions create new relationships or foster existing ones (Ali-Hassan et al., 2015).

The second characteristic of SM platforms is 'social collaboration', in which users participate in virtual communities that are based on common interests, values and beliefs. One form of social collaboration is friendship (Doyle et al., 2015). The SM characteristic 'content sharing' is where users can share different forms of content, such as texts, images, files, photos and links. Additionally, UGC is often created in a nonprofessional context and then published on a social media platform to be visible to others. The final characteristic is 'social connectedness', as SM platforms offer various ways for users to connect with one another using different, highly technological e-tools that are available on their sites. However, social connectedness is a twofold indication. It shows the number of connections a user has, but also it shows the quality of those relations. Even in SM platforms, relationships can be distinguished as weak or strong ties, according to the level and the forms of interaction (Putnam, 2000).

Similarly, Kietzmann et al. (2011) analysed the functional characteristics of SM platforms via the honeycomb of seven functional building blocks. The first one is the *identity functional block*: users develop their own identity in SM settings. They reveal and store personal information such as name, age, gender, profession, location, interests and academic background to create their own profile that represents them virtually. The second is the *conversation block*: there are different communication and conversation facilities among individuals and groups such as recorder messaging or texting (Ellison et al., 2007). Third, the *sharing block* refers to the ability of users to share and distribute content such as videos, pictures and links. Additionally, each SM has different social objectives. For example, music is the social objective for YouTube and MySpace, while it is careers for LinkedIn. Facebook offers different social objectives, as it has different groups and provides and continuously develops social tools (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

The fourth block is the *presence block*, which refers to the extent to which users know if other users are available. This does not only refer to being available for conversation or texting but it also refers to the opportunity that some SM platforms offer for users to post their location. For example, Facebook enables users to upload a photo or update their status to include their location. The fifth block is the *relationships block*, which refers to different forms of relations between

users. Users can connect through different types of association (Ellison et al., 2007). For example, they can be friends, fans, or share social objectives. According to the nature of the specific SM, relationships could be formal or less formal and structured. For example, the Twitter relationship block does not matter so much, while for Facebook, it is considered important, because users must send a ‘friend request’ for a relationship to be formally accepted.

The sixth block is *reputation*. This block is related to the way that users classify the standing not only of others but also their own in the SM settings. This has different meanings according to the character of an SM. For example, YouTube evaluates the reputation of videos based on ‘views’ or ‘rating’, while Facebook measures ‘likes’ (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The seventh and final functional block is the *group block*, which refers to the users’ ability to create communities and sub-communities or groups (Ellison et al., 2007). Users can have a group with friends, fans, or followers. These groups could be open to anyone or closed (approval is necessary), or even secret (invitation is required). Specifically, Facebook offers users the opportunity to create groups, and the creators become the group administrators (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Therefore, they invite users to join the group, approve them or even exclude them.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned, Ribiere et al. (2012, p. 335) characterised SM as “*people-centric, participatory, interactive, engaging, collaborative, emphasizing social interactions, and providing new opportunities for individuals and businesses*”.

### ***User engagement and associated benefits***

SM is also known as “social technologies”, because it facilitates social interaction with family, friends and colleagues, giving a new meaning to the social dimension of relationships through a bidirectional course (Skarzauskiene et al., 2013; Capriotti et al., 2020). The advanced technology tools available through SM platforms have created the notion of virtually networked teams and have set new ‘rules’ in workplace collaboration. Therefore, SM can work as an inter-and intra-organisational tool, which colleagues and customers can use, for either transferring knowledge information (Kwahk and Park, 2016; Nisar, Prabhakar and Strakovaa, 2019; Chatterjee et al., 2021) or even marketing purposes (Ngai et al., 2015).

SM usage has been extremely popular during the recent years, and it has been a part of peoples' social and work-lives (Lam, 2016; Appel et al., 2020; Chatterjee et al., 2021). According to relevant statistics, until September 2020, the number of SM users reached 4 billion worldwide and on average a user spends more than two and a half hours on SM within a day (Olafson and Tran, 2021). This enduring rise in SM user engagement may be related to numerous reasons of usage such as:

- It enables users to develop existing social relationships with relatives, family, friends and colleagues in a new virtual way;
- It gives the opportunity for creating new online social connections (Charoensukmongkol, 2014);
- It is an easy way to express and promote daily life, and to sharing information, opinions, thoughts, interests and experiences naturally and sincerely (Eren and Vardarlier, 2013; Kwahk and Park, 2016; Capriotti et al., 2020).

Therefore, SM user engagement may be related to benefits like social capital achievements, or even well-being improvements (Lampe et al., 2013; Sias and Duncan, 2020). Finally, the level of SM user engagement has been investigated in the past by measuring the intensity of SM usage, as the engagement level is not the same for all the SM users (Ellison et al., 2007; Ernst et al., 2014; Sun and Shang, 2014). Consequently, there are categories according to the level of usage, such as light users and heavy users. Lampe et al. (2013) discovered that light users reported less value in regards to the bonding dimension, such as emotional support in comparison to non-users and heavy users. This is one of the reasons, that this study only included heavy users or otherwise active social users, to qualitatively examine the SM usage influence in workplace bonding capital, as it is clarified later (Chapter 3). Lampe et al. (2013, p. 818) explained, "membership alone is not sufficient to receive all benefits of use".

Further benefits associated with SM usage are related to the smartphone communication systems, where SM is available and accessible at any time and place (Bao, 2016). Additionally, SM users may not be experts in technology, as no extensive technical knowledge is needed to use SM (Bolton et al., 2013). Parallel to this, not only due to the popularity of SM but also due to the potentiality to combine words, pictures, video and audio (Eren and Vardarlier, 2013), SM secures an interactive audience for organisations' advertisements and marketing campaigns (Gangi and

Wasko, 2016), as the message can be easily transferred through the provision of communication tools (Eren and Vardarlier, 2013). Therefore,

*“social media is the layout of applications and technologies that ease the productive interaction between new business forms, the encouragement of social forms and technological presentations using humans, content and data it is an online platform where the participants convey their ideas, mutual interest and experiences by conversing with each other in a natural and sincere way”.* (Evans, 2008, as cited in Eren and Vardarlier, 2013, p. 853)

Looking at the current SM environment, two aspects are involved. The first one is the platforms that constitute the underlying technologies and also the business models developed by the industry and ecosystem (Appel et al., 2020). The second one is the use cases, which is related to the way people and organisations nowadays, are using this technology, and for what reasons (Appel et al., 2020). Below, the employee SM usage within the workplace is discussed.

### **2.1.2 Social media in the workplace**

SM has not only radically changed people’s private lives but also their professional lives. Web 2.0 platforms and social networking have changed how people communicate and interact in their workplaces, which has become more informative and social (Bennett et al., 2010; Yang, 2020). Schmidt and O’Connor (2015, p. 572) mentioned ‘personal social media usage has unavoidably become intertwined with the workplace’. It is, therefore, a challenge today for organisations and communication managers to respond appropriately (Dreher, 2014).

Generally, SM has penetrated the workplace in recent years in various ways. For example, many organisations have modified their recruitment procedures by assessing applicants on SM (Gibbs et al., 2015; Ladkin and Buhalis, 2016; Das, 2021). Further, SM has been used as a marketing tool to interact with customers when promoting products or services (Gibbs et al., 2015; Doyle et al., 2015, Yang, 2020). Also, while some SM platforms like Facebook and Twitter were at first created solely for one’s personal life, today they are more widely used, for connecting professional colleagues in workplaces (Schmidt et al., 2016; Song et al., 2019). Therefore, nowadays SM is considered a new channel of communication between colleagues (Leftheriotis and Giannakos,

2014; van Prooijen et al., 2018). Specifically, some organisations use SM so colleagues can interact and communicate (Dess and Sauerwald, 2014). Adding to this, considerable research has indicated that up to 60% of employees have colleagues as Facebook ‘friends’ (Weidner et al., 2012; Duggan, 2015; Schmidt et al., 2016; Ali-Hassan et al., 2015; Schmidt and O’Connor, 2015). Hence, some employees use SM for sharing both work and non-work-related information (Doyle et al., 2015), as discussed below.

### **2.1.2.1 Dimensions of social media usage by employees**

Generally, literature has identified two main types of SM usage – expressive and instrumental. Expressive usage is mainly social, while instrumental usage is work-related (Ribiere et al., 2010; Song et al., 2019). In other words, according to the literature, people use SM for social reasons like maintaining social relationships or they use it to distribute, present or gain information (van Zoonen et al., 2014; Sun and Shang, 2014; Schmidt et al., 2016). A more recent study (Song et al., 2019) further divided workplace SM usage into corporate usage, which is the instrumental usage as it is work-oriented, and personal usage, which is socially oriented (Song et al., 2019).

As far as the instrumental usage of SM is concerned, employees can get information and informally ask questions with the help of SM platforms. It is, therefore, considered as a tool by which social capital can get support and help for work-related purposes (Putnam, 2000; Ellison et al., 2011; King and Lee, 2016; Phua et al., 2017). Especially in the workplace context, employees can discuss work-related topics and ask questions. They may develop formal internal communication and discussions based on work-related issues and to come up with a solution (Fraser and Dutta, 2008), or they may share core work-related information and content (Song et al., 2019). Overall, it is theoretically and empirically suggested that SM platforms support an organisation’s social capital to work collaboratively (Ellison et al., 2007; Song et al., 2019). SM also facilitates ‘social constructivism’. Employees become a virtual team that can work, inform, and exchange ideas on similar needs, interests and problems (Ali- Hassan et al., 2011; Timimi, 2013; Kluemper et al., 2016). Finally, if employees disseminate work-related issues online through their SM accounts, they are contributing to the corporate reputation (van Zoonen et al., 2014).

Additionally, Ali-Hassan et al. (2015), identified three dimensions of employee SM usage: social, hedonic and cognitive. Hedonic is related to the need for pleasure, relaxation and escape, as people

choose SM activities that offer them fun (Leftheriotis and Giannakos, 2014; Ali-Hassan et al., 2015, Yang, 2020). The cognitive dimension is connected to the need to ask for information and to create and share content for utilitarian use and instrumental value (King and Lee, 2016). Finally, it is 'social' because of the interaction with family, friends and colleagues. These three kinds of usage have been identified because people have various personal needs that they have to satisfy (Ali-Hassan et al., 2015; Phua et al., 2017). Finally, van Zoonen et al. (2014) identified that employees use SM for three reasons: to distribute information; to enhance workplace social relationships; and for organisational ambassadorship. Consequently, van Zoonen et al. (2014, p. 850) clarified that '*social media provide employees with a platform to represent their organisation, manage personal and professional relationships and engage in personal branding*'.

### ***Employee social usage of social media***

Social usage is defined as the practice of social networking (Ribiere et al., 2010; Yang, 2020). Specifically, social usage is considered as using SM with the intention to develop new relations, such as friends or to find others with similar interests, and to strengthen contacts and interactions with existing friends and colleagues (Ali-Hassan and Nevo, 2009; Ali-Hassan et al., 2015).

Employees use SM to communicate with their colleagues in various social ways. They can interact, discuss and create conversations by using the available tools such as chat applications and video programs. They can share content with a colleague or with everyone in the organisation, send a message or view posts or messages from colleagues and react to them, by liking, commenting or even sharing them (Kwahk and Park, 2016; Schmidt et al., 2016). Colleagues interacting via SM platforms develop, maintain and strengthen their relations, as indicated by previous research (Schmidt et al., 2016). This can lead to other organisational benefits, such as group cohesiveness and positive workplace relations (van Zoonen et al., 2014).

While previous research has examined how instrumental usage by employees has influenced and impacted the workplace, further research is needed on the social dimension of employees' SM usage in workplaces (Huang et al., 2015; Ali-Hassan et al., 2015). Huang et al. (2015, p. 49) asserted that: "*the effects of social media within an organisation, when adopted to support and replace other internal forms of communication and interaction, is a growing and important area of research but still relatively under-theorized*". Therefore, this study is solely focused on social SM usage, and the socialization-oriented SM platforms, as it is interested in investigating how

workplace bonding ties are affected by employee social SM usage. Further, the aforementioned expressive-bonding dimension is connected with social usage (Ribiere et al., 2010). Studies on social usage have usually concentrated on informal and expressive ties, which mostly emphasize social and emotional support outcomes (Song et al., 2019). Wang et al. (2014) discovered that the type of SNS usage is important when examining a mechanism for influencing relationships and that social usage is the most important and influential type that should be further researched. More precisely, this study is interested to examine only the inter-social dimension of SM usage – the social usage between colleagues for expressive purposes. Thus, the meaning of the social usage type in this study is defined as the social interaction between people working in the same organisation.

### ***The qualitative and quantitative intensity of usage***

According to the literature, the intensity of SM usage is considered an important factor for examining how social SM usage influences social capital (Ellison et al., 2007; Sun and Shang, 2014; Ernst et al., 2014). Usage intensity is separated into qualitative and quantitative natures.

Qualitative intensity is concerned with the value and the quality of social interaction among colleagues, when using SM tools such as like, share, comment and message (Ellison et al., 2007; Sun and Shang, 2014). Sun and Shang (2014) examined how social usage and instrumental usage influence organisational social capital. They achieved that, by examining the qualitative form of internal SM usage and asking participants if they use the intra-organisational SM platform for arranging events with other colleagues, chatting with them and finding people with similar interests.

However, quantitative intensity is mostly measured by the amount of time a person uses SM (Su and Chan, 2017). In other words, it is measured according to the time a user spends in using SM (Neves, 2015; Huang and Liu, 2017). The importance of intensity usage in SM studies is underlined by previous work. Ellison et al. (2007) examined how Facebook intensity usage maintains the social capital of schools within a sample of students, while Lampe et al. (2013) distinguished heavy and light users according to the intensity of usage. They discovered that light users reported less value in regards to the bonding social dimension such as emotional support in comparison to non-users and heavy users.

In regards to quantitative intensity, there is a further way to measure the frequency of interaction. Schmidt et al. (2016) discovered that organisational support and spontaneity are influenced by the number of SM co-worker connections. To identify the level of social connectedness via co-workers, they examined the number of a person's SM connections with co-workers out of the total number of SM connections. They discovered that the number of co-workers' SM connections is positively related to organisational spontaneity and support.

To sum up, SM and social capital theory recognise the importance of SM intensity usage, in both quality and quantity terms, and this study takes into consideration both aspects. On the one hand, Wang et al. (2014) asserted that future study should include time spent on SM, in order to examine more logged on SM usage, especially through qualitative studies. On the other hand, Lampe et al. (2013, p. 818) explained that "*membership alone is not sufficient to receive all benefits of use*". For this reason, the informants of this study were selected according to their qualitative and quantitative SM usage intensity, as the selection process is explained and clarified in the methodology section (Chapter 3). Only high-intensity users, in terms of quantity and quality, were included in this study, in order to reach qualitative answers.

### **2.1.2.2 Social media usage and implications for organisations**

SM usage has been examined in multiple ways, especially for identifying the negative or positive implications for employees and organisations (Lam, 2016; Men and Muralidharan, 2017; Hanna et al., 2017; Wushe and Shenje, 2019; Alqahtani, 2019, Yang, 2020). In the workplace settings, some studies identify negative implications such as misbehaviour at work or harassment (McDonald and Thompson, 2016) but others found positive outcomes, such as employee productivity (Moqbel et al., 2013). Therefore, various researchers have called for further research in order for these implications to become clearer and for organisations to take the necessary actions to reap possible benefits and overcome drawbacks (Moqbel et al., 2013; Dreher, 2014; Badea, 2014; Schimidt et al., 2016; Kluemper et al, 2016; Men and Muralidharan, 2017; Hanna et al., 2017; Alqahtani, 2019, Yang, 2020).

### *Negative implications*

Generally, some researchers have underlined the negative dimension of SM in the workplace, either because it may lead to a drop in productivity, or because it may make employee relationships more complicated.

Employees' usage of SM may lead to awkward employee relationships (Broughton et al., 2010). Employees' negative communication on SM can cause problems to organisations' healthy social capital (Krishna and Kim, 2015). There are examples of SM usage causing a decrease in employee morale through misbehavior such as harassment, inappropriate messages, pseudo names or cyberbullying among employees (McDonald and Thompson, 2016; Lam, 2016; Song et al., 2019). Cyberbullying is a phenomenon that happens through SM, and includes posting offensive comments or even harassment (Broughton et al., 2010; Sakka and Spyrou, 2014). Workplace harassment through SM platforms could include sending images, text and videos with the intention to humiliate and hurt someone when other colleagues view the content (Taylor et al., 2015; Yang, 2020). Such situations could be related to negative emotions, such as stress, and consequently to lower productivity (Walden, 2016).

Similarly, there is a concern regarding sensitive issues in relation to information and data security (Skarzauskiene et al., 2013). Walden (2016) argued that SNSs may threaten personal privacy, and that people post personal and maybe sensitive information on their personal profiles that they might not want to be accessible to their colleagues or employer at work (Broughton et al., 2010; Frampton and Child, 2013; van Prooijen et al., 2018; Nisar, Prabhakar, and Strakovaa, 2019). Therefore, some employees are reluctant to accept their employer or a colleague as an SM friend, as they do not want to share their private life, and they are thinking of the negative consequences of participation (Gangi and Wasko, 2016; Yang, 2020). Lam (2016) also argued that careless use of SM may even damage friendships in the workplace context. In relation to this, there is further skepticism of its effect on workplace social interactions, as it facilitates employee gossip in an open and public online environment (Wushe and Shenje, 2019).

It is likewise argued that this exposure to personal information may lead to severe stress and negative psychology (Ngai et al., 2015; Yang, 2020). This may also be related to the fact that SNS users have little control or knowledge of access to their information on SNSs (Lewis and West, 2009; Bolton et al., 2013). For example, they might not know how to protect themselves, as they

are not aware of specific safety tools. People usually are not aware of the consequences of a post on SM platforms. There are examples of employees that were fired because they were not careful with SM postings (Frampton and Child, 2013). Technostress also may be related to negative consequences to employees' attitude and behavior (Brooks, 2015). People feel fear and anxiety due to their inability to appropriately use new technologies.

Finally, it is possible for employees to feel betrayed and become angry either because of seeing offending posts from other employees (Moqbel et al., 2013) or because there may be serious ethical dilemmas and conflicts with their job loyalty, such as when someone discovers through SM postings that a colleague is lying to the organisation (Lam, 2016). For example, a person is supposed to be on medical leave, but instead, he/she is on vacation.

Additionally, the most often identified disadvantage related to SM usage in workplaces, according to the literature, is the decrease in productivity (Lam, 2016; Wushe and Shenje, 2019). This is correlated with absenteeism, because the time wasted on SM either for chatting or reading news and even listening to music, can be seen as a major distraction, and related to quality time wastage (Wickramasingh and Nisaf, 2013; Skarzauskiene et al., 2013; Moqbel et al., 2013; Ngai, 2015; McDonald and Thompson, 2016; Wushe and Shenje, 2019). There are also studies suggesting that there should be clear boundaries between life and work realms, as SM workplace use results in the delay of fulfilling job responsibilities (Leonardi et al., 2013; Yang, 2020).

In parallel, Al Busaidi (2014) claimed that employee productivity may also be negatively impacted due to the information overload in SM contexts. Therefore, employers may have the perception that the use of SNSs during working hours distracts people from their work (Kluemper et al., 2016). In relation to that, 'cyberloafing' is a term used to describe the use of the Internet at work for issues unrelated to the job, such as checking Facebook. Askew et al. (2014, as cited in Kluemper et al., 2016, p. 189; McDonald and Thompson, 2016) found that cyberloafing is related to high levels of absenteeism and extended breaks. Nonetheless, other academics, practitioners and researchers have argued that there is a positive relationship between employee SM usage and employee productivity (Wickramasinghe and Nisaf, 2013; Moqbel et al., 2013; Chen and Wei, 2020). This can be explained and proved through various interrelated mechanisms, as discussed below.

### *Positive implications*

On the positive side, previous research has indicated that SM is a modern mean of communication, offering various advantages in relation to employee and organisational performance. It seems that SM connects and engages people, and generally helps them to learn and communicate in workplaces; therefore, knowledge transfer, decision-making process and information sharing are easier, leveraging a plethora of organisational benefits (Lee and Kwahk, 2010; Wickramasingh and Nisaf, 2013; Conner, 2014; Kwahk and Park, 2016; Nisar, Prabhakar and Strakovaa, 2019).

In essence, it is found that SM usage leads to employee support (Stawnicza, 2014; Sigala and Chalkiti, 2015; Schmidt et al., 2016), improves communication channels and sharing of skills in the workplace (Salanova, Llorens and Ventura, 2014), increases collaboration, trust and communication (Parry and Solidoro, 2014), and improves work performance because of knowledge transfer (Nisar, Prabhakar and Strakovaa, 2019; Chatterjee et al., 2021), meta-knowledge expertise sharing (Wei et al., 2020) and increased trust (Cao et al., 2016). Wickramasinghe and Nisaf (2013) also proved that online social networking is related to solving work-related problems collaboratively, and that it, therefore, influences positively an individual's job performance. Nisar, Prabhakar and Strakovaa (2019) also argued that informal, social communication among colleagues generates positive feelings, enhances learning and therefore improves organisational productivity. Along the same lines, Chen and Wei (2020) identified through empirical research that employee SM usage for vertical and horizontal communication is positively related to employee performance. Vertical communication is achieved among people from different hierarchical status levels, while horizontal communication is achieved among people that have the same levels of hierarchical status (Chen and Wei, 2020).

Some researchers have also underlined the benefits of SM in relation to work-life balance (Leidner et al., 2010). This is because employees at the workplace can have a social connection with friends and family. Moqbel et al. (2013) developed a survey of 193 employees and investigated if the use of SNSs affects job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and job performance. Their findings indicate that there is a significant positive effect on job performance through job satisfaction, as motivator, in relation to the use of SNSs, mainly because employees in this way achieve and maintain a balance in their work-life realm. As Walden (2016) explained, employees during their

time at work expect that SM is available for personal use, as they want to communicate with their peers and family during their breaks.

Fraser and Dutta (2008) argued that online social networking can enhance networked open conversation, information sharing and even problem-solving, and organisations can use SN to gain strategic benefits. They suggested that further research should continue to explore the advantages. Organisations could use SM to innovate and develop new ideas (Wickramasingh and Nisaf, 2013). Relevant research has also indicated that SM usage enhances creativity and facilitates brainstorming for new ideas (Duff and Sar, 2015). Similarly, recent studies demonstrated the positive side of SM usage, as it strengthens the social life of the work environment Nisar, Prabhakar and Strakovaa, 2019; Alqahtani, 2019).

Finally, there are various advantages of SM in relation to the formation of workplace social capital. As this study is focusing on the role of social capital ties in workplaces, this part is discussed in the following section more explicitly.

## **2.2 Workplace social capital ties**

### **2.2.1 An introduction into the theory of workplace social ties**

Social capital is derived from and develops through the social interactions among individuals in an organisation or a community (King and Lee, 2016; Sias and Duncan, 2020). It is considered as the organisation's network of relationships, referring not only to the interpersonal relationships but also to the resources forming these relationships (Cao et al., 2016). Coleman (1988) asserted that social capital encompasses a wide range of resources, deriving from one's relationships with others (Keating et al., 2016). Oh et al. (2004, p. 861) concluded that social capital is the

*configuration of a group's members' social relationships within the social structure of the group itself, as well as in the broader social structure of the organisation to which the group belongs, through which necessary resources for the group can be accessed.*

Therefore, an important theoretical basis for examining the impact of SM is based on the concept of social capital ties (Ali-Hassan et al., 2015).

The social network literature addresses different types of social ties. Putnam (2000) distinguished social capital ties as either bridging or bonding. He examined the structural dimension of social capital “*that refers to the individual’s social ties and network of relationships*” (Ali-Hassan et al., 2015, p. 68). Specifically, Putnam described bonding social capital as being based on ‘strong’ emotional close relationships (like family and friends), and bridging social capital as representing ‘weak ties’ between individuals, which are mainly based on useful information (Ellison et al., 2007; Sias and Duncan, 2020). Strong ties are connected with a higher frequency of interaction and reciprocity, while weaker ties with weak emotional attachment (Bao, 2016). Further, Ibarra and Andrews (1999) said there is disunity between expressive and instrumental ties. Expressive ties are related to strong ties, providing friendship and emotional and social support. Instrumental ties are weaker and related to the access of work-related information and resources, and also advice-seeking (Ali-Hassan et al., 2015). Similarly, Bozionelos (2017) claimed that expressive ties are based on socio-emotional support while instrumental ones rely on career interests. Nevertheless, the afore-mentioned terms are interrelated in the theory of social capital and therefore bonding social capital ties are related to expressive ties and bridging social capital tend to be instrumental ties (Neves, 2015; Ali-Hassan et al., 2015).

The enrichment of communication tools that are available via SM sites, such as messaging, blogs and posts, create and maintain the social capital of an organisation, as they change a business’s typical communication methods (Kaplan and Haenli, 2009; Wu, 2016). Social networking platforms create a new communication channel that enables informal social communication outside the organisational boundaries (Cao et al., 2016). Therefore, communication and networking between employees and professionals have moved into another era. Professional networks are updated and connected with the help of SNSs (for example LinkedIn). Someone can maintain hundreds or even thousands of connections very easily (Bennett et al., 2010; Sias and Duncan, 2020). Graham et al. (2009) asserted that online social networking is a powerful tool that can enhance further professional relationships. An example is Facebook, where colleagues can be informed of professional events, attendance levels and updates about individuals’ professional development activities (Sias and Duncan, 2020).

It has been argued by researchers that, due to their dynamic role, social ties can work as a mechanism to achieve various organisational goals by creating and maintaining relationships

(King and Lee, 2016; Song et al., 2019). Ernst (2014) explained that, in an organisation, social capital enables useful information to be located and contributed to the network. Positive employee relationships develop a social capital that is based on effective communication and cooperation (King and Lee, 2016). It can generate value, such as the facilitation of teamwork and coordination that can even increase productivity on an individual or organisational level (Pinho, 2013). It also enables access to information, knowledge and to various resources, even rare resources (Pinho, 2013). It enables also access to information, knowledge and to various resources, even rare resources (Pinho, 2013). Further, greater social capital is related to a higher level of commitment to an online community, shared vision and trust and even to higher project effectiveness (Sun and Shang, 2014). Previous research has also identified that employees who use SM are more likely to indicate a higher level of trust (Kluemper et al., 2016) and a greater level of life satisfaction (Valkenburg et al., 2006). Consequently, it seems possible that in the long term these positives outcomes will lead to increased productivity, job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Kluemper et al., 2016).

It is interesting also to see that King and Lee (2016), who examined the role of SM in the development of internal communication in the hospitality industry, discovered that SM corresponds to a personal need of employees to form close relationships between colleagues. If this need is satisfied, then employees are expected to be better in their jobs by providing better quality service (Cornelissen, 2014). Gibbs et al. (2015), looking into the concept of SM and HR, suggested that organisations and managers could take advantage of SM usage in order to engage current employees and achieve different benefits. *'The SM use with current employees can be seen as internal marketing or "social HR" that focuses on enhancing organisational culture and function'* (Gibbs et al., 2015, p.178). Therefore, as King and Lee (2016) argued, SM may give variable tools to the organisation to build and maintain social capital in a new way, as workplace ties may become stronger (Bennett et al., 2010).

More recently, Yang (2020) examined the SM friendly usage among colleagues in the hospitality sector in relation to workplace stress, fun and guanxi, including motivational and de-motivational factors that affect this relationship. The study found that the advantages of coworker SM interaction outweigh the negatives. The positive outcomes of this relationship are related to the social relationships among employees in the workplace. Therefore, it was underlined that further

research is needed following the same lines, but with more focus on the employee interactions and communicative culture in the workplace (Yang, 2020). Along similar lines, Sias and Duncan (2020), identified that the organisation's Facebook page helps employees to maintain workplace social capital and strengthen organisational identification.

The empirical results of Cao et al. (2016) also, indicated that SM can develop employee's social capital and motivate knowledge sharing through shared vision and trust, and consequently work performance can be enhanced. They argued that, if colleagues connect through common interests and goals in a virtual space, then potential workplace network ties can be identified. However, it has been suggested that existing studies have not yet investigated satisfactorily how social capital is affected by the usage of SM and how this develops individual behaviors. Specifically limited empirical research has focused on measuring the social capital ties within SM in the workplace (Xerri and Brunetto, 2010; Pinho, 2013; Kwahk and Park, 2015; Song et al., 2019).

Therefore, this research focuses on the bonding-expressive ties. In particular, this study examines only the social-related usage of SM by colleagues and expressive ties seem to be more suitable for researching social usage because they are defined as the practice of social networking (Ribiere et al., 2010). Also, Huang and Liu (2017), found that through SM usage bonding social capital impacts positive psychological outcomes, while bridging leads to instrumental outcomes. Therefore, it is suggested that bonding and bridging are two different types that must be examined separately, as they contribute differently (Sheer and Rise, 2016; Huang and Liu, 2017). Consequently, this research is not interested in examining the instrumental or bridging dimension of social capital that is related to work ties, but it includes the resources forming closed and bonding ties such as the emotional and social support dimensions, as explained below.

### **2.2.2 Workplace bonding ties and social media usage**

Generally, the concept of social capital is examined by researchers either from the perspective of social networks or through the benefits of those networks (Charoensukmongol, 2014; Su and Chan, 2017). However, Putnam's (2000) view and categorisation of social capital recognise both aspects as important. He, therefore, conceptualises social capital not only as social networks but also as norms of reciprocity. Therefore it is an effect of the networks and the positive outcomes coming

with them (Putnam, 2000; Williams, 2006). Consequently, agreeing with Putnam's (2000) conceptualisation of social capital should be understood as the social networks-relationships and as the resources and benefits of those relationships, specifically in the communicative context of SM. According to Putnam (2000) and subsequent researchers on social network theory, expressive-bonding ties facilitate emotional and social support benefits through open communication and strong interpersonal connections, such as emotional attachment, reciprocity, trust, reduction of loneliness and understanding (Ellison et al., 2007, Law and Chang, 2008, Ernst et al., 2014, Zhong et al., 2012, Li and Chen, 2014; Jin, 2015; Ali-Hassan et al., 2015; Neves 2015; Cao et al., 2016; Bozionelos, 2017; Yang, 2020). This Thesis follows Putnam's view (2000) that identified social capital as social networks and relationships, but also as the norms arising from them. Next, further related studies and their findings are discussed.

Through SM social interactions, various resources and benefits are available to people, and by identifying and examining these resources, researchers can examine how social capital is generated for its members (Putnam, 1993; Jin, 2015). SM is considered a mechanism by which users request and receive support through their close connections, either via a message, a post, a comment, a 'like' or even by sending birthday wishes (Vitak and Ellison, 2012; Su and Chan, 2017). Thus, bonding, or expressive use of SM, is connected with sociality, as people want to actualize their social interactions, integrate into public performance and foster social ties (Tufekci as cited in Ribiere et al., 2010, p. 336). Along similar lines, Zhong et al. (2012) define this kind of ties to encompass people who give and receive feelings of care, social support and a sense of belonging. Therefore, as aforementioned, this is the reason why it is more possible for these ties to be connected with employee commitment (Zhong et al., 2012; Lin et al., 2016) and satisfaction (Moqbel et al., 2013).

Previous research has examined social capital in the context of SM with interesting and significant results. Ali- Hassan et al. (2015), used another way of examining social capital, through the division of structural, cognitive, and relational social capital (Lin and Lu, 2011; Ali-Hassan et al., 2015; Jun et al., 2017). They examined if SM usage (social, hedonic and cognitive usage) affects different forms of social capital: the structural (number of expressive and instrumental ties), the relational and the cognitive dimension. They discovered that social capital matters and expressive ties are positively related to innovation via emotional support in the organisational settings.

Johnston et al. (2013) also, found that if people interact with other users more frequently via Facebook, then it is more possible for these ties to become stronger. Similarly, Liu et al. (2013) identified that through the use of Renren (a popular SNS in China) the bonding ties of students are enhanced. Ernst et al. (2014) also, explored the connection between an internal SNS and workplace social capital. They discovered that greater SNS intensity leads to more enhanced bonding ties. This also applies especially to newer and younger employees. van Zoonen et al. (2016) investigated how employees use Twitter to talk about work. They discovered that one-third of their tweets were work-related and that Twitter promotes direct communication and social connection and conversation in the workplace. Similarly, Phua et al. (2017) examined the bonding and bridging online social capital through specific SNS platforms using various moderators such as trust and intensity of usage. They discovered that only bonding social capital was increased with higher SNS intensity. Finally, Lampe et al. (2013), through their research proved that light users of Facebook revealed less bonding social capital in comparison with heavy users.

However, Li and Chen (2014) conducted quantitative research in the US university context, and they discovered that SNSs are connected with bridging social ties but not with bonding. The proposed explanation for this is that students might communicate in other ways to maintain stronger ties. In the same way, Ellison et al. (2007) examined the connection between Facebook usage and the formation of bonding, bridging and maintained social capital, among a sample of undergraduate students. They found a positive relationship between Facebook usage and the formation of social capital. However, they discovered a stronger relationship with bridging instead of bonding social capital. The bonding social capital was examined mainly through social constructs such as trust between people to solve problems and seeking personal advice. The results indicated that Facebook intensity predicted low levels of bonding capital. Additionally, Huang and Liu (2017) examined quantitatively if the percentage of coworkers' connections is related to online bridging and or bonding social capital. They did not find any significant relationship with the bonding ties.

It is also argued that previous literature on social ties and SM has mainly focused on bridging social ties, and it has questioned if the usage of SM can affect strong ties – bonding ties of an organisation (Bargh and Mckenna, 2004; Ellison et al., 2007, Li and Chen, 2014; Neves, 2015; Huang and Liu, 2017). Former studies have rejected such a strong relationship and have called for

further research to examine different dimensions of this area (Ellison et al., 2007; Li and Chen, 2014; Huang and Liu, 2017). Researchers assert that different forms of bonding dimensions of relationships should be further examined, as the power of those ties in workplaces has not yet been identified (Choi and Scott, 2012; Walsh et al., 2016; Wu, 2016). Future research is requested, especially, for bonding ties, in order to recognize their full potential for organisations (Bargh and Mckenna, 2004; Ellison et al., 2007, Li and Chen, 2014; Neves, 2015; Walsh et al., 2016; Wu, 2016; van Osch and Bulgurcu, 2020). Finally, as the bonding ties move outside the workplace environment, and are becoming informal social relationships, it would be interesting to examine the different ways employees' SM usage change the expressive-bonding relationships in an organisation (Xerri and Brunetto, 2010; Oh et al. 2014; Wu, 2016).

### **RQ1: How does employees' SM social usage affect workplace bonding ties?**

Next, the workplace bonding dimensions included in this study, and workplace social and emotional support is analysed separately. The findings comprehensively answer RQ1a and RQ1b through RQ1. Specifically, as is indicated below, RQ 1a examines workplace emotional support and RQ 1b examines workplace social support.

#### **2.2.2.1 Emotional support**

Emotional support is an undervalued resource of social capital ties in the workplace and it is one of the most basic and critical resources forming and characterising bonding relationships and strong ties (Ellison et al., 2007; Oh et al., 2014). According to Lin et al. (2016), emotional support is the communication of care, empathy, understanding, trust and even love between the SM users. Because of the social and emotional nature of people, they need and seek emotional support and comfort, even in workplaces. Through the multimedia tools of SM, they express their true feelings and offer support online (Bao, 2016). In this study, and in the context of SM, emotional support is regarded as a supportive online interaction among colleagues (Bugsham et al., 2014), specifically between at least two individuals for the achievement of emotional well-being and satisfaction (Lages, 2012; Gottlieb, 2000 as cited in Bao, 2016, p. 738).

Owing to the interactive character of SM platforms, people seek and find emotional support online. They may ask and get support using the SM tools that enable them to text a message, to send a

voice message and to “like”, to “share”, to “tag” (Lin et al., 2016). Therefore, it is easier for people to communicate their feelings for recovering or asking for emotional support. Bughsan et al. (2014), recognise this as a new form of online support due to the unique character of users’ interaction. In this way, people can express their feelings and emotions and they can even manage their online social relations by classifying their friends (Ellison et al., 2007; Lin et al., 2016). The bonding ties are connected with close, intimate relationships that are characterised by emotional intensity, reciprocity, emotional closeness and empathy, and emotional aid (Putnam, 2000; Vitak and Ellison, 2012; Li and Chen, 2014; Phua et al., 2017; Yang, 2020). Similarly, emotional support helps employees to satisfy their emotional needs. Those needs are related to emotional acceptance, communicational safety, understanding, respect, trust and feelings of caring, encouragement and even recovery of perceived self-efficiency (Lages, 2012; Liu et al., 2013; Jin, 2015; Lin et al., 2016). Precisely, due to emotional needs such as the expression of care, respect and even love, users seek emotional comfort, through texts, messages and videos with friends, family or colleagues (Lin et al., 2016; Bao et al., 2016).

As Wang et al. (2014) and Yang (2020) have argued, very few studies have tried to give light into the mechanism that exists behind the use of SNSs and its influence on the social and psychological aspects of people, in terms of their emotions. Even those results are contradictory. On the one hand, some studies concluded that employees have problems with depression (O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Wang et al., 2014) or feelings related to tension, because it is not easy for them to combine professional and personal life through SNSs (Van Prooijen et al., 2018). For example, there are cases of employees that do not want to expose their personal information over SNSs (Walden, 2016; Yang, 2020), or they feel uncertain because they do not want friends to reach them through SM in the workplace (Bucher et al., 2013). These situations make them feel tense, anxious and stressed instead of giving them emotional support. Further, it was proved that there are people that become addicted to SM usage, which makes them feel stressed and unhappy (Andreassen, 2012). Additionally, much of the personal information and details posted online about people’s lives may not be credible, which makes people have a hard time trusting or feeling safe online (Lin et al., 2016). Finally, some people are reluctant to share their private feelings and concerns and ask for emotional comfort online, because they are worried about matters of privacy and protection (Bao, 2016; Alqahtani, 2019).

On the other hand, the literature suggests that emotional support and employee emotional well-being is enhanced through SM usage (Nduhura and Prieler, 2017). One of the reasons is that people's socio-emotional need to be in contact with other people, can be fulfilled through SM usage, and making them feel more satisfied and then more productive (Nduhura and Prieler, 2017). Further, connecting through SM is not blocked by geographic and time boundaries, which makes people want more to search online for emotional support (Lin et al., 2016). Similarly, it is suggested that if employees connect with their family and friends through SM in the workplace, they will be happier, and their mood will be improved with positive feelings and emotions (Moqbel et al, 2013; Mark et al., 2014; Robertson and Fee, 2017). Finally, Lin et al. (2016) investigated emotional support examining the intention of people on SM to help others facing difficulties, to offer comfort and encouragement, to talk about private feelings, and to express interest and concern for others' well-being. They found a connection with commitment and continuance.

It is said also that, the facilitation of online interactions between colleagues creates a positive work atmosphere with the benefits of feeling relaxed and relieving stress (King and Lee, 2016; Lin et al., 2016). According to Kim and Kim (2017), the bonding emotional benefits of people that interact through SM are reduction of social isolation, anxiety and stress and creation of reciprocity, mutual trust and social support. They discovered that this may even happen in heterogeneous groups of people of different genders, ages, education levels and so on. SM also provides privacy protection filters and tools to protect users' private information of users, even when they share feelings or emotions with colleagues they trust (Lin et al., 2016). Finally, it is possible for people who actively interact daily through SM to create reciprocal or mutual trust. This is because they share personal information and they ask and receive personal support, which creates a feeling of trustworthiness between them (Kim and Kim, 2017; Yang, 2020).

Specifically, a few studies have investigated emotional support in the context of SM and more studies are needed to explore this area and its implications (Lin et al., 2016; Yang, 2020). Notably, Moqbel et al. (2013) argued that the online social interactions between colleagues especially, amplified emotions, which should be investigated further, in order to identify the negative and the positive outcomes for the organisation. Schmidt et al. (2016) argued that it is of great importance to examine how employees' relationships, feelings and emotions change through SM usage. As social capital plays an important role in that, research should study this connection further in the

organisational settings, in correlation also with possible organisational outcomes (Dess and Sauerwald, 2014; Zhang and Luo, 2016).

### **RQ1a How does employees' SM social usage affect workplace emotional support?**

#### **2.2.2.2 Social support**

An early definition of social support was given by Shumaker and Brownell in 1984: “*an exchange of resources between at least two individuals perceived by the provider or the recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient*” (Bao, 2016, p. 738). Later on, Pfeil et al. (2009) described it as verbal or nonverbal messages with the intention to communicate social messages and information to the receiver (Lin et al., 2016). However, online social support is not yet clearly defined in the literature (Lin et al., 2016). According to previous research, social support has different dimensions depending on the contexts. It is usually related to emotional and informational support, instrumental support, appraisal support, and even social friendship, which is related to leisure and entertainment activities (Sherbourne and Stewart, 1991; Bao, 2016). Generally, social support is described by researchers as “*the functions performed for the individual by significant others, such as family members, friends, and colleagues*” (Schreurs et al., 2012, p. 263). Nevertheless, this research is solely focused on the support from colleagues, as they are the people who significantly influence employees' behavior in the workplace (Charoensukmongol, 2014). Also, this study follows Putnam's view and understanding of social support, under the concept of social capital network theory and SM, as it is described and explained below.

Generally, people support each other socially through SM (Kim and Kim, 2017). Previous research indicated that SM could foster the quality of social relationships and provide social support because of people's regular interaction (Chen and Li, 2017). These interactions leave the network members much room for communication and conversation (Jun et al., 2017; Chen and Wei, 2020). Social support in the virtual context is mainly related to mutual help, through providing social support, sharing experiences, offering advice (Yahia et al., 2018), developing new or maintaining relationships (Cao et al., 2016) and also creating a sense of belonging.

To start with, the literature asserts that SM usage supports oneness and the sense of belonging between SM users (Lin and Lu, 2011; Parry and Solidoro, 2014; Shimidt et al., 2016; Cao et al., 2016; Jun et al., 2017; Huang and Liu, 2017; Kim and Kim, 2017; Chen and Wei, 2020). It is suggested that if employees maintain interaction through SM, they create stronger connection and sense of belonging in the organisation (Cao et al., 2016; Chen and Wei, 2020). A prerequisite for successful organisations that want to create and sustain competitive advantage is to increase team engagement among both existing and potential employees (Parry and Solidoro, 2014; Anasori et al., 2021). Referring also to the employees work in wide geographical distances, SM helps in creating a bond between the project team members and sustaining team unity or oneness (Fonner and Roloff, 2012; Haslam et al., 2013; Stawnicza, 2014; Walsh et al., 2015; Chen and Wei, 2020). Employees become a virtual team that can work, inform, and change ideas or who have similar needs, interests, and problems. In this vein, teamwork, and team engagement is supported (Timimi, 2013; Ali- Hassan et al., 2015; Kluemper et al., 2016). SM platforms accelerate the integration of employees into the organisational culture due to the sense of community building and the sense of belonging between employees (Parry and Solidoro, 2013; Kluemper et al., 2016; Chen and Wei, 2020). The social networking sites create a cooperative atmosphere, where the relationships between colleagues are created based on strong bonding, functional interactions and seamless dyadic communication.

That is why Gibbs et al. (2015) opined that SM is not only a tool that helps organisations to attract potential future employees (talent acquisitions) but also to engage existing employees. They conceptualise SM as an important internal marketing tool or ‘social HR’ tool that could enhance the organisational culture and function and they underline that further research should continue further explain this norm. Nevertheless, Eren and Vardarlier (2013) examined quantitatively if SM usage has a direct effect on the sense of belonging. While they found a positive effect on employee motivation, the connection with the sense of belonging was rejected.

These interactions are based on mutual understanding and trust between colleagues, which both create a sense of belonging because employees feel appreciated and loved by their organisation, and trust in their colleagues (King and Lee, 2016). Trust is an emotional or social feeling that evolves through social interactions. Through SM usage employees, gain information about their colleagues, personalities, hobbies and interests, their families and so on. It is believed that the more

people know about others, the more they trust those (Cao et al., 2016). “*Social trust as one's perception or attitude toward others can be developed if one in general feels that others are fair, trustworthy, and helpful*” (Kim and Kim, 2017, p. 622).

Further, social capital is maintained and extended via SM social communication (Su and Chan, 2017). Within the SM network, employees are able to interact not only for maintaining existing interpersonal connections with colleagues but also to expand social relationships and create new ties (Lin and Lu, 2011; Jun et al., 2017). Consequently, one more benefit of SM in regards to social support is the creation of new relationships or ties (Kim and Kim, 2017). Maintaining interpersonal connections means maintaining existing social ties on SM. This means that, through communication and interaction, existing ties become stronger (Schmidt et al., 2016). For example, they have the opportunity, with the help of SM functions such as “friends’ recommendations”, to find and connect with colleagues from their workplace environment (Lin et al., 2016). Therefore, research indicates that communication satisfaction through SM is very important for the development and the maintenance of workplace relationships (Frampton and Child, 2013).

However, as Lam (2016) argued careless use of SM may damage existing network ties in the workplace context, due to complicated ethical and legal dilemmas or generally employment-related dilemmas. These can be employee criticism, offending non-private messages and even unclear boundaries to the explosion of personal information. Further, it is not easy for employees to integrate their personal and professional worlds through SM usage due to those boundaries (van Prooijen et al., 2018). Online use may decrease and harm the quality of real workplace relationships, as online communication may take time from in-person interactions that have more quality and physical ties, and therefore, decrease the well-being of employees (Wang et al., 2014). This is because online relationships are considered sometimes as superficial, which negatively impact the real-life relationships (Kraut et al., 1998; Wang et al., 2014).

Nevertheless, Su et al. (2015) argued that SM could benefit the social relationships in a workplace in different forms. More frequent interaction enhances the opportunities for exchanging mutual personal support. Specifically, friendship and strong relationships depend on structural, individual, situational, and dyadic factors (Price and Arnould, 1999). Structural is related to similarities in terms of language and personality, such as mutual interests. Further, the situational factor is mainly related to the frequency of interactions, and also to the opportunity to share emotions and even

stories (Price and Arnould, 1999; Su et al., 2015). However, there is a lack of empirical connection between SM usage and the social relationships, along the lines of bonding social capital theory (Su and Chan, 2017; Yahia et al., 2018). Recent strategic HR methods should take into consideration the way that SM impacts the organisational social capital because as Dess and Sauerwald (2014, p.7) argued “*We build on recent research of human resource management in the knowledge economy to show that firms must leverage strategic HR assets through technology and social capital to fully capture the value of human capital resources*”.

It is therefore important to examine how this specific resource of bonding relationships is influenced by the employee SM usage, in the workplace environment (Schmidt et al., 2016).

### **RQ1b How does employees’ SM social usage affect workplace social support?**

#### **2.2.3 Individual level vs group level of social capital examination**

At this point, it is important to clarify the level of social capital analysis in this study. Looking at the literature on social capital ties, it seems that generally there are two main levels of examination: micro and macro-levels (Putnam, 1993; Coleman, 1999; Felin et al., 2015; Jin, 2015; King and Lee, 2016). Research-based on micro-level focus on the individual level of social capital deriving from interpersonal relationships (Coleman, 1999; King and Lee, 2016). In other words, the individual dimension is referring to individuals’ social relationships (Burt, 1992, as cited in Borgatti and Jones, 1998, p. 27). However, researchers focusing on the macro view see social capital as a power characteristic of organisations and even collective groups (King and Lee, 2016). There are also multilevel ways of examination, where the social structure of interest encompasses groups inside or outside the organisation (Oh et al., 2014). Therefore, group social capital is usually concerned with the effectiveness of external relationships and relationships with stakeholders.

Since social capital can be conceptualised on different levels such as individual, group, community, organisational end even national, there is a debate on the benefits an individual, can individually or collectively earn (Putnam, 1993; Coleman, 1999; Ernst et al., 2014). This is based on the fact that individuals’ interaction results in important organisational outcomes (Felin et al.,

2015). Thus, the interaction between employees in an organisation does not only lead to benefits for the individuals but for the organisation as well.

Related to the above, this study is examining the influence of social SM usage on the individual social bonding capital and satisfaction and how this affects an important organisational activity – employee’s eWOM quality. While eWOM is an individual activity, it directly affects the performance of the organisation. Consequently, this study is interested in examining the network of social relationships within the organisation. It, therefore, follows the individual-level analysis of social capital, as it is defined by Ellison et al. (2007, p. 959), where social capital at the individual level can be seen as a person that “*draws on resources from other members of the networks to which he or she belongs*”.

A further reason for focusing on the individual level is because this study examines the individual-structural dimension of workplace bonding ties (separated into the social and emotional dimension of resources and relationships). The structural dimension is based on individuals’ social ties, interactions and networking relationships, and therefore it is connected with the individual level and not with the collective level (Ali-Hassan et al., 2015). This is because the structural dimension is related to individuals’ social experiences and emotional feelings.

Further, explanations involving the individual level are more constant and generalizable compared to group explanations (Coleman, 1999; Felin et al., 2015). This is also explained by the fact that even macro constructs are mediated by the actions of individuals (Coleman, 1999; Felin et al., 2015). Finally, SM usage in the workplace is a phenomenon that can be explained better in terms of individual action and interaction, and for examining better the social capital benefits in regards to SM usage (Huang and Liu, 2017).

### **2.3 Employee satisfaction**

Employee satisfaction is a commonly-used dependent variable of workplace communicational research (Staw, 1984). It is the employees’ overall attitude towards their work, driven by various psychological needs (Hanna et al., 2017). It is therefore seen as a multifaceted construct that includes various aspects of satisfaction, such as payment, working conditions and relationships with supervisors and colleagues (Rad and Yarmohammadian, 2006).

Employee satisfaction indicates the extent to which employees are pleased and happy in their relationship with their organisation (Kang and Sung, 2017). However, it is not only dependent on structural job conditions, but on perceptions as well (Hurlbert, 1991). Consequently, it is connected with employees' expectations - if their expectations are met, they are satisfied and committed (Schweitzer and Lyons, 2008). More satisfied employees are happier employees that perform better and help in achieving organisational goals and targets (Scott and Stephens, 2009). This is because satisfied employees will reveal benefits, either in work tasks and procedures or in workplace relationships, practices, and routines (Robertson and Fee, 2017). Therefore, organisations invest in strategies that will help them to increase the levels of satisfaction in the workplace environment, and to increase employee effectiveness and retain the most valuable employees (Hanna et al., 2017; Wnuk, 2017).

For the needs of this research, the term employee satisfaction does not refer to the overall job satisfaction in general, and therefore, overall job satisfaction is not examined in this study. In this study, the term 'employee satisfaction' refers to the satisfaction that an individual feels, when his/her emotional and social needs are satisfied (Bao, 2016). Hence, employee satisfaction in these terms is the perceived socio-emotional satisfaction in regards to the psychological well-being, as a result of the satisfaction of employees' workplace socio-emotional needs. This is because the objective of socio-emotional support is to enhance the subjective psychological well-being of the beneficiary (Bao, 2016). In this sense, as Huang and Liu (2017, p.515) clarify "*job satisfaction refers to one's attitude toward his/her job which captures employees' emotional feelings of organisations, coworkers, and jobs*". Social and emotional support are related to health outcomes and well-being benefits, such as individual psychological well-being, while the absence of socio-emotional support is related to depression (Glover and Parry, 2008; Jin, 2015).

Socio-emotional support is considered very important in organisational settings because it reduces the levels of stress and anxiety (Lages, 2012) and affects the mood and makes personal relationships stronger (Bao, 2016). It is suggested also, that online social support through SM usage offers a good opportunity for managers to achieve social capital gains. They can create a more interactive communication environment between customers, which will enhance business value (Lin et al., 2016), and develop further the social learning process at the workplace, in relation to employee well-being (Liu et al., 2016). It could be assumed that, the benefits from this support

could even help employees to overcome difficult circumstances in their workplace (Glover and Parry, 2008). For this reason, Dess and Sauerwald (2014) focused on the importance of social capital ties and investigated how these could support organisational benefits, such as reducing employee turnover via socio-emotional attachment and they called for further research in this aspect. SM connections between colleagues ease the personal connections to become stronger. In relation to this, people search for emotional and social support online (Schmidt et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2016).

Further, employee job satisfaction has been selected in this study, to examine the link between workplace bonding social capital and employee WOM, for different reasons. Job satisfaction is a key indicator of the success of an organisation (Charoensukmongol, 2014), and one important factor influencing employee satisfaction nowadays, is SM employee usage (Robertson and Fee, 2017). Previous relevant studies suggest that the use of SM by employees, may enhance the levels of employee satisfaction (see van Zyl, 2009; Wickramasingh and Nisaf, 2013; Wnuk, 2017). Valkenburg et al. (2006) proved that individuals who use SNSs like Facebook, are more likely to report satisfaction with life and happiness. Further, Charoensukmongkol (2014) demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between job satisfaction, job performance and cognitive absorption with SM intensity, and finally, Robertson and Fee (2017) found that the levels of employee satisfaction are connected with the time employees spend, interacting with colleagues on Facebook. Finally, Anasori et al. (2021) argued that underestimating employee social support in hospitality workplaces may affect negatively employee well-being and lead to employee dissatisfaction.

There is also previous research that relates the use of employee SM with satisfaction to achieve work-life balance (see Leidner et al., 2010; Moqbel et al., 2013; Walden, 2016). Moqbel et al. (2013) identified that job satisfaction is an important motivator between the use of SNSs and job performance, because employees in this way maintain the work-life realm. Specifically, they examined the role of SM usage with job performance and organisational commitment via the job satisfaction effect, and they found a positive connection in this relationship. Similarly, Tarafdar, Pullins and Ragu-Nathan (2015) discovered that the employee usage intensity of Facebook, is positively related to life satisfaction and social trust, while Abdulahi, Samadi and Gharleghi (2014)

argued that SM usage enhances sociability in the workplace, and this, therefore, enhances workplace growth and satisfaction.

A further reason for the selection of job satisfaction is the argument that employee satisfaction is considered one of the most important antecedents of WOM (Cao et al., 2016; Zhang and Luo, 2016; Bravo et al., 2017). Specifically, job satisfaction is a very strong indicator of employee willingness to participate in employee branding and positive WOM (Alexandrov et al., 2013; Cervellon and Lirio, 2017). Bravo et al. (2017) proved that employees are willing to spread positive things about their organisation, only if they are satisfied and their needs are taken into consideration. In the same vein, Lee and Kim (2020) proved that for employees who are satisfied with their organisation, it is more possible for them to be interested in the success of their organisation and its reputation. Consequently, employee satisfaction is seen as an imperative tool that seems suitable for connecting SM, bonding capital and employee eWOM behavior.

Finally, Robertson and Fee (2017) mentioned that relatively restricted research has examined workplace satisfaction in regards to SM usage, and further research is needed for unpacking this relationship more. Similarly, Mogbel et al. (2013) suggested that employee satisfaction can be considered as an outcome to be taken into account when examining the impact of SM in workplaces. The bonding ties in an organisation can modify and influence the employee commitment and satisfaction levels (Zhong et al., 2012), as discussed next. Therefore, by extending the findings of previous research on SM usage and job satisfaction, this study examines the employee satisfaction levels deriving from the bonding ties and colleagues' relationships, as these have been affected by SM usage.

## **RQ2: How do workplace bonding ties affect employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction?**

The two critical bonding elements that represent the workplace bonding social ties in this study are social and emotional support; and the findings of RQ2a and RQ2b are utilised for answering RQ2. Specifically, as is indicated below RQ 2a examines how workplace emotional support affects employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction and RQ 2b examines how workplace social support affects employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

Beginning with emotional support, as one of the most important resources forming workplace bonding ties, it is expected that there will be higher levels of employee satisfaction when employee emotional needs are satisfied (Lages, 2012). The satisfaction of self-needs such as positive social interactions and healthy social ties based on mutual concern and care, understanding, trust and encouragement, may lead to higher levels of employee satisfaction. This is in line with Zhong et al.' (2012, p. 210) argument: "*Expressive ties are quite useful in the workplace as they can provide psychological support for the individual such as encouragement in trying times, comfort when encountering difficulties and give advice about balancing work and life pressures*".

Nabi et al. (2013) identified through their research that socio-emotional support minimizes stress, while social networks without support, entail stress and anxiety. Therefore, higher levels of emotional support led to greater subjective psychological well-being. Pelit et al. (2011) also investigated if behavioural and psychological empowerment impact job satisfaction. Similarly, Karl et al. (2012, as cited in Lampinen et al., 2015) underlined the importance of social support deriving from colleagues' job satisfaction, which also decreases work-related stress. Also, Huy and Shipilov (2012) noted that emotional supported workplace capital within the employee network, advantages the organisation in regards to greater employee satisfaction. Emotional support is even associated with a greater propensity for positive WOM (Buttle, 1998). Finally, it is suggested that emotional attachment creates more committed and satisfied employees that develop better relations with customers (Parry and Solidoro, 2014).

Hence, colleagues' interaction through SM, could act as a medium by which social and emotional support is enhanced, and therefore employees feel more socio and emotional satisfied, and are ready to give back to their organisation (Schimidt et al., 2016), through positive eWOM behavior. Therefore, it is expected that emotional support through employee SM usage, may affect employee satisfaction.

### **RQ2a How does workplace emotional support affect employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction?**

Similarly, positive social interactions and social support may lead to higher levels of employee satisfaction. It may be that, it has been discovered that positive and effective relations with colleagues, is the most important factor for enhancing employee satisfaction. This is mainly

because social ties may influence job satisfaction via the facilitation of social support (Murlbert, 1991). Therefore, SM usage may act as a social source that develops further social ties (Lin et al., 1981), and social ties may facilitate job satisfaction through the provision of social support, which was found to enhance job satisfaction (Hurlbert, 1991; Moqbel, 2013). Specifically, Hurlbert (1991) proved that social networks work as social resources that affect job satisfaction via social support.

Due to the fact that employees can maintain and foster their relationships with colleagues through SM usage, it is more possible the employee relationships to be improved and therefore employee satisfaction can be enhanced (Huang and Liu, 2017).

Prior studies also have proved that the sense of community and employee oneness is associated with higher levels of employee satisfaction (Lampinen et al., 2015). The role of SM in this relationship is important because, if employees do not have frequent face-to-face contact with each other, through SM, they may feel, they are part of the organisational culture, are less lonely, and consequently have enhanced levels of employee satisfaction (Bennett et al., 2010; Appel et al., 2020). Through SM tools, employees may satisfy their need for social interaction and the feeling of being connected with their colleagues (Bao, 2016). This is related to the need for a sense of belonging. Just a few years ago, the Intranet, was a unique communication channel, and it created a sense of community with higher satisfaction, compared to employee face-to-face contact (Kruger et al., 2001). This is because, the sense of belonging in workplaces is related to greater job satisfaction (Milliman et al., 1999; Milliman et al., 2003). Winter-Collins and McDaniel (2000) investigated the sense of belonging and new graduate job satisfaction in the nursing sector and found a significant positive relationship between them.

Consequently, it is possible for employees who receive workplace social support through SM usage, to be more satisfied, and the satisfaction of social needs is seen as an important transmitter to eWOM (Alexandrov et al., 2013; Appel et al., 2020). Previous research indicated that workplace interaction ties with strong bonding elements bring positive outcomes for the organisation (Lin, 2010); and such an outcome is employee satisfaction (Rawlins, 1992; Riordan and Griffeth, 1995). Oh et al. (2014) asserted that informal workplace social ties with strong expressive components, such as emotional and social support may lead to employee satisfaction. Consequently, the development and maintenance of long-term relationships with colleagues leads to higher levels of

employee satisfaction, and this may even link to positive eWOM (Schweitzer and Lyons, 2008). However, it is underlined that further research should examine more the workplace factors that affect employee satisfaction such a factor is workplace social support, as it is developed through employee SM social usage (Charoensukmongkol, 2014; Kim and Kim, 2017).

**RQ2b How does workplace social support affect employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction?**

## **2.4 Employee word-of-mouth behavior**

### **2.4.1 Defining electronic word-of-mouth behavior**

WOM may be one of the oldest mechanisms by which people share their opinion about products they have bought or services they have experienced (Paulin et al., 2016; Morokane et al., 2016). For example, customers share their judgments and views with friends and family, and employees informally share positive or negative information and comments, regarding their employer or brand, away from the workplace (Morokane et al., 2016; Lee and Kim, 2020). Consequently, employee WOM is an internal source that provides information to internal or external sources, sometimes negative and sometimes positive (Uen et al., 2011). It is also mentioned in literature as staff WOM (SWOM) (Keeling et al., 2013).

Employees share their own experience either pleasant or unpleasant with friends and their private network or even in the workplace among other colleagues and stakeholders (Men and Muralidharan, 2017). Consequently, it is possible to harm the reputation of a company or a brand, while also contributing positively. For example, employee WOM may be related to products and services, or to the organisation as an employer. When it is related to the organisational brand products and services, it can influence potential and existing customers, and if it provides essential job and organisational characteristics, it may influence the organisation's recruitments procedures. This is because job seekers create their own opinions and perception about the organisation according to the words of existing or previous employees (Melián-González and Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016). Generally, some of the main characteristics of employee WOM according to Keeling et al. (2013) are:

- It is an informal process, not directed by companies
- It is a process where not only current but also former staff talk with existing staff or even potential applicants mainly personally (or via phone and email)
- It is not related to any reward, because it is based on personal, unpaid communication and therefore it is considered more credible
- There is no direct cost for companies as they do not control it, but they may in the near future be able to monitor it

As influencers of brand perceptions, employees' opinions are regarded as one of the most reliable sources, and therefore employee WOM is very important in the marketing and HR domain (Berger, 2014; Sias and Duncan, 2020; Sakka and Ahammad, 2020). It is an external information provision and external representation of the company, which is not under the control of the organisation (Uen et al., 2011; Lages, 2012). Peers such as friends and co-workers with strong social ties are essential socialisation agents whose interaction has been broadened because of SM and therefore they can influence consumer attitudes and intentions (Wang et al., 2012; Men and Muralidharan, 2017). Consequently, both researchers and practitioners considered informal WOM by employees, as a powerful competitive advantage for organisations, which requires further research, as it may drive organisational effectiveness (Lages, 2012; Xiong et al., 2013; Chang and Busser, 2017).

The two main forms of WOM is the face-to-face WOM and online WOM (eWOM) or otherwise known as worker electronic word of mouth (weWOM) (Melián-González and Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016). The former corresponds to the traditional way, while the latter use various internet tools, but mainly SM, for spreading information externally (Choi and Scott, 2012). Generally, face-to-face employee WOM is conceptualised as oral, face-to-face communication and instant conversation among the receiver and the sender, in relation to the brands, products and services, not only within, but also outside of the workplace social network (Harris and Ogbonna, 2013; Bravo et al., 2017). In the past, before the invention of the Internet, face-to-face WOM was a vital tool for learning about products and brands (Men and Muralidharan, 2017). However, during the last years more and more people have been exchanging information and personal experiences on virtual platforms (Choi and Scott, 2012). It is interesting to note that 80 per cent of Internet users, use SM (Capriotti et al., 2020). This may be related to the fact that online users feel the need not only to creates and share, but also to interact with the content with other SM users or friends or

followers (Capriotti et al., 2020). For all these reasons, Chang and Busser (2017) argued that both forms are extremely important and need further empirical attention.

WOM transcends the traditional boundaries of person to person contact through SM and develop interactive discussions for products or brands with information, opinions, experiences, arguments and relevant details (Men and Muralidharan, 2017). Specifically, eWOM is stated as “*any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet*” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39). In this electronic age, online written communication seems preferable and effective. The interactive character of SM facilitates eWOM behavior. Today, it is very usual for someone to upload experiences with or opinions of a product or a company, and consequently, SM users get valuable information (Choi and Scott, 1998).

Importantly, SM is an updated form of WOM, called electronic WOM, because it is a form of marketing communication for a firm, a brand, or a product (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011; Wu, 2016). SM has the power to monitor and spread WOM messages (Huotari et al., 2015) and it is an ideal tool for employee eWOM. While face-to-face WOM is based on oral communication, eWOM is created with the written word (Choi and Scott, 2012). Electronic WOM (eWOM) involves various interactions with various people via SM and with no time limitation (Choi and Scott, 2012; Ji et al. 2017). Information is available at any time to a multitude of people through the Internet whose interactions are disconnected from time and space (Choi and Scott, 2012; Sias and Duncan, 2020). For this reason, the online users that comment positively about a company or a product are even called ‘online evangelists’ (Lee et al., 2006; Huotari et al., 2015).

Therefore, employee eWOM, nowadays is a major HR and marketing challenge. Employees can speak about their organisation online, and their participation cannot be controlled or monitored (Dreher, 2014). Employees are getting involved in informal online interactions, and their online behavior and activities in regards to their organisation, are meaningful for the organisational or brand reputation (Cervellon and Lirio, 2017). Stakeholders recognise employees as trustworthy informers because they can represent the organisational culture online (van den Berg and Verhoeven, 2017). Nowadays, employees even use websites designed specifically for the purpose of posting reviews, where they can speak online about their companies and share their work

experiences. Potential customers, job candidates, and other stakeholders can view the ratings and the comments. Glassdoor is a well-known example (Melián-González and Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016; Lee and Kim, 2020).

By examining social relationships of individual and social ties through SM sites, it is easier to understand and explain the eWOM behavior (Shen et al., 2016). eWOM is related to informal, but intended communication about the quality of an organisation, a brand, or a service (Jun et al., 2017). However, SM has expanded the power of WOM among consumers, employees, and other stakeholders, and it has impacted purchase intentions, and therefore eWOM was developed. More specifically, eWOM may be related to online messages, online reviews or even posts and comments on SM sites (Jun et al., 2017). Consequently, employees can express their thoughts, opinions, and feelings for their organisation or brand, and these define whether their words negative or positive.

#### **2.4.1.1 Quality of employee electronic word-of-mouth**

The quality of employee eWOM is very important, as positive eWOM can promote a company, whereas negative eWOM can severely harm a company's reputation (Walsh et al., 2016). An overview of existing studies on eWOM behavior in organisational settings, follows.

##### ***Negative eWOM***

Negative eWOM is considered a form of "organisational misbehavior" (Harris and Ogbonna, 2013), and it is well-known as bad WOM or badmouthing behavior (Stoughton et al., 2013). It may refer to criticisms and even mendacious facts and data, which employees express in counterproductive ways (Walsh et al., 2013). Employees may express negative and even false information for their organisation, or for their coworkers and manager (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Kluemper et al., 2016; Lee and Kim, 2020). Through public SM, therefore, such as Facebook or Twitter, employees may reach a large external audience for sharing negative information about their company or even provide confidential information and data (Lee and Kim, 2020). Harmful or incorrect information or messages can damage the reputation of the company in the eyes of stakeholders, such as customers, competitors and existing or potential employees (Walsh et al., 2016).

As it was mentioned before, employees voice their dissatisfaction either orally to their social networks, such as friends and family, or online, reaching more people. Due to the great level of employees' influence, as their opinion matters to stakeholders, negative words can lead to wide-reaching effects on a company's reputation (Dreher, 2014). It has been argued that negative eWOM has a greater impact than positive eWOM. This means that if someone is not happy, it is possible to tell twice in comparison with someone satisfied (Buttle, 1998). Especially via SM, everything from private becomes public (Kluemper et al., 2016) and once something is said, it may last forever (Dreher, 2014). Therefore, the inappropriate or negative behavior of employees on SM may humiliate organisations, result in a loss of a company's credibility and damage a company's productivity (Flynn, 2012). There are examples of employees who were fired because they were engaged in this kind of behavior on SM (Stoughton et al., 2013). Additionally, it may discourage potential job applicants from applying to an organisation, as the way an organisation is perceived is extremely important, not only for reaching potential customers but for reaching effective potential employees as well (Harris and Ogbonna, 2013).

Further, referring to the reasons that lead employees to share negative eWOM, there are relatively few studies examining this aspect and generally bad-mouthing is a neglected area (Harris and Ogbonna, 2013; Lee and Kim, 2020). According to the relevant literature, the main reason for bad-mouthing is employee dissatisfaction. Mainly, if employees do not feel satisfied with their company or employer and their expectations are not met, they possibly will communicate negatively (Chang and Busser, 2017). Employees may express negative WOM because of an unpleasant event or unhappy situation (Bagozzi, 1992), and therefore, they may want to warn others (Lee and Kim, 2020). However, Stoughton et al. (2013) examined if specific personal characteristics reflect the content of their SM postings. They discovered that people who were characterised as being less agreeable and conscientious, would engage more in online bad-mouth behaviour. Along similar lines, Harris and Ogbonna (2013) examined the forms of employee negative WOM. They demonstrated that while some forms of WOM may range from dissatisfaction with management or cynicism, others cannot be linked to a premeditated rationale, as the behavior of front-line employees is unpredictable and motivated by different individual and collective stimulators. Thus, Harris and Ogbonna (2013) called for further research examining the actions and emotions of employees in regards to bad-mouthing. In the same vein, Lee and Kim (2020), argued that it is required to examine further the motives that lead to negative eWOM.

Finally, van den Berg and Verhoeven (2017) investigated through qualitative research what kind of policy managers adopt, in order to enhance employee advocacy. They found that some managers were prevention-focused and therefore adopted policies only to prevent risks, while others gave more attention to the potentialities of employee SM usage and, therefore they were focused on advantages. Either from the perspective of organisational psychologists or from the marketing perspective, further research developments in the area of WOM are needed, to examine further the dynamic of employee WOM (Harris and Ogbonna, 2013; Jun et al., 2017; Gvili and Levy, 2018; Walsh et al., 2020).

### ***Positive eWOM***

Not unfairly, positive eWOM is considered as one of the most influential forces in the marketplace (Paulin et al., 2006) and a significant notion of internal marketing (Schweitzer and Lyons, 2008). This is because, it can attract potential customers (Paulin et al., 2006), and it is an important source of information for job seekers, which affects potential employees in their decision to work at a specific organisation (Uen et al., 2011; Keeling et al., 2013). The positive eWOM can be found in literature, as either a brand-building attitude or even as an employee promotional attitude (Chang and Busser, 2017). Generally, positive eWOM is the willingness of employees to share positive things and comments about their organisation within their network in order to promote it (Bravo et al., 2017).

It has been argued that there is an important gap regarding the social dimension of eWOM (Alexandrov, 2013; Sias and Duncan, 2020). Positive behavior of employees mainly depends on two conditions: firstly, employees must have a positive perception of their employer and feel proud to be part of the organisation, and secondly they must want to pass this positive perception to others internally and externally (Bravo et al., 2017). However, additional factors influence positive eWOM. If employees' expectations are met and they have good treatment from the part of the company, they will feel more satisfied, more engaged and more attached to the company, and therefore they will communicate positively (Bagozzi, 1992; Chang and Busser, 2017; Sakka and Ahammad, 2020).

A further transmitter of positive WOM is the power of strong ties. Lages (2012) investigated the drivers of employee favourable external representation of the workplace through workgroup support and its effect on job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and emotional exhaustion.

The study found out that the two most important emotional influences are employee commitment and satisfaction via workgroup support. Therefore, it is suggested that future research should further investigate positive WOM, through the relationship of strong emotional sources, such as socio-emotional support and employee satisfaction.

Finally, Choi and Scott (2012) accomplished a survey including university students and discovered that the intensity of SM usage influences eWOM, through the relational dimension of social capital. Specifically, they examined the relationship between the student SNS usage, users' relational social capital, knowledge sharing and eWOM. They concluded that future research should examine the relationship between social networking ties in the context of SM and positive eWOM in workplaces (Choi and Scott, 2012; Thourunroje, 2014). This is because they consider SM as a tool that organisations can use to enhance employees' identification with and connection to the organisation, and by satisfying the need for belonging, positive eWOM may be revealed (Bravo et al., 2017; Sakka and Ahammad, 2020).

Previous work also, shows that higher levels of employee commitment and satisfaction, lead to employee ambassadorship, where employees reach an upper level of positive eWOM. At this level, not only they pose positive things for their organisations, but they act as marketers that want to promote their organisation and brand to customers and potential employees, with both words and actions (Schweitzer and Lyons, 2008; Keeling et al., 2013; Xiong et al., 2013). Thus, employee ambassadorship, employee advocacy or employee branding behavior, is the willingness of employees to become "marketers" and promote their organisational brand to different stakeholders (Schweitzer and Lyons, 2008; Sakka and Ahammad, 2020). From the marketing perspective "*positive WOM occurs when good news testimonials and endorsements desired by the company are uttered*" (Buttle, 1998, p. 243).

It is argued by researchers that if employees freely use SM in the workplace, then they will be willing to blog about their company's products and services, and enhance performance (Broughton et al., 2010). This is because happy customers will generate favorable eWOM, as they will promote the company's products and brand; the same applies to employees as transmitters of positive eWOM (Bravo et al., 2017). In this way, it is even seen as free advertising for the organisation (Buttle, 1998). Employees have the power to shape brand perceptions via personal contact with brand stakeholders. Within this scope, organisational managers are expected to find ways to

activate potential advocacy of their brands and positive eWOM behavior (Huotari et al., 2015; Walsh et al., 2016; Morokane et al., 2016; Cervellon and Lirio, 2017; Sakka and Ahammad, 2020). Different organisational influences impact employees' intention to become corporate brand ambassadors to their close networks (Morokane et al., 2016). As Huotari et al. (2015) asserted employees could be the positive content creators through SM, and companies could consider this, as a new marketing opportunity. Potential customers can be the friends or the followers of employees in their personal SM networking and employees could be the connection to successful reputation strategies (Walsh et al., 2016). WOM could even positively impact recruitment, increase customers' loyalty and promote the company's products or services (Choi and Scott, 2012). Therefore, employees who are satisfied could communicate positive information through informal online networks and be involved in positive advocacy that provides positive marketing outcomes for the organisation (Harris and Ogbonna, 2013; Sias and Duncan, 2020).

Positive eWOM can be seen from different perspectives and levels and there are different categories for employee brand behavior. Paulin et al. (2006) in order to examine how organisational commitment influences employee intention to recommend and speak positively for their organisation, divided positive employee WOM into three categories: 1) employee as a brand ambassador, 2) employee as an advocate and 3) employee as a passive supporter. This separation is based on the employees' level of positive intention and action. For example, a passive supporter would recommend the organisation only if asked, and an employee as an advocate would make a positive point and recommendation, while an ambassador would even urge others to speak positively. Further, King et al. (2012) classified this employee behavior into employee brand endorsement, employee brand allegiance and discretionary employee brand consistent behavior.

Along similar lines, Cervellon and Lirio (2017) conducted two studies, one in a big multinational company and one in private sector companies in France, in order to find how employees engage in SM, for promoting their organisation. In their study, Cervellon and Lirio (2017) identified that while 77% of the respondents used at least one SM platform, they showed low brand engagement in SM. This conclusion concerns either baby boomers or Generations X or Y. Consequently, they highlight the need for further research in this area, to see if employees in different cultures promote their company and discover the factors leading to this behavior and discover ways for fostering further employee branding behavior. To assess employee behavior online, Cervellon and Lirio

(2017) developed 14 items for examining 14 behaviors, separated into four dimensions: employee WOM, employee endorsement, employee sharing and employee culture.

Researchers are calling the need to further understand the issues involved in this decision and the attention must be given to the potentiality of employee eWOM (Schweitzer and Lyons, 2008; King et al., 2012; Harris and Ogbonna, 2013; Dreher, 2014; Morokane et al., 2016; Sias and Duncan, 2020). Limited scholarly work has been conducted for exploring the role of employees in the branding process, out of the workplace (Dreher, 2014; Cervellon and Lirio, 2017; Sakka and Ahammad, 2020). Nevertheless, having in mind that every employee has an online contact with a stakeholder, it is important to drive this connection in positive ways (Cervellon and Lirio, 2017; Sias and Duncan, 2020). Consequently, additional research is needed, not only for preventing risks but mainly for releasing benefits (Dreher, 2014; Walsh et al., 2020).

#### **2.4.1.2 Employee satisfaction and employee electronic word-of-mouth behavior**

Looking at the literature on employee eWOM domain, job satisfaction is considered as the most important driver of positive eWOM among other factors such as loyalty, commitment and trust (Buttle, 1998; King et al., 2012; Alexandrov et al., 2013; Harris and Ogbonna, 2013; Bravo et al., 2017). Very satisfied or unsatisfied people are more likely to express comments about a company or a brand (Harris and Ogbonna, 2013). As Bagozzi (1992) explains when someone feels a sense of satisfaction and happiness because of a pleasant event, the individual is motivated to share this happiness with others.

Most of the studies are based on the connection between customers WOM and organisational success, but it is even important to examine further the connection between employee satisfaction and employee eWOM (Lages, 2012; Harris and Ogbonna, 2013). Especially in regards to the workplace social media domain and workplace social capital, the concept of eWOM has received little attention. Ways also must be found to reduce the level of employee dissatisfaction that results in negative eWOM (Keeling et al., 2013).

Employee satisfaction is mostly linked with employee expectations. If employees' expectations are met, then the organisation will benefit from a satisfied employee, in terms of either a lower level of turnover, or better performance or more employee advocacy levels (Schweitzer and Lyons, 2008). Therefore, this is another reason for adopting employee satisfaction as a driver for positive employee eWOM in this study. If employees fulfil the need for socio-emotional support, such as the need for social approval, respect and care, they are expected to be more satisfied and happier and therefore, it is more possible for them to pursue positive eWOM (Lages, 2012). In other words, employees that feel socially and emotionally supported in their working environment, exhibit positive work behavior as they want their organisation to succeed. For this reason, it is possible to show positive eWOM behavior. Hence, further research is expected to examine the relationship between social networking ties in the context of SM and positive eWOM in workplaces (Choi and Scott, 2012; Thourunrojje, 2014). As Huang and Liu (2017) argued, especially in regards to employee satisfaction, little research has seen the relationship between online social capital and positive or negative employee outcomes.

**RQ3 How does employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction affect employees' eWOM behavior?**

The following table summarises the preliminary factors of this Thesis, deriving from the literature, including the relevant references and the research questions examining them.

**Table 2.1: Thesis' preliminary factors (Source: Author's own)**

Preliminary factors	References	Research Questions
<b>A) Workplace emotional support:</b>		RQ1a
1) Mutual concern and care	Lin et al., 2016; Huang and Liu, 2017; Yahia et al., 2017	RQ1a
2) Empathy and love	Lin et al., 2016; Hu, 2004	RQ1a
3) Encouragement and comfort	Lin et al., 2016; Bao, 2016; Yahia et al., 2017	RQ1a
4) Trust	Kluemper et al., 2016	RQ1a
5) Stress Relief	Williams, 2006; Ellison et al., 2007; Su and Chan, 2017	RQ1a
<b>B) Workplace social support:</b>		RQ1b
1) Social interaction and communication	Lu and Yang, 2014	RQ1b
2) Sense of belonging	Huang and Liu, 2017	RQ1b
3) Maintenance of interpersonal relationships	Ali-Hassan et al., 2015	RQ1b
4) Building new relationships	Ali-Hassan et al., 2015	RQ1b
5) Reducing of loneliness and isolation	Hu et al., 2004	RQ1b
<b>C) Individual effect: employee satisfaction</b>		RQ2
1) Employee satisfaction and emotional support	Putnam, 2000; Robertson and Fee, 2017	RQ2a
2) Employee satisfaction and social support	Putnam, 2000; Robertson and Fee, 2017	RQ2b
<b>D) Organisational effect: employee e-WOM behaviour</b>	Cervellon and Lirio, 2017	RQ3

## 2.5 Gap identification

The extensive theoretical research undertaken and presented in this chapter has identified the knowledge gaps, which highlight the need for and direction of further research in the specific domain. Most of these arguments have already been mentioned and discussed in this chapter, but are hereby presented comprehensively, interrelated and in the specific context of gap identification and further research avenues.

Recent literature clearly states that additional research must investigate employee SM usage in workplaces, and identify the implications for organisations so that actions can be taken to reach possible benefits and overcome drawbacks (Moqbel et al., 2013; Dreher, 2014; Badea, 2014; Schimidt et al., 2016; Kluemper et al., 2016; Men and Muralidharan, 2017; Hanna et al., 2017; Bala et al., 2019; Song et al., 2019; Lee, 2020). Specifically, Song et al. (2019, p. 103) stated that it is important *“to uncover differences and the relationships between social media, as well as understanding how the joint use of multiple social media may influence employee practices and outcomes”*,

Additional research is expected to shed light on the way that SM modify specific workplace factors, organisational incidents and the functioning of businesses (Charoensukmongkol, 2014; Huang et al., 2015; Ngai et al., 2015, Bala et al., 2019), in order to guide modern companies in redefining their SM usage strategies and policies (Chen and Wei, 2020). While much attention has been given to the effect of SM generally on society and community, limited research has examined how the forms of internal communication, in an organisation, have changed due to the diffusion of SM (Huang et al., 2015; Ngai et al., 2015; Lee, 2020). In relation to this, while there is research examining the effect of SM on workplace communication, research examining this relationship including social exchange relationship outcomes, is scarce (Chen and Wei, 2020).

The fluid and interactive means of SM communication may leverage opportunities and benefits in the business context, especially from the marketing and HR approach, and hence, it should be further investigated (Wu, 2016). Such an opportunity is the fact that the virtual communication facilitated through SM, further develops social capital connections in workplaces, in ways that organisations could leverage competitive advantages (Wickramasingh and Nisaf, 2013; Parry and Solidoro, 2014; Gibbs et al., 2015; Sias and Duncan, 2020). It could be assumed, that SM is a mean

for engaging current employees and as an internal marketing tool that contributes to the organisational culture (Gibbs et al., 2015; Sakka and Ahammad, 2020). Therefore, it is suggested that the internal communication and marketing potential of SM, in the organisational context should be examined further (Gibbs et al. 2015; Wu, 2016; Cervellon and Lirio, 2017; Wushe and Shenje, 2019). Specifically, fresh empirical research is needed to examine the dynamics of motivations that direct employee SM behavior (Lee, 2020).

In relation to this, it is also argued that future research should examine how social capital is affected by the usage of SM and how this develops individual behaviors. As Jun et al. (2017, p. 379) mentioned “*social capital has rarely been investigated in the context of SNSs, and there is a particular paucity of research regarding the structural model of social capital*”. Thus, existing studies have not yet investigated this issue satisfactorily and limited empirical research has been focused on measuring the social capital ties within SM (Xerry and Brunetto, 2010; Pinho, 2013; Kwahk and Park, 2015; Sias and Duncan, 2020). Even the attention given to bonding ties is narrower. Previous work on SM and social ties is mainly based on bridging social ties, and the latest literature raises the question regarding the way that SM affect strong ties in the workplace (Bargh and Mckenna, 2004; Ellison et al., 2007, Li and Chen, 2014; Neves, 2015). Following this inconsistency, researchers have identified the need for further examination of bonding ties in the workplace, so that their full potential for organisations can be richer (Bargh and Mckenna, 2004; Ellison et al., 2007, Li and Chen, 2014; Neves, 2015; Walsh et al., 2016; Wu, 2016).

Similarly, it is important to examine how employees’ SM usage is affecting the expressive-bonding relationships in an organisation, in different dimensions (Xerri and Brunetto, 2010; Oh et al. 2014; Lee, 2020). For example, additional focus should be placed on socio-emotional support, which is considered an undervalued resource of social capital ties in the workplace (Oh et al., 2014; Lin et al., 2016), and on the need of employees to belong and feel part of the organisation (Choi and Scott, 2012; Alqahtani, 2019). Specifically, only a few studies have investigated social and emotional support in the context of SM and more studies are needed to explore this area and its implications (Lin et al., 2016). Therefore, Kluemper et al. (2016) suggested that future research should investigate how bonding social capital is affected by employee SM usage, and how organisations could benefit from an appropriate utilisation of SM.

The connection of coworkers through public SM advantages affects either the individual or organisational level and these should be identified (Huang and Liu, 2017; Lee, 2020). However, little research is focused on how employee SM usage impacts colleagues' connections, and on how this is related to positive or negative work attitudes and behaviors (Schmidt et al., 2016). More recently, it has been stated that "*limited empirical investigations comprehensively focus on the impacts of organisational factors, apart from individual factors, on employees' social media behaviors*" (Lee and Kim, 2020, p. 2). Such an employee attitude that affects organisations directly or indirectly is employee WOM and employee online branding behavior. Especially, from the part of WOM domain and the emotional and social implications involved in employees deciding to speak positively or negatively, marketing literature is calling for further research (Harris and Ogbonna, 2013; Cervellon and Lirio, 2017; Sias and Duncan, 2020). Possibly in the near future, SM may empower internal marketing, as employees may be influenced through SM networking and become ambassadors of their organisations in the virtual world (Parry and Solidoro, 2014; Bravo et al., 2017; Sakka and Ahammad, 2020). Consequently, employee satisfaction and emotional attachment of employees are important factors, in clarifying the ways that lead to employee endorsement and positive employee attitudes, in favor of the organisation (Parry and Solidoro, 2014; Schmidt et al., 2016; Sias and Duncan, 2020).

Additional research is requested to be conducted along these lines, to enhance employee online communication life, and employee eWOM behavior attitude. "*Even though the importance of research for strategic communications programs generally is common knowledge, it is hardly addressed in the context of managing employees' participation in social media*" (Dreher, 2014, p. 347), and therefore more research must examine these relationships. In other words, it is important to see how different types of organisations, industries, and even cultures, confront the risks or take advantage of the benefits of employee SM communication activities (Dreher, 2014); and even how these benefits influence positive organisational outputs such as positive eWOM (Leonardi et al., 2013). In achieving desired organisational outcomes, identifying the factors that motivate employees to contribute positively online for the benefit of their organisation, is needed (Lee and Kim, 2020).

On the other hand, given that employees may use their SM profiles to speak about their organisation/or their employer, and that their words are considered credible, companies must pay

attention to this phenomenon, as it is possible to negatively affect the organisational reputation (Lee and Kim, 2020). Therefore, it is recommended that future research should examine the relationship between social networking ties, in the context of SM and positive eWOM in workplaces (Choi and Scott, 2012; Thoumrungroje, 2014; Gvili and Levy, 2018; Lee and Kim, 2020).

Additionally, an important limitation, in terms of the research approach that extant literature on employee SM usage has applied is the fact that more qualitative research is required in this domain. As surveys and generally quantitative studies cannot deeply explain sensitive relationships, more qualitative research studies are required in the area of SM and its implications for firms and employees (Charoensukmonhkol, 2014; Ali-Hassan et al., 2015; Gonzalez, 2015). Specifically, Gonzalez (2015) proposed that future research should examine the impacts of SM from a deeper and wider perspective. Updated research should focus mainly on qualitative measuring of employees' usage because qualitative data will reveal new and interesting dimensions of SM usage (Wang et al., 2014; Ali-Hassan et al., 2015). Huang and Liu (2017) also investigated quantitatively the bridging ties and the work-related SM usage in the workplace and they suggested that future studies in this context should be based on face-to-face approaches, to achieve better quality data. After reviewing SM studies in the workplace domain, it seems that quantitative studies have dominated. Finally, Song et al. (2019, p. 104), advised further qualitative research to uncover the underlying complex effect of SM technology in the workplace. They also added that as *“research on the role of social media in the workplace is still in its infancy, a qualitative study is recommendable”*. To fill this research void, a qualitative approach is followed in this study.

A further important inconsistency in research on employee SM usage is the fact that most of the SM studies do not obey academic standards of transparency, reliability, validity and objectivity (Dreher, 2014). Wickramasinghe and Nisaf (2013) concluded that the majority of research in the area of online social networking is mainly practitioner viewpoints or just conceptual papers. Similarly, Leftheriotis and Giannakos (2014) argued that empirical research on SM usage in the workplace is rare. This is may be because, while SM has attracted attention during the last years, only recently it has constituted an emerging field of academic investigation (Wickramasingh and Nisaf, 2013; Gibbs et al., 2015; Song et al., 2019). For this reason, McDonald and Thompson

(2016) suggested that more empirical-driven research is required for addressing cyberspace and the work environment.

Lastly, this Thesis corresponds to a further gap related to the selected industry and context of this study, which is the Cyprus hospitality industry. The quality of employee service is being acknowledged as an extremely important factor that affects customers' experience in the hospitality industry. Employee service, however, depends largely on internal employee communication and employee satisfaction (Yang, 2020) and "*despite such a need, research regarding effective communication practices in the dynamic hospitality workplace is lacking*" (King and Lee, 2016, p. 1). Further, there is scarce research based on SM in the hospitality workplace (Ladkin and Buhalis, 2016; King and Lee, 2016; Anasori et al., 2021). Taking also into consideration the significance of social capital and its impact on organisational performance, the studies that are based on these elements, within the hospitality area are, overall, restricted (Zhao *et al.*, 2011; Sainaghi and Baggio, 2014; King and Lee, 2016; Anasori et al., 2021). High-quality social relationships among employees may benefit hospitality organisations to a significant extent, and further research is needed, in this context (Anasori et al., 2021).

## **2.6 Preliminary conceptual framework**

Having presented the contextual and focused extant literature pertaining to this research, the essential theories and elements are hereby brought forward to develop a preliminary conceptual framework to guide and be tested through the primary research towards finalization.

Generally, the proposed framework provides insights into employee SM usage and an in-depth understanding of how this affects the bonding relationships of colleagues in workplaces. As Broughton et al. 2010 (p. 25) argued "*within the workplace, social networking sites can also disrupt traditional boundaries, relationships and hierarchies between employees*". More precisely, a new relationship (SM usage-workplace bonding ties-employee satisfaction-employee eWOM) is tested, which will give updated theoretical insights and new knowledge into these concepts, which could lay down the foundation for further research. A new correlation between crucial bonding constructs, with important HR resources, such as employee satisfaction, and essential organisational outcomes with marketing orientation, such as employee eWOM, will give light to new concepts and zones of theoretical interest in SM studies.

Specifically, this framework corresponds to the main aim of this study, which is to empirically examine how SM affects eWOM employee behavior via workplace social capital ties and employee satisfaction. To achieve this, the framework is separated into three main stages. The first stage (“employees’ social usage of SM”) illustrates the characteristics of SM usage included in this study: the social usage of SM between colleagues, the high quantitative intensity and the high qualitative intensity. These three characteristics work as indicators that help the researcher to choose the stratified sample of this study (as is explained in the Methodology chapter).

The second stage of the preliminary framework is an important part of the social capital domain - the ‘workplace bonding ties’. The bonding dimension of workplace social ties is examined by including the two main bonding resources of social ties, which according to the literature are social and emotional support. The preliminary framework has been designed by taking into consideration the RQs and the ROs of this study. Therefore, social and emotional support dimensions help the researcher to examine the first research question of this study, by including two sub-questions, as indicated below:

**RQ1: How does employees’ SM social usage affect workplace bonding ties?**

RQ1a How does employees’ SM social usage affect workplace emotional support?

RQ1b How does employees’ SM social usage affect workplace social support?

Continuing with the third stage, employee satisfaction is an important aspect of this framework, as it will draw a connection between workplace social bonding ties and employee eWOM. As it was mentioned before, this connection is not random, but it is based on the literature conception that (a) employee satisfaction is an important antecedent of eWOM (Alexandrov et al., 2013; Gao et al., 2016; Zhang and Luo, 2016; Cervellon and Lirio, 2017; Bravo et al., 2017), (b) SM usage influences employees’ levels of satisfaction (see Valkenburg et al., 2006; van Zyl, 2009; Wickramasingh and Nisaf, 2013; Wnuk, 2017) and finally (c) bonding ties are linked with employee satisfaction (Hurlbert, 1991; Lages, 2012; Moqbel, 2013; Oh et al., 2014; Scheepers et al., 2014; Cao et al., 2016). However, to be able to answer the second main question of this study, it is important to see how each bonding element included in this study affects employee satisfaction, as indicated below:

**RQ2: How do workplace bonding ties affect employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction?**

RQ2a How does workplace emotional support affect employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction?

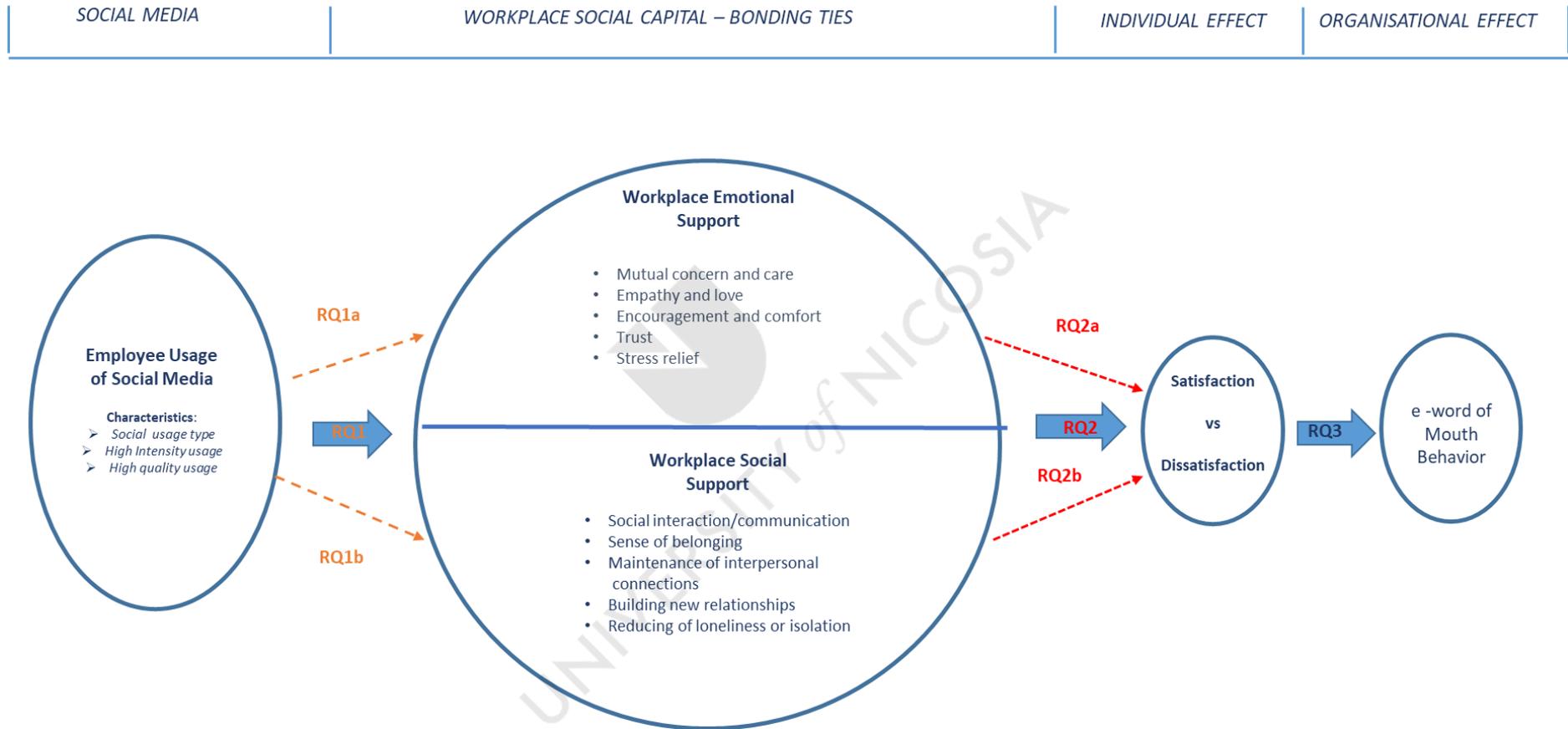
RQ2b How does workplace social support affect employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction?

The final stage of this framework is important for organisations, as it entails an important organisational effect, which is the employee eWOM. As it was explained before, eWOM is the new modern way for employees to express their feelings and opinions (Men and Muralidharan, 2017). Further, it is expected that both positive and negative eWOM give the full picture, of the way that employee social usage of SM may affect employee eWOM, via workplace bonding ties and employee satisfaction.

**RQ3 How does employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction affect employees' eWOM behavior?**

The framework is presented in Figure 2.1 below.

**Figure 2.1: The Preliminary conceptual framework (Source: Author's own)**

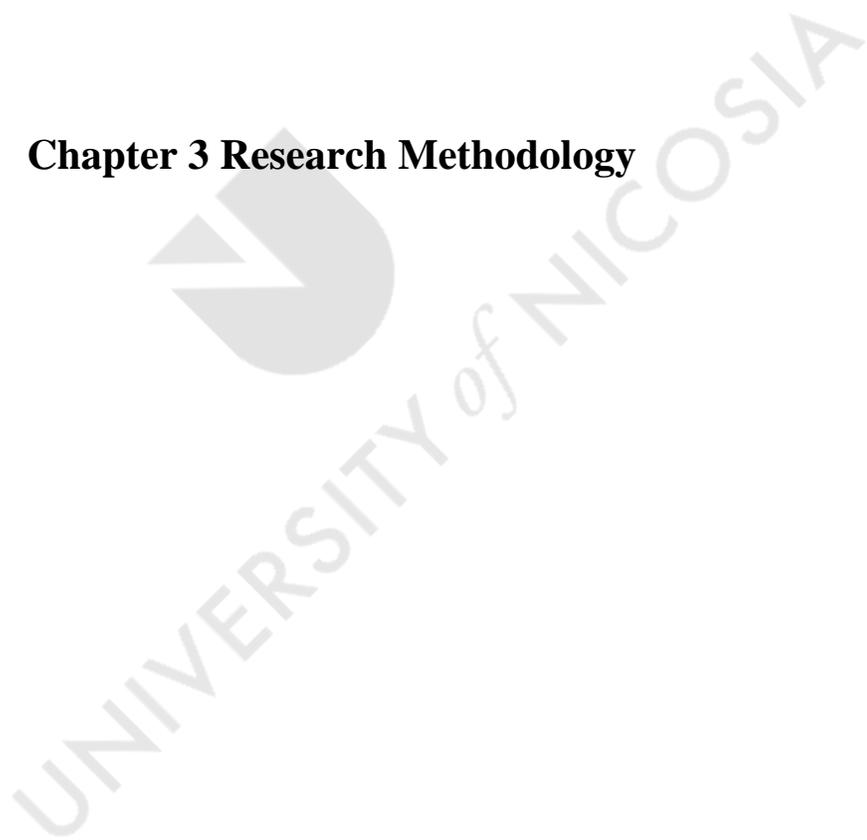


## **2.7 Conclusion**

This Chapter conducted a narrative literature review analysis and thoroughly discussed the main theoretical foundations of this study. Specifically, at an initial stage, it presented a theoretical discussion based on various SM platforms, elucidated on the relevant terminology, and elaborated on SM classifications and SM characteristics. It then expounded on SM usage in the workplace and its relationship with employee satisfaction and employee eWOM behavior in the organisational settings. Following the identified literature gaps, this Chapter extracted a preliminary conceptual framework, and presented the RQs of this study, as derived from existing theory.

To sum up, this chapter presented the related conceptual theories of the three interrelated - under the scope of this Thesis - domains, which are employee SM usage, workplace social capital and eWOM behavior. The relationship between these, and the way that this Thesis qualitatively examines this relationship are explained in the following chapter, which elaborating on the relevant methodology and tools that this Thesis employs, in order to empirically validate the proposed preliminary framework.

## **Chapter 3 Research Methodology**



### **3.0 Introduction**

Chapter three presents the selection, planning and application of various methodological steps, necessary for the implementation of this research. It firstly outlines the research' philosophical positioning, followed by the research design, including the research purpose and approach. Subsequently, this chapter details the data-gathering technique of the study, which is the depth semi-structured interviews, including the research sample approach and the interview protocol. Finally, data analysis is elucidated and data quality issues are addressed.

### **3.1 Research philosophical positioning**

The research philosophy selected and used by a researcher is interrelated with his/her assumptions and views about the world and these views lead to the selection of specific strategies and methods (Saunders et al., 2012). It is of significant importance, the researcher to reflect on the philosophical position that is the basis of his/her research approaching, and a rationale of the selected research methods (Bryman, 2004). Ontology and epistemology considered the most vital elements of the research philosophy.

#### **3.1.1 Ontology and epistemology**

Ontology deals with the nature of reality or the nature of existence (McMullen and Shepherd, 2006). Specifically, it is related to the understanding of how the world operates and the obligations to those views (Saunders et al., 2012). The ontological position of individuals is depended on the way they see nature and the conception of reality (Wikgren, 2005).

In this vein, there are two important aspects of ontology: objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism is based on the belief that there is only one reality independently of social actors, and this reality must be identified (Saunders et al., 2012). However, subjectivism asserts that reality relies on social actors and that social phenomena are created based on the perceptions of those actors. Concerning this, social constructivism explains reality as socially constructed, as there are different actors and different views (Saunders et al., 2012).

Further, epistemology concerns with acceptable knowledge and how knowledge can be obtained in the framework of a specific field of interest (Saunders et al., 2012). Mostly, it is related to the philosophy of knowledge and how knowledge is communicated to others (Tronvoll et al., 2011). Three important research paradigms are positivism, interpretivism and critical realism. Positivism concerns observable reality and causal relationships. Reliable data are created only through the observation of phenomena and the development of hypotheses that after their examination contribute to the existing theory (Saunders et al., 2012). In other words, positivism is based on the notion that reality can be analysed and measured by viewing it in a specific value free-way (Sobh and Perry, 2006). Interpretivism or otherwise constructivist approach views social reality as subjective because this approach is based on the theory of phenomenology, underlining that each person makes his/her own sense of the world (Saunders et al., 2012). Therefore, the social reality is constructed according to the experiences and the expectations of each person-social actor (Peters et al., 2013). It seems that there are various social realities, and the researcher must understand the world from the point of view of those different and unique social realities (Gray, 2004). The third approach of epistemology is critical realism (hereinafter CR) which is analysed further below, as it is used for the development of this specific research.

### **3.1.2 Defining and applying critical realism**

*“What we experience are sensations, the images of the things in the real world, not the world directly”* (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 115). CR suggests that the world and reality exist in an independent way of the mind or of our understanding or knowledge of the world (Fleetwood, 2005; Terman, 2011). It gives explanations by deeply analysing and understanding data (Saunders et al., 2012). It does not only provide the truth, but it also explains the situation, by taking into account the intricacy of the real world (Easton, 2010). Consequently, it asserts that there are different levels of reality, and the empirical level is our personal experience of those levels (McGhee and Grant, 2017).

An important philosophical element of this approach is that a researcher must have a deep understanding of the situation and the results (Archer, 2000). As the world is not stable, and it is changing, further management research is needed for providing an understanding of those new

mechanisms and new phenomena, which can be explained only through a specific context (Saunders et al., 2012). Thus, it is difficult to measure those observed phenomena, but someone can properly describe them and understand them (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2016). As Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain, it can be apprehended probabilistically. This is a reason why especially this approach seems more suitable for examining the social world. SM is such a social reality phenomenon, which affects people and organisations. It affects them, in the sense that SM online society world consists of feelings, emotions and thoughts of employees that need to be explored because they affect meaningful organisational outcomes.

A critical realist realises the importance of multilevel study and conducts his/her research, by taking into consideration this important element. For example, the level of the individual, the group or the organisation could even change the understanding of the researcher on the research topic or problem (Saunders et al., 2012). Therefore, the philosophical positioning of the researcher of this study (as a critical realist), enables her to research the individual level, to examine deeply the perceptions of employees around the use of SM and its effect on eWOM. A critical realist needs to see the perception of each person for a phenomenon, to reach realistic important conclusions for managerial and theoretical implications. This is achieved, by taking into consideration and examining the role of bonding social capital, to examine the situation under this context.

Consequently, the approach of critical realism not only represents the philosophical perception of the researcher but also seems relevant for examining the specific relationship. At one level, there is an overarching reality called SM, characterised by specific features, and at the other level, there is the perspective of subjective employees and their own independent reality. This is because each perception of SM is subjective. As the main aim of this research is to fill in a literature gap, in terms of how employee SM change the workplace bonding social capital and influence the employee eWOM quality, it helps the researcher to examine in depth what employees believe, feel and apprehend the phenomenon from their point of view.

This approach also is taking into account the complexities of the real-world setting and asserts that to examine social phenomena we must do it critically, via social mechanisms (Easton, 2010). The world is structured and therefore differentiated and changing. CR does not solely look into the events to explain social phenomena, but on mechanisms providing those events (Danemark et al., 2002) *“the things we perceive about reality are transitive, whereas the actual underlying*

*structures of reality, (i.e. what is objectively real), are intransitive*” (McGhee and Grant, 2017, p. 848). However, this does not change the fact that there is a reality behind the structures. Mechanisms and structures are important as they help the researcher to explain deeply the phenomena, as we can only see ‘images’ of the real world and not the world as it is directly (Saunders et al., 2012). Therefore, the researcher of this study critically identifies and examines the way that SM, as a part of this changing world, impacts the bonding ties of an organisation, and how this influences external employee eWOM. The researcher, is not focused on the events – in this study ‘events’ could be considered the relationship between the employee SM usage and eWOM – but explain deeply and qualitatively the mechanism that creates and leading this relationship - through the role of bonding social capital and employee satisfaction. In this way, not only images are revealed, but also reasons explaining the images are provided and discussed.

Concerning the above and considering that one of the main elements of CR is the understanding of structures, mechanisms, processes and the reproductive mechanism of factors (Gray, 2004), this philosophical paradigm seems suitable for the investigation of the RQs of this study. This study gives answers to questions on *how* the employee usage of SM affects the social capital of an organisation and *how* this affects the employee eWOM. Therefore, not only a mechanism is investigated, but also other interrelated factors such as the workplace bonding ties and the role of employee satisfaction, and structures, are investigated from the employees’ point of view and in the specific context of the hospitality industry of Cyprus.

### **3.1.3 Research strategy approaches**

After discussing the relevant philosophical points of this study, it is also important to specify the research strategy approaches that are adopted in this Thesis. Mainly, there are three approaches: deductive, inductive and abductive and these are discussed below.

The deductive approach allows a researcher to test the theory through a research strategy created based on academic literature. It is based on critical aspects of existing theories, the development of hypotheses and then the test of those hypotheses, usually quantitatively (Mason, 2002). In other words, researchers build their research on existing theory-proven facts and information (see figure 3.1). This approach is focusing on a wider to a much-defined topic, and a defined hypothesis that

will be tested, in order for the researcher to reach conclusions (Holsapple and Joshi, 2002). Usually, researchers following this approach are using quantitative methods because they want to achieve better validity and generalisation of the results (Tsanis, 2013).

Inductive enables researchers at a first step to collect data to examine a phenomenon, then to design a conceptual framework and in this way to develop a theory (Saunders et al., 2012). Therefore, this approach is mainly related to new phenomena, patterns and themes and is based on grounded theory (Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2011). The inductive approach helps a researcher to develop a theory, while the deductive to test a theory (Chang, 2009). However, with an inductive strategy, a researcher creates a theory based only on empirical generalisations and observation of the specific situation of interest (see figure 3.1) (Punch, 2013; Tsanis, 2013).

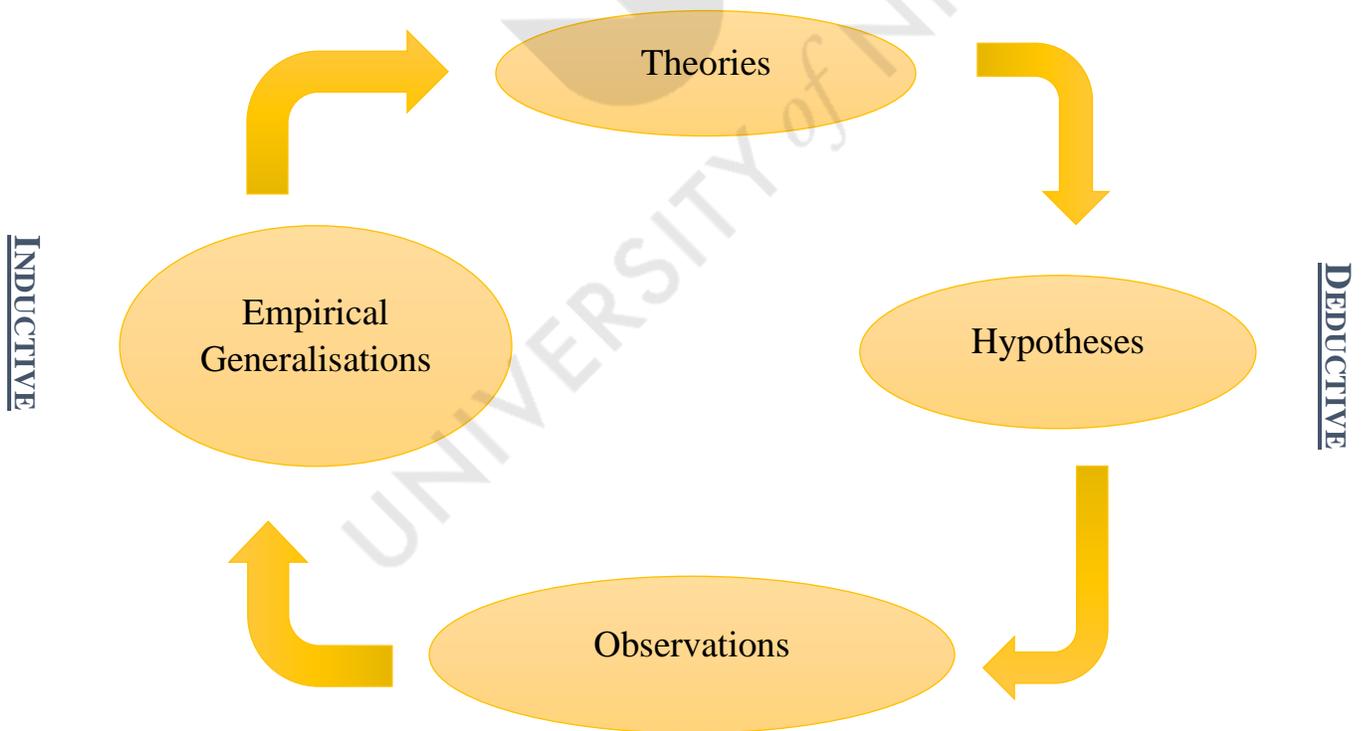
Finally, the abductive approach is a comparatively modern research strategy, and it is placed between inductive and deductive approaches (Tsanis, 2013). This is because it is based on important elements from both approaches such as: while it is related to the collection of data to examine a new phenomenon and develop new theory, it can also modify existing theory even via further data collection if it is needed (Saunders et al., 2012). Therefore, it is an important approach to finding new relationships and new factors. While it takes into consideration existing theories and academic knowledge, it is also based on the exploration of new things. However, this is achieved with the ongoing redevelopment and reconstruction of existing theoretical models and frameworks, to reach a new updated and enhanced framework (Dubois and Gabbe, 2002). This new framework is based not only on new empirical outcomes but also on further theoretical data.

Considering the requirements of this study, the abductive approach seems to be the most appropriate for the requirements of this study, for different reasons. To start with, the abductive theory is mainly adopted for the examination of new relationships based on new factors, which creates knowledge for a specific phenomenon under investigation (Andreewsky and Bourcier, 2000). This study is interested in an emerging and relatively new phenomenon, the world of SM and their influence on the workplace settings, through a completely new relationship that has never been examined before: SM – workplace bonding social capital- employee satisfaction – employee eWOM. Consequently, the abductive approach seems more suitable for examining this new relationship more appropriately.

Even though SM is a modern phenomenon, there is considerable research on the topic and empirical existing findings could not be ignored. Further, the usage of SM in the workplace context needs further research (Hassan et al., 2015, King and Lee, 2016). As Saunders et al. (2012, p. 148) mentioned: “a topic about which there is a wealth of information in one context but far less in the context in which you are researching may lend itself to an abductive approach enabling you to modify an existing theory”.

Finally, this research strategy is consistent with the philosophical approach of the researcher, because the theory of abductive approach is mainly adopted by CR researchers (van Hoek et al. 2005). This is because, the critical realist will have the opportunity to obtain a wider picture of the situation, with more details and interpretations that may lead to a very different framework with new knowledge, as required by his/her philosophy. Therefore, a combination of deductive and inductive research elements are approached by the researcher, as it is explained below.

**Figure 3.1: Wheel of science (Source: Wallace, 1971)**



In agreement with the abductive approach, for this study to answer its research questions and achieved its aims, it uses both secondary and primary data. First, it analyses and discusses existing relevant theory and knowledge on the related subjects and topics, while it also obtains data from its primary research. Then it compares and integrates the primary and secondary data, in the analysis section, in a way that further promotes the existing knowledge on SM usage in workplaces, by developing a newly updated framework that contributes to creating positive employee eWOM and reduce negative eWOM, through the employee usage of SM in organisations.

## **3.2 Research design**

Research Design “*is the general plan of how you will go about answering your research question(s)*” (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 159). This part is considered very important, as the researcher clarifies the sources, the research purpose and the research approach.

### **3.2.1 Research purpose**

Starting from the research purpose, the three main research purposes are exploratory, descriptive and explanatory (Saunders et al., 2007). A researcher can use only one, or a combination of those (Adams, 2007).

Exploratory research is suitable for investigating new phenomena that there is limited knowledge or no knowledge about them (Gray, 2004; Babbie, 2012). It usually focuses on new themes and factors correlated with the phenomenon under investigation, which is a relatively un-investigated phenomenon. Therefore, it is a method that entails a depth-investigation, for more explanations to be provided for the phenomenon. It then gives light to new insights and new relationships (Robson, 2002).

The descriptive research method is mainly focused on perceptions, opinions and views of respondents about a phenomenon (Gray, 2004; Adams, 2007). For this reason, most of the qualitative studies are descriptive (Babbie, 2012). Finally, there is also a third approach that will not apply in this study, as it is not corresponding to the needs of this study, the explanatory. This

kind of research is mainly based on cause-and-effect relationships but through the use of usually quantitatively examined constructs (Sefiani, 2013). Specifically, it tries to investigate the relationship and the connection between different constructs of the phenomenon under investigation (Tsang, 1997).

In essence, taking into consideration the nature of this study, it seems to fall into exploratory and descriptive purposes for various reasons. The exploratory method can be explained because this study focuses on two relatively new phenomena that are un-investigated, needing further examination and research, such as SM (Huang et al., 2015; Ali-Hassan et al., 2015) and eWOM (Choi and Scott, 2013; Bravo et al., 2017). Further, the set of the specific factors (SM-bonding ties-employee satisfaction-employee eWOM) develop a new relationship, that has never been investigated before, and consequently, the researcher follows this approach, to examine the way that SM changes the workplace bonding ties of an organisation and influence the quality of employee eWOM behavior.

However, this study could also be considered descriptive. This is because it is interested mostly in employee perceptions and personal evaluations in sensitive areas, related to emotions and social relationships. Specifically, it aims to analyse the perceptions, feelings, emotions and beliefs of employees in relation to employees' SM usage and employee satisfaction, descriptively. Therefore, as descriptive research helps researchers to gain an accurate picture of persons and situations (Saunders et al., 2012), it also helps the researcher of this study, to examine the phenomenon of SM with employee relationships in the workplace environment. Finally, most qualitative studies are descriptive in nature, and the research identity of this study is qualitative (Babbie, 2012).

Specifically, this study starts from a descriptive approach and then continue to exploratory. At the first stage, in a descriptive way literature insights gives light into the relevant concepts, while also perceptions and feelings of employees describe the way SM influence workplace bonding ties. At a second stage, the exploratory method allows the researcher to explore the new completed relationship, including employee eWOM. The findings are expected to develop new concepts and theory in the organisational context.

### 3.2.2 Research approach

Coming to the researcher approaches, there are different tactics that a researcher could follow, according to what he/she wants to achieve and how intends to do so. Generally, the way and the method of collecting data are very important, because they are giving answers to the research questions (Bryman, 2004). The two main research strategies usually used by researchers are quantitative and qualitative, and their description follows (Saunders et al., 2012).

The aforementioned two main research designs are differentiated in several ways. Generally, they are approaching in different ways research philosophy, research approach, collection method, analysis method and research strategies (see figure 3.2). Therefore, the total research procedure starting from collecting data, to giving answers to research questions depends largely on the chosen type of research design. Thus, one of the main differences between these two approaches is that quantitative is related to numbers and qualitative with non-numerical data. That is why quantitative is based usually on questionnaires as a data collection technique, while qualitative on interviews. Looking also at the analysis method, quantitative is related to graphs and qualitative with data categorisation (Saunders et al., 2012).

Specifically, some of the main characteristics associated with quantitative research are:

- It is mainly linked with positivism, as it encompasses the belief that there is an external objective reality (Erikson and Kovalainen, 2008; Chang, 2009)
- Large numbers of participants are usually included, in order for a representable sample to be achieved (Chang, 2009)
- It is related to the development of hypotheses and the examination of various relationships (Bryman, 2004)
- It is associated with experiments or surveys (Saunders et al., 2012)

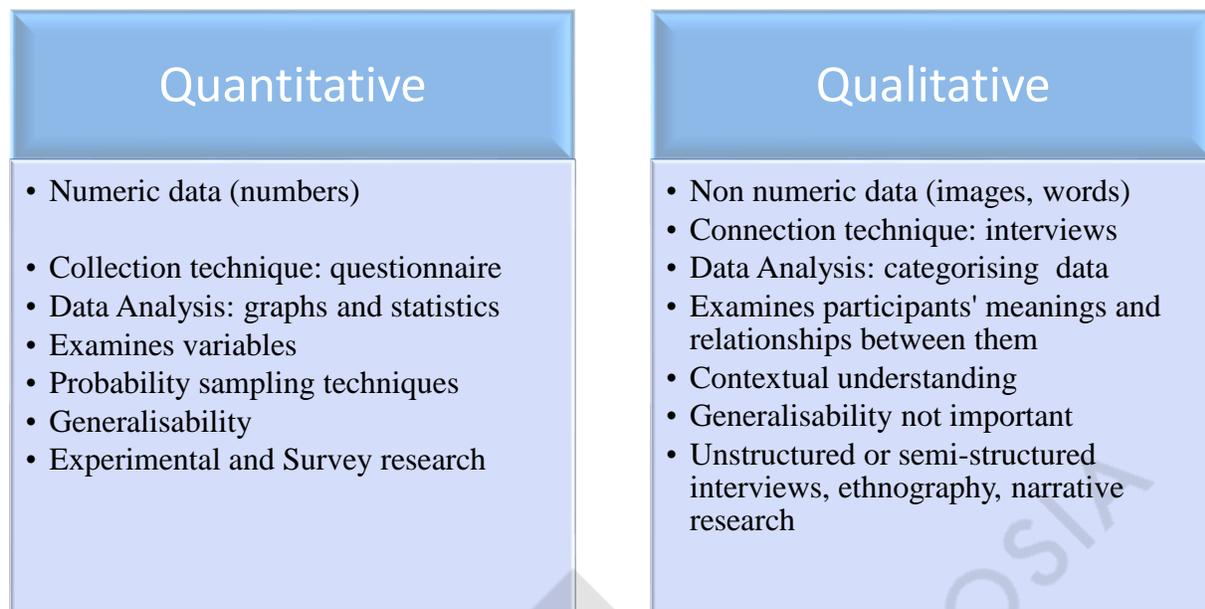
Finally, researchers choose the quantitative approach, because they have a theory and they want to test it (Chang, 2009). This is achieved with the help of related variables, and examine possible relationships between them, through a conceptual framework (Bryman, 2004). A large number of participants is important in this approach, as the representativeness of the sample is depending on this (Chang, 2009). Finally, a theory and hypotheses are developed for testing, via surveys and experiments, in order for the final framework to be developed (Hunt, 1991).

### ***Qualitative research***

Qualitative research is based on a different philosophy. In nature, it is interpretive, as the researcher must examine and conclude on “*subjective and socially constructed meanings expressed about the phenomenon being studied*” (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 163). This kind of research is concerned with human behavior, interested in what people say and do, examines people’s beliefs and emotions and is usually keen on meanings that need an in-depth understanding (Milliken, 2001). It is, therefore, an effective method for describing and explaining personal emotions, experiences and perceptions. Hence, this approach is mostly interested in participants’ meanings and possible relationships among them, and the creation of a conceptual framework, after the collection of relevant data (Saunders et al., 2012). These data usually are sensitive and therefore, the role of the researcher in accessing them is vital (Saunders et al., 2012).

The approach followed in this kind of research is not structured, or it is much less structured than the structure followed in quantitative studies. This is because, the qualitative approach is often more connected with new phenomena, where the researcher does not want to test a theory, but to create a theory and there is a need to understand the phenomenon in depth (Merriam, 2009; Chang, 2009). Hence, the data gathering techniques related to this approach, enable the participants to express themselves in a free and open way. The research strategies related to this approach are action research, case studies, ethnography and grounded theory (Saunders et al., 2012); while research methods are in-depth interviews, focus groups, open or open-ended questions and observations (Gummesson, 2005; Saunders et al., 2012).

**Figure 3.2: Comparison of qualitative and quantitative elements (Source: Saunders et al., 2012)**



### ***Methodological choice***

Usually, researchers choose their strategy according to the nature of their study, as was explained before. However, it is also possible for a researcher to mix the methods and combine either both quantitative and qualitative techniques (Greene, 2008), or combine different qualitative techniques or different quantitative techniques (Saunders et al., 2012). In essence, researchers can choose a mono-method (quantitative or qualitative study) or multiple methods. In mono-methods, only one method is used, while multiple methods study adopts more than one method (Azorin and Cameron, 2010). Multiple methods are either multimethod (multimethod qualitative or multimethod quantitative) and even mixed methods (mixed model research or mixed-method research) (Saunders et al., 2012). This study applies the mono-method, being an interview-based qualitative study. The justification for choosing this method follows.

### *Selecting research method*

Either perspectives of mono-method or multimethod have advantages. Multiple methods are considered important in the research context of communicational and social studies for different reasons. Firstly, the researchers have the opportunity to gain knowledge about different aspects of the problem and the phenomenon., while also multiple methods change the validation level of the results, as by using multiple methods, more valid and reliable constructions of reality, are expected (Golafshani, 2003). Nevertheless, “*mixed methods research is not intrinsically superior to research that relies on a single method*” (Azorin and Cameron, 2010, p. 3). This is because the issue is that the best research method that best addresses the research problem and the phenomenon under study should be chosen, and this could be a mixed or a mono-method (Azorin and Cameron, 2010). Finally, yet importantly, a mono-method approach may give new and important data that others could not (Golafshani, 2003). Therefore, the reasons for choosing a mono-qualitative method are explained below.

This research purposefully follows a qualitative methodology for several essential reasons. The philosophical perspective of the researcher as a critical realist, with the adoption of the abductive approach, along with the nature of the research questions and aim of this study, are better qualitatively approachable. Abductive research is considered as a suitable research design for a critical realist, as it allows a deeper picture of the phenomenon, and this could be better achieved via qualitative methods (Ryan et al., 2012). As Easton (2010) explains, CR consists of different research methods, and the method of a study should be carefully chosen according to the nature of a study.

The qualitative approach and methods help in penetrating the realities of research participants and understanding the substantive research problem. This is because the qualitative approach is seen as a helpful approach, generally, for overlapping social phenomena, and especially for complex networks and complex social relationships (Shaw, 1988). It is an approach that allows researchers to get close to participants, see their own reality and understand their own perceptions. In this sense, participants are ‘human subjects’, belonging to the social world, and by comprehending their thoughts and point of view, they can examine the social world in its entirety (Shaw, 1988). In the context of the specific study, the qualitative direction gives light to the research problem that is socially based. The world of SM and the way they influence colleagues’ bonding

relationships and networks, through socio-emotional support, are substantial socially-constructed elements.

To the above, qualitative research is more suitable for this study, as a depth exploration of social SM usage by employees is needed, to identify new patterns and mechanisms that can better explain and portrait the impact on bonding ties, and to identify new ways for enhancing positive employee eWOM. As this study intends to explore beliefs, feelings, emotions and thoughts of employees and sensitive constructs of bonding ties such as emotional and social support, the qualitative approach seems to be the most appropriate for reaching sensitive data (Gummesson, 2000).

Further, according to various researchers more qualitative studies are needed in the area of SM and workplace social capital to have a clearer picture of the phenomenon (Charoensukmonhkol, 2014; Ali-Hassan et al., 2015; Gonzalez, 2015). As Ali-Hassan et al. (2015) explain the main disadvantage of surveys and quantitative studies is that they cannot explain relationships or get a deeper insight into the phenomenon of SM in the workplace (for more see Gap section).

Finally, this study does not test hypotheses, but it explores the mechanisms of the SM phenomenon, to identify the effect on workplace bonding ties and employee WOM. Their perspectives and experiences could be better identified and analysed qualitatively (Chang, 2009). Following the next section, the qualitative data gathering technique is discussed.

### **3.3 Research data gathering technique**

An important step of research is to define and present the data collection technique. A few of the most popular techniques of qualitative research are focus group, interviews, questionnaires, observations, case research, study groups or ethnography (Goulding, 2005). All these are frequently used in business and management research and especially some of them in the exploratory phases of research (Baker and Foy, 2012). The researcher is expected to decide which method or methods will adopt, to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon and collect the necessary data that will answer the research questions.

The researcher to generate reliable and valid data for this research decided to use one qualitative technique for gathering the primary data, which is semi-structured interviews. The main reason for selecting the specific technique, as is explained below is mainly for acquiring richer data. Further,

this technique seems to be suitable for examining the ROs and the research goals of this study. Besides, it is a technique with numerous advantages, as is next discussed. Therefore, the following subsections are presenting the rationale for choosing the specific technique, the interview protocol, the research sample approach and the pilot testing process.

### **3.3.1 Semi-structured interviews**

An interview usually refers to a conversation between the observer and the participant, to obtain information and data on the phenomenon under investigation (Mojtahed, 2014). It is mainly based on a discussion between an interviewer and an interviewee, or even between groups of people, “*where the interviewer seeks to obtain specific information on a topic with the co-operation of the interviewee(s)*” (Baker and Foy, 2012, p. 233). Interviews can be conducted in various forms such as face-to-face, or via telephone or even in an online form, with the help of various online tools and one to one or one to many, such as focus groups and group interviews (Saunders et al., 2012).

Further, according to the type of conversations, there are different types of interview, such as informal or structured. A usual typology could be: 1) structured interviews 2) semi-structured interviews and 3) unstructured or in-depth interviews (Saunders et al., 2012; Baker and Foy, 2012). The informal interviews do not include specific pre-selected questions and the questions are not in a specific pre-established order. The interviewer can make additional questions according to the answers and the actual situation that he/she will confront (Gummesson, 2000). This mainly applies to unstructured interviews. This type is helpful for researchers that want to obtain depth knowledge of a general area of interest. However, structured (formal) interviews are based on a specific set of questions, with a specific order and schedule (Saunders et al., 2012).

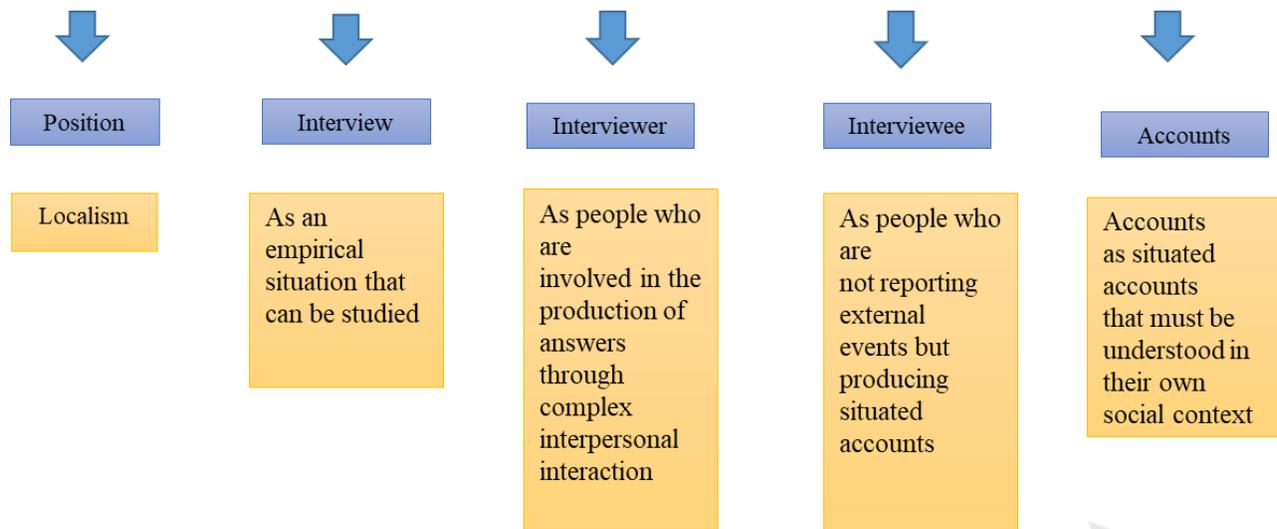
Finally, the third type is the in-depth semi-structured interviews. This type is used in this study as the main data gathering method. In semi-structured interviews, there are specific themes and key questions that must be included in the interview for discussion, as they are considered vital for the examination of the research topic (Saunders et al., 2012). There is not a specific order of the questions and additional questions may be added by the interviewer, during the dialogue, depending on the flow of the conversation (Saunders et al., 2012).

Therefore, in this study, the interviews are face-to-face and in-depth semi-structured. The rationale of choosing interviews as the data-gathering technique in this study depends on different reasons. Firstly, interviewing was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore in-depth the phenomena, through direct contact and communication with the interviewee (Show and Thomas, 1994). The interviewees through this approach can reflect on their beliefs, emotions and experiences more easily (Yin, 2010). This is because the researcher can reach information and data more communicatively and not in a faceless and cold approach, such as the closed questionnaires. Therefore, if a researcher wants to reach more personal and sensitive information, this is considered to be one appropriate way (Show and Thomas, 1994). Consequently, as this study examines the perceptions of employees regarding the effect of SM usage on workplace bonding ties, a sensitive topic, this technique of data gathering seems suitable. Then, the interviews of this study are conducted in a semi-structured format that allows informants to discuss their emotions and feelings. The questions are focused on the topic and the main aim of the study.

Additionally, depth semi-structured interviews offer further advantages to this study. As this type of interviews offers the flexibility to the researcher to discuss specific themes and to add questions during the interview, crucial in-depth information and data can be obtained for examining the research theme. It may be that the discussion may reach some points or areas that the researcher did not think about before, but prove to be significant (Saunders et al., 2012). Similarly, as Saunders et al. (2012) add in an exploratory study semi-structured interview can be wisely used as it provides contextual data that are vital for the study.

Finally, yet importantly, according to Sandy and Dumay (2011), the perspective of localism is related to semi-structured interviews. This is because reflecting on the meaning of localism and the quality of semi-structured interviewing, they are interrelated and based on common basic perspective characteristics, which are related also to the character of this research, as it seems in the following figure (Figure 3.3).

**Figure 3.3: Localism perspective on the interview method (Source: Sandy and Dumay, 2011)**



The perspective of semi-structured interviews meets the needs of this study for various reasons: the understanding of interviews is achieved in a social context, trying to understand the social phenomena. One of the main objectives of this study is to understand better the phenomenon of SM, in the social context of the workplace. Further, it is also a method and a perspective that enable a researcher to explore complex issues from different theoretical perspectives. In this study, each participant is seen as a different case that gives potential responses from his/her point of view and social context, to reach important conclusions.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning that there are quantitative researchers, asserting that qualitative data from interviews are not objective and realistic (Sandy and Dumay, 2011). For this reason, careful planning and preparation are required. A well-planned interview with good communication between the interviewee and interviewer may bring out important data (Saunders et al., 2012) and for achieving good communication, a well-prepared questionnaire is important.

### ***Conducting the Semi-Structured Interview Protocol***

A questionnaire is comprised of a set of questions, aiming to collect information and data from participants, in order for the researcher to achieve data comparison, reduce bias and reach important conclusions (Saris and Gallhofer, 2014).

Usually, a semi-structured interview protocol includes a combination of open and closed-ended questions (Baker and Foy, 2012). For the needs of this research, the protocol for the interviews is

comprised of open-ended questions. Specifically, for the needs of this study, at the beginning of the interview process, some topics are covered and an ad hoc discussion is following, for a first exploration of the issue and an initial conversational touch with the interviewees. This is also called an *interview guide approach*, and it is preferred by researchers as an exploratory beginning (Baker and Foy, 2012). Then, standardised in-depth, open-ended questions follow.

This is because unstructured and open-ended questions are better preferred in exploratory and qualitative research studies (Baker and Foy, 2012; Saunders et al., 2012). Further, open-ended questions are preferred because key informants can discuss and express their ideas and feelings, in their own words and in an open way. This kind of questions is better matching the objectives and research questions of this study, as informants are expected to speak for emotions, support and bonding ties, which are sensitive issues.

The open-ended questions included in this study are predetermined and in the form of a specific list of issues that the researcher should cover (Li, 2014). Further, while there is a specific sequence of questions, the interviewer is not obliged to strictly follow this sequence, but according to the needs of the conversation, the sequence may change and further questions may be added (Li, 2014). This is related to the fact that each response is distinctive and isolated, and very unique and important for a researcher (Saunders et al., 2012).

Finally, a researcher can use research questions and items from previous studies that have addressed similar issues (Baker and Foy, 2012). Therefore, specific sources were used for structuring the interview protocol of this study, as it seems in the following table (Table 3.1). However, some topics were not addressed before by other researchers and consequently, are developed by the researcher. Further, Table 3.1 includes the interview questions (hereinafter IQs), concerning the research questions and the ROs of this study. While the questions are asking the participants what they think is generally true, the researcher before started the interview process informed the participants that they could answer both personally and generally - what they think is generally true.

**Table 3.1: Interview Protocol of the study (Source: Author's own)**

<b>Research Objective (RO)</b>	<b>Research Question (RQ)</b>	<b>Interview Question (IQ)</b>	<b>Sources of Interview Questions</b>
N/A	'Ice Braking' Questions	IQ1: What do you believe in general about the use of social media nowadays?	N/A
RO1, RO2 and RO6	RQ1	IQ2: What do you think about the use of SM in the workplace?	N/A
RO1 and RO2	RQ1a	<p>IQ3: Do you believe that social media communication between colleagues helps in better understanding each other's feelings? If yes, does this make them concern and care for each other more?</p> <p>IQ4: Do you believe that social media communication between colleagues helps them to develop deeper feelings for each other, such as (friendly) love and empathy?</p> <p>IQ5: Do you believe that social media are a further mean for colleagues to encourage and comfort each other more?</p> <p>IQ6: Do you believe that there are employees that trust their colleagues enough, to discuss with them a personal problem through social media?</p> <p>IQ7: Do you believe that when colleagues interacting with each other through SM, helps them to relieve stress and anxiety?</p>	<p>Lin et al., 2016; Huang and Liu, 2017; Yahia et al., 2017</p> <p>Lin et al., 2016; Hu, 2004</p> <p>Lin et al., 2016; Bao, 2016; Yahia et al., 2017</p> <p>Williams, 2006; Ellison et al., 2007; Su and Chan, 2017</p> <p>N/A</p>

RO1 and RO2	RQ1b	<p>IQ8: Do you believe that social media helps colleagues to interact and communicate more with each other?</p> <p>IQ9: Does the interaction among colleagues through social media, creates a sense of belonging in the workplace?</p> <p>IQ10: Do you believe that social media communication among colleagues helps them to keep a closer connection between them?</p> <p>IQ11: Do you think that employees can create new relationships at their work through social media?</p> <p>IQ12: Do you believe that social media communication among colleagues helps them to overcome loneliness or isolation at the workplace?</p>	<p>Lu and Yang, 2014</p> <p>Huang and Liu, 2017</p> <p>Ali-Hassan et al., 2015</p> <p>Ali-Hassan et al., 2015</p> <p>Hu et al., 2004</p>
RO3	RQ2a	IQ13: Do you believe that emotional support can enhance workplace employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction?	N/A
RO3	RQ2b	IQ14: Do you believe that social support can enhance workplace employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction?	N/A
RO1, RO4 and RO5	RQ3	IQ15: Do you believe that employees use social media to express their satisfaction/dissatisfaction at the workplace for their organisation, to others, outside the organisation? Or to their colleagues?	Cervellon and Lirio, 2017

### 3.3.2 Organising data

Regarding the approach of organising the data, the interviews were audio-recorded, after the permission of key informants. Similarly, contextual data were recorded, such as the interview

location, the date and time etc. Parallel to the audio record, the researcher was taking also notes for the main points (interview notes).

The interviews were conducted at the hotels' premises during employees' working time. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and it was transcribed within the same day, as it is suggested that it must be accomplished no later than 24 hours (Eisenhardt, 1989). The interviews (except from two cases) were conducted in the Greek language (see Appendix II), as this was the native language of key informants. After the interviews, the data were translated into English. In two cases, where the Greek language was not the native language of the informants, the interviews took place in English (see Appendix III). Finally, the personal details of informants remained protected, and anonymity and confidentiality were respected as required (Yin, 2010).

To facilitate the data organisation and analysis, the personal details of all participants were kept anonymous, and the participants were recognised by using a number as an indication such as 'Participant 1', 'Participant 2' and so on. After the end of the transcription, the researcher applied a thematic analysis technique, to identify patterns, themes and subthemes within primary qualitative data, following Braun and Clark's (2016) framework. More explanations with regards to this technique are given in the Data Analysis and Discussion Chapter. The researcher decided not to use any qualitative data analysis software, as, during the primary collection data, the key themes and patterns evolved naturally and easily through the in-depth interview discussions. Besides, this technique is considered suitable for the needs of this research because it is appropriate for unexpected themes and for identifying recording themes within rich qualitative data (Guest et al., 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2016).

### **3.3.3 Research sample approach**

Decisions on sampling approaching usually are depending on how the researcher can obtain relevant and important in-depth data (Yin, 2010). Mainly, there are two types of sampling techniques: probability and non-probability sampling (Bernard, 2000). Probability sampling is usually related to survey and experiment strategies. This is because, through this approach, a researcher can collect data from the sample that could be representable for the population (Saunders et al., 2012). However, with non-probability samples, the probability of each case is not

known. For this reason, the researcher chooses the key informants of the sample according to subjective criteria. In this case, researchers can generalise, but not statistically as with surveys (Saunders et al., 2012). There are different techniques for each case. As this study is using non-probability sampling, more attention is given to the non-probability chosen technique, which is purposive sampling.

With purposive sampling, a researcher can obtain relevant data, especially in the hospitality industry, which is a very challenging industry (Ozgen and Kozak, 2015). According to what the researcher needs to know or what data needs to gather for the phenomenon of interest, he/she tries to find the informants that have the knowledge or the experience to provide the necessary and relevant information (Bernard, 2002). Therefore, in the specific study, only the employees that use SM sites for interacting with their colleagues can provide the requested data and answer satisfactorily the research questions of this study. Besides, the purposive sampling approach seems suitable for semi-structured interviews, according to Saunders et al. (2012). This is because particularly in qualitative research studies, the researcher can choose the rich information cases, by including participants that are well-informed or well-experienced in the phenomenon under investigation (Cresswell and Plano Clarke, 2011).

Consequently, this approach seems appropriate for examining the research questions and aim of this study. Specifically, purposive sampling is adopted in this study, as relevant and in-depth data are required. As Saunders et al. (2012, p. 287) argue: “*with purposive sampling you need to use your judgment to select cases that will best enable you to answer your research question(s) and to meet your objectives*”. While from the one hand, it is not representable for the total population, on the other hand, in some studies this kind of sampling helps researchers to obtain depth data, important for examining the objectives of this study; and for this reason, it is also known as judgmental sampling (Patton, 2002). In particular, in this study key informants were selected on the specific purposive sampling criterion: the social use of SM with colleagues (see Table 3.2).

As the phenomenon under investigation in this study is the way that the employee SM usage affects the bonding ties and employee eWOM, the employees that do not use SM at all or do not use SM for socialising with colleagues cannot provide reach information for this study. Thus, the purposive sample was selected, because it is expected to help the researcher to answer better the research questions and meet the objectives of this study. Specifically, the informants of this study were

selected according to three criteria: 1) social usage type of SM, 2) high-intensity usage and 3) high-quality usage. The social usage type of SM, as is already mentioned (see Literature Review), it is defined as the social interaction through SM sites solely between people working in the same organisation (Wang et al.; 2014; Huang et al., 2015; Ali-Hassan et al., 2015). Therefore, only employees that use SM for interacting with colleagues contribute to this study. Further, high-intensity usage is referring to the time a user spends in SM (Ellison et al., 2007; Neves, 2015; Huang and Liu, 2017). Consequently, only employees that spend considerable time in SM platforms are taking part in this study. This was examined by including only participants that the use of SM was almost a part of their everyday activity (Ellison et al., 2007). Finally, the quality intensity is concerned with the value and the quality of social interaction among colleagues, through the use of SM tools such as like, share, comment, messaging, arranging events with other colleagues, chat with them and find people with similar interests (Ellison et al., 2007; Sun and Shang, 2014; Brailovskaia et al., 2020). Thus, only employees that use various SM tools for interacting with their colleagues are participating in this study. The following table (Table 3.2) indicates the criteria (characteristics of employee SM usage) according to which the purposive sample was selected, the relevant questions examining these characteristics and the sources of those criteria.

**Table 3.2: Characteristics of employee social media usage and sources (Source: Author's own)**

<b>Characteristics of Employee SM Usage</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Sources</b>
Social Usage Type	Do you use social media to socially interact with your colleagues?	Sun and Shang, 2014 Ali-Hassan et al., 2015
High-Intensity Usage	Do you use social media daily?	Ellison et al., 2007
High-Quality Usage	Do you use social media for uploading photos, posting, sharing, and generally are you an active social media user?	Scheepers et al., 2014 Ali-Hassan et al., 2015

The key informants were also selected, according to further criteria. Firstly, they were full-time employees, secondly, they were at least holders of a bachelor degree and thirdly they were selected from various luxury 4\* and 5\*hotels (specifically seven hotels), located and operating in the Cyprus hospitality industry. Thus, participants were selected from different hotels, but within the same quality, operating in different areas of Cyprus. It is argued that this is a prerequisite, for a researcher to obtain valid results within the hospitality industry (Karatepe, 2009; Lu et al., 2013).

Furthermore, back-office employees were used for this research study. Back-office employees are an important asset for organisations. Even though are invisible to the customers, they are very important for delivering functional service, different operational services and customer satisfaction (Murthy and Guthrie, 2012; Stephens and Faranda, 2013; Kearney et al., 2017; Ma et al., 2017). Therefore, organisations that encompass such organisational policies and practices and require excellent service delivery, such hotels are, must take into account the importance of back-office employees (Ma et al., 2017).

However, it seems that the contribution of back-office employees is usually ignored either by the literature or empirical research. Current research is mostly focusing on the behavior and attitude of front-line employees (Kearney et al., 2017). Especially in the hospitality industry, back-office employees that are dealing with important technical and administrative aspects, are usually ignored (Stephens and Faranda, 2013; Yli-Kauhaluoma and Pantzar, 2016). A relatively obvious explanation for overpassing the importance of back-office employees is the fact that they do not have any direct contact with customers, such as front-line employees have. However, this fact during the last years has changed. Nowadays, back-office employees have contact with different organisational stakeholders such as colleagues, or customers, or suppliers etc., through different online tools, such as their private SM. Therefore, as it was explained and described extensively in the Literature Review section of this study, employees have the power to spread positive or negative WOM online, to different organisational stakeholders. Consequently, this research is aiming to contribute to the address of this gap.

Furthermore, back-office administrative employees, are employees that usually spent most of their time working in front of their computers, and use SM. Such positions are related to the sales and marketing department, HRM department, accounting and finance department and quality control department or positions related to information and communication technologies and generally

various administrative positions such as bookkeeping. Taking into consideration the fact that, only 4\* and 5\* hotels are included in this study, the participating hotels embraced this kind of departments.

To sum up, the selected key informants were selected according to specific criteria. Firstly, each selected informant should be administrative staff from low and medium level. Those informants should not work at the front-office level but at the back-office line, where no regular contact with customers is required. Therefore, housekeeping staff, restaurant and bar employees or receptionists are excluded. Secondly, the key informants should be full-time employees, as part-time employees were excluded. Thirdly, managers are not selected as key informants in this study. This is because managers are more willing to adopt a positive WOM behavior, as they want to promote their organisation (Litvin et al., 2016). They are responsible for the good image of their hotels and therefore, are expected to spread only positive eWOM. Further, some employees adopt negative eWOM about their organisation because they are not happy with their managers and generally with the management of their organisation (Litvin et al., 2016).

The researcher, in order to select participants that meet the aforementioned characteristics (see Table 3.2) and criteria, communicated with the relevant HRM personnel of the participating hotels. Following this, the researcher communicated with the participants through telephone and confirmed their willingness to participate in this study. She has also reconfirmed with them, that they meet the criteria of this study.

### ***Sample Size***

In regards to sample size, in qualitative research studies, there are no specific guidelines for the sample size (Marshall et al., 2013). However, the literature suggests that 20-30 interviews in a grounded theory study are a sufficient number, as the quality of data in qualitative studies is more essential than the size of the sample or other measurements (Creswell, 2007; Marshall et al., 2013).

The exact number of interviews that were implemented is, in total, 31, in addition to the pilot interviews. Nevertheless, the specific number of interviews was dependent on the achievement of theoretical saturation of findings (based on Eisenhardt, 1989). According to this theory, the data gathering process must end, as soon as a point of saturation is reached (King, 2004). In specific, after 29 interviews, the level of saturation was reached, when no new dimensions, or relationships,

or information emerged. Therefore, the researcher decided to proceed only with only two more interviews, and consequently, 31 interviews were conducted in total.

Specifically, seven 4\* and 5\*hotels are included in this study, and three participants were selected from each hotel (except from one hotel, from where four participants were selected), to address the research questions of this study. Potential participants from each hotel that were meeting the aforementioned criteria, were personally approached by the researcher and were given an informed consent form (see Appendix I). Through this document, participants were informed about the main purpose of this Thesis, anonymity and confidentiality issues and about their right to receive the results at the end of the research. Therefore, they received this form as an informative document.

With regards to the characteristics and demographics of the sample, it is important to note that there were no restrictions or limitations in regards to participants' nationality, age, gender, culture etc. However, regarding the age parameter, most of the participants that met the characteristics of employee SM usage (see Table 3.2) were millennials (born between 1981-1996), and female. Nevertheless, participants of other generations and both genders were represented as well in this study. The following table (Table 3.3) provides demographic information for the 31 participants of this study.

**Table 3.3 Participants demographic information (Source: Author's own)**

Participant Number	Gender	Age	Educational Level	Department	Years of Service
P.N.1	Male	40	PhD	HRM	10
P.N.2	Female	36	Master	Quality Control	12
P.N.3	Female	30	Bachelor	HRM	4
P.N.4	Male	33	Master	Information and Technology	2
P.N.5	Male	44	Master	Sales and Marketing	8

P.N.6	Female	54	Bachelor	Information and Technology	19
P.N.7	Female	55	Bachelor	Sales and Marketing	23
P.N.8	Male	50	Bachelor	Finance	10
P.N.9	Female	50	Bachelor	Sales and Marketing	20
P.N.10	Female	37	Master	HRM	9
P.N.11	Female	28	Bachelor	HRM	3
P.N.12	Female	30	Master	Information and Technology	2
P.N.13	Male	57	Bachelor	Finance	32
P.N.14	Female	39	Master	Finance	7
P.N.15	Female	38	Bachelor	Information and Technology	14
P.N.16	Female	46	Master	Finance	10
P.N.17	Female	38	Bachelor	Quality Control	4
P.N.18	Female	44	PhD	Finance	10
P.N.19	Female	36	Bachelor	HRM	2
P.N.20	Female	29	Bachelor	HRM	4
P.N.21	Female	42	Master	Finance	11
P.N.22	Male	25	Bachelor	Marketing	1

P.N.23	Female	37	Master	Marketing	7
P.N.24	Female	40	Bachelor	Sales and Marketing	11
P.N.25	Female	34	Bachelor	Information and Technology	6
P.N.26	Male	40	Bachelor	Finance	7
P.N.27	Male	46	Master	Sales and Marketing	8
P.N.28	Female	33	Bachelor	Quality Control	6
P.N.29	Male	36	Master	Information and Technology	8
P.N.30	Male	47	Master	HRM	15
P.N.31	Female	34	Bachelor	Sales and Marketing	5

### 3.3.4 Pilot study

*“A usual procedure for testing the quality of an interview protocol and for identifying potential researcher biases is the pilot study in which investigators try out their proposed methods to see if the planned procedures perform as envisioned by the researcher”* (Chenail, 2011, p. 257). In essence, it is the test-run of the data collective procedure, where the researchers use a small sample of the participants and try to collect data (Tsanis, 2013). Therefore, the pilot study enables the researcher to improve the different aspects of the data collection procedure, to achieve better data gathering (Yin, 2010). For example, the researcher can identify any inconsistencies in regards to the IQs, or any problems in regards to the organisation of time, or any other possible implications during the empirical research project and improve those (Tsanis, 2013).

Therefore, the pilot testing is an important part of the research process, as not only researchers have the opportunity to identify possible problems with the protocol, such as validity and reliability issues (Saunders et al., 2012), but also to get some comments and revise a few points, to improve the understanding of questions and develop further the process of interviews (Snow and Thomas, 2004). More precisely, the advantages of pilot studies are numerous and significant. Firstly, they can warn the researcher about inappropriate or complicated questions. In this way, they can discard some of them or even modify them, re-word or rescale, or even add more new questions (Chenail, 2011). Researchers can also check if the time needed for the completion of an interview, is reasonable.

Further, in regards to the size of pilot testing, three pilot interviews are considered necessary, because it is argued by the researchers that 10% of the overall sample size should be represented in the pilot study (Lackey & Wingate, 1998; Hertzog, 2008). Therefore, three semi-structured interviews were conducted with hotel employees that were selected according to the aforementioned criteria (see Table 3.2).

Before discussing the reflections from the pilot testing, it is important to mention that before the conduction of the pilot interviews, the researcher asked for help from three professionals. As it is explained later on, an academic expert in the field of psychology observed the items examining emotions and feelings, while an SM practitioner and a marketing academic observed the items based on SM usage and eWOM respectively. Their opinion and evaluation were taken into great consideration, to improve the questionnaire before the conduction of pilot interviews. After the alteration suggested by the practitioners, three pilot interviews were accomplished. The main purpose of the pilot interviews was to enhance the data gathering process of this research study (Tsanis, 2013). Therefore, the reflection outcomes from the conducted pilot interviews are described below.

First of all, some questions were not easy to comprehend by all pilot participants. Therefore, further clarifications for some specific questions were needed. In relation to this, the pilot interviews helped the interviewer to improve her interview skills and consequently provide more explanations, for these questions to be clearer to participants. In the same way, the researcher identified that a few participants were hesitating to answer specific questions. Thus, this helped the researcher to find a way to make those questions more accessible and comprehensive. Further,

some questions were redefined, while others were removed and new added replaced them. Finally, the researcher was able to identify the real-time that would be needed for each interview, which was 1 hour to 1½ hours.

### **3.4 Data analysis and data presentation**

The approach for analysing quantitative and qualitative data is very different. The quantitative analysis techniques are graphs, charts and statistics, while qualitative analysis approaches are based on a different philosophy. The qualitative data are meanings related to beliefs, emotions, thoughts etc. expressed through words, and researchers are expected to explain and analyse those meanings. This is achieved by classifying the data into categories, according to a specific theme, and then structure those categories to give answers to the research questions (Saunders et al., 2012).

As it was aforementioned, each interview was audio-recorded and also transcribed within the same day. The interviews transcription may be time-consuming, but it enhances the quality of the gathered data, as it facilitates the exact word transcription (Snow and Thomas, 2004). Further, the researcher also documented comments in relation to the nonverbal communication with each key informant. Each interview transcription and document comments were saved in a file for each key informant, maintaining in this way confidentiality and anonymity (Saunders et al., 2012).

This study has followed a thematic analysis for the analysis of primary data. The thematic analysis enables the researcher to build the analysis procedure based on themes and subthemes at this final interpretation stage. Specifically, some of the themes or categories were derived from the literature review and others during the data analysis. In this way, the researcher developed a template for the thematic analysis.

The analysis section also provides a discussion among existing theory and related theoretical concepts (Raveswood, 2011), to compare them with the primary findings of this study. In this vein, the analysis and discussion part identifies some similarities or contradictions, with the main aim to develop further the existing theory and knowledge. The approach therefore for analysing the primary data is achieved through an ongoing comparison among primary data, analytical construction and existing theory. More details are given in Chapter 4. Nevertheless, it is important also to develop a study based on data quality, as is discussed below.

## **3.5 Data Quality**

To achieve the data quality of their research study, researchers must obey and respond to different research quality criteria (Tracy, 2010). Therefore, this section of this study clarifies how different data quality issues are addressed from a qualitative point of view. Specifically, the data quality issues that are developed are credibility, validity, reliability and ethical considerations.

### **3.5.1 Credibility**

Credibility mainly refers to the trustworthiness and the evaluation of the research findings of a qualitative study (Golafshani, 2003; Tracy, 2010). In quantitative research, credibility is based on instrument construction. However, in qualitative research, credibility relies on the ability, knowledge, expertise and effort of the researcher (Golafshani, 2003). Therefore, it is correlated with the effort of the researcher, to show that he/she has the expertise and the knowledge for accomplishing the study. Especially, in regards to interviews as the data gathering process is largely dependent on the credibility of the researcher (Street and Ward, 2012). Even more importantly, in the case that a researcher intends to gather sensitive data such as emotions, the credibility of the interviewer is even more essential (Saunders et al., 2012).

Hence, the researcher of this study managed to achieve higher levels of credibility with the interviewees, by accomplishing telephone conversations with them, before the interviews. Through this communication, interviewees were able not only to realise the relevant knowledge and the expertise of the researcher but also to acknowledge that their names and the names of their organisations would remain confidential, to share their emotions and thoughts without hesitation. Additionally, this important information was further acknowledged and explained to participants the day of the interview, as a pre-interview briefing was achieved, before the actual interviews (see appendices IV and V).

Lastly, the researcher can prove her experience in the research area and interviews' procedure and protocol by her previous research-focused background that includes research involvement in European funded projects as a Project Manager and a researcher and member of the EuroMed Research Business Institute. She has also published in the area of HRM, Social Media and gender issues in management and participated in international conferences and workshops.

### 3.5.2 Validity

If a researcher wants to achieve research quality, validity issues should be addressed. However, it has been asserted by several researchers that validity is mainly applicable only in quantitative research and that qualitatively research validity is mainly concerned with trustworthiness, quality and vigour (Golafshani, 2003). Particularly, there are different forms of validity such as construct, internal and external validity. External validity is concerned with the generalisability of results. However, this study is qualitative and external validity is not important for this study, as it does not try to achieve generalisations. Construct validity is related to the extent to which research measures or methods, examine what it was intended to measure (Saunders et al., 2012). Generally, also, validity concerns how much valid the results are (Golafshani, 2003).

The researcher of this study enhances construct validity, by following different steps. Firstly, the researcher provides and presents a clear description of the way that data were collected from the beginning until the end of the research process (Stuart et al., 2002). She describes clearly the data collection method that is used, which are the in depth-interviews. Concerning this, the researcher kept evidence from the data collection process, such as the interview recording documents. Besides, as was aforementioned, pilot testing enhanced further the construct validity of this study. This is because, all the problems and weaknesses that were identified during the pilot testing were faced, and consequently not only the process of data collection was improved but also the validity of the protocol interview was enhanced.

Moreover, internal validity applies when the research indicates a causal relationship between two variables, and again it is mainly related to quantitative studies (Saunders et al., 2012). In qualitative studies, according to Sobh and Perry (2000), key informants must be free to express themselves in the way they want and not forcing them to take part in the interview process. This study took into consideration this aspect, as key informants were asked to take part in the research process only if they wanted to. Also, most of the questions comprising the interview questionnaire were open-ended, and therefore participants were able to speak freely and expressed themselves in their way. They had also the opportunity to talk about an issue or topic that was not referring at all in the interview protocol, as the interviews were semi-structured. Therefore, the researcher urged on a discussion development, to further validate the results.

Finally, yet importantly, internal validity was further enhanced, by the fact that the key informants of this study were pre-selected, as only those that were using SM for socialising with colleagues were chosen. The specific criteria were afore mentioned. According to Sobh and Perry (2000), this increases validity as depth and rich data on the subject are acquired. Consequently, the purposive sampling method, allowed the researcher to acquire important data and to enhance the research validity.

### **3.5.3 Reliability**

According to Joppe (2000, as cited in Golafshani, 2003, p. 598) reliability is “*the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable*”. In other words, it is related to the extent that the research process of a specific study, including the data collection techniques, can be repeated by a different researcher and concludes with the same results (Saunders et al., 2012). For this reason, each part of this study and especially the methodology section is clearly described, in order for a replication of this study in the future to be possible.

Further, the reliability of questions was achieved by involving three practitioners in the interview protocol development process. These practitioners proposed further improvements and identified possible mistakes that the researcher took into consideration, for refining the questionnaire. Specifically, a psychology academic examined the items related to emotions and feelings, a social media practitioner examined the items related to SM usage, and finally, a marketing academic examined the items related to employee eWOM.

Finally, it is important to note that the researcher developed appropriately the analysis procedure, by eliminating any possible mistakes, and by creating in an accurate way the themes and the sub-themes. Therefore, the researcher avoided the researcher’s bias and errors for achieving a higher level of reliability.

### **3.5.4 Ethical considerations**

A researcher must follow and obey to codes of research ethics. These codes are principles and ethical statements of ethical research that guide a researcher accordingly, to avoid ethical concerns and risks (Saunders et al., 2012). This study has taken into great consideration the research ethical guidelines in every single step of the research process.

At first, the researcher has adopted an ethical behavior obeying integrity and objectivity. She respected the anonymity and confidentiality of key informants participating in this study and all the documents and interviews recordings were not used for any other purpose, except for the research requirements of this study and were protected so nobody else to have access (Blumberg et al., 2014). Further, the data and findings of this research are presented clearly and accurately.

Additionally, the people that participated in this study are respected and privacy issues are taken into concern. After their permission, only their replies were for the needs of this study recorded, but their names and their hotels' names were remained confidential. Therefore, all the key informants of this study were asked to give their permission for participating in the interview, and they were given an informed consent form (Appendix I). In this vein, participants also had the right to withdraw at any time during the interview process or to choose not to answer a specific question, if they wished to (Blumberg et al., 2014). In the same way, the hotels were asked to give their permission too. For ethical reasons, permission from the hotels was necessary (Saunders et al., 2012).

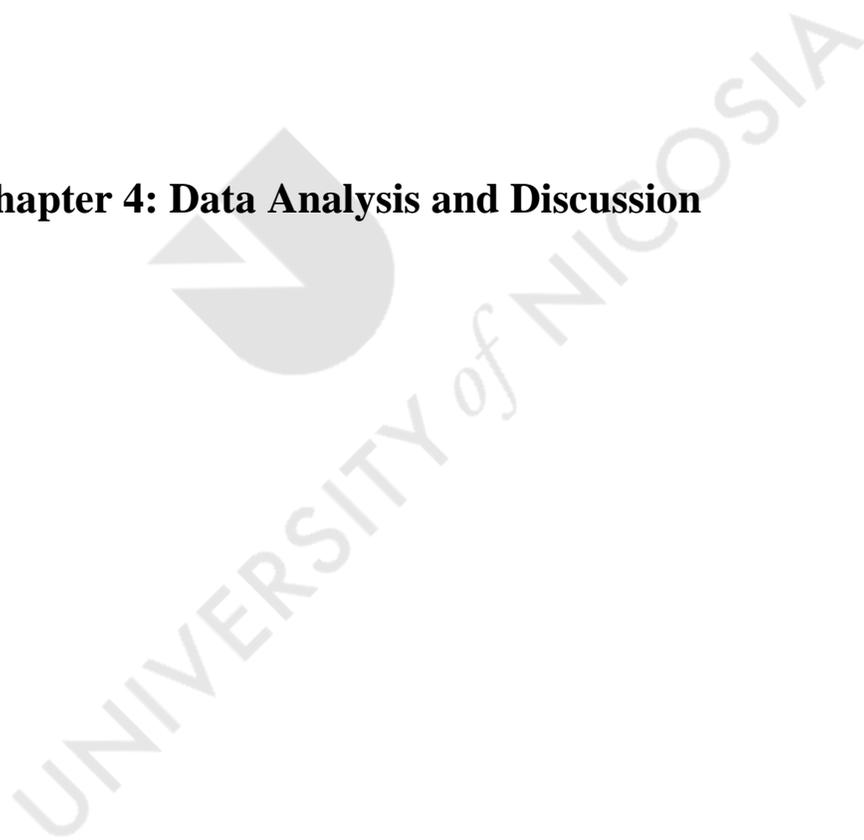
Finally, according to the methodology research, the studies that are examining human emotions through a qualitative method must take into consideration further ethical considerations. The researcher must be very careful in the design of the IQs, so as not to psychologically harm any participant (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, experts in psychology must review the questions, propose some amendments, or even remove a question if it is considered not appropriate. For this reason, as was mentioned before an academic psychologist reviewed the questions of the interview protocol. All the required changes were made, so all the ethical considerations to be respected and ethical biases to be avoided.

### **3.6 Conclusions**

This chapter presented the methodological approaches of the research, by describing the methods of data collection and the methods of data analysis. Related terminology, methodological definitions and principles underpinning the methodological approaches and directions of the researcher were also discussed.

Specifically, the chapter started by stating the philosophical positioning of the researcher, including ontology and epistemology and the research strategy approaches. Further, at this point, an elaboration on Critical Realism was achieved, as the main philosophical direction of the researcher. The justification of this choice was achieved through relevant argumentation. Following this, through the research design section, the researcher outlined the general plan on how the main research questions of this research will be methodologically approached and answered, through a thorough analysis of the research purpose and the research approach. Further, the researcher elaborated on the research data gathering technique of this study, which is semi-structured interviews, and the reasons for the selection of this particular method were clarified. This sub-section also described the sampling approach, providing justification for choice and presenting the outcomes of the pilot study. The subsection subsequently discussed the employed method for qualitative data analysis. Lastly, the final section described the ways in which the different data quality issues were addressed, to reassure the credibility, validity and reliability of collected data. In this vein, it was also explained how research ethical guidelines were taken into consideration during the research process, for ethical biases to be avoided.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Discussion**



## **4.0 Introduction**

After analysing the methodology for gathering the primary data, this chapter presents and discusses the collected primary data. At first, the chosen data analysis technique, which is the thematic analysis technique, is presented and explained. Secondly, the results from the 31 semi-structured in-depth interviews, are presented, analysed and discussed.

Following the thematic analysis technique approach, the structure of this chapter is based on the themes and subthemes that were mostly identified a priori from related literature theory and slightly modified after the data collection, as will be further explained below.

### **4.1 Thematic analysis technique**

Before presenting the primary data of this study, analysing and discussing them, it is significant to provide information and explanations about the use of thematic analysis technique, its meaning and its credibility.

The data analysis part is one of the most important parts of a research study because it helps the researcher to successfully meet the aim and ROs and answer the research questions of a study (Saunders et al., 2012). Thematic analysis is one of the most imperative techniques that help a qualitative researcher to provide a quality data analysis, as it uncovers human behaviors, perceptions, feelings, emotions and experiences, under specific circumstances and contexts (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). It is well recognised by qualitative researchers as a valuable and credible technique, with various advantages such as accessibility and flexibility (Guest et al., 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2012).

Mainly, the thematic analysis technique is the process, through which the researcher recognises and discovers patterns, themes, and subthemes within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2016). As Guest et al. (2012, p. 9) argue, it “focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes”.

Specifically, numerous patterns are identified through primary collected data, to give answers to a specific research question (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2012). In this way, the researcher by addressing the themes and the subthemes can answer the research questions, which are derived

from the literature review analysis and the primary data collection analysis. Therefore, through the creation of themes, the quality thematic analysis will interpret the qualitative data, comprehend the data and consequently create a meaning (Boyatzis, 1998; Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Specifically, a theme is related to a research question, as it provides data for answering the specific question and it helps in structuring the literature into themes and categories, in a meaningful way (Vergne and Wry, 2014). Finally, this technique helps the researcher to identify the underlying mechanisms and new phenomena of this study.

The specific technique is based on two approaches: 1) An inductive approach or otherwise a bottom-up approach, where the coding and analysis procedures are developed according to what it was found in the data and 2) the deductive approach, which is a top-down approach, where the researcher uses specific theoretical codes, or ideas and topics during the primary data collection, to code and interpret the data. A combination of both approaches is also possible. The research of this study followed the third option: a combination of a deductive and inductive approach of the thematic analysis technique. This was achieved by coding through the primarily collected data (inductive), and by elaborating on the main theoretical and conceptual constructs of SM employee usage, Workplace Social Capital domain and employee eWOM domain (deductive). It is important to note concerning this, that through systematic coding and analysing, triangulation of the results is achieved through the involvement of various theoretical and conceptual topics (Braun and Clarke, 2012; Guest et al., 2012).

Following Braun and Clark's (2016) framework for conducting this kind of analysis, the steps that were followed are summarised in the following table.

**Table 4.1: Steps of Thematic Analysis Technique (Source: Author's own)**

<b>Step 1</b>	Searching for theoretical ideas and themes within the literature (preliminary themes)
<b>Step 2</b>	Reviewing the themes during the data gathering process
<b>Step 3</b>	Familiarising with the data
<b>Step 4</b>	Searching for themes within primary data
<b>Step 5</b>	Reviewing potential themes
<b>Step 6</b>	Defining and naming themes
<b>Step 7</b>	Producing the Report

At a first step, the researcher searched for themes deriving from the literature review analysis (preliminary themes), at a second step reviewed the themes during the data gathering process, then had a careful overlook at the primary data, and at a fourth step defined the themes with the completion of interviews. Then reviewing and naming of the themes followed and the final step is the writing up, where the researcher finalised the report including the data separated into themes (producing the report).

#### **4.2 Data analysis of semi-structured interviews**

The presentation of findings, as shown below, is achieved through the thematic presentation of findings with the use of direct quotations from participants. Further, the discussion of findings is accomplished by engaging existing theory and by making comparisons, to indicate new insights and fill gaps. Further, by coding, analysing and involving theoretical and conceptual topics to discuss the findings of this Thesis, the triangulation of results is achieved (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2012).

Mainly, the findings from interviews are separated into three main themes, which are distinguished into subthemes. **Theme 1** deals with the effect of employee SM usage on workplace bonding ties. Therefore, this theme gives answers to RQ1, RQ1a, RQ1b, RO1 and RO2. **Theme 2** is based on the examination of the effect of workplace emotional and workplace social support on employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and it answers RQ2, RQ2a, RQ2b and RO3. Finally, **Theme 3** analyses the effect of employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction on employee e-WOM behavior. This theme provides answers to RQ3, RO1, RO4 and RO5. Further to this, each theme provides a discussion of findings with the use of secondary data and theoretical argumentation, to provide new insights on the subject and the research topics included in this research study. The following table (Table 4.2), presents the themes, the subthemes and the interview questions examining these.

**Table 4.2: Themes, subthemes and interview questions (Source: Author’s own)**

Theme	Subthemes	Interview Questions
<b>Theme 1:</b> The effect of employee social usage of social media on workplace bonding ties	<b>Subtheme 1:</b> The effect of employee social usage of social media on workplace emotional support	IQ3, IQ4, IQ5, IQ6 and IQ7
	<b>Subtheme 2:</b> The effect of employee social usage of social media on workplace social support	IQ8, IQ9, IQ10, IQ11 and IQ12
<b>Theme 2:</b> The effect of workplace bonding ties on employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction	<b>Subtheme 1:</b> The effect of workplace emotional support on employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction	IQ 13
	<b>Subtheme 2:</b> The effect of workplace social support on employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction.	IQ 14
<b>Theme 3:</b> The effect of employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction on employee eWOM behavior	No subthemes	IQ 15

Before proceeding to the presentation and discussion of theme 1, it is important to note that the research findings overall highlight the importance of this research as in the ice braking questions, all responders discussed the ways the SM has changed peoples’ lives, including the facilitation of communication and interaction among friends, colleagues and family. They also pointed out that the use of SM in the workplace is of utmost importance, as updated mechanisms are needed that will minimise the disadvantages related to SM usage among colleagues but will also facilitate the benefits that this interaction may bring.

#### **4.2.1 Theme 1: The effect of employee social usage of social media on workplace bonding ties**

The analysis of this theme is based on the categorisation of participants’ responses, with the main aim to provide comprehension and understanding of the effect of employee SM social usage on workplace emotional and social bonding ties.

At a first point the researcher asked participants what they believe about the use of SM as a communication tool among colleagues in the workplace and how it affects employee relations in terms of emotional (subtheme 1) and social (subtheme 2) bonding ties. The majority of the participants expressed their feeling that there are more positives instead of negatives, while only a few of them elaborated intensively on the negative side. Generally, the positive positioning argued that due to the use of specific SM tools such as messenger and Viber, colleagues communicate more with each other, offer, and receive support and consequently their ties are becoming stronger. The negative positioning argued that sometimes, SM usage might be the reason for the creation of conflicts and misunderstandings among colleagues in the workplace. Both positioning statements and their responses are presented below in detail, through subtheme 1 and subtheme 2.

#### **4.2.1.1 Subtheme 1: The effect of employee social usage of social media on workplace emotional support**

The specific subtheme is examined through the IQ3, IQ4, IQ5, IQ6 and IQ7.

##### **4.2.1.1.1 Presentation of results**

###### **Social media communication between colleagues, the importance of understanding each other's feelings and the effect on mutual concern and care**

One of the most important parameters of workplace emotional support is to understand the feelings of others and feel concerned and care about them. Therefore, starting from IQ3, participants were asked if they believe that through the usage of SM they understand how their colleagues feel, and if this makes them feel concerned and care about them (IQ3: *Do you believe that social media communication between colleagues helps in better understanding each other's feelings? If yes, does this make them concern and care for each other more?*)

###### ***Positive Positioning***

The majority of respondents (24 out of the 31) gave a positive response. Specifically, 24 respondents mentioned that through SM usage, someone can realise the real feelings of workplace colleagues. At a second stage also, they indicated that by understanding the feelings of their

colleagues, they feel concerned and care for them most of the times. Next, some of the relevant quotes follow:

*“SM helps you to realise if someone has a problem or if this person is sad. For example, through a post of my colleagues, I understand their feelings. Of course, this depends mostly on the person and his/her personality. Some people want to share with others their feelings and problems or even happiness. According to their feelings and their problems, I do feel concerned and care for them” (P.N.21).*

*“Yes, I can understand the feelings of my SM contacts. For example, I can see the cases of a divorce, of a lost, of a sad moment or even I, be informed about the happy incidents of their life, such as cases of pregnancy, birth or birthdays’ celebrations. This makes me feel concerned and care or even feel happy for my colleagues respectively” (P.N.12).*

*“Yes, I believe that. Through a post that someone will share or a comment, I can understand if someone needs help, or realise his/her condition. This, of course, makes me feel concerned about him/her, and I would like to ask him/her how I could help. Especially, if I knew that the specific person is open to discuss the problem with me” (P.N.2).*

Some participants also mentioned that not only bad news but also happy movements of their colleagues make them feel happy for them, such as P.N.22 and P.N.25.

*“Of course, there are happy colleagues uploading things on Facebook, and this makes me happy too” (P.N.22).*

*“For example, yesterday a daughter of a colleague gave birth, and we were informed about this through Facebook. Through her post, everybody here at the work knew. Thus, we congratulated her and gave her presents” (P.N.25).*

- **Social media communication between colleagues helps in explaining workplace behaviors**

Through the positive positioning category, considerable participants stated also that through SM, can explain why some colleagues are behaving in a specific way or they are in a certain mood. For instance, participants number 3 and 20 mentioned:

*“If a colleague shares a post though SM to notify about a death (family or a friend), and the next day I see him/her at the work being in a bad mood, I will be able to understand and explain his/her behavior. And yes, this will make me concerned and care for him/her” (P.N.3).*

*“Yes, because you can be informed about the sad or happy moments of your colleagues. This does make me worry and concern about them, especially, if it is something bad. I will be happy with something good. If there is something bad, you will know it directly. You will see this person the next day, and you will know why is in a bad psychological condition. You will be able to explain his/her behavior. Otherwise, you may be informed about the bad news after a month maybe, and until then you will not know what happened. Therefore, awareness will help you to give support to the specific colleague” (P.N.20).*

- **The need of receiving emotional support through SM communication among colleagues**

Some respondents also, mentioned that sometimes they feel the need to post their thoughts or feelings on SM, because they may want to receive emotional support, such as concern and care from their colleagues, while others mentioned that they appreciate and understand the fact that some colleagues may post their feelings or concerns because they want to get support. Below some responses, clarify this further.

*“There are colleagues that want to share how they feel and what is happening in their life, because they may need to get support through SM. This is not something that I would do, but I respect the need of other colleagues, because we are different characters, and we have different needs” (P.N.12).*

*“Through SM postings, you understand a lot about others’ feelings and emotions, even their interests, hobbies, what makes them happy, what makes them sad, and even their character. In addition, yes, this makes me concern and care for them very much. It has happened to me something similar in the past and my colleagues supported me” (P.N.16).*

*“When I am emotionally charged for various reasons, and I want to show how I feel, that specific moment I use SM. This is because it is a way to express myself. Yes, I feel that this make us concern and care for each other. For example, when I post something sad, some colleagues will leave a comment, to encourage me, and I know they love me and they want me to feel OK. This makes me feel nice because I share my feelings and thoughts, and I am getting support” (P.N.20).*

Further to that, some participants argued that they would concern and feel care mainly for colleagues that have stronger ties with them in the workplace, as shown below from their responses.

*“If it is going to make me concern about them depends on the colleague. For example, I may have 100 colleagues. I do not feel the same for everybody. I have those that are close to me and those that are not so much close to me. I will worry and concern mainly only for those that they are closer to me. In addition, some colleagues are exaggerating, just because they want to have attention. We all know these cases” (P.N.7).*

*“If the colleague that will post something is a friend and I have close relationships with him/her, I will concern. If not, I will concern, but much less” (P.N.11).*

### ***Neutral Positioning***

As it can be noticed also, the P.N.17 is not directly negative or positive. While the participant believes that generally, someone cannot trust what sees in SM, some postings are true such as a post from a colleague that gave birth to a baby. Under such circumstances, the participant feels care and concern for colleagues.

*“I think that you cannot understand how your colleagues feel just through SM postings. This is because someone can post anything online and it may be false or misleading. You cannot know if someone shares his/her true feelings through SM. However, if I realise somehow that a colleague expresses true feelings, then yes, I will feel concerned and care, either for the good or bad news. For example, if I see that a colleague gave birth to a child, I will be very happy for her and I will feel empathy and care for her.” (P.N.17).*

### ***Negative Positioning***

Nevertheless, six participants mentioned that they do not believe that via SM usage a colleague can understand other’s feelings. The reason for this is that they do not easily trust what other people post, as this may not be always the fact. This is clearly shown below, though some indicated quotes:

*“Not always people express their true feelings through SM. Usually, they show what other people want to see. For example, some people want to show that they are happy, but in reality, they are unhappy and lonely” (P.N.1).*

*“I think that what we see through SM postings, is not always really the truth or reality. Thus, we cannot understand others’ feelings. You give your concern and care through face-to-face contact in the workplace when you know how your colleagues are feeling. Of course, this may be a matter of age. Nowadays, younger people use SM under a different scope and for different reasons” (P.N.13).*

**Social media communication between colleagues and the development of deeper feelings such as (friendly) love and empathy**

The second question examining the effect of employee social usage of SM on workplace emotional support (subtheme 1) is IQ4 (*Do you believe that social media communication between colleagues helps them to develop deeper feelings for each other, such as (friendly) love and empathy?*). Particularly, participants were asked if, through the usage of SM, deeper feelings are developed for their colleagues, such as love and empathy.

As it is illustrated below, the majority of respondents (specifically 23 out of 31), replied positively and they argue that it is possible, for different reasons, to develop deeper feelings for their colleagues through SM communication.

***Positive Positioning***

- **Positive feelings of love and empathy because of sharing the same interests and hobbies**

According to the responses of participants, one of the main reasons for feeling love and empathy for their colleagues through SM communication, is that through SM usage they may discover that they have common friends, interests, hobbies, worries and concerns. This insight is observed through the following quotes:

*“It could be. This is because colleagues may realise through SM communication that they have common interests, worries and even joys, and these may bring them closer to each other, and therefore feel empathy for each other. This is something that may happen through Facebook or other SM platforms as well”.* (P.N.1)

*“Yes, I agree. For example, through the SM posts of a colleague, we can see that he/she loves and supports animal welfare. Well, yes I could feel empathy and even love for this person, as we share the same feelings for animals”.* (P.N.2)

*“First of all, when we share something with a colleague this creates empathy, and you develop better your relationship with this person. You can also see that you have common friends with a colleague or generally common things that you did not know about, such as interests and concerns and this helps in developing empathy for the other”.* (P.N.28)

*“Through SM you get easily information about some people, and therefore like them more, and even develop friendlier and deeper feelings for them. This is because all people are different, and we cannot be friends with everybody or like everybody”.* (P.N.6)

*“If I discover through SM that I share the same interests with a colleague, I may create more empathy for him/her. For example, if I see that a colleague is an animal lover, something that I did not know before and he/she is interested in protecting stray dogs, and his/he is a volunteer in an animal welfare asylum, I will certainly sympathise/love this colleague more”.* (P.N.11)

This is also related to the fact that employees may not have the time to learn so much from each other at the workplace. Therefore, SM gives them the chance to learn more things about their colleagues, as it is explained in the following participant’s quote:

*“The truth is that I have been working for many years now in this hotel, and therefore there are many colleagues that I knew them before start using SM. However, there are colleagues that I felt empathy for them because of SM, as they started working at a later stage in this organisation. You get knowledge about their life, their interests, and how many common things you may have with them. However, at the workplace, you do not have the opportunity to know them so well, because our time for socialising here is so little, and we do the same thing at work every single day, and this does not enable us to learn from each other”.* (P.N.7)

- **Positive feelings of love and empathy because SM facilitates further communication**

An additional reason that makes employees feel love and empathy for their colleagues through SM communication is related to the communicational tools of SM that enable more communication among colleagues, such as messenger (Facebook application) or Viber. This is spotted from the response of P.N.5.

*“Well, for sure yes. Especially, when we see colleagues that have created group discussions and are communicating even when they are not at work. They also arranging things to do together, such as meet up and go for dinner or organise events. This means that they have love and empathy in their relationships, and SM contribute to this”* (P.N.5).

### *Neutral positioning*

- **The parameters of age and the quality of the face-to-face relationship**

Further to the above, some participants clarified that in order to feel love and empathy for a colleague through SM communication, depends on two parameters: a) the age of SM users and b) the current face-to-face quality of this relationship. For example:

*“At this hotel mostly, we are 40 years old and above. I mean the administration and officers. We know each other for so many years now. Thus, I do not think that there is something new to see for my colleagues through SM, that it will make me love them more, or the opposite to dislike them. I think that this is because we are 40 and above and age is important, and because we know each other for so many years now. Let’s take my son as an example: the way he uses SM is different from the way I use it” (P.N.9)*

*“Mostly it depends on the feelings I have for this person in the workplace - if I like this person in the workplace or not. I think that you are more or less predisposed to someone before you judge him/her about his/her profile in SM. If I like a person or a colleague, I will be happy to see what he/she uploads online, and what she/he has done, where she/he went etc. However, it may happen to see the profile of someone and even though you do not like him/her, to say that you have misunderstood him/her; he/she seems to be a good person. But I think this is rear to happen” (P.N.20)*

- **‘Like’ or ‘dislike’ are both options**

On the other side, some of the participants mentioned that through SM communication, colleagues might like or even dislike each other. They explained that both options are possible. As they have mentioned SM communication, may create negative feelings for each other because of their colleagues’ online behavior, or online profile. Further clarification and details/reasons are given below through some supportive quotes:

*“On the other hand, you may dislike somebody, just because of his/her online behavior”.* (P.N.10)

*“I believe that SM helps in developing non-friendly feelings for colleagues as well. For example, you may dislike someone if you see his/her profile. As regards me, I do not like to see girls (colleagues) wearing their swimwear and posing on SM. I believe that this is not proper and therefore, I may dislike them. Further to that, you may see a certain online behavior of colleagues that is inconsistent with their character at the workplace. At the workplace, for example, they may seem very serious, obeying limits and behaving proper,*

while on their Facebook page behaving in a very different manner. I think that this very hypocritical”. (P.N.3)

“You may see through SM that a colleague is living a different life from what you believed. He may seem a very down to earth person at the workplace and looks very eccentric online. Then you start wondering about his personality, how he is in reality, and that I may do not like this kind of personality. The same may happen for example with the girls working in the kitchen. They always wearing their white uniform, and in the SM you may see them with eccentric, or with very sexy clothes and you may change your mind about them” (P.N. 11).

“There are things that make us dislike other people, such as if you see through SM that someone is a rival team fan or if you see that he/she is posting things for a rival political group”. (P.N.27)

“We are not all people the same. Some people may feel jealous of you... when they see your online profile. These are mean people. You can also see the ‘real’ character and personality of someone in SM, and you may get disappointed and dislike him/her. You may even do not want to cooperate with him/her in the workplace”. (P.N.6)

“Yes, but it may happen from both sides. Someone can develop empathy for some people, while for other abhorrence. Because this depends on the online behavior of people. For example, you may see that someone does not respect you online. He/she may make a comment online that is embarrassing for you, and your friends will see it”. (P.N.8)

“It may happen but only to some extent. It cannot make you shape your initial and main opinion about the other person. I trust the face-to-face interaction and impression I will have about the other when I meet him/her personally and face-to-face. Also, if I see that a colleague is behaving in a very different way in SM, comparing to the workplace, this will make me start thinking that I should redefine my opinion for the specific person”. (P.N.17)

### **Social media as a further mean between colleagues to encourage and comfort each other**

The third question examining the effect of employee social usage of SM on workplace emotional support (subtheme 1) is IQ5 (*Do you believe that social media are a further mean for colleagues to encourage and comfort each other more?*). Particularly, participants were asked if the usage of SM could encourage and comfort each other.

#### ***Positive Positioning***

Overall, 25 out of the 31 respondents, mentioned that colleagues may gain encouragement and comfort through SM communication. They pointed out different ways, through which this is

possible. Below, some of their quotes are explaining why and how this is possible. Specifically, some of them mentioned that this is mainly possible through the use of SM messaging tools, through a comment, a share or a 'like'. Finally, some mentioned that this may mainly happen with colleagues that have a more face-to-face close relationship within the workplace. All these ways are presented through the following quotes of participants, which are classified as below:

- **Colleagues can offer and receive encouragement and comfort at any time due to SM messaging tools**

*“Yes, this is possible. For example, when we are changing group messages through SM, I see that I share the same worries and concerns in the workplace with other colleagues. This makes me feel better. Also, if there are things that need to be done and there is time pressure and deadlines to reach, I share this pressure with other colleagues and we give encouragement and comfort to each other. Finally, they may encourage me through group discussions and I can do the same for them when there is a serious problem irrelevant to the hotel issues, a personal issue let’s say”.* (P.N.1)

*“Yes, I think this is true. Especially, if something bad has happened to a colleague, and we may not have the chance to see him/her at work to encourage and comfort him/her, we can do it through Facebook messaging or Viber”.* (P.N.15)

*“Yes, I strongly believe it. I admire and respect the colleagues that try to encourage and comfort me through SM. I believe that the people that are doing it online through messaging, are also doing it face to face.”* (P.N.16)

*“I believe that SM is a good way to encourage and comfort someone in need. This is because you can do it anytime during the day and under various circumstances. You can start a conversation and encourage someone in need very much. This is very good”.* (P.N.22)

- **Colleagues offer encouragement and comfort to each other through a comment, a share or a 'like'**

*“Yes, I agree. With just a 'like', you show that you support an online 'action' of a colleague, or that you agree with a statement or a situation, or with a comment, and this means that you support him/her. It is, therefore, a modern way to encourage someone.”* (P.N.5)

*“With a share, a 'like', or a comment you support a colleague. For example, you can promote something that a colleague uploaded, through your own profile to support him. In this way, your friends will see it, and this is very good. This may be an event that a colleague organised*

*or a statement that your colleague believes in or generally something important for him.”* (P.N.6)

*“Yes, I believe that. There are many ways to encourage and comfort other colleagues through SM. For example, via likes, comments, and shares we support each other. I am doing it very often because I know that in this way, I encourage and support them, and from the other side I want them to do the same for me. It makes me feel better. I like it”.* (P.N.7)

*“Yes, there are some actions of my colleagues through SM that I support. For example, we have a colleague that she is a painter, and every time she is organising an exhibition, we support her. Not only me but other colleagues as well. We will share posts about her work, or place positive comments on her uploads. I think that this is a good way to encourage someone for an initiative”.* (P.N.31)

*“Yes, I agree. You can send a message or through a comment, you show your encouragement about the others for different occasions and situations in life”.* (P.N.12)

*“Yes it is. You express your positive feelings either through an encouraging comment or a like or even a share or a post”* (P.N.17).

- **Some colleagues are pursuing online support and encouragement on SM**

*“There are a lot of people that share their own stories on SM. Their colleagues can encourage and comfort them even through SM. Those people that upload very often private moments and incidents of their life online are those people that ask for online support and encouragement. Therefore, yes this is true. This can be achieved in various ways such as with positive and encouraging comments.”* (P.N.14)

*“Yes, I believe that you can encourage and comfort colleagues through SM. Especially, for colleagues that need encouragement and comfort. Those colleagues will find a way to demonstrate their need for encouragement and comfort, by uploading relevant posts on SM”.* (P.N.10)

### ***Neutral Positioning***

Two participants mentioned that the quality of face-to-face relationships is more important in receiving and giving encouragement and comfort through SM.

- **Receive and offer encouragement and comfort mainly with colleagues that have close face-to-face relationships in the workplace**

*“Yes, I believe that you can encourage and comfort colleagues through SM. Especially, with colleagues that you have common hobbies and they are more friends and more close to you, you can encourage and comfort more those people”. (P.N.10)*

*“It depends on the connection you have with the specific person in the real life. If this person is much close to you, you can do it, otherwise it is difficult”. (P.N.3)*

Contrary to the aforementioned positioning, four participants argued that they have some concerns in regards to the sharing of encouragement and comfort through SM tools. Specifically, they mentioned that they do not strongly believe that through SM communication, colleagues can encourage each other. Mainly, this is because they believe that face-to-face encouragement cannot be replaced by online encouragement. Some representative quotes are the following:

*“No, I do not believe that you can encourage or comfort someone through SM. This is something that you have to do face to face. However, when there are events shared through SM from a colleague, such as philanthropic events organised by a colleague, of course, I will share it and promote it further because it is for a good purpose. Therefore, it depends on the purpose and the case.” (P.N.3)*

*“Again, there are negatives and positive. For example, you may send a message through SM to comfort or encourage a colleague, and this is good. However, this can work against the face-to-face contact and the face-to-face encouragement”. (P.N.8)*

*“I am sharing posts in SM, and colleagues usually support my online activity. They may like or share my posts. In some sense, this may feel like encouragement and comfort. Of course, you need encouragement and comfort more physically at the workplace. I am also doing the same for my colleagues especially if their post is sensitive or has a deeper meaning. (P.N.11)*

### **Social media communication between colleagues and the trust to discuss a personal problem**

Continuing, the next interview question examining emotional support through SM is IQ6. Via this question the researcher wants to examine if participants trust to discuss a personal problem through SM (IQ6: *Do you believe that there are employees that trust their colleagues enough, to discuss with them a personal problem through social media?*). Interestingly, very few participants gave

positive responses to this question. The majority mentioned that they do not trust SM communicational tools for discussing a personal problem. Nevertheless, some of them replied positively. The relevant positioning statements are following.

### ***Positive Positioning***

Some quotes below indicate that some participants (seven specifically), use SM means for discussing a problem with their colleagues. However, they underline that only in case they trust someone very much, they will do it.

*“Yes, I certainly believe it, and this is maybe an easier way for someone to express his/her feelings. For example, I have friends which, I know they prefer to discuss their problems with their colleagues through messenger because they can talk about their problems better in this way” (P.N.6)*

*“I think that if I trust someone very much, it is ok to discuss a personal problem through SM, like for example text it through messenger. Nevertheless, if someone or a colleague wants to take advantage of you and share your private issues with others he/she will find a way to do it. It is not necessary to have a text message from you to do it; there are other ways as well”. (P.N.11)*

*“I believe that communication through Messenger or face-to-face contact is the same. Therefore, it is not a matter of the mean that you will use to express your problems, but the important thing is the person who you will share your problems with. You have to trust someone very much to be able to speak about a personal problem, either online or face-to-face. Therefore, if your trust a colleague very much, you can discuss it through SM” (P.N.4)*

*“Only with the people I trust, I am doing it. I can share a personal problem with a colleague through Viber or messenger. Of course, my problems are not so much serious in order to be afraid of using SM for discussing private issues.” (P.N.7)*

### ***Negative Positioning***

Specifically, 24 out of 31 respondents clarified that they do not trust to discuss a personal problem with a colleague through SM communication, for different reasons. As their responses below indicate, some of the reasons are self-protection reasons, preference to discuss a problem face-to-face and avoiding misunderstandings. Some related quotes follow.

*“I believe no. This is because, if something is written down, it stays forever. If it is private, it is better to be discussed face to face. It is not safe. If someone does not respect your problem, he/she may control-screen your message and shows it to others. Therefore, I*

*would never share a personal and serious problem through SM. I could only maybe make an innuendo that something is happening with me through SM, in order to get support from other colleagues. But after that, I would like to discuss this in person”. (P.N.1)*

*“I do not believe that there is a reason to express and discuss a personal problem online. I think that this is something that you must do face-to-face. I believe more in face-to-face communication. However, you may send something to a colleague just to mention that you have a problem and you want to discuss it face to face. Also, of course, you have to trust very much someone in order to share a personal problem through SM. I have seen pictures or messages going around at work that was supposed to be confidential, and this was the reason for conflicts.” (P.N.3)*

*“I do not discuss a personal problem online. Either I prefer to do it personally through telephone conversation, or face-to-face with a person, I trust. Generally, I believe that people are hesitating to discuss a personal problem through SM. You may exchange some information and news based on a workplace matter with your colleagues, but not to discuss a personal problem through SM communication.” (P.N.26)*

*“I think that in this organisation, we prefer the face-to-face communication in order to discuss and solve a problem. Besides, with colleagues that I am closer to and I consider them as friends, we may go somewhere and discuss personal issues. Therefore, there is no reason to discuss your problems through messenger or Viber. I think maybe, I would send something to colleagues through SM, if there was a problem that I could not discuss with him/her because it makes me feel uncomfortable. But not a serious one”. (P.N.9)*

*“I do not agree with that, because this is not safe. You must trust very much the other in order to send something very private through SM messaging, and even in this case, it is risky. Even if it is a friend, it is risky. It is maybe used against you in the future. It is better to be a face-to-face conversation for those matters. However, I have friends that they are sending me messages including personal matters. You may also read a message in the wrong way, and therefore misunderstand something. While, if it is face-to-face you will see reactions, emotions and you can explain/describe better the situation. However, it depends also on the problem, how personal, and how much serious it is. The only advantage I can see in the texting is that you have the time to think how you will write something”. (P.N.7)*

*“I prefer to discuss a personal problem, face to face. This is because there are misunderstandings most of the times, and if it is something very personal it is not safe”. (P.N.13)*

*“I would not do that. This is because, through messages, misunderstandings happen, as you just sending a few words to the other, but you cannot see expressions, or body language, or even the sound colour of the voice. And if we are talking about a serious problem, I would not like to talk about it online, but face to face”. (P.N.17)*

### *Social media communication between colleagues and stress release*

The final IQ examining emotional support through SM is IQ7: “*Do you believe that when are colleagues interacting with each other through SM, helps them to relieve stress and anxiety?*” In total, the positive responses among the majority of participants indicate that SM communication among colleagues relieve stress and anxiety in different ways, as it is explained below. Specifically, solely two participants were negative, three belong to the neutral positioning and the rest of the participants replied positively.

#### ***Positive Positioning***

Starting with the positive positioning approach, some of the participants, underlined specific ways through which relieve stress and anxiety, as far as SM interaction among colleagues is concerned. In essence, they mentioned that this may happen mainly, by using messenger as a communicational tool such as group discussions, via photo sharing and through reading comments in Facebook or Instagram sharing posts.

- **Group discussions among colleagues relieve stress**

The most popular answer in regards to the specific question is that when colleagues interact via SM group discussions, they relieve stress. This is illustrated by some representative quotes that follow:

*“Yes, you relieve stress and anxiety through specific SM tools such as messenger where group discussions are quite funny and relaxing. In addition, this more relaxing contact with your colleagues may bring you more close to them and help you to enhance the work-related relationships. Therefore, you may enhance the climate in the working environment and the overall workplace communication, leading sometimes to better performance results”.* (P.N.2)

*“In regards to SM, I think that the only thing that can offer you happiness and it is anti-stress is group discussions because they make me laugh.”* (P.N.23)

*“I think that actually, SM usage is a way of relaxing and generally SM is anti-stress. When you go home in the night, you may feel the need to contact your colleagues, and this will make you feel better; especially, through group discussions”.* (P.N.5)

*“Generally, I am convinced that the communication between colleagues helps them to relieve stress and anxiety. Through messenger especially. Imagine a day that did not go well... you can find ways through SM to mock some moments of the day, and this is stress relief. But we are doing this face-to-face as well.” (P.N.9)*

- **Photo sharing and posts among colleagues relieve stress**

*“When there is workplace stress, some colleagues are trying to make the situation better by sharing a photo through SM ...maybe a funny photo, or to share an emoji. Further, when you see that, you feel that other colleagues feel the same with you, you feel that you belong in the same community. This actually, makes you feel better, and it reduces the level of stress. You can share/express your stress through SM and realise that your colleagues feel the same”. (P.N.4)*

*“Yes, I feel this way, mainly, because in this organisation colleagues use a lot of SM tools for communication. I feel this way, every time we post a picture, say something funny about it or I may even laugh with a post.” (P.N.16)*

- **Is it a matter of age?**

Four participants also mentioned that this is a matter related to users’ age and that specifically, it is more possible for younger people to feel that SM relieves stress, as indicated below.

*“Yes, it is a way of relaxing, especially during the break or lunchtime. However, this is true mostly for younger people. I think that the older people do not find it so much relaxing”. (P.N.13)*

- **The quality of the existing relationship among your colleagues is an important factor**

Further, five participants clarified that SM communication among colleagues relieve stress but only with colleagues that have close relationships with, as shown from the following quotes.

*“I think that this depends on the current relationship you have with your colleagues. For example, if you have a group messenger with other colleagues that are close to you, a discussion with them may make you feel better and relieve stress. However, if there are colleagues in the group that you do not know so well, you may feel uncomfortable saying a joke. It may be misunderstood. Further, I think that generally employees that work in an environment that is very busy and they are more stressed may use more intensively SM to feel relax. I think they share more things with their colleagues, and generally, they interact more through SM, especially for this purpose. Here, in this workplace, things are not so*

*much stressed, and we have the time to interact face-to-face and say a joke or interact personally in order to relieve stress.” (P.N.10)*

Similarly, P.N.11 argues that:

*“Well, this may happen during the break, when we go for lunch, and we take with us our phone, and we may discuss and communicate with other colleagues through SM, or in a specific moment during the day when you want to relax. But, only with colleagues that you have a good relationship with them”. (P.N.11)*

### ***Neutral Positioning***

Continuing with neutral positioning, the following participants (P.N.7 and P.N.17) mentioned that SM communication among colleagues might sometimes make them feel stress relieved in some cases but also stressed in some others.

*“I believe that it can help you to reduce stress as it makes you feel more relaxed. However, the opposite may happen as well. For example, if you are using it at work for many hours, it can make you feel stressed because you may lose time and do not work as much as you should. Again, I believe that it depends on how you use SM, and how much educated you are, to have the maturity to use it appropriately”. (P.N.7)*

*“I would not say that it helps me to relieve stress and anxiety, especially if I am very stressed, it will not help. On the other side, it can help me, in some ways. If I see something funny through SM and especially through colleagues group discussions I will laugh, and this will make me relieve the stress at least for that moment. However, if all colleagues start sending a message during working hours, this is annoying and stressful”. (P.N.17)*

### ***Negative Positioning***

As it was aforementioned only two participants, believe that SM communication among colleagues will not make employees feel stress relief.

*“Well, if you feel anxious about work issues, or you worry about other problems, I do not think that SM will manage to make you feel less stressed. However, those five minutes spending for navigating through SM in order to contact your colleagues and say jokes you may feel happier and less stress but only for that moment I think”. (P.N.6)*

The following table provides a synopsis of the main findings for Theme 1 – Subtheme 1, including the positive, negative and neutral positioning.

**Table 4.3 Summary of the main findings for Theme 1, Subtheme 1 (Source: Author’s own)**

<b>Subtheme 1: The effect of employee social usage of SM on workplace emotional support</b>	
<b>Positive positioning</b>	<b>Negative and neutral positioning</b>
➤ Understanding colleagues’ feelings and identifying colleagues sad/happy moments	➤ Do not trust colleagues’ SM postings
➤ Empathy – feeling sad for bad news and feeling happy for good news	➤ No colleagues’ real feelings may be revealed
➤ Creation of love (friendly) feelings	➤ May dislike a colleague – non-friendly feelings created
➤ Explain colleagues workplace behavior	➤ Face-to-face communication is preferred for giving and receiving encouragement and comfort
➤ Receive and offer encouragement and comfort (at any time and through various actions – a share, a comment, a ‘like’)	➤ Do not trust to discuss a personal problem with a colleague through SM
➤ Sharing common interests, hobbies, worries and concerns	
➤ Release workplace stress (through SM group discussions and photo-sharing and posts)	

#### **4.2.1.1.2 Discussion**

According to the primary results of this research study examining Sub-theme 1 (RQ1a), it is proved that employee social SM usage affects in various positive ways workplace emotional support. Consequently, the findings of this research are in line with the recent literature review, as is discussed below. Overall, according to the literature, the expressive-bonding ties ease emotional support gains through SM communication through stronger interpersonal connections, emotional attachment, reduce loneliness and enhance understanding (Ellison et al., 2007, Law and Chang, 2008, Ernst et al., 2009, Zhong et al., 2012, Li and Chen, 2014; Jin, 2015; Ali-Hassan et al., 2015; Neves 2015; Cao et al., 2016; Bozionelos, 2017).

In essence, the results indicated three main types of positions towards SM usage among colleagues and its influence on workplace emotional support: positive, neutral and negative. As far as positive positioning is concerned, it represents the majority of respondents. Specifically, it seems that employees, who use SM tools to achieve a social interaction with their colleagues, manage to influence relationships of a bonding dimension through which emotional support is becoming stronger. The analysis of the results led to the following observations: employees via online interaction with their colleagues manage to offer and receive concern and care, empathy and friendly love feelings for their colleagues; to receive and offer encouragement and comfort, and even to reduce workplace stress in the organisational settings of the hotel industry. These observations are aligned with the findings of previous research, where it was identified that emotional well-being is enhanced with SNSs, such as the study of Nduhura and Prieler (2017). Looking also at further relatively recent studies including King and Lee (2016), Lin et al. (2016) and Kim and Kim (2017), their findings identified that online interaction among colleagues creates a positive working atmosphere, including the advantages of relaxation and stress relief feelings. Further, as Chen and Wei (2020) mentioned, SM interactions among employees, promote the sharing of common interests, facilitate instrumental and emotional support, and therefore encouraging employees to build high-quality relationships. Lastly, Nisar, Prabhakar and Strakovaa (2019) found that informal and social communication among colleagues through SM generates positive feelings and knowledge through group discussion, and this improves organisational productivity.

Employees achieve this meaningful reciprocity of emotional support in different ways. In essence, according to the responses of this study employees of the hospitality industry have emotional needs, such as the needs of giving and receiving care, love, encouragement and support. They achieve this reciprocity of emotional support, by using SM tools and participating in SM activities such as comment, share, like, message private or group/colleagues discussions, photo sharing and posting. This is also supported by existing literature through which SM is seen as a mechanism where users receive and offer emotional support, either through video connections or via a message, a post, a comment, a 'like' (Vitak and Ellison, 2013; Su and Chan, 2017). This is also in line with previous research studies accomplished by Lin et al. (2016) and Bao et al. (2016), who discovered that through texts, videos and messages colleagues try to satisfy such emotional needs.

That is why it is believed that this is a modern form of online emotional support, as it is a rather new form of interaction among people (Bugsham et al., 2014) and colleagues (Lee, 2020).

Following the next categorisation, some respondents' answers were characterised as neutral. This is because they had concerns in regards to SM social usage among colleagues and its influence on the workplace relationship and ties, but overall they were not negative. Specifically, their concerns were related to the argument that face-to-face emotional support cannot be replaced and that SM interaction among colleagues may release stress, but it can also create stress. This is in agreement found in related literature, as there are studies indicating that sometimes employees feel stress, as they cannot combine professional and personal communication through SM (van Prooijen et al., 2018). Additionally, a further argument related to the specific positioning is that education is very important in this effect. If people are educated on how to use appropriately SM, it is more possible to be able to relieve only the positives of this relationship. This is in agreement with literature as security education, privation and research are important fundamentals in protecting privacy and confidentiality in the cyber world (Sakka and Spyrou, 2014). Therefore, to have the benefit of enjoining the advantages of SM and the dynamic of confronting the drawbacks of online communication, education is an important parameter.

Even though only a few participants belong to the negative positioning, it is still important to discuss their main arguments, about the way they believe SM social usage influences employee social relations, in terms of emotional support. Overall, they believe that SM does not reflect the real feelings of SM users and that people cannot trust this kind of communication. Therefore, they pointed out that solely face-to-face communication is safe, and therefore only in this way colleagues must offer and receive emotional support. This is in line with previous research where it was revealed that some employees do not trust SM, and they do not want to expose themselves through personal information and communication among SNS (see Walden, 2016).

Similarly, according to the results of this study, some employees do not want to receive or ask for emotional support online due to privacy and protection issues. This is mainly related to the fact that the majority of the participants of this study mentioned that they do not trust discussing something personal through SM because they do not trust the online way. It is worth underlining that this was the only question – examining emotional support and SM usage - that the majority of participants was negative. According to the literature, people are reluctant to share their private

feelings and concerns through SM because they are worried about issues of privacy, safety and protection (Bao, 2016; Lin et al., 2016; Alqahtani, 2019; Yang, 2020), and this is related with the feeling of fear (Alqahtani, 2019). Nevertheless, this is not directly in line with a study accomplished by Kim and Kim (2017) who discovered that people who share personal support through SM enhance the feeling of trustworthiness among them. Although employees change feelings of emotional support, they do not trust sharing personal problems through SM sites. Nevertheless, the reasons for this are not only related to trust issues between colleagues but also with safety issues and SM privacy tools concerns.

After presenting and discussing the primary data of Subtheme 1 (workplace emotional support), Subtheme 2 examines how the social usage of SM by colleagues affects workplace social support.

#### **4.2.1.2 Subtheme 2: The effect of employee social usage of social media on workplace social support**

Continuing to the second subtheme, this is dealing with the perception of employees in regards to the effect of SM social usage on workplace social support. Overall, most of the informants belong to the positive positioning, fewer in the neutral due to some concerns and finally yet importantly, negative positioning is very limited. Their views and opinion are observed through the following questions, examining this sub-theme. In specific, this subtheme is examined through IQ8, IQ9, IQ10, IQ11 and IQ12.

##### **4.2.1.2.1 Presentation of results**

###### **Social media communication between colleagues and enhancement of interaction and communication**

In essence, IQ8 examines if SM social usage help in increasing the interaction and communication among colleagues (IQ8: *Do you believe that social media helps colleagues to interact and communicate more with each other?*). In total, the majority of the participants replied positively. Specifically, 27 out of 31 belong to the positive positioning and only four in the neutral positioning. No negative responses were identified in regards to this question.

## ***Positive Positioning***

The majority of the participants mentioned that SM social usage between colleagues enhances the overall communication and interaction among them because there are many advantages related to the SM tools that facilitate interaction. Some of those advantages are related to the low cost of SM, to the variety of SM communicational tools, to the accessibility of SM and to the fact that it is very easy to use and navigate. Some participants' characteristic quotes follow:

*“SM offers various ways to communicate and interact with others and colleagues. It is free and easy to use, and always available through various devices. You can interact at the same time with many people, and this is something that you cannot do with other means”.* (P.N.20)

*“It is an easy way, free and easily accessible. So, you may like something that a colleague shared, you may leave a comment and it is a different way of communication”.* (P.N.5)

*“I can say that for me, SM is a very good way of communication, even better when comparing to a face-to-face contact, because of the availability of numerous tools that I can use, to communicate with my colleagues”* (P.N.16)

*“The communication nowadays, through SM, is better among colleagues and more quality in nature, as it is interactive and multifaceted.”* (P.N.12)

- **Through SM tools, colleagues can communicate in non-working hours as well**

Related to the aforementioned arguments, some participants reported that due to the nature of SM, users have the opportunity to use it any time and in any place, they want, to interact with other people and colleagues. Therefore, they use it for interacting with their colleagues at any moment during the day, and this helps in enhancing even further the interaction among them.

*“Yes, I believe this! For example, during non-working hours, you may send a message at the group discussion forum with your colleagues, either because you did not have the time to do it at work, or because you want to share a funny photo, or because you want to discuss and comment upon something that happened during the day”.* (P.N.7)

*“This can be true especially, because of the group discussions. Maybe in less than an hour, someone will send a joke, or send a pic, or say something, and this is a communication from morning since night, either you are at work, or home. Besides, via SM you manage to be in connection with a colleague that may do not see every day at work. Through this connection, it feels like you see him/her every day”.* (P.N.19)

*“Yes, because for example during the night when you are in a relaxing mode....colleagues may continue the communication, where otherwise this would be impossible. Also, they can continue online interaction after work, where they know that their manager is not there, and this feels better for interacting with each other”.* (P.N.2)

*“Well, during the past, except face-to-face contact, colleagues had only email to communicate; and this tool actually, was not used to cover personal issues and communication, as it was mainly related to work purposes. Now, with the use of SM, which is an additional tool for communication and interaction, the communication is achieved via different forms and on another level”.* (P.N.3)

*“Yes, because otherwise, someone would not contact his/her colleagues other times rather than working times. But now things are different”.* (P.N.5)

### ***Neutral Positioning***

Furthermore, some of the respondents belong to the neutral positioning. This is because, while they believe that the overall colleagues' communication is enhanced through SM, they have concerns in regards to the results of this communication. Specifically, their concerns are related to some disadvantages that enhanced communication among colleagues may create, such as misunderstandings and irritation. Some related characteristics quotes are the following:

*“However, this kind of communication may lead to misunderstandings among colleagues. For example, if you send a message through messenger to a colleague and he/she may do not respond, although your message was viewed. Sometimes also, there are misunderstandings because you cannot express yourself in writing in the same way as face-to-face. Therefore, some of your written words may be misunderstood”* (P.N.20)

*“Yes, this is one of the advantages. Colleagues interact and communicate more; they are organising events or arrange to go out. However, you have to be a bit careful because for example in a group messaging, if the participants send all the time messages, in the end, it will be very annoying.”* (P.N.10)

*“The working team of this hotel has recently been created. Therefore, we do not know much about each other so to use SM to communicate further. But generally, when you are in a team with strong ties and you know each other, you can say jokes more easily and therefore communicate more”.* (P.N.4)

**Social media communication between colleagues and the creation of a sense of belonging**  
**(IQ9)**

Continuing to the next question examining social support through SM in the workplace, participants were asked if they believe that the usage of SM between colleagues creates a sense of belonging in the workplace (IQ9: *Does the interaction among colleagues through social media, creates a sense of belonging in the workplace?*). Overall, 25 out of 31 participants were positive and only six neutral. No negative responses were received for this question.

***Positive Positioning***

*“I think that SM usage creates and develops further the team spirit and the sense of belonging in the organisation. It brings you more close to the others and you feel that you belong to a team.” (P.N.25)*

*“Yes, I agree, mainly because the interaction you have with your colleagues is getting stronger”. (P.N.7)*

*“This is the truth. Employees create networking through SM, they communicate more, they feel part of the team, and they may solve some misunderstandings because they discuss more. The sense of belonging and team spirit is really important for the organisation.” (P.N.15)*

*“Yes, I believe this. SM communication makes the members of the team more connected.” (P.N.17)*

- **Upkeep of communication and interaction even during the winter months that the hotel is close**

Some of the participants mentioned that through SM, they manage to stay connected with their colleagues throughout the year, even when the hotel is closed, from November until April.

*“Yes, this is true. Particularly, some specific SM platforms such as Facebook, make you feel that you are a part of the team. Especially, in our industry - hospitality, some people do not work full year and SM keeps colleagues together. With the beginning of the season when returning to the hotel, it will be like we have never been apart because of the continuous communication through SM.” (P.N.1)*

- **Maintenance of communication and interaction through group discussions**

*“Yes, I believe that. For example, through a group discussion, you can share with your colleagues a problem; find solutions discuss different issues etc. Therefore, SM contributes to keeping the team spirit alive.” (N.P.3)*

*“For example, if there is a manager that you do not like and there are other colleagues that have the same feelings with you, you can discuss this through SM texting tools. This of course creates a sense of belonging. This is something happening in all the companies. They may also give a nickname to the manager for their discussions... and this creates connectivity among colleagues, as it is an informal and confidential discussion. I do not know If this is appropriate or not, but it is anyway an expression of communication between the colleagues.” (N.P.4)*

### **Neutral Positioning**

Some of the respondents expressed their concerns and considerations, in regards to the specific question. Specifically, six respondents mentioned that only sometimes SM contributes to the enhancement of the sense of belonging among colleagues. In essence, their deliberations were based on two parameters, as below:

- **Quality of the face-to-face relationship**

*“I have to note that it depends on the existing quality of the relationship between colleagues. Colleagues that are closer to each other, feel more easily the feeling of belonging through SM interaction. For example, if there is a colleague that you do not like, you will not want to have him/her in the same group messenger or even a friend through Facebook.” (P.N.10)*

*“I think that this can happen, but not with everybody in the workplace. Some people are very difficult to communicate with, and they are creating problems. With those people, you cannot feel like you are on the same team. However, with others, you can feel that you are working for the same targets, for the same organisation and therefore that it feels like you belong to the same workplace.” (P.N.6)*

- **Is it a matter of age?**

*“If we are talking about older employees, I think no. However, for younger employees, this may be true. (P.N.10)*

*“Sometimes, there is a sense of belonging and sometimes not. A reason may be because my colleagues are much younger than I am and sometimes I feel like an outsider. For example, they may go out without inviting me, and I get informed about that through SM. (P.N.16)*

Finally, a participant mentioned that SM communication among colleagues, does not create a sense of belonging, but it may enhance the sense of belonging in the organisational settings.

*“I believe that we feel the team spirit anyway. I do not think that the SM will build a sense of belonging in the workplace. Nevertheless, of course, when the hotel is close during the winter, the SM keep us close and in communication. Therefore, I can say that SM does not create the feelings of belonging, but it may contribute to this somehow” (P.N.9)*

### **Social media communication between colleagues and the development of a closer connection between colleagues (IQ10)**

The following question aims to examine if, through the usage of SM, colleagues come closer to each other and create closer connection and ties (IQ10: *Do you believe that social media communication among colleagues helps them to keep a closer connection between them?*). Mainly the majority of responses were positive, as only four neutral and three negative were identified.

#### ***Positive Positioning***

Participants that reply positive to the specific question, mentioned different reasons and arguments, to support their opinion. Specifically, they described the specific ways that SM communication makes them come closer to each other: arranging events, interacting through group discussions, exchanging photos, communicating in no-working hours, and finally discussing on a more personal and friendly basis.

*“Yes, this is correct. For example, we have discussion groups with specific colleagues, and are changing messages, sometimes even during the nights and even our wives are taking part. We discuss different issues, including work matters, but on a more personal and friendly basis. Without SM, we may do not have the opportunity for this kind of discussions. We are arranging dinner nights, or other things together. So, yes I can see that SM helps in making the relationship between colleagues closer.” (P.N.29)*

*“For some colleagues, this may be true; for example, if they have a day-to-day communication including photo sharing and exchange of messages.” (P.N.11)*

*“Yes, this is for sure. For example, we tell each other where we are, we send photos, we say we did during the weekend... Therefore, we are communicating during non-working hours and weekends as well, and this brings us closer.” (P.N.16)*

*“Yes, this is something that may happen. Not with me, but I can see it with other people and friends. For example, I have friends that they have a group messenger where they are arranging nights out and other various events. They have conversation and communication anytime and anywhere they are. Therefore, they are becoming friends, with more strong ties.” (P.N.2)*

*“Based on my own experience, I believe that SM brings closer colleagues. Until today, this is what I believe. I do not know if something different will happen later and make me change my mind. Of course, this is maybe the case for me because as I told you before, I am working with the same colleagues for many years now, and therefore SM makes us feel closer. Maybe in other organisations, the situation is different.” (P.N.7)*

*“I think that with colleagues that we are not so close to each other, SM may bring us closer. You may discuss more with them and generally, SM will give us reasons to discuss at the workplace as well, for example, to comment on something shared through SM.” (P.N.19)*

### ***Neutral Positioning***

Some responses were more or less positive, but with some considerations. As it is shown from the following quotes, some participants believe that SM may make the bonding among colleagues closer, but only for those whose face-to-face ties are already strong.

*“Not always. It will bring you closer but only to those that you are already close to. With colleagues that you do not have a very good face-to-face relationship, the situation will be the same online. I do not think that SM will make you change your mind for someone that you do not like.” (P.N.5)*

*“With people that you are not so close with, SM may do not help. In addition, when the hotel is closed for four months, you keep the ties with your colleagues through SM communication. You do not lose the connection you have with them. Someone will comment, some other will share a thought, and therefore you have to say something.” (P.N.7)*

### ***Negative Positioning***

The approach of the three respondents was negative, in regards to the specific question. As they mentioned, communication through SM is not able to make the ties among people stronger and closer, because online relationships are vague.

*“The ‘friendships’ through SM are superficial and they need time in order to become real friendships with strong ties.” (P.N.4)*

*“No, because this can happen only in real life.” (P.N.13)*

### **Social media communication between colleagues and the creation of new relationships in the workplace**

Continuing to the analysis of the next question examining Subtheme 2, IQ11 (*Do you think that employees can create new relationships at their work through social media?*) is examining if employees believe that they can build new relationships in the workplace with the help of SM.

#### ***Positive Positioning***

Overall, the majority of the respondents mentioned that SM helps in the creation of new relationships, under various circumstances. As it is indicated below, new relationships are developed through SM interaction: a) in the case of a newcomer in the workplace, b) when colleagues discover their common interests that did not know before and c) in the case of isolated colleagues.

- **The case of a newcomer and the creation of new relationships**

*“If there is a new employee in the workplace... then I think that yes, this is the truth. This is because SM is a good way for a new social communicational beginning. SM is an opportunity for a newcomer to get to know others in the workplace. For example, with a like someone shows sympathy to a colleague.” (P.N.5)*

*“I think that SM is a good way that newcomers or generally people that want to create more ties in the workplace use at work, in order to approach the others. The existing employees may also send a friend request to a newcomer in order to make this person feel part of the team, and start building workplace relationships.” (P.N.17)*

*“Yes, this is true. For example, I would be very friendly with someone that is new in the workplace and wants to make new relationships. I would accept him/her as a friend and try to do my best for this person to feel part of the workplace.” (P.N.16)*

*“If there is a new employee in the workplace and has no ties at all with the existing colleagues because he/she is new, I think that SM will help him/her to be a part of the team, eventually more easily or more quickly. This is because, if he/she become a part let’s say of a group discussion, he/she will feel part of the family as well, and he/she will get to know better the others”. (P.N.11)*

*“As far as I am concerned, if I was a newcomer in a job, I would not contact my colleagues through SM from the beginning, but I would like to wait a bit to meet them first and then send them a friend request. However, we have a girl that has recently started working here and she directly sent us a friend request. Therefore, it depends on the character of each one. I believe that there are people that use SM in the workplace to build new relationships, and they manage to do it in a way.” (P.N.3)*

- **The case of common interests**

*“I believe that this is the first step for two people that do not know each other to come closer through SM. Or discover common interests that will bring them closer.” (P.N.7)*

*“Even, if I do not have close communication with a specific colleague, and I see that she is going to a concert or an event through Facebook that I have the intention to go to, I may ask her to go together. Alternatively, if I see that she has a 4-year-old boy and I have a son at the same age, I may ask her to go to the playground together with our sons. So, I answer positively in the specific question.” (P.N.10)*

- **Isolated colleagues**

*“I think that SM is also a way to approach someone that you see and he/she seems to be a bit inapproachable at the workplace... maybe because it is a lonely personality.” (P.N.20)*

### **Neutral Positioning**

Despite the positive responses, some participants expressed concerns. They mentioned that SM might be the reason for not creating new relationships or even the reason for making an employee feeling isolated and disappointed. Some quotes indicating these concerns, follow.

*“It depends. For example, if you check someone in SM, you may create a bad impression for this person, especially if you do not know him/her very well. Therefore, it may even keep you away from making new relationships”. (P.N.29)*

*“In the case that a colleague is not participating in group discussions that other colleagues have, he/she may feel disappointed and isolated. Similarly, if he/she makes a friend request through Facebook to some colleagues, and he/she is not being accepted, he/she will be disappointed. However, in the case he/she is accepted, he/she will be able to learn different things for other colleagues, and find common issues for discussions, or common interests, or even common friends with others. All these could be issues for face-to-face discussions and further communication.” (P.N.1)*

*“Yes, this may happen. However, I believe that the best way for someone to create relationships with other colleagues in the workplace is to work hard, to be a good*

*employee, to communicate well and to help others in the organisation. For example, we had a new colleague two years ago, and she was a very responsible and very hard working employee. Thus, she managed to create new relationships in the workplace and be part of the existing team. SM may help an employee to be more sociable in the workplace, but I think that personal contact is a better way. Further to that, allow me to refer again to the example of my son. I think that the younger generation uses SM to create new relationships. The same applies to the workplace. For me, I do not know. I prefer to build my new relationships and friendships face to face” (P.N.9)*

### **Social media communication between colleagues and the reduction of loneliness and isolation**

The last question examining the effect of employee SM usage on workplace social support is IQ 12 (*Do you believe that social media communication among colleagues helps them to overcome loneliness or isolation at the workplace?*). Overall, most of the responses were positive. Specifically, only five out of 31 were negative, and two neutral.

#### ***Positive Positioning***

Overall, the positive responses of participants were separated into two subjects: the cases of isolated colleagues in terms of psychological loneliness and the cases of physical isolation. They mentioned that in both cases, SM helps in minimizing isolation, either psychological or physical isolation.

- **The cases of isolated colleagues**

*“There are people that are isolated and lonely by choice. I think that SM helps them at least to have communication through SM with other colleagues. If they are lonely, it does not mean that they do not want to use SM, or they do not want to have public and social relations. I know a person at this hotel that is depressed and isolated. I see that he is sharing photos in SM and is seeking communication. Additionally, some people are isolated for other different reasons. I think that SM helps those people more to feel closer to their colleagues and be part of the hotel”.* (P.N.10)

*“Yes, because colleagues can communicate from different locations at the same time. It is very easy and the lonely people or the isolated people have their chance to overcome loneliness”.* (P.N.12)

*“Yes, it can happen, because colleagues will find a way to contact each other and if it is not physically, then it will be online. And more importantly, if you are a lonely person, you may approach a bit more another colleague through SM and face loneliness”.* (P.N.14).

*“Especially the communication during the night in non-working hours makes isolated and lonely people in a workplace, to feel better, and maybe happier”.* (P.N.19)

*“Yes, it can help. I know a girl that is a bit lonely at work. Therefore, I often contact her through SM, to come to my office, or ask her if she wants anything, or to arrange to go out and eat ...”.* (P.N.23)

- **The cases of physical isolation**

*“This is something that happened to me during last year when my office was transferred to another floor, and I lost communication with my colleagues. Therefore, I managed to keep communicating and socialising with them through SM.”* (P.N.2)

*“Yes, this is truth. Especially, for people that work at the beach bars of the hotel, or in the basement, and they are isolated from others. For example, a physically isolated colleague, he/she may see something in my SM profile and come here to say something about it, or even ask something”.* (P.N.7)

*“If it is a person that we have very good social relationships and is isolated physically let’s say, yes, I think that SM will help keep contact”.* (P.N.22)

*“I believe that in regards to physical isolation at work, communication through SM will help colleagues to stay in contact with each other.* (P.N.5)

*“I think yes, but only in the case that somebody is isolated because his/her office is far away from his/her friend, and maybe only with the colleagues, that someone has very close relationships with. In the case that someone is isolated because he/she is very lonely, I do not think that SM will bring him/her closer to the others”.* (P.N.11)

### **Neutral Positioning**

Nevertheless, some of the participants were concerned if SM helps in approaching colleagues that are isolated by choice.

*“It may help, but I do not think in a big manner. If there is a colleague that overall, is isolated by choice and he/she likes to be alone, then SM will not help.”* (P.N.5).

*“A lonely person may come closer to others. Nevertheless, if he/she is isolated because of a choice, it is difficult to be more sociable. In some way, however, he/she can come closer to the others”.* (P.N.15)

*“However, with people that they like and prefer to stay alone, SM may do not help, as those people do not want to communicate a lot with others”.* (P.N.19)

### ***Negative Positioning***

The negative positioning is based on personal beliefs that only face-to-face communication can eliminate people’s isolation and that SM communication may even create isolation in some cases. Some indicating quotes follow.

*“I do not believe that. Only if the existing colleagues are willing to contact personally a lonely person in the workplace, and let’s say ask him/her to go out with their families or do things together in order to be more sociable and less isolated. I think that SM help only in the communication, and nothing else than that”.* (P.N.9).

*“Loneliness is a very bad thing. I think that you have to help someone face-to-face and give him/her support personally, and then you can help him/her through SM”.* (P.N.16).

*“It can work on the other way around as sometimes SM creates isolation. This is because when I was in a totally cold and unfamiliar working environment, I had my friends in SM to support me. It, therefore, kept me away from meeting new people and new colleagues”.* (P.N.4)

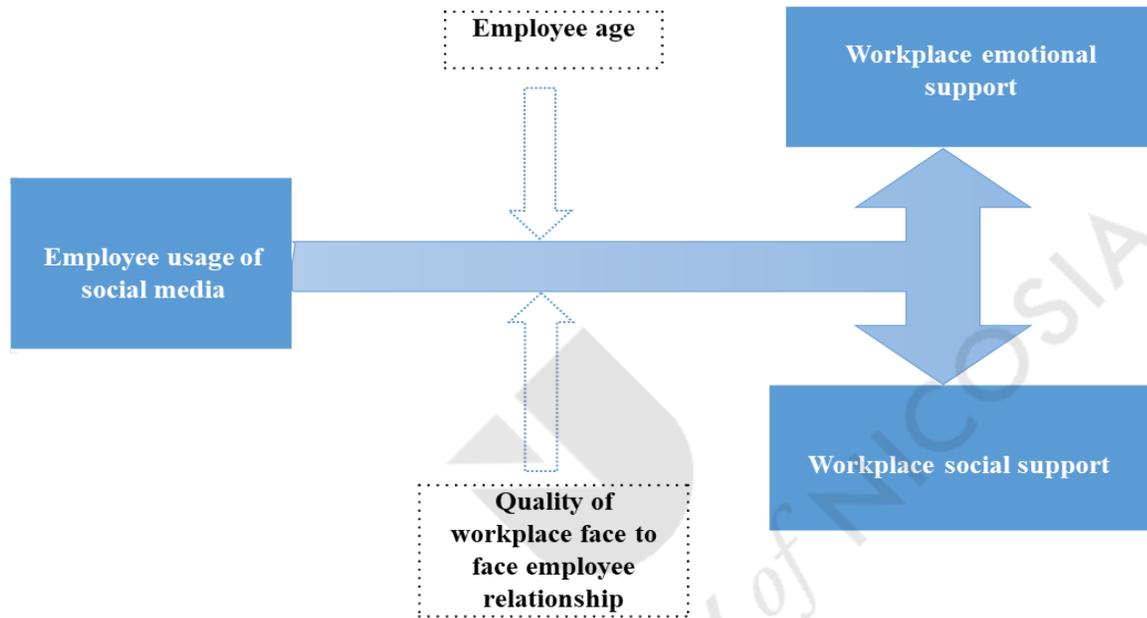
The following table summarises the main findings in regards to the specific subtheme.

**Table 4.4: Summary of the main findings for Theme 1, Subtheme 2**

<b>Subtheme 2: The effect of employee social usage of SM on workplace social support</b>	
<b>Positive positioning</b>	<b>Negative and neutral positioning</b>
➤ Enhancement of Interaction among colleagues – Ongoing interaction, even during non-working hours	➤ Misunderstandings among colleagues
➤ Enhancement of workplace Sense of Belonging – Communication even during winter months (hotels are closed)	➤ Irritation
➤ Creates a closed connection among colleagues	➤ Development of superficial and vague relationships
➤ Development of new social relationships among colleagues	➤ It may create isolation
➤ Reduction of employee loneliness and isolation	

Further, looking at the primary qualitative data of this study examining Theme 1, two important parameters seem to affect this relationship, employee age and the quality of face to face employee relationships. In the following figure (4.1), these parameters are indicated.

**Figure 4.1: Analysing Theme 1 - affecting parameters (Source: Author's own)**



After presenting, the results of Subtheme 2 (Theme 1), the discussion of those results follows.

#### **4.2.1.2.2 Discussion**

In essence, Sub-Theme 1b deals with the employee usage of SM and workplace social support. Taking into consideration the responses and perspectives of participants through this primary research, the majority confirmed the positive effect of SM communication on workplace social support. This finding is in an agreement with recent literature review and research findings that underline the creation of bonding ties based on social support through SM online connection (see Chen and Li, 2017; Chen and Wei, 2020), as indicated and discussed below.

To be precise, the findings in regards to social support and SM usage specified three different types of positions that are the positive, neutral and negative. The dominant positioning though is positive, as relatively few participants expressed some concerns, and even less expressed some negative indications.

Specifically, by elaborating on participants' responses, it seems that SM communication enhances social communication among colleagues. The participants mentioned that due to some advantages of SM platforms, they like to be engaged in SM communication with their colleagues. Such advantages are SM is easily accessible, it is free, and it is easy to use and easy to navigate. Finally, they mentioned that they like the fact that there is a variety of SM interaction tools, and hence they can communicate with their colleagues in different ways, both in synchronous and asynchronous mode. Linking with related to SM user engagement literature, SM users have mentioned that they are keen on SM communication, because SM is available and accessible anytime and anywhere (Bao, 2016), and therefore this has extended the interaction among colleagues even in non-working hours. SM users believe that SM is an easy way not only to sustain interactions but also to enhance face-to-face communication further (Eren and Vardarli, 2013; Kwahk and Park, 2016).

Additionally, this research results indicate that employees' SM social usage enhance the sense of belonging. The majority of the participants mentioned that the interaction among colleagues, especially through group discussion tools, help them to stay connected and this overall enhance the team spirit. They also pointed out that through the winter months, where hotels are closed, they continue interacting and communicating through SM. It is meaningful that they have used some terms during the discussion with the researcher, such as team spirit, creation of an online community and networking, to elaborate on the sense of belonging and the SM communication among colleagues. The current research findings agree with the literature concerning this aspect. This is because, it is argued that the exchange of communication messages through SM platforms, facilitate belongingness and cohesion among team members in organisational settings (Chen and Wei, 2020). Similarly, previous studies (see Lin and Lu, 2011; Parry and Solidoro, 2014; Cao et al., 2015; Shimidt et al., 2016; Cao et al., 2016; Jun et al., 2017; Huang and Liu, 2017; Kim and Kim, 2017), found a connection among the oneness spirit and the sense of belonging among SM users in the workplace, or in other areas. In addition, elaborating on the argument that hotel employees can continue communication among the winter months - this is interrelated with

previous research, where it was identified that employee SM social usage help project team members working in wide geographical distances, to sustain a team of unity and a feeling of oneness (Fonner and Roloff, 2012; Stawnicza, 2014; Walsh et al., 2015). However, this is not in line with Eren and Vardarlier (2013) study, where they found that SM usage has not a direct effect on the sense of belonging.

Similarly, through this research, it was identified that SM communication helps employees to keep a closer connection with their colleagues, and it is a good way for newcomers to meet their colleagues and create new ties with them. In essence, they elaborated on specific ways, where they explained how the ties among colleagues are becoming stronger through SM social interaction: through the development of more personal and friendly discussions, through the exchange of messages, through the sharing and exchanging of opinions and through the arrangement of events and going out on a friendly and informal basis. As Yahia et al. (2018) and Cao et al. (2016) assert social support in the virtual context is mainly achieved through the sharing of experiences and advice. In addition, the majority of the participants explained that SM communication might facilitate the creation of new ties with existing employees, through the discovery of common hobbies interests. As Charoensukmongkol (2014) has found, SM gives the opportunity of creating new online social connections. Correspondingly, socially or physically isolated employees find a way to be involved in the day to day communication and create new ties or enhance the existing ties with their colleagues in the workplace. Bennett et al. (2010) has shown that social networking offers the opportunity for interaction among employees, and this enhances employee satisfaction by reducing social isolation in the workplace.

After analysing the positive positioning, in regards to the effect of employee social usage of SM on workplace social support, it is important to discuss the neutral and negative positioning as well. Specifically, some concerns were mentioned especially, in regards to some misunderstandings that social interaction might create among colleagues. However, it was clarified that if the face-to-face relationship among colleagues is good, more probably no misunderstandings will be created. Further, it was argued that sometimes the relationships build through online platforms are vague and superficial, and therefore it is not easy to gain social support via online interaction forms. Looking to the literature, sometimes, social networking may make employee relationships more awkward (Broughton et al., 2010), due to examples of online misbehaviour (Mac Donald and

Thompson, 2016; Lam, 2016). This may lead to negative implications such as stress, isolation and lower productivity (Walden, 2016).

Finally, yet importantly, one of the participants' concerns is related to the parameter of age. It was argued that the younger generation is willing to build new and strengthen existing relationships through online interactions. However, older generations are more reluctant in creating new relationships online and getting and offering social support through SM. Related research has demonstrated that the new generation that is entering the workplace (Generation Y), is characterised by different needs, as far as the technology at work is concerned (Bolton et al., 2013; Cervellon and Lirio, 2017; Sakka and Ahammad, 2020). This is a generation that is characterised by technological literacy, able and willing to build online social connections and strong relationships (Naim and Lenka, 2018). Looking at the results of this research, the participants, that were mostly neutral or negative in their responses, do not belong to the younger generation. However, the majority of the participants of this study belong to the younger generation – Generation Y (the generation that was born in 1981 and 1996). Specifically, 20 out of 31 participants, belong to the specific generation. This may be also explained by the fact that as recent literature suggests, Gen Y is more likely to use SM for social interaction purposes, for sharing information and ideas and connecting socially online (Bolton et al., 2013; Mehra and Nickerson, 2019). As Mehra and Nickerson (2019) discovered, this is also connected with organisational communication and the perceived satisfaction deriving from this communication. In other words, the younger generation seems that needs a different form of communication in the workplace, related to digital and electronic technology, that fulfil its social and emotional needs.

After presenting and discussing the results based on employee SM social usage and workplace social and emotional support, the next part presents and analyses results concerning the effect of workplace bonding ties (emotional and social support) on employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

## **4.2.2 Theme 2: The effect of workplace bonding ties on employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction**

The second theme of this research study analyses the effect of workplace bonding ties on employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and it is, therefore, distinguished into two subthemes. The first subtheme analyses the effect of workplace emotional support on employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and the second subtheme examines the effect of workplace social support on employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Overall, this theme answers the RO3 and RQ2.

Overall, participants confirmed the positive relationship between workplace bonding ties and employee satisfaction. This is because the majority of participants confirmed the importance of emotional and social support in relation to satisfaction. Some neutral positions and possible participants concerns are also stated and discussed.

### **4.2.2.1 Subtheme 1: The effect of workplace emotional support on employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction**

The specific subtheme is examined through the IQ 13 (*Do you believe that emotional support can enhance workplace employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction?*).

#### **4.2.2.1.1 Presentation of results**

##### **Emotional support and workplace satisfaction and dissatisfaction**

Through the specific question (IQ 13), participants were asked to elaborate on the importance of emotional support in enhancing employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Overall, the majority of the respondents confirmed the importance of emotional support in enhancing employee satisfaction. They also elaborated on how emotional support, as perceived from SM social communication among colleagues, makes them feel satisfied. Some of them also, made a connection with related positive organisational outcomes, as is discussed further down in detail. Their responses are separated into positives, neutral and negative.

## ***Positive Positioning***

- **Emotional support enhances employee satisfaction**

Some of the respondents explained why generally emotional support is important in the organisational environment. They elaborated on specific reasons, to explain this relationship, and they clarified that they become more efficient and overall, better in their work when their emotional needs are satisfied.

*“Emotional support is very important in the workplace. Especially, if you consider how much important is to feel that others empower you, like you, feel you, respect you etc. Therefore, I believe that emotional support generally is an important factor that can make you satisfied in a working environment”.* (P.N. 5)

*“Different factors are affecting the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of employees in the workplace. Emotional support is important too. It is good to have good relationships with your colleagues, to go out with them and support you emotionally. Friendship is also important. Usually, during our nights out with colleagues, we discuss problems we are facing and get emotional support from each other”.* (P.N. 4)

*“I think that emotional support is one of the most important factors affecting workplace employee satisfaction. This is because you spent so many hours at work, and you seek emotional support there. Therefore, your psychology and your mood are affected by the hours you spent at your work”.* (P.N.10)

*“Generally, emotional support is one of the most important factors affecting the satisfaction of employees. Through emotional support, you get the power and energy to be able to continue. From my own experience, if I get disappointed and someone does not emotionally support me at the workplace, I will not be able to work and be productive.* (P.N. 6)

*“Yes, I think that emotional support is extremely important. If someone works in an environment where feels that nobody understands him/her and have no emotional support, this person will be isolated and may want to even leave a job. If you share your problems and your stress, you feel much better. I have colleagues here that I feel like my sisters. When I was sick, they took over my responsibilities, and they helped me a lot”.* (P.N.23)

*“I believe that emotional support is extremely important. If you have good ties with your colleagues, if you can discuss and find solutions with them, if they offer support and if you give support to them, then everybody can work better and have the energy”* (P.N.11)

*“Yes, for sure. It is very important; especially in the hotel industry, where we must successfully communicate with each other”.* (P.N.12)

*“For me is extremely important. I want to give and receive support from my colleagues to be happy at the workplace. If I do not have emotional support, it affects my feelings and therefore my work. There are difficult moments that you need your colleagues to support you”.* (P.N.16)

*“It is very important. If you feel that you do not have emotional support from your colleagues, you feel isolated, unhappy and therefore you will not be able to perform well”.* (P.N.20)

- **Emotional support as perceived from SM social interaction among colleagues enhances employee satisfaction**

Also, some participants extended their responses, by elaborating on the role of SM in this relationship. Below, some answers describe the way they believe that SM social interaction among colleagues, fulfil some of their emotional needs, and make them feel more satisfied in the workplace.

*“Usually, you get the emotional support face to face, but I believe that you can get it also through SM. It is a way of communication and therefore I think it is a way for someone to feel emotionally supported, and this can, of course, make you even more satisfied”.* (P.N.5)

*“If you give emotional support or if you receive emotional support, you enhance your workplace satisfaction in both cases. I think that both sides are important. Therefore, emotional support is extremely important for employees. In regards to SM, the emotional support you receive from here is not in a direct way, but indirectly. SM has a contribution to the enhancement of emotional support in the workplace and therefore may enhance employee satisfaction”.* (P.N.7)

*“I sometimes feel that my colleagues are around to help me and support me emotionally via SM, when I need it, and this makes me satisfied”* (P.N.25)

*“Receiving online emotional support makes me feel happy and satisfied”* (P.N.20)

*“I think that there are various ways to receive emotional support and SM is one of those. This enhances the feeling of satisfaction in my workplace, and I can say that this makes me a better employee, because I feel more motivated and contribute better for the organisational success”* (P.N.19)

*“I believe that emotional support is really important in the workplace. In addition, it can have an impact on the satisfaction of an employee. I believe that the emotional support you get through SM in the workplace more or less is good, and this can make you satisfied and happy”.* (P.N.1)

### ***Neutral Positioning***

One respondent mentioned that the appropriate use of SM is important, in order to get emotional support and be satisfied through the SM social interaction with colleagues. Otherwise, non-proper use of SM, may lead to dissatisfaction.

*“Generally, I believe that it can enhance the feeling of satisfaction instead of dissatisfaction. This is because I can see more positives instead of negatives. However, for some other people, the opposite may be issued, depending on their own experiences and feelings. I think that if there is a proper use of SM, more positives will be revealed” (P.N.1).*

### ***Negative Positioning***

Overall, three participants only were negative, because as they mentioned there are other, more important factors leading to employee satisfaction, instead of emotional support. A supportive quote follows.

*“I think that various important factors are affecting the levels of satisfaction of employees, such as the money and the career opportunities that an organisation offers. Therefore, I do not believe that emotional support is so much important” (P.N.15).*

Further, two participants mentioned that while emotional support is important in the organisational settings, and it affects employee satisfaction, they do not believe that SM reveals sufficient emotional support connected with an indirect effect on employee satisfaction.

*“I believe that emotional support through SM is not so much important that can make someone satisfied or dissatisfied”. (P.N.3)*

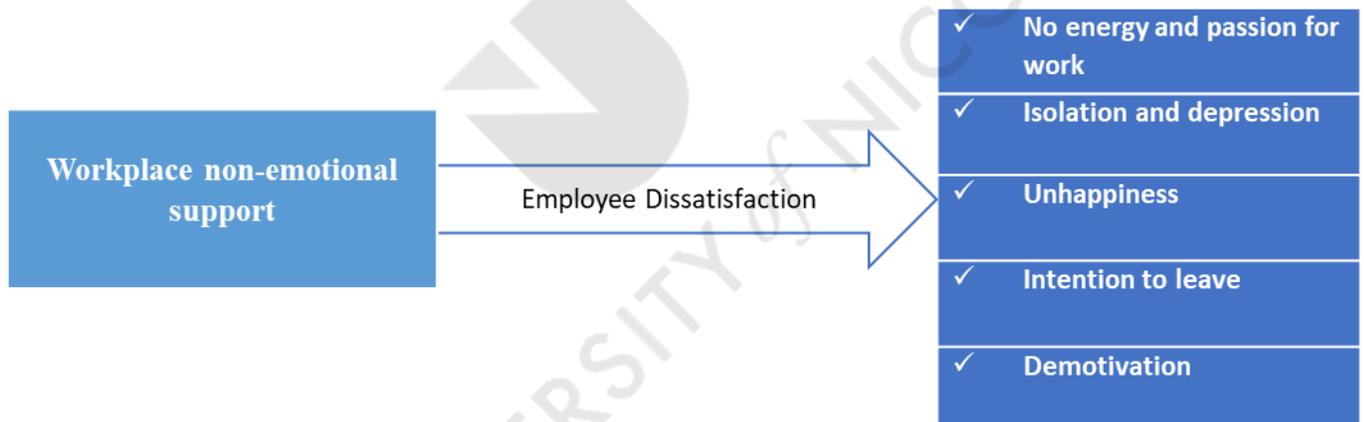
*“In regards to SM, a colleague can get support and emotional encouragement from other colleagues, but not in high levels. Therefore, I do not know if this is a strong parameter affecting the emotional satisfaction of employees”. (P.N.6)*

To provide a synopsis of the main findings concerning the specific Subtheme (Subtheme 1, Theme 2), the below figures (Figure 4.2 and 4.3) present, the main outcomes in relation to employee workplace emotional support, satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

**Figure 4.2: Workplace emotional support and employee satisfaction (Source: Author's own)**



**Figure 4.3: Workplace non-emotional support and employee dissatisfaction (Source: Author's own)**



Below the discussion of Subtheme 1 (Theme 2) follows.

#### **4.2.2.1.2 Discussion**

Looking at the primary results of this research, related to the emotional support and the enhancement of employee workplace satisfaction and dissatisfaction, it can be argued that overall participants believe that emotional support is a very important parameter that affects the levels of employee satisfaction in the workplace. First, participants' answers indicated the importance of employee emotional support and secondly explained why and how the emotional support they get from SM communication among colleagues, enhances the levels of employee satisfaction. There

were a few participants thought that expressed their concerns. The literature underpinning below enhances further the discussion part of this subtheme.

The participants elaborated on specific advantages related to the fulfilment of their emotional needs such as productivity, energy and passion to work, happiness, and positive feelings, able to face difficult situations and achieve a good performance. Searching in the literature, satisfied employees in the organisational settings are connected with several advantages and benefits for the workplace (Robertson and Fee, 2017). Emotionally satisfied employees are willing to give back to their organisation (Schmidt et al., 2016). Emotional support also benefits employees to overpass difficult circumstances in their workplace (Glover and Parry, 2018). Similarly, different studies elaborated on the connection between emotional support and employee well-being and better employee performance (see Jin, 2015; Liu et al., 2016; Glover and Parry, 2018). Therefore, the findings of this study is in an agreement with the recent literature, supporting that communication among colleagues is associated with emotional benefits that are very important for an organisation to succeed, as they are associated with employee satisfaction (Fang et al., 2017; Huang and Liu, 2017; Chen and Wei, 2020).

However, looking at the HRM literature, there is no previous empirical evidence based on examining the perceived emotional support employees are receiving through SM social interaction among colleagues, and its effect on employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction. However, previous research (see Schmidt et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2016), discovered that employees are looking for emotional and social support online. This is also related to the fact that recent researchers have provided empirical evidence that SM use for communication and social exchange relationship, has a positive impact on employee performance (see Chen and Wei, 2020).

Next, the analysis of Subtheme 2 (Theme 2), which presents the social aspect of this theme related to employee satisfaction, follows.

#### **4.2.2.2 Subtheme 2: The effect of workplace social support on employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction.**

Continuing to subtheme 2, this is examining if social support can make employees feel satisfied or dissatisfied. This is examined through the IQ 14 (*Do you believe that social support can enhance workplace employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction?*).

##### **4.2.2.2.1 Presentation of results**

Overall, participants confirmed the positive relationship between social support and employee satisfaction. Only one participant's response belongs to the negative positioning. Some indicative positive participants' responses are following, related to the positive broader role of social support in the workplace. Subsequently, some participants' arguments relevant to the role of SM in enhancing social support and employee satisfaction are stated.

#### **Social support and workplace satisfaction and dissatisfaction**

##### ***Positive Positioning***

*"You have to know your colleagues 'socially'; to respect them and to respect you. If you have good social relationships with them, they will trust you, they will tell you things, you can solve problems with them, and it is good to know that there is someone there that you can talk to and I think that this helps the overall performance of the company, as it improves the performance of each employee. Therefore, social support is an important factor affecting employee satisfaction". (P.N.4)*

*"From my own experience, social support is extremely important in the workplace. You feel disappointed and maybe depressed if you are socially isolated. I am new at this workplace and I do not have emotional and social support. I know that I may leave one day because of that. I cannot work under these circumstances. The existing colleagues do not want to make a space for you in the workplace if you are new, and this is very disappointing. It affects negatively your psychology." (P.N.6)*

*"I believe social support enhances employee satisfaction in the workplace. Especially, as far as my workplace is concerned, social support is very important and make employees feel satisfied". (P.N.28)*

*“Yes, I believe that social relationships are also important. Especially, during the period that the hotel is closed, we socially communicate with each other, receiving and offering social support”.* (P.N.13)

*“Social support bring satisfaction because I think that social support makes you feel part of the team. If you do not receive this support, you feel that you are not a part of the organisation and you do not work with the same passion”.* (P.N.16)

*“Better social relationships in the workplace, bring employee satisfaction”.* (P.N.17)

- **Social Support enhances the intention to stay**

Further, some participants mentioned that healthy social interactions in the workplace are so much important, that enhance the level of satisfaction, and therefore the intention to leave or stay in an organisation.

*“You are spending so many hours with your colleagues, and therefore you are connected with them. You are happy if they are happy, and you are sad if they are sad. Therefore, it is expected that you will seek social support from them. Thus, social support is important as well. Social interaction and social ties are created as a normal effect of the years you spend in a working environment. Respectively, the quality of those ties makes you happy or sad in the workplace. For example, I have some colleagues that are not doing well with other colleagues at work, and I see that they are not happy. I will not be surprised if they tell me someday that somebody of them left”.* (P.N.10)

*“Yes, social support is very important as well. Because we are humans, and while we are working in an organisation, we are creating more close social ties with our colleagues. As time passes, we get to know each other very well, we know their family, their children, and we build social communication and social life with them. Thus, it is very important to work with people that are receiving social support from them. This is also very good for the organisation as well, because employees receiving social support in a workplace, they will not want to leave the organisation, but they will work harder for its success”.* (P.N.11)

- **Social support received from SM social interaction among colleagues, enhances employee satisfaction**

Further, participants’ responses illustrated the role of SM in enhancing social interaction among their colleagues, and therefore enhancing satisfaction. Some selected quotes, as evidence, follow:

*“In regards to my own experience in the workplace, SM has enhanced my social relationships with my colleagues and therefore, has made me more satisfied in the workplace”.* (P.N.2)

*“SM help colleagues in socialising more and this, therefore, enhances the perceived social support and employee satisfaction”.* (P.N.6)

*“The social part yes, is important. For example, SM tools may give you the change as we have discussed before, to be more socially active and came closer to your colleagues. For example, there was a colleague that I commented on a photo of him through Facebook, and we came closer to each other from that day. Generally, I believe that social support is extremely important in the workplace and for the well-being of colleagues as well. SM today has an important role in that”.* (P.N.3)

*“Through SM you build relationships in the workplace, you feel part of the team, and no matter what, you stay connected with them. This makes me satisfied and happy”.* (P.N.24)

### **Negative Response**

One of the participants mentioned that social support is not much important in the workplace, while emotional support is.

*“I am not interested in getting social support in the workplace, and I cannot see it as an important factor affecting satisfaction. For example, some people are too much sociable in the workplace, and I do not find the reason for that. I choose to be social with those that I have close relations, and I trust them. These colleagues are not too many. On the other hand, you cannot be socially isolated in the workplace. So, I think that slightly it is important but not as much as emotional support is”.* (P.N.5)

To provide a summary of the main findings concerning the specific Subtheme (Subtheme 2, Theme 2), the following figures (Figures 4.4 and 4.5) present, the main concluding marks related to employee workplace social support, satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

**Figure 4.4 Workplace social support and employee satisfaction (Source: Author's own)**



**Figure 4.5 Workplace non-social support and employee dissatisfaction (Source: Author's own)**



After presenting the finding of Subthemes 2, the results' discussion follows.

#### **4.2.2.2.2 Discussion**

Taking into consideration that almost all participants underlined the positive effect of social support on employee satisfaction, this confirms that the social aspect in the workplace is important and it is directly relevant and connected with the character of SM. The participants, elaborated on the benefits associated with social support in the workplace settings. Specifically, they mentioned that workplace social support enhances the levels of trust and respect among colleagues, it makes

them feel part of the organisation, enhances the sense of belonging, and the intention to stay. Further, it was stated that in the workplace, socially isolated people feel depressed and unable to work. However, the satisfaction they are getting from workplace social support helps them to improve their overall performance and motivate them in working harder for the success of their organisation. Finally, they mentioned that especially in the period that the hotel is closed, the social communication and exchange of social support via SM continues among them.

Following an examination of the literature review, past research revealed that the sense of community and employee oneness is associated with higher levels of employee satisfaction (Lampinen et al., 2015), and therefore, through the use of SM tools, employees are able to satisfy both their needs for social interaction and the needs of stay connected with their colleagues (Bao, 2016). This can also be explained by elaborating on Hurlbert (1991), who discovered that social networks and relationships in the workplace environment, work as social resources that lead to social support and thus to employee satisfaction. Recently also, Chen and Wei (2020), examined if the SM usage by employees may lead to various social exchange relationships outcomes, and a very good relationship with organisational performance was identified.

After presenting and discussing the findings of Theme 2, below the primary data of Theme 3 are presented.

### **4.2.3 Theme 3: The effect of employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction on employee eWOM behavior**

The last theme of this research study (theme 3) is examined through IQ 15 (*How does employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction affect employees' eWOM behavior?*). Specifically, this theme is analysing the perceptions of employees in regards to the effects of employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction on employee eWOM.

#### **4.2.3.1 Presentation of results**

Overall, the majority of the participants mentioned that they express their satisfaction instead of dissatisfaction for their organisation through SM. This is because various reasons make the

dissatisfied employees reluctant in posting something offensive for their hotel online. Some of the reasons may be fear of losing their jobs, or other ethical constraints or ethical dilemmas. Instead, the majority mentioned that prefer to express their dissatisfaction through other ways, as is analysed below. Further, the responses of the participants are presented and analysed through categorisation.

### **Employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction and the effect on e-WOM behavior**

- **The effects of dissatisfaction – the case of negative eWOM behavior**

Looking at the responses of participants, as it was aforementioned, very few of them expressed negative eWOM behavior in the case of dissatisfaction. Specifically, only six out of 31 interviewees mentioned that employees might express their dissatisfaction online, as below.

*“In regards to dissatisfaction, I believe that employees use SM to express their dissatisfaction, even publicly. They may use Instagram or Twitter for this. I have seen such posts in the past. However, employees also discuss their dissatisfaction face-to-face or through private discussions”.* (P.N.6)

*“I know someone that left the hotel and after a few days he expressed his dissatisfaction on Facebook, by writing not supporting but offensive words for the hotel. In addition, employees that are not happy will speak to other non-happy/non-satisfied colleagues either through messenger or face to face. This is something very usual in all the organisations I think”.* (P.N.11)

*“I know people that negatively expressed themselves online against their organisation because they were dissatisfied. Their main intention was their posts to reach customers or other stakeholders, in order to harm their company”.* (P.N.2)

*“Non-satisfied employees will do that. They may also dishonour their company online, even by using a fake profile. Alternatively, they may also do it through a more personal way for example through private messages, sent either to colleagues or other stakeholders. In addition, bad-mouthing is also related to another way of harming your organisation such as giving incorrect and misleading information to customers. Someone that is not satisfied will find a way to harm his/her organisation, either directly or indirectly, and someone satisfied will find a way to help his/her organisation again directly or indirectly”.* (P.N.17)

- **The effects of dissatisfaction – negative e-WOM behavior is not preferred**

Specifically, 25 out of 31 employees mentioned that employees do not negatively express themselves online against their organisation, for different reasons. As it is indicated below, some of the reasons are fear/danger to lose their job, ethical reasons and restrictions, they do not want to expose themselves, and overall they prefer to choose other ways to show their dissatisfaction.

*“I do not think that employees can do that directly through online tools and platforms. They may do it, but indirectly. For example, they may imply something. If they are dissatisfied, I think this is the only way of expression through SM. Otherwise, someone will be in danger and may be exposed, end even loses his/her job”* (P.N.5).

*“I am not this kind of person. You can leave your organisation if you are not happy and find another job. Despite your dissatisfaction, it is an organisation that you have to respect, as it gives you money”*. (P.N. 22).

*“I wouldn’t negatively express myself online, because it is there, and everybody will see that. I would be exposed. Only in the case that I would have left from the company, maybe I would have negatively expressed myself for my organisation”*. (P.N.1)

*“I wouldn’t do that. I think it is a matter of personality. My personality and my ethical codes would not allow me to do that for any reason”*. (P.N.2)

*“In regards to the dissatisfaction part, I certainly wouldn’t express negatively for my organisation online. In addition, I have not seen online any negative comments from another colleague or something relevant. I think it is dangerous to lose your job and it is unethical. There are other ways to help you to overcome any problems you may face or your dissatisfaction”*. (P.N. 29)

*“Dissatisfied colleagues will do it either face-to-face with other employees or through messenger and private messages with other employees and even with relatives and friends, but not in SM I think”*. (P.N.10)

*“It is a bit difficult for dissatisfied people, to say something negative for their organisation online, because they may lose their job. If someone has problems, he/she may discuss them with the manager or someone else to find solutions to the problems, if of course, this is possible. The bad news flies very quickly, more quickly than the good news”*. (P.N.15)

- **The use of SM messaging tools for expressing dissatisfaction**

A considerable number of participants (specifically 11) also, mentioned that while they would not expose their organisation and themselves publicly, they would, however, discuss their

dissatisfaction with their colleagues or other stakeholders in a more private way, such as SM messaging tools. Some indicative statements follow.

*“I would discuss my dissatisfaction with colleagues that I trust, through a personal conversation via SM. I have done it in the past and my colleagues the same. When I discuss negative feelings and comments for the hotel, this makes me even more dissatisfied as I feel that I and my colleagues share the same disappointment”.* (P.N.2)

*“Usually, satisfaction actions are shared publicly, in order everybody to see it, while dissatisfaction is mostly expressed privately”.* (P.N.6)

*“In this hotel, I have not noticed people that express their dissatisfaction in SM. But I have seen them discuss it with other employees, either face-to-face or through SM texting”.* (P.N.19)

- **Reluctant in using SM messaging tools for expressing dissatisfaction**

Nevertheless, some participants (specifically four) mentioned that they would not use SM messenger tools for expressing their dissatisfaction with their colleagues, as they find it dangerous, as below. Two relevant statements follow.

*“The dissatisfaction can also be expressed face-to-face between colleagues or with external people, or even through the phone. I do not believe that this may happen through SM messenger or texting because it is still dangerous”.* (P.N.4)

*“If I was dissatisfied, I wouldn't use SM personal messaging tools, such as Viber or Facebook messenger, to discuss it with my colleagues. There were cases in the past that some colleagues came to me and showed me personal conversations with other colleagues about complaining about their organisation or even their manager. Why shall I trust others? Most probably they will do the same for me”* (P.N.11).

- **The effects of dissatisfaction – neutral e-WOM behavior**

Interestingly, most participants argued that another way for employees to show dissatisfaction for their organisation is to maintain a neutral position, by not promoting and supporting their organisations online – through SM. In essence, some actions that prove this behavior are avoiding sharing posts of the organisation and not following/supporting the organisation's profile in SM. In other words, in case of dissatisfaction, some employees do not want to be expressed negatively for

their organisation in SM, but they do not also intend to support their organisation online. The following responses prove this position.

*“The dissatisfied people will not support their organisation online. They will not share events and other relevant information related to their organisation”.* (P.N.10)

*“If for a reason you are not satisfied with your organisation, maybe you will not share so many things about your organisation in SM. It depends also on the level of dissatisfaction. However, if you are so much dissatisfied, you may discuss this through SM but always in private messaging”.* (P.N.5)

*“Most of us, follow the website of the hotel, and we support it as much as we can. We comment positively in SM, and we promote the activities and events of the hotel. In the case that someone is not happy and satisfied, probably will not be willing to proceed to all the aforementioned activities”.* (P.N.7)

*“The people that are not happy with their organisation will not post anything in SM or will not take photos from different events and festivals of the hotel and share them online”.* (P.N.9)

*“If I was satisfied with my organisation, I would be more prone to share my company’s website, to promote it online through my social media and like any positive and supportive posts of my company. But I certainly would not do that if I was dissatisfied”.* (P.N.22)

- **Part-timers are dissatisfied and therefore keep a neutral e-WOM behavior**

Finally, in regards to the dissatisfaction part, one participant mentioned that specifically, part-timers are not so much satisfied with their organisation and so they are not interested in supporting their hotel in SM.

*“We can see also the part-timers that they are not very much interested in promoting the hotel online, as they know that they will work only for a season, and therefore they don’t have passion for their job”.* (P.N.13)

Below, the responses in regards to the satisfied employees and positive e-WOM behavior follow.

- **The effects of satisfaction – the case of positive e-WOM behavior**

It is worth noting that all participants (31 out of 31) agreed that satisfied employees express their satisfaction online, through SM. Specifically, they indicated different ways, through which they

support online their organisation. Most importantly, they share the web pages of their organisation, they promote the page of their hotel via their private SM profiles, they leave positive comments to support their hotel, share photos of the hotel, promote/advertise the facilities, the restaurants and the shops of the hotels and share related information and announcements for the hotel. Some characteristic quotes follow.

*“My happiness and my satisfaction for my organisation are obvious in SM. When I am satisfied, I keep a positive behavior for my organisation through SM. This means that I am promoting further the web pages of my organisation, or comment positively through my SM profiles, and like whatever has to do with my work. Especially, if there are any achievements of my hotel, I want my SM contacts to know it, so I share them”.* (P.N.1)

*“I believe that really satisfied employees are more prone to share information for their hotels and promote it further online through their profiles. This is because you want your company to succeed. If your company is successful, you have more chances to succeed too”.* (P.N.23)

*“As an employee, you can easily express your satisfaction through SM. Especially, if it is an organisation that you like and you feel proud of it, you will speak positively through SM. You will be willing to promote your hotel and its restaurants, and you will want to leave a good impression to your friends and others about your organisation”.* (P.N.5)

*“In regards to satisfaction, specific SM actions are showing that employees are satisfied and happy. For instance, they may share via SM photos of the hotel, taken in the swimming pool, or a photo showing the sunshine from the hotel, or pictures of the hotel bars and restaurants. In addition, they may even share other related information about the hotel such as announcements of the best employee of the year; and all these actions indicate that they are happy in their organisation. They may also share an online advertisement for the hotel, or share the hotel website, or share the events of the hotel”.* (P.N.7)

*“I see colleagues that are happy and satisfied with their job, and they post online photos, and feel proud for their organisation. Working in a hotel is not always easy. However, in this hotel, you feel the appreciation. They recognise your good work and your effort”.* (P.N.9)

*“I see many colleagues that they support online our hotel – they share photos taken from the hotel and mention that this is our family; they share events, the website of the hotel, and generally, they promote the hotel. These people are satisfied and happy in the workplace”.* (P.N.10)

*“I think that when employees are satisfied, they recommend their companies and hotels to their SM friends and followers, and they regularly share the hotel’s good sides and advantages. This is what I am doing, as well”.* (P.N.30)

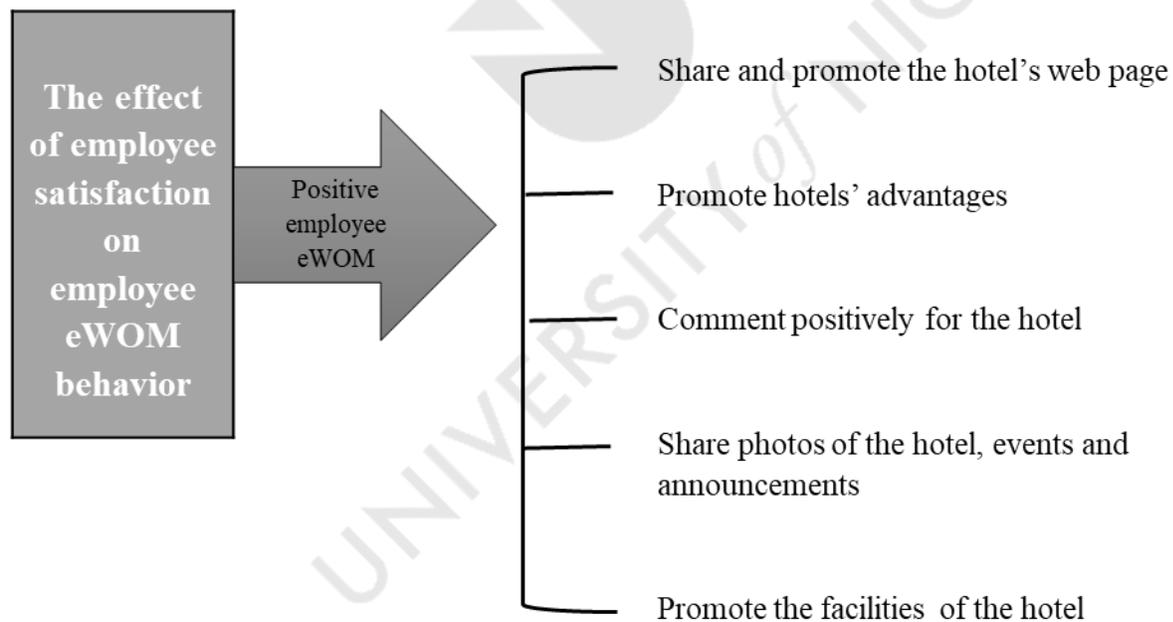
- **Age is an important parameter**

Further, seven participants mentioned that age is an important parameter. This is because the younger generation is more prone to promoting their organisations online. As an example, the below participant mentioned that employees that do not belong to the younger generation, may not use SM for promoting online their hotel, as is indicated in the following quote.

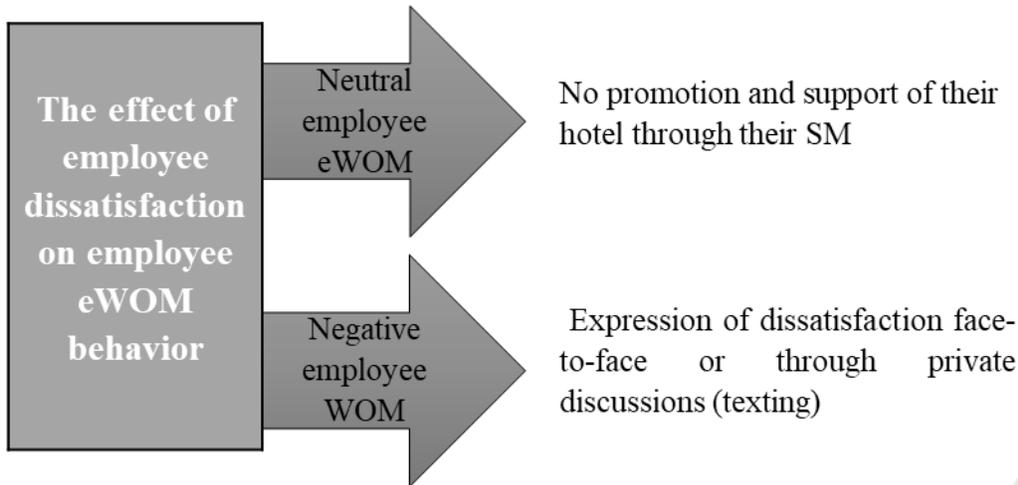
*“The satisfaction online can be expressed in sharing things in relation to the hotel. However, if someone does not share something, it does not mean that he/she is not happy. Usually, the young people use SM more for these purposes – for promoting their organisation online”.*  
(P.N.12)

The below figures (Figures 4.6 and 4.7) show the effect of employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction on eWOM employee behavior.

**Figure 4.6: The effect of employee satisfaction on eWOM employee behavior (Source: Author’s own)**



**Figure 4.7: The effect of employee dissatisfaction on eWOM employee behavior (Source: Author's own)**



After presenting the results in regards to dissatisfaction vs satisfaction and how it affects employee e-WOM, below a discussion will follow by elaborating on these findings, and by engaging in related theory.

#### **4.2.3.2 Discussion**

SM is considered a relatively new form through which employees share their feelings, experiences, dissatisfaction or satisfaction about their organisation (Huotari et al., 2015; Sakka and Ahammad, 2020; Lee, 2020). The findings concerning this theme provide very interesting insights, as participants indicated in a precise and clear manner that dissatisfaction may not directly lead to negative employee e-WOM, but certainly employee satisfaction leads to positive employee e-WOM. Therefore, as shown from the participants' responses the majority does not prefer to show their dissatisfaction publicly, through SM posting and sharing. Instead, other more private solutions are preferred, as is discussed below. However, satisfied employees prefer to use their personal SM profiles and accounts, to promote their company, and overall contribute to the good reputation of their hotel online.

In essence, in regards to dissatisfaction, four participants only mentioned that they have experienced negative e-WOM incidents, because of employee dissatisfaction. As it was mentioned, the main intention was to harm the reputation of the company, by creating a bad image for their company available to stakeholders. The participants mentioned specific social media platforms, where those incidents were revealed, such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, which are some of the most popular SM platforms. Specifically, dissatisfied employees use offensive, misleading and incorrect information posted in SM, to harm their company. The intention is for their posts to be available to different stakeholders, and mainly customers. This is in line with the current theory based on the subject. As McFarland and Ployhart (2015) and Kluemper et al. (2016) mentioned, employees, express negative and sometimes false information and messages offending their company or their coworkers and managers. They intend to damage the image of their company in the eyes of stakeholders: customers, competitors, colleagues, or potential employees (Walsh et al., 2016; Lee, 2020). Further, some employees may even use a fake profile to proceed with negative e-WOM (Lee and Kim, 2020). This is also confirmed by Lee (2020), as through a related study it was discovered that employees choose anonymous SM platforms for sharing their negative emotions and dissatisfaction for their organisations, mainly because of low perceived risk. Risk is one of the main reasons, as it is indicated below, explaining why employees do not want to proceed publicly with negative eWOM.

The majority of the participants mentioned that they did not come across any related incidents of bad eWOM and negative publicity. They clarified that instead of posting harmful information for their hotel online, or express their dissatisfaction through their SM profiles publicly, they prefer to show their dissatisfaction in other ways. They explained that this is because of their fear of losing their job and due to other ethical constraints. Looking at the literature, their fear is reasonable, as there are examples of employees that lost their jobs because of engaging in this kind of behavior in SM (Stoughton et al., 2013). Further, this kind of results is supported by the results of recent research conducted by Lee (2020, p. 988), who examined the factors affecting employees' communicative behavior on SM, discovering that "*employees also turned out to share positive, rather than negative, information about their company on social media*". On the other hand, they prefer to use public SM (such as Facebook), when they are promoting their company.

In relation to the above, a considerable number of participants mentioned that they prefer to discuss and share with their colleagues their dissatisfaction more privately, such as via SM messaging. In connection with related literature, bad e-WOM among employees is very usual and very harmful for the organisation as well (Gonzalez and Gudumal, 2015). As it was seen in the results of this research, it may affect staff attitudes as well, because employees feel that they share the same dissatisfaction with other colleagues, and this makes them feel right about their feelings. As Gonzalez and Gudumal (2015) discovered, bad e-WOM among employees affect staff attitudes as well, as it affects their pride in being part of the organisation and their sense of belonging.

That is why bad or negative e-WOM is related to monetary and non-monetary negative organisational outcomes (Walsh et al, 2020). For these reasons, an effort has been made by relevant research, to prevent this kind of behavior, and help companies to overall avoid actions that are contradictory to companys' guidelines and communication strategies (see Walsh et al., 2016; Walsh et al., 2020).

Continuing to the satisfaction component, it is of significant importance to underline that all participants mentioned that they would promote their hotel through SM if they were satisfied and happy with their organisation. Looking carefully at the results of this research, participants mentioned specific ways, through which they support online their hotels through SM: placing positive comments for their hotels, recommending their hotels to their SM contacts (such as friends and followers), sharing and promoting posts of their hotels such as hotels' achievements and advertising the facilities and shops of the hotels. In this sense, employees become ambassadors of their own company and work as advocates to enhance their hotel's reputation through SM (Sakka and Ahammad, 2020; Lee, 2020). Therefore, this study is in line with current empirical research and conceptual theory (King et al., 2012; Morokane et al., 2016; Bravo et al., 2017; Cervellon and Lirio, 2017, Sakka and Ahammad, 2020), as it confirms that employee satisfaction, leads to a productive employee branding behavior. Bravo et al. (2017), proved that employee satisfaction at work and employee engagement moderate the connection between internal branding and employee endorsement behavior.

However, Cervellon and Lirio (2017) examined employee-branding behavior on social media based on four dimensions: WOM, endorsement, sharing, and culture. They identified that overall, even satisfied employees are reluctant to adopt an employee-branding behavior and support their

organisations online. These results are not in line with the results of this study, as all participants mentioned that satisfaction is an important parameter in promoting their hotels through SM. This can be explained by the fact that Cervellon and Lirio (2017) study included participants, that were using at least one SM platform. However, this study included participants that were characterised not only by high intensity but also by high-quality employee SM usage. For example, passive SM users just read information and navigate through SM platforms, while high-quality users are active users that share, comment and like content through SM (Fietkiewicz et al., 2016; Brailovskaia et al., 2020). This may also explain why Cervellon and Lirio (2017) did not identify any differentiation in regards to the age parameter. Gen Y is overall more qualitatively active in SM, while baby boomers are more passive users. That is why, this study confirms that age is important, as Gen Y is more prone to sharing and promoting its organisation in SM.

In conclusion, following recent literature lines, employees create, share and distribute through SM supportive information for their companies, to improve the corporates' reputation. Especially looking at the hospitality industry, previous research has indicated that customer satisfaction is directly related to employee attitudes and behaviours (Xiong et al., 2013). That is why recently, companies have realised the importance of enlisting their employees' contribution in sharing online corporate messages (Schaarschmidt and Walsh 2018; Walsh et al., 2020). More recently, Yang (2020) examined the SM friendly usage among colleagues in relation to workplace stress, fun and guanxi, including motivational and de-motivational factors that affect this relationship. It was found that the advantages of coworker SM interaction outweigh the negatives.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a thorough exploration of the thematic analysis technique, through which the researcher presented and analysed the primary data of this research. At first, the credibility of this technique, and the steps followed in applying this technique were defined. At a second stage, the researcher answered the research questions of this study by analysing the primary gathering data through categorisation and development of themes. Specifically, three themes were developed. For each theme the results were interpreted, and triangulated with existing theory,

ensuring in this way the reliability of findings. Continuing, Chapter 5 provides a summary of the main findings of the research and presents the final framework of this Thesis.



## **Chapter 5: Conclusions**

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## **5.0 Introduction**

The previous chapter (Chapter 4) presented an in-depth analysis of the study's primary results. The present chapter brings forward the key findings, interrelates them and comprehensively incorporates them into a framework that advances theory and offers practical contributions. Specifically, this chapter encapsulates and condenses the significant concluding findings, with reference to the research questions of this study and elaborates on the main relevant themes and subthemes. Subsequently, this chapter develops the final conceptual framework, by incorporating the main primary data results. An elucidation of the contribution of this study, both to theory and practice follows, and lastly, the research limitations and suggested avenues for future research are presented.

### **5.1 Synopsis of the main findings - answering the research questions**

This study theoretically examines and empirically validates the effect of SM usage on employee online word-of-mouth behavior (eWOM), in the context of workplace bonding social capital and employee satisfaction within Cyprus's hospitality industry. This Thesis therefore, integrates the ways that SM social usage among employees, affect workplace bonding ties and eWOM through employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction factor, in the context of the hospitality industry in Cyprus. By analysing the ways that SM social usage among employees affect emotional and social bonding ties and by understanding the dynamics of drivers for employees' positive and negative behaviors in SM (Lee, 2020), new mechanisms can be found for minimizing negative employee eWOM and enhancing positive employee eWOM. According to the current literature, employee SM usage positively affects employee social and emotional support, and several advantages are related to this positive relationship under the context of workplace social capital. Related theory and research also support that positive workplace employee relationships, based on emotional and social support exchange, reveal satisfaction that leads to positive employee eWOM. This theoretically supported relationship was examined through primary qualitative research in Cyprus's hospitality industry. Specifically, by collecting primary qualitative data through interviews and analyse them, this study answers the main research questions involved in this research, as presented below.

### 5.1.1 Research question 1

The first research question of this Thesis examines the effect of employee SM social usage on workplace bonding ties with the help of two sub-research questions, as indicated below:

**RQ1: How does employees' SM social usage affect workplace bonding ties?**

RQ1a How does employees' SM social usage affect workplace emotional support?

RQ1b How does employees' SM social usage affect workplace social support?

Overall, the participants discussed the positive and negative effects of employee SM usage on workplace emotional and social support. However, the primary data identified more advantages than disadvantages. The positive side of this relationship was supported by different arguments that confirm the benefits associated with SM employee usage. However, the disadvantages were limited and mainly related to the improper use of SM by employees.

Specifically, the advantages of the emotional workplace capital dimension are mainly described as sharing and exchanging feelings of concern and care, empathy and love, encouragement and comfort. Further, the participants described also feelings of stress release while communicating with their colleagues on SM. Therefore, participants explained that, by using SM, they receive from and offer emotional support to their colleagues. Similarly, in regards to the social workplace capital dimension, participants described that SM usage among colleagues further enhances the communication among them, strengthens the sense of belonging to the workplace, helps them to build new relationships, but also maintains the existing workplace interpersonal connections and also reduces loneliness and isolation in the working environment. This positive relationship among employees' usage of SM and workplace social capital was explained, described and supported through the availability of specific SM interactive mechanisms and tools, such as comment, share, like, private messaging or group/colleagues' discussions, photo sharing and posting. Further, it was argued that it is important that SM helps them to understand their colleagues' feelings and to identify sad or happy moments of their lives. In this way, they offer them support when it is needed. In addition, through SM interaction, employees may discover they share common interests and hobbies with some colleagues, making them more empathetic and helping them to enhance the existing communication with them. Equally important is that they may see that they share the same

worries and concerns. Moreover, the group discussion facilitation was mentioned as a vital tool for enhancing, in various ways, workplace social capital ties, such as improving the sense of belonging. Similarly, it was pointed out that SM communication among colleagues on a friendly basis, in non-working hours and even during winter months when the hotel is closed, make their social and emotional bonds stronger. Finally, it was identified that the social dimension of SM among colleagues helps isolated employees to be part of the team and to overall be more interactive within the workplace team. The following table summarises the main findings in relation to the specific research question, and it is included in the final conceptual framework of this study.

**Table 5.1 The positive effect of SM usage on workplace social capital (Source: Author's own)**

Positive effect of SM usage on workplace social capital
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding colleagues' feelings and sad/happy moments</li> <li>• Feeling empathy – feeling sad for bad news and feeling happy for good news</li> <li>• Creating feelings (friendliness) love feelings towards their colleagues</li> <li>• Explaining colleagues' workplace behavior</li> <li>• Discovering common interests and hobbies</li> <li>• Sharing common worries and concerns</li> <li>• Facilitating group discussions</li> <li>• Receiving and offering encouragement and comfort (at any time and through various actions – sharing, commenting, 'liking')</li> <li>• Enhancing interaction among colleagues – Ongoing interaction, even during non-working hours</li> <li>• Developing new social relationships among colleagues</li> <li>• Enhancing workplace sense of belonging – communicating even during winter months when hotels are closed</li> <li>• Engaging in friendly and informal interactions</li> <li>• Releasing workplace stress</li> <li>• Reducing employee loneliness and isolation</li> </ul>

Continuing, some participants underlined the negative side-effects as well. Mainly, the disadvantages that this study's primary data identified in regards to employee SM social usage are related to inappropriate employee online behavior, workplace irritations and to some misunderstandings that may occur among colleagues. Further, it was argued that it is not easy to form bonding social connections with colleagues for emotional and social support in online settings, because these are mainly superficial and vague. Finally, it was mentioned that SM usage may create isolation in the workplace.

**Table 5.2 The negative effect of SM usage on workplace social capital (Source: Author's own)**

Negative effect of SM usage on workplace social capital
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Employee online misbehavior</li><li>• Workplace irritation</li><li>• Misunderstandings among colleagues</li><li>• Development of superficial and vague relationships</li><li>• Creation of workplace isolation</li><li>• Development of non-friendly feelings</li><li>• No trust for SM postings</li></ul>

To sum up, the primary results of this study indicate the positive effect of SM social usage on workplace bonding ties (see Table 5.1) and highlight a few disadvantages (see Table 5.2). Nevertheless, the positive side is stronger and underlined by most participants.

### **5.1.2 Research question 2**

The second research question of this Thesis analyses the effect of workplace bonding ties on employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the help of two sub-questions, as seen below.

**RQ2: How do workplace bonding ties affect employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction?**

RQ2a How does workplace emotional support affect employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction?

RQ2b How does workplace social support affect employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction?

Overall, participants confirmed a positive relationship between workplace bonding ties and employee satisfaction. The majority of participants discussed that both emotional and social support is very important in organisational settings, as both elements make employees feel happy, and help them to be better at their jobs due to passion and energy. Additionally, it was argued that if they are emotionally and socially satisfied in their workplace, they feel more connected to the organisation and there is an intention to stay. Finally, they added that overall they feel that they perform better, and this benefits the organisation. On the opposite side, if their emotional and social needs are not met, they feel unhappy and depressed, with no energy or passion for work, have an intention to leave their jobs. Therefore, they do not perform well in their tasks and responsibilities (see Table 5.3).

**Table 5.3 Workplace bonding ties and workplace satisfaction vs. dissatisfaction (Source: Author's own)**

Satisfaction	Dissatisfaction
Energy and passion for work	No energy and passion for work
Positive psychology - better employee performance	Depression and negative psychology – not able to work
Happiness	Unhappiness
Motivation to be a better employee	Demotivation
Intention to stay	Intention to leave

More importantly, it was pointed out that SM online communication helps employees in receiving and offering socio-emotional support. This is because they feel that their colleagues are around to help them and support them any time during the day. In this way, they maintain communication and manage to satisfy their workplace emotional and social needs.

### 5.1.3 Research question 3

The final research question of this study is RQ3, which examines the effect of satisfaction or dissatisfaction on employee eWOM behavior. In essence, this is a question that connects workplace capital with an important organisational effect and implication, which is the employee online WOM.

**RQ3 How does employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction affect employees' eWOM behavior?**

The primary data of this study, contribute significantly to the existing literature, as they indicate the importance of an indirect mechanism by which SM employee usage influences employee positive eWOM behavior, through bonding social capital (emotional and social support) and employee satisfaction. In an attempt to explain this relationship, all participants mentioned that employee satisfaction leads to positive eWOM. Besides, the majority of participants agreed that non-satisfaction leads to neutral eWOM but not to negative eWOM. Specifically, according to the primary data of this research, the main reasons for avoiding negative e-WOM are listed in the table below:

**Table 5.4 Reasons for avoiding negative e-WOM (Source: Author's own)**

Reasons for avoiding negative eWOM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fear/danger of losing their job</li><li>• Ethical reasons and restrictions</li><li>• Unwilling to expose themselves</li><li>• Other ways are preferred to show their dissatisfaction</li></ul>

According to the primary data of this study, dissatisfied employees are not willing to proceed with negative eWOM but they keep a neutral position. This means that they choose not to speak negatively about their hotel, but they also do not promote or support their organisation through SM. Specifically, they avoid sharing posts and information about their organisation, and overall they have no intention to contribute to the good picture and online reputation of their hotel. Although the participants of this study are characterised by high-intensity and high-quality usage

(see Table 3.2), when they are dissatisfied, they tend to keep a neutral position and do not promote their hotel online. It is important also to note that when participants are dissatisfied, they will speak negatively about their organisation more privately with their colleagues, such as through SM messenger tools.

Moreover, all interviewees mentioned that employee satisfaction leads to positive eWOM behavior. In essence, this positive attitude is related to particular online actions that benefit the organisation. The main intention of those actions is to recommend and promote their hotel to their SM contacts, which are important organisational stakeholders. These actions are summarised in Table 5.5.

**Table 5.5 Actions related to positive employee e-WOM behavior (Source: Author’s own)**

Positive employee e-WOM behavior
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share and promote hotel’s web page</li> <li>• Comment positively about the hotel</li> <li>• Share photos of the hotel</li> <li>• Promote online the hotel facilities</li> <li>• Share hotel-related information, events and announcements</li> </ul>

After presenting the main important conclusions in regards to the three research questions, below is a discussion of the factors affecting the relationship among employee SM usage and employee e-WOM behavior.

## **5.2 The final conceptual framework development**

This study has examined the effect of employee SM usage on workplace bonding social capital ties (social and emotional support) and positive and negative employee eWOM behavior, through employee satisfaction. Therefore, the workplace bonding social ties were included and examined as a connecting factor that facilitates employee satisfaction and leads to positive employee e-WOM. In an attempt to examine how employee SM social usage affects the workplace bonding social capital and influences employee eWOM quality, it was identified that employee SM usage

affects positively workplace bonding ties and facilitates emotional and social support. This positive effect leads to employee satisfaction that works as an important mediating factor, leading to positive employee eWOM behavior.

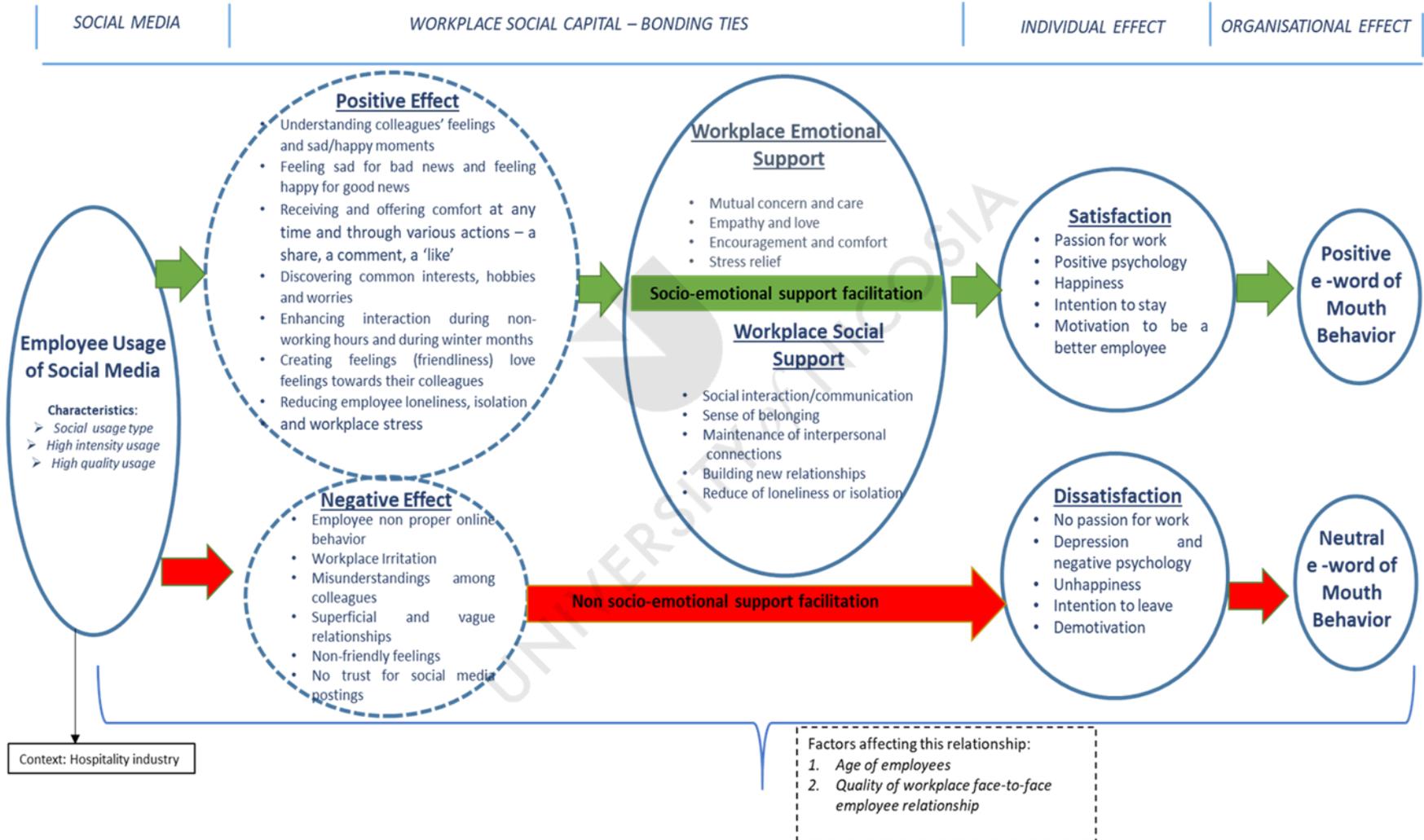
Further, taking into consideration the primary results of this study, the majority of the participants stated that two important factors are affecting the examined relationship among employee SM usage and employee e-WOM. These two factors are age and the quality of the workplace face-to-face employee relationships. Particularly as concerned the age parameter, it was identified that the Gen Y employees are more willing to give and receive emotional and social support through SM. Older generations are more reluctant and sceptical to create new relationships online and to exchange socio-emotional support through SM. Further, a considerable number of participants mentioned that the quality of face-to-face relationships in the workplace among colleagues is an important parameter that affects the online emotional and social support received from SM.

This relationship, including the factors affecting it, is further discussed below by presenting and explaining the final conceptual framework of this study.

#### ***Final Conceptual Framework Development***

Following the primary qualitative research findings of this study, along with the main outcomes derived from the critical analysis of the narrative literature review, the preliminary framework was further developed, refined and finalized (see figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1 Final Conceptual Framework (Source: Author's own)**



According to the empirically validated conceptual framework of this study, when employees interact socially with their colleagues through SM, they exchange socio-emotional support that facilitates employee satisfaction and leads to positive employee e-WOM behavior. Specifically, employee SM usage among colleagues affects positively the workplace social capital. Through SM usage, employees realise their colleagues' feelings and emotions and their sad and happy moments. They discover common interests and hobbies. They share common worries and concerns. They can connect on an informal basis or join group discussions with colleagues, even after work and during winter when hotels are closed. Employees can interact with each other through SM activities (such as share, comment and like), and finally, they can socially involve isolated colleagues and make them feel part of the team.

This positive effect on employee social relations enhances workplace emotional support, as employees feel more concern, care, empathy and love for their colleagues. In addition, they encourage and comfort each other more, and they feel less stressed. Similarly, the positive effect of SM usage among colleagues accelerates workplace social support, as employees communicate more among each other, feel part of the team through a stronger sense of belonging, maintain their workplace interpersonal connections, create new workplace relationships and reduce isolation. This positive effect on workplace social capital makes them feel satisfied and happy. Therefore, their eWOM behavior on their SM profiles is positive and promotes a good reputation and image for their hotel.

On the other hand, there is a negative effect of employee SM usage. However, this effect is not very strong, as only a few participants highlighted the negative side. Therefore, the relationship between employee SM usage and the positive effect is stronger. According to the participants' statements, the most important negative aspect of employee SM usage is improper online behavior, workplace irritation, misunderstandings among colleagues and that online communication develops only superficial and vague relationships among colleagues. This negative side, as it is seen in the framework, does not facilitate workplace emotional and social support. Therefore, only the positive effect of SM employee usage enhances emotional and social support. Consequently, negative effects lead to employee dissatisfaction, which is associated with neutral e-WOM behavior, which does not facilitate employees to engage in supportive actions for the organisation, such as enhancing the hotel's reputation. However, according to a few participants, dissatisfied

employees engage in negative e-WOM behavior only on a more private basis, such as through SM messenger tools.

In total, it is concluded that employee SM usage affects positively the bonding dimension of workplace ties in the hospitality industry, due to the ease of emotional and social support, which is positively connected with employee satisfaction and leads to positive employee e-WOM behavior. However, according to the qualitative responses of participants, this mechanism depends on two important factors: the age of employees and the quality of workplace ties among employees. This is because the younger generation is more willing to use SM for emotional and social support, while the older generation prefers face-to-face relationships and contacts for socio-emotional support. Further, in regards to the role of the quality of workplace face-to-face relationships, several participants stated that the effect of employee SM usage on workplace bonding ties depends on the quality of workplace ties. For example, they offer and receive online socio-emotional support through SM more easily with employees that maintain friendly workplace connections. Consequently, the mechanism that leads to positive eWOM through employee bonding social capital and employee satisfaction is considerably affected by these two important factors.

By assessing the effect of employee SM usage on employee eWOM, this framework highlights the meaningful importance of taking advantage of the positive effect of employee SM usage on workplace employee bonding ties, which leads to employee satisfaction and positive eWOM. The application of the theory derived from this framework will help organisations to pursue employee positive eWOM behavior and practitioners to redefine and redesign their SM usage strategies. The next two parts of this chapter discuss in detail the contribution of this research study to theory and practice.

### **5.3 Contribution to existing theory**

The primary research findings of this Thesis largely contribute to the existing theories and add new knowledge. This section clarifies and discusses the new knowledge that the empirically tested conceptual framework provides to the related areas and the phenomenon under investigation, and it fills relatively recently identified literature gaps by giving answers and explanations. In an initial

step, it clarifies the contribution to the hospitality industry. It then elaborates on its addition to the three involved areas (employee SM usage, workplace social capital and employee eWOM). Next, it underlines the theoretical input of this Thesis on employee brand ambassadorship. Finally, this section expounds on the methodological contribution of this Thesis concerning the qualitative approach.

To start with, the specific study has contributed to the existing knowledge of the industry involved, which is the hospitality industry. As discussed in the literature section (see Chapter 2), the hospitality industry needs further empirical investigation of the effective communication practices (King and Lee, 2016) in using SM (Ladkin and Buhalis, 2016), and the social capital and its impact on the organisational performance in the hospitality workplaces (King and Lee, 2016; Sias and Duncan, 2020). To fill these gaps, this study focuses on the hospitality industry. Finally, it is important to note that eWOM is considered a major source of hotel information that influences consumers' opinions (Litvin et al., 2018). eWOM, consequently, is very important for hotels' brand image. In this sense, this study has indicated a mechanism through which hotels can leverage positive employee eWOM to further enhance their online brand image and reputation.

This dissertation study contributes theoretically to two HRM oriented areas, which are workplace social bonding capital and employee SM usage in the workplace. It also contributes theoretically to one marketing-oriented area, which is employee eWOM behavior. The framework of this study, therefore, has identified updated correlations between crucial bonding constructs with important HR implications for employee satisfaction, and essential organisational outcomes with the marketing orientation, such as employee WOM. The framework highlights new concepts and zones of theoretical interest in SM studies that set the ground for further research.

First, this study gives light to employee SM usage in workplaces and its positive and negative implications for organisations. This contribution is considered important, as several researchers have called the need for further empirical investigation on how SM usage affects the internal communication among employees, and how this may benefit the business context (see Men and Muralidharan, 2017; Hanna et al., 2017; Chen and Wei, 2020).

Second, this framework conveys knowledge in the context of workplace social bonding capital associated with employee SM usage in the organisational settings. It identifies the way employee SM usage develops the bonding social capital connections and forms individual behaviors in

workplaces of the Cyprus hospitality industry. Previous studies on the subject were mainly focused on examining bridging workplace social capital and work-related connections. However, recent literature called for further research on examining strong workplace ties in relation to employee SM usage to leverage organisational benefits (Neves, 2015; Lin et al., 2016; Kluemper et al., 2016; Jun t al., 2017; Fusi and Zhang, 2020). The results of this research give light on this theoretical request, by identifying the positive and negative affect of employee SM usage on workplace bonding capital and workplace socio-emotional support. Therefore, this research theoretically contributes to the context of managing employees' participation in SM and in supporting SM communication among employees (Dreher, 2014; Chen and Wei, 2020).

Third, in an attempt to fill in gaps in understanding the organisational benefits of this relationship (positive effect of employee SM usage on bonding social capital) (see Schmidt et al., 2016; Huang and Liu, 2017; Sias and Duncan, 2020), this Thesis extends research in employee e-WOM behavior. This framework, therefore, explains the reasons leading to a positive or negative effect of SM employee usage, in order to find new ways and strategies that will enhance the level of employee satisfaction and reduce the level of employee dissatisfaction accordingly, to promote positive employee eWOM behavior that benefits the performance of organisations.

Fourth, from the marketing point of view, this study contributes to the exploration of employees' role in the online branding process. Specifically, it adds knowledge to this relatively new field and provides new insights into the role of employee brand ambassadorship and/or otherwise employee advocacy in online settings. In this way, it contributes towards bridging literature gaps in the field (see Cervellon and Lirio, 2017, Sakka and Ahammad, 2020), as limited previous scholarly work has examined employees' eWOM behavior through their SM usage. This aspect is further discussed in the next section of this chapter, where the practical contribution of this study is explained and supported.

Although several studies have focused on employees' social media behaviors from various perspectives following a quantitative approach, limited studies have provided an in-depth qualitative analysis of such behaviors, and then mainly on their positive or negative organisational effect (Ali-Hassan et al., 2015; Gonzalez, 2015). As Huang and Liu (2017) suggested, a face-to-face data gathering approach helps to acquire valuable and in-depth data that will open or illustrate new theoretical horizons. Therefore, this study followed a qualitative approach with interviews

and face-to-face contact with participants and acquired rich qualitative data for insights into relationships and factors that help in explaining behaviors.

#### **5.4 Contribution to practice**

In this section, the practical applications and contributions of this study are highlighted and discussed. SM has obtained an integral role in many employees' lives, and organisations must be ready to respond to this new communication method and the relevant impacts on employee relationships. From the practical side, therefore, this study provides guidelines to organisations on how to manage the employee SM usage challenge, and how to integrate SM into their communication policy and organisational structure (Badea, 2014). Specifically, examining employee SM usage practically helps organisations to understand the relevant relationships and connecting factors that will assist them in redefining their SM strategies for reaching internal and external organisational benefits (Chen and Wei, 2020), as is discussed below.

To achieve positive internal organisational benefits, HR practitioners are welcome to follow the rationale of this study. Other research has argued that if an organisation manages to create strong social ties among its workers, the potential benefits will be numerous, such as reducing employee turnover (Dess and Sauerwald, 2014), higher levels of employee commitment and satisfaction, and improving work-related attitudes (Ellinger et al., 2014). According to the results of this study, through SM usage, employees enhance their sense of belonging. Therefore, through using specific online means, workplace turnover can be reduced, and higher retention levels can be pursued, especially, in the hospitality industry, which is characterised by low retention (Tews et al., 2014). Consequently, in line with these theories, one of the main contributions of this study is that employee usage of SM can be considered a strategic tool that strengthens employees' ties to an organisation such as a hotel. This is because, according to the primary data of this research, SM communication among colleagues is associated with bonding social capital benefits. Specifically, these benefits are connected with various social and emotional exchange relationship outcomes that enhance employee workplace communication and employee satisfaction and build higher quality bonding connections. Both practitioners and organisations must take advantage of this important role of SM in the workplace.

More specifically, organisations should support employees' social involvement in SM by creating groups and pages based on common interests and concerns. For example, they may encourage them to visit the company's Facebook page regularly to stay informed about organisation's news and updates but also to communicate with their colleagues. For example, recently Sias and Duncan (2020) discovered that if employees contact the company's Facebook page regularly, the employee-organisation relationship and the social capital of the organisation are enhanced. Similarly, it is suggested that the SM communication dynamic must be seen by practitioners as a means for engaging current employees and for internal marketing that improves the organisational culture (Gibbs et al., 2015). Organisation SM pages may contain information that is useful for employees, encouraging them to follow these pages (Sias and Duncan, 2020) and communicate with their colleagues more.

In relation to this, SM must not be seen only as a communication tool that engages organisational customers (as previous studies have proved) but also, as the result of this study suggests, as an employee communication tool that engages emotionally and socially satisfied employees. Therefore, companies should manage their employees' positive online behavior in different ways. Employees should be encouraged to respect each other, give and receive emotional and social care through SM, and enhance mutual understanding. Interactive SM applications that meet the specific need can be developed. Moreover, employees need to be educated to use SM technology properly. Therefore, target training designed and implemented by managers, organisations and HR practitioners can help employees acquire skills and knowledge on specific SM aspects, such as technical matters. For instance, training on how to use the privacy settings and SM safety filters may help reduce employee misunderstandings and conflicts. Similarly, organised behavioural workshops may raise awareness on how employees should behave online in order to enhance organisational employee communication and avoid possible online conflicts.

Discussed below is a final, yet important contribution of this framework, which is the external organisational advantages of employee SM usage. This framework has indicated that internal benefits of employee SM usage, such as socio-emotional support, lead to positive employee e-WOM behavior. Specifically, the empirical framework of this study strengthens existing knowledge on positive employee e-WOM behavior and in the field of employee brand

ambassadorship and suggests innovative marketing methods to organisations, HR and marketing practitioners.

Taking into consideration the results of this study from a practical standpoint, employee positive eWOM is an important promotional tool for a company, and SM could be the 'driver' of this positive employee attitude. This is an innovative marketing-related employee attitude, which today's managers and organisations must acknowledge. In essence, the primary research data of this research can help organisations, practitioners and managers design employee training and support programs that will guide them not only on how to protect organisational reputation online, but also on how to solicit them for promoting the organisation and even its brand, services and other related organisational facilities through SM. Therefore, specific programs can be developed that enhance employee SM activity in favor of their organisations. Similarly, developing and offering SM workshops may help organisations to make employees aware of the importance of employee ambassadorship and advocacy. Overall, they can educate employees about corporate awareness efforts and how these efforts strengthen an organisation's reputation.

Today's organisations can develop SM employee groups, where they can upload useful information about their company and industry. In relation to this, employees may discuss, discover, and implement ways through which they can promote their company via their personal SM profiles. The purpose of these kinds of actions is meaningful for many reasons. The workplace social network will be strengthened. As the exchange of socio-emotional support is enhanced, employees' sense of belonging will be maintained and strengthened. Through group involvement, employees will acquire useful information and knowledge about their company and will be further motivated to become online brand advocates. The employees will promote online brand awareness of the company and, finally, they will realise the importance of their role as online brand ambassadors. The development of employee SM groups is just an example. In essence, the availability of various SM tools and the fact that it is a very fast-moving domain (Kaplan and Haenlain, 2010) opens opportunities to develop new, updated forms of online promotion with employee involvement.

Similarly, another idea is to involve employees in the developing of new SM pages, where they can advertise and promote their organisation to various stakeholders, such as customers, by uploading related content, such as photos, on an informal basis. Positive employee eWOM looks

very attractive to customers. This can be a very good promotional tool for modern hotels in general, when taking into account the importance of promoting hotels online and that hotels' customers are keen to search online for information about hotels. Nevertheless, encouraging employees to be active with customers online through these pages is also a bit risky, and organisations must be ready to confront any negative employee comments and strategically find ways to eliminate this risk.

Especially, organisations need to consider Gen Y employees, who are technologically acute and will dominate the workplace in a few years. Companies should also be aware of the way SM is changing workplace relationships to take advantage of the potential dynamic of SM to gain organisational benefits and incorporate them at a strategic level. According to the results of this research, this generation needs to receive and offer socio-emotional support through online settings, and organisations must respond to these needs and expectations, as these are connected to employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Further to this, Gen Y workers are very willing to act online for the benefit of their organisations (Mehra and Nickerson, 2019). By actively incorporating SM usage policy into employees' workplace life, organisations will further satisfy this generation who will be willing to adopt positive eWOM behavior and contribute overall to promoting online organisational strategy.

To sum up, noted interventions of this framework can be incorporated into the HR and marketing strategy. Through higher levels of satisfied and positive employee e-WOM behavior, organisations can gain a competitive advantage and achieve organisational goals. Consequently, today's organisations must invest in this modern marketing pathway. Kaplan and Haenlain (2010, p.67) argued, *"Using Social Media is not an easy task and may require new ways of thinking, but the potential gains are far from being negligible"*.

## **5.5 Limitations of the study**

After discussing the valuable theoretical and practical insights of this Thesis, this section elaborates on the study limitations, which are largely inherent to its qualitative nature.

To start with, related biases may be involved due to the methodological approach of this study, which is qualitative. This is mainly because no quantitative method was employed and the generalisability of the results is not possible when applying solely qualitative methods. However, generalisability is not one of the main objectives of this research. As it was explained in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3) and the gap section of this Thesis, the qualitative approach was followed for various reasons. One of the main reasons was to fill a gap in relation to the methodological approach of the previous studies on SM and workplace social capital. According to various researchers, more qualitative studies are needed in this domain for a more in-depth analysis of the subject and to explain more relationships and mechanisms in regards to the phenomenon of SM in the workplace (Varki et al., 2000; Charoensukmonhkol, 2014; Ali-Hassan et al., 2015; Gonzalez, 2015). Finally, the limitation of interpreting qualitative data was addressed by presenting and describing the primary data in-depth. Many interview verbatim statements were included in this Thesis to present the overall picture from an in-depth and detailed approach.

Further, a single qualitative method was used for gathering data, which was an in-depth semi-structured interview. This may also be criticised and considered as a limitation, as through mixed methods designs, data are better validated and triangulated. Nevertheless, this limitation is addressed by the fact that through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, participants had the opportunity to elaborate on their feelings and thoughts. In addition, there was space to discuss and to further explain specific concepts related to the world of SM. Hence, the data-gathering technique in this approach is considered flexible, enabling the study's participants to express themselves in a freer and more open way. Finally, yet importantly, a single-method approach may give new and vital data that other methods could not (Golafshani, 2003).

The selected sampling of this research could also be considered a limitation. This is because the sample of this study is purposive, and the participants were selected according to specific criteria. Specifically, this study included full-time, back-office, employees of 4\* and 5\* hotels of the Cyprus hotel industry. Also, the participants were selected according to some more criteria: SM social usage for interacting with colleagues, high intensity and high-quality usage (for further explanations, see Chapter 3: Methodology). Nevertheless, sample limitations can be explained by the fact that, in qualitative research studies, the researcher may choose information-rich cases, by

getting data from participants that are well informed or well experienced in the phenomenon under investigation (Cresswell and Plano Clarke, 2011). Further, part-timers were not included, as this study examined the social capital among full-time employees. This can be explained by the fact that workplace social capital ties among full-time and part-time employees vary. Therefore, the benefits of purposive sampling outweigh the aforementioned limitations. The participants that are active SM users, provided rich and in-depth data, which helped the researcher to successfully answer the research questions of this study.

One further research limitation that may be a reason for criticism concerns the limited number of informants who participated in this study. Specifically, there were 31 interviews in total. However, a limited sample is expected in qualitative studies, as the generalisability of the results is not important. This limitation, however, is also addressed by the fact that, following Eisenhardt (1989), the number of interviews was based on achieving a theoretical saturation of findings.

The aforementioned methodological limitations can be overcome through further research. Similarly, future research may also explore additional relationships and underlying mechanisms related to the concept of this study that will provide updated results on the subject under investigation. These are presented and discussed below.

## **5.6 Suggestions for future research**

By offering insights into employee SM usage in the workplace, this Thesis indicates the directions for further research. Therefore, this section provides potential methodological, contextual and content avenues for further research.

### ***Content Avenues***

Focusing on the potential content avenues, the final conceptual framework of this Thesis can be the basis for future research studies and can consequently create new research opportunities that examine new relationships and create new theory. Specific suggestions under this avenue are indicated below.

1) The framework of this Thesis has included and examined the bonding dimension of social capital. Future research may examine the instrumental (or bridging) dimension of workplace social capital to identify if it similarly affects employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction. This may be achieved by using it as a mediator and examine if it leads to positive or negative employee WOM behavior.

2) Looking at the content of SM tools, it would be interesting to investigate if specific SM platforms lead to different results, or if different SM tools have different effects on employee emotional and social satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

3) It should be added that the pool of SM platforms is growing every day, with new ones being created incessantly over the last few years. Taking into consideration that the primary data collection was completed by the end of November 2019, some platforms did not exist or were new. Consequently, ongoing research is needed in this domain, to capture any updates about new SM platforms (Capriotti et al., 2021), and especially any new ones that will have appeared since the time of the primary collection of this Thesis eg. Clubhouse, Twitter Spaces, Caffeine, Instagram Reels and Houseparty (Bump, 2021).

4) Additionally, looking at the outcomes of the examined relationship, which is positive and neutral eWOM, future research may include different employee organisational or employee outcomes at an individual level, such as employee commitment or employee innovation.

5) Further empirical research may also examine and include additional interrelations and mechanisms based on the framework of this study. Specifically, further research directions may include more variables that may affect the outcome of the relationship. These kinds of variables are gender differences, organisational levels of analysis and even the managers' role and their approach towards employee SM usage (positive or negative). Finally, from the psychological perspective, and within the employee behavior domain, specific individual characteristics and attributes of employees may affect the results.

6) In relation to the aforementioned suggestion and looking at the qualitative results of this Thesis, it seems that the variable of age is very important and needs to be investigated further. Future research, therefore, needs to examine employee SM usage and its effect on the workplace,

including the role of generations (and more importantly Gen Y). This will enable researchers to identify specific ways through which SM usage affects Generation Y positively or negatively in modern organisational workplaces in order to design specific strategies that will respond to the needs of this generation. One possible research question to be further investigated is *in what sense does Generation Y differ from Generation X and Baby Boomers in terms of SM usage and workplace employee satisfaction?* Currently, there is limited research on this subject. This may also be investigated, in combination with updated employee outcomes (that current research investigates), such as employee acceptance towards organisational change.

### ***Methodological Avenues***

1) Continuing with the methodological avenues, future studies may follow different directions to examine the framework of this study. This study involves a single qualitative method. Future research, examining the same interrelated subjects, but following a different methodological approach, would not only be interesting but would also cover the aforementioned methodological limitations of this study. Specifically, a mixed-method design or a quantitative method would triangulate and validate the results, and finally achieve the results' generalisability.

2) Concerning also the sample included in this study, it would have been interesting to see if, by following the same research approach, but including only passive employee SM users (this study has included active, high-quality SM users), the same results will be observed.

### ***Context Avenues***

1) Looking at the context avenues for further research, it is important to note that one important exogenous factor that may affect the results of this research is the cultural context. Taking this into consideration, it is important to see if the results are replicated in different cultural settings. Therefore, a cross-culture study is suggested for further research, as it will also help in generalising the study's results.

2) In the same vein, it will be of great importance to repeat this research in different contexts. This study was accomplished in the context of the hospitality industry in Cyprus, and it is suggested to be duplicated in other industries or various working environments of Cyprus.

### *Foci Avenues*

Lastly, under this category, future researchers are expected to focus on specific constructs and elements of this Thesis framework in order to examine those in-isolation and in-depth. Specifically, some relationships that constitute promising avenues for further research are employee SM usage and employee satisfaction, or emotional social support and employee SM usage, or employee dissatisfaction and negative eWOM behaviour.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the researcher of this Thesis aimed to indicate how employee SM usage affects the workplace in terms of social capital, and how this can work as a tool for organisations to pursue positive employee eWOM. In detail, this Thesis theoretically and practically contributes to the areas of employee SM usage and employee eWOM behavior by investigating this relationship through the effect of employee SM usage on workplace social capital ties. Therefore, this Thesis adds knowledge to the aforementioned areas and indicates the way through which practitioners and managers may redesign their strategies in order to take advantage of the positive effect of social employee SM usage among colleagues, on workplace social capital and employee eWOM.

More importantly, this study takes place in a very important context, which is the hospitality industry. Interesting insights, therefore, are presented that enhance employee social and emotional satisfaction in the workplace settings and set the scene for the development of online employee advocacy. Practitioners of the hospitality industry may utilise the results and the suggestions of this Thesis, in order to strengthen the bonding ties of the workplace social capital, enhance the socio-emotional support among employees and, in this way, promote positive employee eWOM behaviour. Consequently, this study contributes to the quite new domain of employee brand ambassadorship, where employees can facilitate the online promotion of their hotel, to their SM contacts. This is considered a relatively new valuable marketing tool, with great potential, as it significantly benefits modern organisations.

Finally, the final conceptual framework of this study is significant and comprehensive, as it can be used as a basis for the development of further underlying mechanisms and interrelationships that will explore new benefits of employee SM usage. This Thesis is expected to motivate the

hospitality industry and guide practitioners to redefine their SM strategies and to invest in ways that, from a marketing perspective, will be beneficial.



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## Appendix I: Informed Consent Form



DD/MM/YYYY

To Whom It May Concern,

### PARTICIPATION IN A PhD RESEARCH STUDY

**Title of Study:** An Integrated Framework of the Effect of Social Media Usage on Employee Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication in the Hospitality Industry of Cyprus

This letter is to introduce a PhD researcher from the University of Nicosia and the purpose of this research. The research will be conducted through the use of 31 semi-structured individual interviews that will last approximately 60 minutes. The participants of this study will be employees that work in the hospitality industry in Cyprus.

The purpose of this research study is at a first stage, to examine the effect of Social Media social usage between colleagues on the workplace social and emotional support and at a second stage to examine how this, affects the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behavior of employees. Therefore, with your contribution, this study will provide an in-depth understanding of how Social Media usage affects the relationships of colleagues and daily life in workplaces, with the main intention to give guidelines to organisations on how to confront the new challenge of social media, and how to integrate it into their communication policy and organisational structure, to achieve positive eWOM behavior by employees.

I would like to assure you that the entire data gathered and the results of this research will be used only for the needs of this research. Also, throughout the process, the anonymity and confidentiality of participants will be retained. Further, an electronic recorder will be used for better comprehension of the data. As soon

as the data analysis process will be developed, the recordings will be deleted. However, in the case that a participant will request not to use an electronic recorder, his/her wish will be respected.

On behalf of me and my supervisors, Prof. Alkis Thrassou, Prof. Ioanna Papasolomou and Dr Michael Christofi, I would like to express our gratitude for your collaboration. If you wish to receive the results of this research, please let me know. Thank you once again for your contribution.

Sincerely,



Georgia Sakka  
PhD Candidate  
School of Business and Management  
University of Nicosia, Cyprus



UNIVERSITY of NICOSIA

## Appendix II: Interview Protocol Questions in the Greek Language

<b>Δημογραφικά στοιχεία</b>	
<b>Ηλικία</b>	
<b>Φύλο</b>	
<b>Υπηκοότητα</b>	
<b>Θέση εργασίας</b>	

<b>Οδηγός Ερωτήσεων Συνέντευξης</b>	
1.	Γενικότερα, τι πιστεύεις όσον αφορά την χρήση των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης στις μέρες μας;
2.	Τι πιστεύεις όσον αφορά την χρήση των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης στον χώρο εργασίας;
3.	Πιστεύεις ότι η χρήση των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης, ως μέσο επικοινωνίας μεταξύ των συναδέλφων, τους βοηθά ώστε να καταλαβαίνουν περισσότερο τα συναισθήματα ο ένας του άλλου; Εάν ναι, αυτό τους κάνει να ενδιαφέρονται και να ανησυχούν ο ένας για τον άλλο περισσότερο;
4.	Πιστεύεις ότι η χρήση των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης, ως μέσο επικοινωνίας μεταξύ των συναδέλφων, βοηθά ώστε να αναπτυχθεί περισσότερη συμπάθεια αλλά και αγάπη (σε φιλικό επίπεδο) μεταξύ τους;
5.	Πιστεύεις ότι η χρήση των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης είναι ένα επιπρόσθετο μέσο, μέσα από το οποίο οι συνάδελφοι μπορούν να ενθαρρύνουν και να παρηγορούν ο ένας τον άλλο;
6.	Θεωρείς ότι υπάρχουν άτομα που εμπιστεύονται αρκετά κάποιον συνάδελφό τους, ώστε να συζητήσουν μαζί του κάποιο προσωπικό τους πρόβλημα, μέσω των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης;
7.	Πιστεύεις ότι η επικοινωνία και η αλληλεπίδραση μεταξύ των συναδέλφων μέσω των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης, τους βοηθά πολλές φορές να αποβάλουν το στρες και το άγχος στον χώρο εργασίας;

8.	Πιστεύεις ότι μέσα από την χρήση των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης, οι συναδέλφοι μπορούν να επικοινωνούν περισσότερο μεταξύ τους;
9.	Πιστεύεις ότι η επικοινωνία και η αλληλεπίδραση μεταξύ των συναδέλφων μέσω των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης, κάνει πιο έντονο το συναίσθημα ότι αποτελούν μέρος την ομάδα στο εργασιακό περιβάλλον;
10.	Πιστεύεις ότι η επικοινωνία και η αλληλεπίδραση μεταξύ των συναδέλφων μέσω των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης, τους βοηθά να κάνουν την υφιστάμενη τους σχέση ακόμα πιο στενή;
11.	Πιστεύεις ότι τα μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης βοηθούν στην δημιουργία νέων σχέσεων στον χώρο εργασίας;
12.	Πιστεύεις ότι η επικοινωνία και η αλληλεπίδραση μεταξύ των συναδέλφων μέσω των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης, τους βοηθά να ξεπεράσουν την μοναξιά ή την απομόνωση που ίσως να αντιμετωπίζουν στον χώρο εργασίας;
13.	Πιστεύεις ότι η συναισθηματική υποστήριξη στο χώρο εργασίας, μπορεί να ενισχύσει ή να μειώσει ανάλογα το αίσθημα εργασιακής ικανοποίησης;
14.	Πιστεύεις ότι η κοινωνική υποστήριξη στο χώρο εργασίας, μπορεί να ενισχύσει ή να μειώσει ανάλογα το αίσθημα εργασιακής ικανοποίησης;
15.	Πιστεύεις ότι οι εργαζόμενοι χρησιμοποιούν τα μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης για να εκφράσουν την εργασιακή ικανοποίηση ή δυσαρέσκεια τους μιλώντας θετικά ή αρνητικά για τον οργανισμό τους, σε άλλα άτομα εκτός του οργανισμού; Ή ακόμα και στους ίδιους τους συναδέλφους τους

### Appendix III: Interview Protocol Questions in the English Language

<b>Demographics</b>	
<b>Age</b>	
<b>Gender</b>	
<b>Nationality</b>	
<b>Position</b>	

<b>Questions</b>	
1.	What do you believe in general about the use of social media nowadays?
2.	What do you think about the use of SM in the workplace?
3.	Do you believe that social media communication between colleagues helps in better understanding each other's feelings? If yes, does this make them concern and care for each other more?
4.	Do you believe that social media communication between colleagues helps them to develop deeper feelings for each other, such as (friendly) love and empathy?
5.	Do you believe that social media are a further mean for colleagues to encourage and comfort each other more?
6.	Do you believe that there are employees that trust their colleagues enough, to discuss with them a personal problem through social media?
7.	Do you believe that when colleagues interacting with each other through SM, helps them to relieve stress and anxiety?
8.	Do you believe that social media helps colleagues to interact and communicate more with each other?

9.	Does the interaction among colleagues through social media, creates a sense of belonging in the workplace?
10.	Do you believe that social media communication among colleagues helps them to keep a closer connection between them?
11.	Do you think that employees can create new relationships at their work through social media?
12.	Do you believe that social media communication among colleagues helps them to overcome loneliness or isolation at the workplace?
13.	Do you believe that emotional support can enhance workplace employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction?
14.	Do you believe that social support can enhance workplace employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction?
15.	Do you believe that employees use social media to express their satisfaction/dissatisfaction at the workplace for their organisation, to others, outside the organisation? Or to their colleagues?

## Appendix IV: Pre-Interview Briefing in the Greek Language

**Title of Study:** An Integrated Framework of the Effect of Social Media Usage on Employee Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication in the Hospitality Industry of Cyprus

**Χρόνος:** Η συνέντευξη θα διαρκέσει περίπου 60 λεπτά

Θα ήθελα να σας ευχαριστήσω που αφιερώσατε τον χρόνο αυτό για να πάρετε μέρος στην έρευνα μου, και για την συναίνεση σας να απαντήσετε στις ερωτήσεις μου. Θα ήθελα να ενημερώσω ότι όσα πρόκειται να λεχθούν θα χρησιμοποιηθούν μόνο για τις ανάγκες της συγκεκριμένης έρευνας και για κανένα άλλο σκοπό. Επιπλέον, το όνομα σας αλλά και το όνομα του ξενοδοχείου δεν πρόκειται να αποκαλυφθούν στην έρευνα μου και όσα θα ειπωθούν είναι απόλυτα εμπιστευτικά και θα τηρηθεί εχεμύθεια. Παράλληλα, θα ήθελα να ζητήσω την έγκρισή σας να χρησιμοποιήσω καταγραφικό φωνής (voice recorder). Ο λόγος είναι ότι θα με βοηθήσει να καταγράψω όσα λεχθούν αργότερα, και αυτό θα διευκολύνει την διαδικασία ανάλυσης των δεδομένων. Στην συνέχεια το υλικό θα καταστραφεί.

Σε πρώτο στάδιο, θα ήθελα να σας δώσω κάποιες σημαντικές πληροφορίες για την έρευνα αυτή και τον σκοπό της. Ο ουσιαστικός σκοπός της συγκεκριμένης έρευνας είναι να ερευνήσουμε πως τα μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης επηρεάζουν την κοινωνική και συναισθηματική υποστήριξη στον χώρο εργασίας, και πώς αυτό καταληκτικά επηρεάζει την διάθεση των υπαλλήλων να εκφραστούν θετικά ή αρνητικά για τον οργανισμό τους στο διαδίκτυο. Η πρωτογενή έρευνα πραγματοποιείται σε πολυτελή ξενοδοχεία της Κύπρου 4\* και 5\*.

Στο στάδιο αυτό είναι σημαντικό επίσης, να καθορίσουμε τι εννοούμε με τον όρο μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης. Εννοούμε τα μέσα, τα οποία αποτελούν μέσα επικοινωνίας αλλά και κοινωνικής αλληλεπίδρασης ανάμεσα σε ομάδες χρηστών, όπως το Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Viber, YouTube και άλλα συναφή (όχι το email). Εάν έχετε κάποια απορία σχετικά με συγκεκριμένη πλατφόρμα, εάν ανήκει στην κατηγορία των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης, μπορείτε να με ρωτήσετε. Και φυσικά είναι σημαντικό να τονίσω ότι στην έρευνα συμπεριλαμβάνονται και οι εφαρμογές των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης, όπως είναι για παράδειγμα το *Messenger*, το οποίο αποτελεί εφαρμογή του Facebook.

Οι ερωτήσεις που θα ακολουθήσουν χωρίζονται σε 4 στάδια, και το κάθε στάδιο εξετάζει κάτι διαφορετικό. Στο πρώτο στάδιο θα εξετάσουμε κατά πόσο τα μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης επηρεάζουν την συναισθηματική υποστήριξη των υπαλλήλων, στο δεύτερο στάδιο κατά πόσο επηρεάζουν την κοινωνική υποστήριξη των υπαλλήλων, στο τρίτο στάδιο κατά πόσο η συναισθηματική και κοινωνική υποστήριξη επηρεάζουν το αίσθημα της εργασιακής ικανοποίησης ή δυσαρέσκειας ανάλογα, και στο τέταρτο στάδιο εξετάζεται κατά πόσο αυτό επηρεάζει την διάθεση των υπαλλήλων να μιλήσουν θετικά ή αρνητικά για τον οργανισμό τους στο διαδίκτυο.

## Appendix V: Pre-Interview Briefing in the English Language

**Title of Study:** An Integrated Framework of the Effect of Social Media Usage on Employee Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication in the Hospitality Industry of Cyprus

**Time:** The interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

I would like to thank you for participating in this study, and for the time you will spend in this interview in order to answer my questions. I would like to let you know that anything you say, will be used only for the needs of this study, and not for any other purpose. Further, both your name and the hotel's name will not be revealed in my research. Also, whatever you say, will remain confidential. I would also like to ask you to permit me to use a voice recorder. The reason is that it will help me to write down/transcribe all your words. At a later stage, this material will be destroyed.

Firstly, I would like to give you some information about my research and its purpose. The main aim of this research is to examine how Social Media affect the socio-emotional support of employees in the workplace, and how this affects employee eWOM behaviour. This research is taking place in luxury hotels of Cyprus 4\* and 5\*.

Secondly, it is also important to define social media. Social media is a group of online (internet-based) sites or otherwise platforms that enable people to actively participate and socially interact in virtual communities such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Viber, YouTube (email is not a social media). It is also important to note that not only social media but also their applications are included in this study, such as messenger, which is an application of Facebook.

The interview questions are separated into four stages. At the first stage, it will be examined if social media affects the social support of employees, at a second stage it will be investigated if social media affects the emotional support of employees, at a third stage it will be examined if this affects their satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the workplace, and the final stage is examining if this affects their intention to speak positively or negatively for their organisation online.