

The Impact of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) on the Tourists' Purchasing Intentions in Tourism and Hotel Sectors

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Abstract

Purpose – Word of Mouth (WOM) is an important information source for consumers when making purchase **decisions, especially** in the tourism and hospitality industries, where it is difficult to evaluate intangible products before **consumption**. Consumers increasingly use online resources to share their experiences with goods and services, and to compare **them to their substitutes**. The growth of digital communication across social networks, webpages, and other platforms has generated a new approach to WOM, which is: Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM).

Objective – This paper aims to explore the impact of eWOM on the purchasing intentions of tourists in the tourism and hotel sectors, utilizing the Information Acceptance Model (IACM).

Method – Data is collected through a web-based survey from customers who have experience with tourism and hotel organizations in Egypt via travel applications and websites. The questionnaire was designed based on (IACM) Model. A total of 233 valid forms were received electronically and were statistically analyzed. Structural equation modeling was used to investigate the hypothesized correlations.

Findings – This study highlights the importance of consumers' behaviors towards information as well as the characteristics of information. These findings will provide marketers with a framework to understand the impact of eWOM in travel apps and websites on tourists' purchasing intentions. There was a significant impact on management by explaining the limitations of eWOM information for travel applications and websites. Therefore, the results of this study would enable marketers to understand the dynamics of eWOM on companies' networks and develop better eWOM marketing strategies.

Keywords: Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), Purchasing Intentions, Hotel, Tourism.

1. Introduction

Tourism and hospitality are information-oriented industries (Verma *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, their products and services have intangible nature; they cannot be touched, examined, or evaluated before consumption (Madafuri, 2018; Ishida *et al.*, 2016), which creates a potential risk for consumers when making choices (Rakjit and Laohavichien, 2020; Tsao *et al.*, 2015). Thus, word of mouth (WOM) becomes a significant and influential information source regarding tourism destinations and the travel decision-making process (Lin *et al.*, 2019; Huete-Alcocer, 2017).

The dramatic development of technology allowed people to easily search for and share information using the Internet in all fields of life (Kesumayuda *et al.*, 2020), which led to massive growth in the number of people who search for travel-related information using the Internet. These technological advancements have generated a new approach to WOM, that is electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) (Ismagilova *et al.*, 2021; Chang, 2018).

eWOM has evolved as a powerful information source before making a purchase, especially regarding tourism and hospitality services (Reyes-Menendez *et al.*, 2020; Pour *et al.*, 2020). By providing easy and timely access to a vast amount of information, eWOM has become a preferred

source of information for travelers (Ran *et al.*, 2021; Lee and Tussyadiah, 2016). Reference consumers use eWOM as a sociocultural measure of a product's popularity to determine whether they want to buy it (Amblee and Bui, 2011; King *et al.*, 2014). To increase their confidence in their choices, consumers can also take advantage of eWOM to assess how closely their choices are aligned with reference group norms.

2. Literature Review

The growth and spread of networking and social media are the results of technological advancements, which have been more apparent in the past two decades. Social media networks, which began with the growth of the Internet, have enabled a vast volume of data to be produced and shared. These fast-growing platforms on the Internet allowed consumers to easily produce and exchange their content using a variety of channels, including blogs, review websites, online communities, etc. Consequently, consumers shifted from utilizing WOM to adopting eWOM for sharing reviews (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004).

2.1 WOM vs. eWOM

WOM refers to casual communication between a communicator and a recipient about products or services (Cantallops and Salvi, 2014). While, electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), or online word of mouth, refers to casual communication between a communicator and a recipient using Internet Technology (IT) about products or services (Sampat and Sabat, 2021). Since many experts (Filieri and McLeay, 2014) considered eWOM reviews as a digital form of WOM. Table 1 discusses the differences between these two concepts. The first difference is credibility as a source of information (Hussain *et al.*, 2017; Cheung and Thadani, 2012), which can affect buyers' attitudes about goods or services (Veasna *et al.*, 2013). However, the anonymity of the communicator of eWOM may negatively affect the credibility of the information when it comes to risky purchase decisions, where the recipient would seek more trusted opinions from familiar individuals (Iriobe and Abiola-Oke, 2019; Selvi and Thomson,

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2016). Reducing pre-purchase risks and uncertainty, seeking products that are socially approved and accepted by other people, as well as saving search time and effort while making purchase decisions are significant consumers' motivations to use eWOM (Ismagilova *et al.*, 2017).

Table 1: Differences between WOM and eWOM

	WOM	eWOM
Credibility	The receiver of the information knows the communicator (positive influence on credibility)	Anonymity between the communicator and the receiver of the information (negative influence on credibility)
Privacy	The conversation is private, interpersonal (via dialogs), and conducted in real time	The shared information is not private and, because it is written down, can sometimes be viewed by anyone and at any time
Diffusion speed	Messages spread slowly. Users must be present when the information is being shared	Messages are conveyed more quickly between users and, via the Internet, can be conveyed at any time
Accessibility	Less accessible	Easily accessible

Source: Chen *et al.* (2015).

Message privacy is another element that distinguishes the two mediums, as information in classical WOM is transmitted over private, real-time, face-to-face dialogues and discussions. On the other hand, information available through eWOM is not private, but can also be seen by anonymous people that don't know each other. Moreover, reviews can be seen at different times (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). In addition, since eWOM reviews are written, businesses and consumers can access them at any time, as opposed to the traditional WOM, where a message seems to

disappear once it reaches the recipient. Unlike traditional WOM, eWOM has a high speed of information diffusion as messages are delivered quickly to recipients and are easily accessible via the Internet anytime, anywhere (Bulut and Karabulut, 2018; Huete-Alcocer, 2017). eWOM encompasses four forms; it could be one to one (e.g. private messages), one to many (e.g. online reviews), many to one (e.g. voting), or many to many (e.g. chat rooms) (Sánchez-González and González-Fernández, 2021; Kassam, 2018).

2.2 The importance of eWOM in tourism and hospitality

The dynamics of the tourism and hospitality industries have changed dramatically over the past decade. In addition, the spread of Information Communication Technology (ICT), marketing channels, and tourists' interactions with each other and with the industry have created some challenges to classical organization structure. Furthermore, the number of tourists who use the Internet as an important information source for purchase decisions, and as a means of reservations is rapidly increasing. The increase in internet usage has led to the majority of bookings being made through online channels, such as booking hotel rooms and airline tickets. Online platforms provide not only products and services, but useful information and feedback from previous users as well. For example, Tripadvisor provides reviews of resorts, hotels, tourist attractions, restaurants, and a variety of other travel-related activities and services. Every day, millions of reviews are updated, checked, and used by tourists (Tripadvisor Website, 2013).

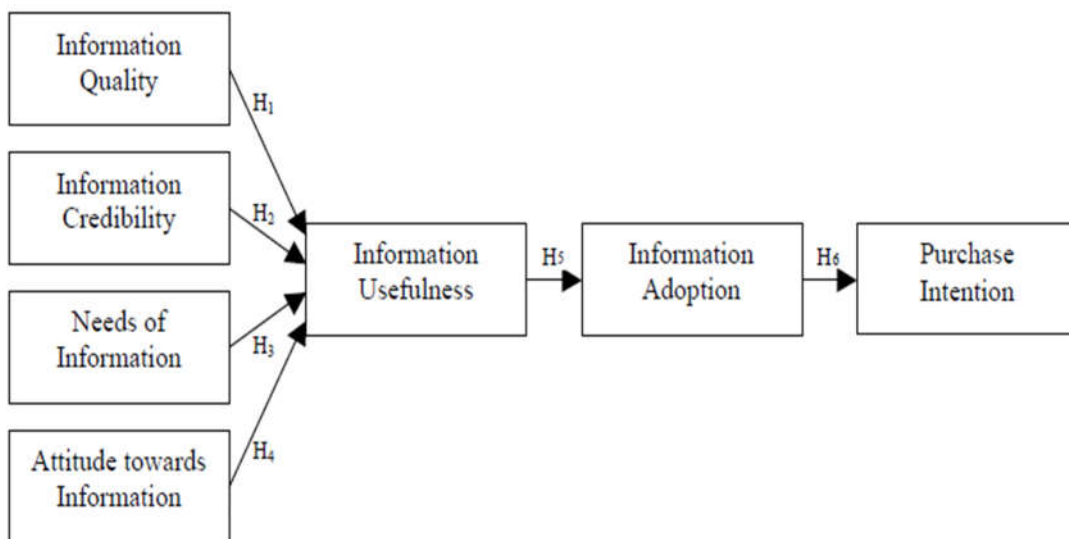
According to McIntosh *et al.* (2009), tourism and hospitality products are typically experienced-based products and services. Besides, digital technology is the main source of information during the decision-making and purchase processes of travel or booking, particularly in developed countries (Felfernig *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, before making purchase decisions, tourists often seek advice from the feedback and experience of past tourists using online sources (Ye *et al.*, 2011). The tourism and

hospitality industries exert more efforts to track eWOM in electronic environments and handle customer messages that are shared on the web. This information is useful for improving products and services, tracking the brand's image and position in the market, and adjusting marketing strategies (Litvin *et al.*, 2008). Hence, the tourism and hospitality industries must understand and acknowledge eWOM and its significance, as well as develop strategies to manage its effects. However, some companies not only monitor shared content but also manipulate eWOM to generate revenue by creating and spreading positive eWOM as well as reinforcing existing ideas (Felfernig *et al.*, 2007).

2.3 Conceptual framework and hypotheses development

The purpose of this research is to explore the impact of eWOM on the purchasing intentions of tourists in the tourism and hotel sectors, utilizing the Information Acceptance Model (IACM) (Erkan and Evans, 2016) as shown in figure 1. It offers a more comprehensive approach considering the behavior of consumers together with the characteristics of information. The IACM brings a new approach to information adoption by extending the Information Adoption Model (IAM) (Song *et al.*, 2021). Accordingly, IACM examines the relationships between the following components as illustrated in Figure 1:

Fig. 1. A Conceptual Model of eWOM



2.3.1 Information Quality determines whether the information and the content quality of the online reviews meet consumers' needs (Jiang *et al.*, 2021). It is assessed with regard to content, precision, and format (Chong *et al.*, 2018). The hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H1: Quality of information on travel-related websites has a positive effect on the perceived usefulness of eWOM.

2.3.2 Information Credibility measures the extent to which the presented information is reliable, authentic, believable, and non-commercial (Alsheikh *et al.*, 2021; Porter, 2017), which is a critical element due to the anonymity of the reviewer (González-Rodríguez and Martínez-Torres, 2016; Shabsogh, 2013). Therefore, the expertise and trustworthiness of the reviewer are fundamental to determine information credibility (Abd-Elaziz *et al.*, 2015; Lis, 2013).

H2: Credibility of eWOM information on travel-related websites has a positive effect on eWOM's perceived usefulness.

2.3.3 Needs of information refer to the motivation and curiosity of consumers seeking useful information to make purchase decisions (Sardar *et al.*, 2021; Sánchez Torres *et al.*, 2018).

H3: Needs of eWOM information on travel-related websites has a positive effect on the perceived usefulness of eWOM.

2.3.4 Attitude towards information can positively affect the information usefulness as well as the purchasing intentions (Sánchez Torres *et al.*, 2018). As stated by Leong (2022), consumer behavior plays an integral role in influencing the importance of eWOM information.

H4: Attitude towards eWOM information on travel-related websites has a positive effect on eWOM's perceived usefulness.

2.3.5 Perceived Usefulness where buyers undergo an eWOM information check to determine what is valuable and what is not (Purnawirawan *et al.*, 2012). As reflected in the previous literature, perceived usefulness is a crucial predictor of the end-user adoption decision. Besides, perceived usefulness refers to the degree to which a user recognizes that utilizing a superior system improves their work performance (Saade' and Bahli, 2005; Sussman and Siegel, 2003; Davis, 1989). According to Chong *et al.* (2018), positive eWOM affects the perceived usefulness of information adoption.

H5: Perceived usefulness has a positive effect on the information adoption of eWOM.

2.3.6 Information adoption is critical because it indicates the extent to which Individuals are satisfied with the information they have received, and they agree that it is important and relevant, which is thought to influence purchase intentions (Erkan and Evans, 2016; Watts and Zhang, 2008). As a result of the knowledge transfer process, when a user describes his goals in adopting behavioral or technical aspects, he will model specific preferences for ideas, actions, and beliefs that adopt various preferences (Sussman and Siegel, 2003). The concept of

information adoption originates from the assumption that users purposefully commission and participate in the use of information (Cheung *et al.*, 2008).

H6: Information adoption of eWOM has a positive effect on the consumers' purchase intention.

2.3.7 Purchasing intention

Purchasing intention is defined as “the desire to buy some products or services in the future” (Hassan *et al.*, 2020: 33). Regarding tourism, it refers to “the willingness to visit the destination” (Nechoud *et al.*, 2021: 5). Purchasing intention can be remarkably affected by the information exchanged between consumers. Thus, eWOM plays an integral role in influencing consumers' purchasing intention (Aprilia and Kusumawati, 2021; Tariq *et al.*, 2017). Besides, traveling intention is powerfully affected by eWOM (Harahap and Dwita, 2020; Abubakar, 2016).

3. Research methodology

Research model variable constructs were measured using a web-based survey. The survey was divided into two parts covering the following aspects: eWOM and demographics. The first section comprised the seven constructs of eWOM, adapted from the Information Acceptance Model (IACM) (Erkan and Evans, 2016). A five-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) was employed to measure eWOM. Meanwhile, the demographic characteristics of participants who used online reviews on related websites such as (TripAdvisor, Booking, Airbnb, airlines websites, and others) were discussed in the second section.

3.1 Sample and data collection

The questionnaire was designed using an online survey from January 1, 2022, to February 15, 2022. Study survey links were distributed to participants who use online reviews on travel-related sites (e.g., TripAdvisor, Booking, Airbnb, and airlines websites). The survey was

accurately translated and revised into Arabic to ensure that all statements are clearly understood by respondents. A total of 233 valid forms were received electronically via the Google application form.

3.2 Questionnaire Development

This research aims to explore the impact of eWOM on the purchasing intentions of tourists in the tourism and hotel sectors. As a result, the measure for this study was adapted from previous research to fit the study's objective. The study's measure was developed based on the Information Acceptance Model (IACM) (Erkan and Evans, 2016) and the extended Information Adoption Model (IAM) (Song *et al.*, 2021). The methodology of the study examined "information quality" using a four-item scale (Park *et al.*, 2007), while "information credibility" was assessed using a four-item scale (Gunawan *et al.*, 2016; Prendergast *et al.*, 2010; Sussman and Siegel, 2003). Moreover, four-item weights were used to assess both "information needs" (Chu and Kim, 2011) and "attitude toward information" (Park *et al.*, 2007), whereas only a one-item scale was used to investigate "perceived usefulness" (Bailey and Pearson (1983). "Information Adoption" was assessed by modifying three items developed by Cheung *et al.* (2009). In addition, four items in the survey were used to assess purchase decisions (Prendergast *et al.*, 2010; Coyle and Thorson, 2001). All measures used in this study are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Instrument Measurements

Information Quality (Park <i>et al.</i> , 2007; Chong <i>et al.</i> , 2018).	The information reviews were: IQ1 I think they have sufficient reasons supporting the opinions. IQ2 I think they are objective. IQ3 I think they are understandable. IQ4 In general, I think the quality of them is high.
Information Credibility (Gunawan <i>et al.</i> , 2016; Prendergast <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Sussman and Siegel, 2003).	IC1 They seem convincing to me. IC2 I think they are strong. IC3 I think they are credible. IC4 They seem to be accurate, in my opinion.
Needs of Information (Chu and Kim, 2011).	NOI1 I like to use them when I'm thinking about new products. NOI2 I frequently use products with which I have little experience. NOI3 I usually consult with them to determine the best option for me. NOI4 I collect them frequently before making a purchase.
Attitude Towards Information (Park <i>et al.</i> , 2007).	ATI1 I always read them when I buy a product. ATI2 They assist me in making purchasing decisions. ATI3 They give me the confidence to buy a product. ATI4 I'm concerned about my decision if I don't read them.
Perceived Usefulness (Bailey and Pearson, 1983).	PU1 I think they are generally useful.
Information Adoption (Cheung <i>et al.</i> , 2009).	IA1 They help me to know more about the product. IA2 They make purchasing decisions easy for me. IA3 They encourage me to make a purchase.
Purchase Intention (Prendergast <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Coyle and Thorson, 2001).	Based on the data collected: PI1 I am very likely to purchase the product. PI2 I will purchase the product next time I need a product. PI3 I will undoubtedly test the product.

PI4 I will recommend the product to my friends.

3.3 Reliability Assessment

The internal consistency reliability was validated using Cronbach's alpha. The eWOM scale has a significant internal consistency of 0.805. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for all constructs and exceeded the recommended value of 0.70, indicating that the questionnaire findings are reliable (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Profile

Participants submitted 233 electronic and direct responses to the survey between January 1, 2022, and February 15, 2022. The demographic profile is shown in table 3 below, where it can be concluded that the majority of participants were females with 59.2%, while 40.8% were males. Table 3 illustrates that 54.5 % of the respondents were between the ages of 31-50, followed by 42.1% of them aged from 18-30, and only 3.4 % were over 50 years old. The majority of respondents (53.4%) were graduates, while 24.6 percent were non-graduates, and 22% were post-graduates. Besides, 50.3% of respondents visit travel-related websites or apps with an average of 1 to 3 times a month, followed by 30% with an average of 6 to 9 times, and 19.7% visit travel-related websites more than ten times a month. Finally, the frequencies showed that 53.4% of the participants dealt with both hotels and tourism websites and applications, 24.6% dealt with hotels websites and applications only, and 22% dealt with tourism websites and applications.

Table 3: Demographic Profile

Demographics	(%)
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	40.8
Female	59.2
Total	100
<i>Age</i>	
18-30	42.1
31-50	54.5
Over 50 years old	3.4
Total	100
<i>Education level</i>	
Non-graduated	24.6
Graduated	53.4
Post-graduated	22
Total	100
<i>Frequency of accessing travel-related websites or apps within a month</i>	
1-5 times	50.3
6-9 times	30
More than 10 times	19.7
Total	100
<i>Examples of websites and applications that you deal with</i>	
Hotel websites and apps	24.6
Tourism websites and apps	22
Both	53.4

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 4 shows the means and standard deviations for the seven variables along with 29 measures. A five-point Likert scale was used for all the measurements, ranging from (strongly disagree 1 to strongly agree 5). The mean score for all seven variables are as follows; the higher attribute was Perceived Usefulness with a mean score of 4.18, followed by Needs of Information (4.14), Information Adoption (4.09), purchase intention (4.05), Attitudes Toward Information (4), Information Quality (3.6), and the lowest score was 3.6 for the Information Credibility.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
Information Quality	3.85	0.30
Information Credibility	3.64	0.19
Needs Of Information	4.14	0.13
Attitudes Toward Information	4	0.13
Perceived Usefulness	4.18	0.11
Information Adoption	4.09	0.12
Purchase Intention	4.05	0.06

4.3 Results of Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

The proposed research model is measured using SEM, and the hypotheses are tested using SPSS AMOS version 26. The structural model was tested using six goodness of fit indices: Chi-square (X^2), degree of freedom (Df), incremental fit index (IFI), Tucker-index Lewis's (TLI), comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximations (RMSEA). Table 5 shows the structural model's goodness of fit indices as well as the proposed guidelines for these tests (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The chi-square value for this study was 739.822. The IFI was 0.927, the CFI was 0.972, the TLI was 0.922, and the incremental fit was above 0.9. The RMSEA score was 0.047, which is below the limit of 0.08 as proposed by Browne and Cudeck (1993).

The study showed that all six hypotheses were supported. H1 revealed a positive correlation between information quality and perceived usefulness of eWOM, which was significant at $\beta = 0.332$ and $p < 0.001$. While H2 is significant, $\beta = 0.284$, $p < 0.001$, indicating that the credibility of information has a positive effect on perceived usefulness. With a score of

$\beta = 0.233$, $p < 0.001$, the third hypothesis, H3, provides significant results confirming that need of information had a positive impact on perceived usefulness. H4 is significant, with a value of $\beta = 0.156$ and a significance level of $p < 0.05$, indicating that attitude towards information had a significant positive impact on perceived usefulness. H5 is supported since the regression coefficient of the relationship between perceived usefulness and information adoption was significant at $\beta = 0.228$, $p < 0.001$. Finally, H6 was considered statistically significant at $\beta = 0.688$, $p < 0.001$, showing that information adoption had a direct positive effect on customers' purchasing intentions.

Table 5: The Assessment of the structure model and hypothesis testing

Model fit indices			
Chi-square		739.822	
Degree of freedom		1.854	
Probability level		0.000	
RMSEA		0.047	
IFI		0.927	
CFI		0.972	
TLI		0.922	
ChiSq/df		2.133	
Hypothesized relationships	Estimate	p-values	Result
H1 Quality of information - Perceived Usefulness	0.332	***	Supported
H2 Credibility of information - Perceived Usefulness	0.284	***	Supported
H3 Needs of information - Perceived Usefulness	0.233	***	Supported
H4 Attitude towards information - Perceived Usefulness	0.156	0.007	Supported
H5 Perceived Usefulness - Adoption of information	0.228	***	Supported
H6 Adoption of information - purchase intentions	0.688	***	Supported

Note: *** $p < 0.001$

5. Implications of the Study

5.1 Academic implications

The research provides further knowledge of the effect of eWOM on consumers' purchase intention. The results show that consumers are actively engaged in eWOM, which influences their purchase intention to obtain products and services. Therefore, the presented extended model of IACM is verified and applied effectively in the context of eWOM and can further be applied in different fields of research for better understanding and generalization.

5.2 Organizational implications

This article deepens the understanding of how marketers can effectively invest time, resources, and effort in revising online reviews on their websites to target consumers more effectively. They can improve the usability and significance of eWOM by ensuring that their website provides extended information to clients. Besides, the platforms should be improved by combining information quality, information credibility, needs of information, and attitudes toward information. Moreover, the comprehensiveness of eWOM information sources on travel-related websites is important for travelers to make effective purchasing decisions. Therefore, travel-related websites operators should have a proper monitoring system on the eWOM information shared about them. Thus, they would be able to intervene and provide clarity for any misleading shared information and maintain high-quality content. Additionally, regular monitoring is required in the eWOM of travel networking sites to further improve their quality standard and draw more customers.

6. Conclusion

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is a critical marketing strategy for improving customer outcomes and company performance. The research offered an eWOM conceptual model and addressed several attributes for harnessing media power to help hospitality and tourism companies boost

their marketing efforts. The eWOM appears as a new kind of WOM that blends several tactics for managing interpersonal influence (i.e., the power of information), while also developing new techniques enabled by the Internet's exceptional features. Moreover, marketers of the tourism and hospitality industries must realize that guests are using the Internet in increasing numbers, and that these consumers in their online world are likely to be exposed and affected by many sites dedicated to selling or discussing travel. Thus, they should take the lead in understanding and utilizing the emerging technologies rather than being driven by the adoption of strategies by their competitors.

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Volume 8, Issue 2, 2022

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