

The Influence Of Electronic Word Of Mouth On Domestic Tourists' Choice Of Hoi An Tourism Destination

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Abstract: *This study aims to investigate the influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) on domestic tourists' intention to choose Hoi An as a tourist destination. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), persuasion theory, and technology acceptance theory, the study proposes a research model comprising six independent variables, one mediating variable, and one dependent variable. The independent variables include expertise, involvement, social connectedness, source credibility, information quality, and information quantity. The mediating variable is "acceptance," and the dependent variable is "intention to choose the destination." Data was collected from 267 domestic tourists who have or are planning to choose Hoi An as a tourist destination. The preliminary assessment of scale reliability and validity was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient and composite reliability coefficient (CR) in SmartPLS software to screen and remove observation variables that did not meet the standard. The authors also used SMARTPLS 3 software along with data analysis techniques, reliability analysis, SEM, etc., to process and analyze the collected data. Among the independent variables, "source credibility" had the strongest impact on "acceptance" with a coefficient of 0.41, while "information quantity" had the least impact with a coefficient of 0.019.*

I. Introduction

The advent and development of the Internet have revolutionized human life and business operations for large and small enterprises in various fields worldwide. With the explosion of the first (late 18th century), second (late 19th century), and third (1969-2010) industrial revolutions, the old industrial era has been replaced by the information technology era. Currently, we are in the midst of the fourth industrial revolution. With the aid of the Internet, information can be transmitted quickly and easily to any country, people, anytime, anywhere. Similarly, using traditional methods to reach customers such as consulting information, WOM, advertising, etc., is no longer as effective as before.

Theoretically, when researching EWOM, researchers focus on providing perspectives on the concept and components of EWOM. It is the positive or negative evaluation of products and services by past, present, and potential customers through the Internet (Goyette et al., 2010). According to Hovland et al. (1961), the components of EWOM are a combination of variables: Context variable (source factor, message, channel, receiver). Therefore, EWOM will impact tourist destination choice intentions by shaping their destination image. According to Ajzen (1991), choice intention is a motivating factor that drives an individual to be willing to perform a behavior. The study argues that 3 factors affect choice intention: Belief in behavior, Belief in norms, and Belief in control. Exploring tourists' behavioral intentions towards different types of tourism is crucial to understanding the industry's mechanisms. Hence, identifying a theoretical framework that is consistent with intention prediction is important. Many studies have used psychological theories to examine tourist behavior and intentions. Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB - Theory of Planned Behavior) (1991) is a well-known and frequently used theoretical model for predicting intentions. Therefore, the TPB model is highly suitable for use in the tourism context to predict tourist behavior and intentions in destination choice. The Theory of Planned Behavior is an expectancy value theory that assumes that people are rational and planful in their behavior and strive to maximize satisfaction through exchange.

In practice, according to information from the Ministry of Information and Communications, in Vietnam, after the first half of 2023, the proportion of Internet users in the country reached 78.59%, exceeding the 2023 plan target. According to data from GWI and data.ai, the popularity of social networks in Vietnam continues to grow and shows no signs of slowing down. According to data from the Klook platform, an e-commerce and travel experience platform, 54% of Gen Z in the Asia-Pacific region and 69% of Gen Z in Vietnam use social networks as their first tool to find inspiration and plan travel. Up to 67% of tourists in Asia Pacific and 73% of tourists in Vietnam prefer to refer to prices and tourism theme suggestions on social networks when planning their vacations and consider them an important source of information before choosing a destination. This shows that the proportion of people using the internet and smart devices to learn about tourism issues in Vietnam is

currently very high. It is easy to see that EWOM is a method of accessing and sharing information by tourists in a more proactive way, which is becoming increasingly popular on social networking platforms and tourists can easily access this information. There are many studies on the impact of EWOM on tourist destination choice intentions, such as the study by Duan, Gu, and Whinston (2008) which found a positive relationship between EWOM and tourist destination choice intentions. They also found that user interaction on social networks can influence customer decisions. Xiang and Gretzel's (2010) study explored that EWOM can influence the tourist destination image in the eyes of customers and positively impact the choice intention of that destination.

As such, it can be seen that many research works have explored and pointed out the importance of EWOM communication on consumers purchasing intentions, such as Katz et al.; Cheung et al. (2008); Fan & Miao (2012); Lin et al. (2013) However, it is difficult to apply the results of these studies to the tourism sector in Vietnam due to different cultural environments and different consumer behaviors in each country. Moreover, in Vietnam, the influence of EWOM on EWOM acceptance and tourism destination choice intention has not received due attention, and there have not been many studies on this issue. Therefore, further research in this area is really necessary to better understand the impacts of EWOM on tourists' destination choice intention. In addition, Vietnam tourism and Hoi An tourism in particular are taking the lead in applying information technology advantages to the tourism sector. Studying the role of information sources, especially EWOM, on Hoi An tourism has practical significance and is in line with the development trend of tourism in the context of widespread application of IT achievements around the world.

Based on the analysis of both theoretical and practical aspects, the research group found that the topic "*The influence of electronic word of mouth on domestic tourists' choice of Hoi An tourist destination*" is necessary and has both theoretical and practical significance.

II. Research Overview on the Impact of EWOM on Travel Destination Choice Intention Overview of Research on Travel Destination Choice Intention

Travel destination choice intention is a concept that has received considerable attention from researchers worldwide, particularly in the fields of economics and business management, especially in today's era of burgeoning service industries.

Classical theories approach the concept with the assumption that travel destination choice intention occurs before tourists make ancillary decisions. According to ISO - Aloha 1980, *Travel destination choice is the process of tourists selecting a destination from the results of their search and awareness of destination attributes provided by optimal stimulating agents* Um and Crompton (1990) define it as *the stage of choosing a travel destination from among destinations that meet the needs of tourists.* According to these two authors, travel destination choice decision is the second stage in the travel destination choice process (with the first stage being the awareness of a set of destinations that match the tourist's desires among all the destinations they have researched).

However, the concept has evolved with modern and near-modern theories. Not all cases follow the order of selecting a destination before making ancillary decisions. In some cases, tourists may choose according to their own criteria, make ancillary decisions, and then make the final destination choice decision (Decrop and Snelders, 2005). According to Hwang (2006), *Travel destination choice decision is the stage where tourists make their final decision on destination choice, meaning tourists choose a destination from the set of available alternative destinations researched in previous stages and become actual consumers in the tourism sector.*

Thus, theories of travel destination choice intention are diverse and rich. Each theory has its own unique strengths and differences, but they do not contradict each other.

III. Overview of EWOM Research

EWOM (Electronic Word of Mouth) is a communication tool, and its components are therefore defined based on persuasion communication theory. According to Lassell's (1948) one-way communication model, communication is divided into the following elements: who says what? how? and to whom? These communication elements are represented by: Source; Receiver; Channel; Message. These elements form the context of persuasive communication. Additionally, according to Hovland and colleagues (1961), the components of persuasion are a combination of variables:

- **Contextual variables (source, message, channel, receiver factors)**
- **Target variables (immediate attitude change, maintenance, behavior change)**
- **Mediating variables (attention, comprehension, acceptance)**

According to McGuire (1985), the factors that ensure effective and successful message transmission include: Source credibility; Message format; Transmission channel; Target audience. These factors (Source credibility; Message format; Transmission channel; Target audience) will impact the effectiveness and success of message transmission to the message recipient.

Thus, in conclusion of the research overview, the authors find that the success of Lassell's (1948) and McGuire's (1985) communication theories lies in their rigorous and persuasive analysis.

IV. Research Model on the Impact of EWOM on Destination Choice Intention

Based on the overall theory of customer choice behavior, relevant domestic and foreign studies, and qualitative research results, within the scope of this research, the authors have chosen to integrate McGuire's persuasion communication theory (1985), Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (1991), and technology acceptance theory as the foundation theories for the research model. At the same time, based on the experimental model of Yi-Wen Fan and Yi-Feng Miao (2012) in combination with the full theoretical model of Christy M.K. Cheung et al. (2012); through the research objectives and research questions that are directed towards, the research model of this study is proposed to address the two basic relationships:

- (1) The factors of electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) that affect EWOM acceptance: According to the research overview, the persuasion communication theory states that the components of EWOM include the sender, the receiver, and the message. According to Yi - Wen Fan and Yi - Feng Miao (2012), the receiver is measured through expertise and involvement. According to Pham Thi Minh Ly (2016) on cosmetics buying behavior, the sender is measured through engagement, which is the relationship between the information provider and the information receiver. The closer this relationship is, the greater the trust in EWOM information and the greater the impact on the consumer's purchasing decision. Positive information received about the product, service, or company will have a positive impact on purchasing intentions and ultimately purchasing decisions. In addition, the sender is also measured through trustworthiness, which was studied by Cheung & Thadani (2010) who found that reliable information sources are an important predictor in the early stages when a consumer is searching for information about products they intend to buy and it contributes to the perceived credibility of the message on websites. According to Park & Kim (2008), EWOM message quality is measured through the quality of EWOM information (high quality information is information that is specific, detailed, clear, objective, and reasonable). This is also supported by Sher and Lee (2009), who found that the amount of information on EWOM is significantly correlated with its impact on consumer behavior.
- (2) The relationship between EWOM acceptance and domestic tourists' intention to visit Hoi An: Sherif and Hovland (1980) pointed out that people's perceptions of attitudes, values, beliefs, and changes in behavioral intentions exist on a continuum that includes denial, non-commitment, and acceptance. Persuasive messages are most likely to be successful when they fall within an individual's acceptance range. By examining attitudes, social influence, and perceived control, researchers can understand whether an individual tourist will carry out their behavioral intention and in order to make a destination choice decision, EWOM factors must fall within the range of information acceptance.

Based on resolving the two aforementioned relationships, the research model is projected as follows:

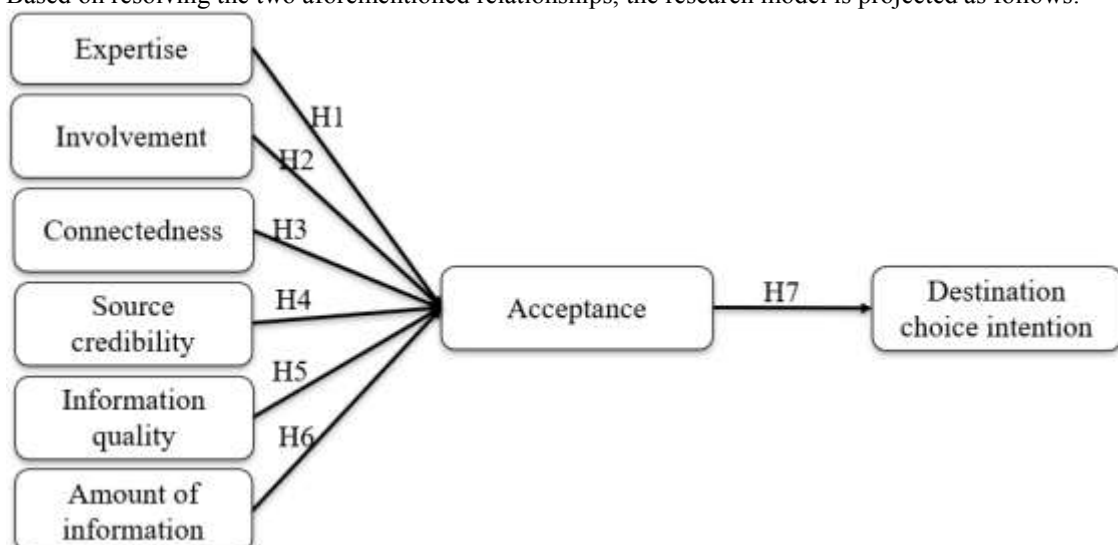


Figure 01: Research Model

Source: Synthesized by the authors

Research Hypotheses:

Hypothesis H1: The higher the level of people's knowledge about tourism, the higher the acceptance of EWOM.

Hypothesis H2: The higher the level of people's interest in tourism, the higher the acceptance of EWOM.

Hypothesis H3: The higher the credibility of the information source, the higher the acceptance of EWOM.

Hypothesis H4: The closer the relationship between the EWOM communicator and receiver, the higher the acceptance of EWOM.

Hypothesis H5: The higher the quality of EWOM information, the higher the acceptance of EWOM.

Hypothesis H6: The greater the quantity of EWOM, the higher the acceptance of EWOM.

Hypothesis H7: The higher the acceptance of EWOM, the higher the intention to travel.

V. Research Methodology

Data Collection Methods

Secondary Data

Secondary data was collected from scientific studies, scientific articles, and reports related to planned behavior theories, planned behavior theories, persuasive communication theories, and electronic word-of-mouth measurement variables. Numerical data was collected from survey reports.

Primary Data

Primary data was collected through a survey method. Data was collected using an in-depth interview questionnaire to screen and test the fit of the variables in the research model of the impact of EWOM on destination choice intention. From there, the research questionnaire was developed, the research objectives were rearranged, and the basis for a preliminary survey was conducted. In-depth interviews were conducted with experts and locals who had traveled to Hoi An to obtain the most objective and reliable assessments. Based on the results of the in-depth interview questionnaire, the research team conducted an interview questionnaire with 300 domestic tourists who were currently or will be choosing Hoi An as a tourist destination with a convenient sample size and a small size (n=100).

Questionnaire Construction

The questionnaire was designed with a structure consisting of 3 parts: Part A is the introduction, Part B is the content of the survey questions focusing on the factors influencing the intention to choose Hoi An tourist destination with questions ranging from "Completely agree" to "Disagree" and Part C is the general information related to the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The questionnaire was designed in Vietnamese.

Defining the Subject and Data Collection Organization: Using a non-probability sampling method (Charmaz, 2006), conducted by surveying people living and working in Hanoi.

Questionnaire Implementation

The questionnaire was conducted in 2 forms:

- Direct: The questionnaire was printed and directly surveyed to the people.
- Indirect: The research team designed the questionnaire in the form of a google form and posted it on the websites of the Vietnam Tourism Association, Hoi An tourism groups, etc.

Sample Survey Characteristics

Survey participants were concentrated in the age group of 18-35 years old, who are working-age people and have the health and financial ability to afford trips.

The male-to-female ratio was 44.94% and 55.06%, respectively. In terms of income, the tourist group with income of 5-10 million accounted for 36.33%, 3-5 million for 25.09%.

VI. Data Analysis Methods

Data Synthesis and Analysis

Preliminary quantitative research was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaire and to remove inappropriate observation variables. Preliminary assessment of scale reliability and validity was performed using Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient, and composite reliability coefficient (CR) Smartpls software to screen and remove observation variables that do not meet the standard.

The authors used SMARTPLS 3 software along with data analysis techniques, and reliability analysis... SEM, ... to process and analyze the collected data.

VII. Research Findings

General Information of the Study Sample

A total of 290 questionnaires were collected, of which 267 were valid (95.36%) and used for further analysis to address the research questions. The data was cleaned and pre-processed using Excel software before being imported into SmartPLS software for analysis and evaluation. Table 1 summarizes the general information of the respondents, including gender, age, occupation, income, and place of residence.

Table 1: Results of Survey Sample Data Analysis

Gender		
Grouping	Frequency	%
Male	120	44,94
Female	147	55,06
Total	267	100
Age		
Grouping	Frequency	%
Under 18	32	11,98
18 - 24	76	28,46
25 - 34	95	35,58
35 - 44	46	17,23
Over 45	18	6,75
Total	267	100
Occupation		
Grouping	Frequency	%
Student	65	24,34
Office worker	82	30,71
Self-employed	48	17,98
Other occupations	72	27,97
Total	267	100
Income		
Grouping	Frequency	%
Under 3 million	50	18,73
3 - 5 million VND	67	25,09
5 - 10 million VND	97	36,33
Over 10 million VND	53	19,85
Total	267	100
Place of Residence		
Grouping	Frequency	%

Ha Noi City	140	52,43
Ho Chi Minh City	68	25,46
Other provinces/cities	59	22,11
Total	267	100

Source: Data Analysis Results

Among a total of 267 surveyed individuals, there were 120 male participants (44.94%) and 147 female participants (55.06%). In terms of age, tourists under 18 years old accounted for 11.98%; those aged 18 - 24 accounted for 28.46%, ages 25 - 34 accounted for 35.58%; ages 35 - 44 accounted for 17.23%; and ages over 45 accounted for 6.75%. Regarding occupations, the student group accounted for 24.34%; office workers accounted for 30.71%; freelancers accounted for 17.98%; and other professions accounted for 27.97%. The common income range of surveyed individuals was from 5 to 10 million VND (36.33%), followed by those earning from 3 to 5 million VND, and subsequently those earning over 10 million VND (19.85%) and those earning under 3 million VND (18.73%). In terms of residence, the majority of the surveyed individuals lived and worked in Hanoi (52.43%), followed by Ho Chi Minh City (25.46%), and finally residing in other provinces and cities (22.11%).

VIII. Scale Reliability Test Results

Assessment of Scale Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha values for almost all survey scales are greater than 0.7, with the lowest being the scale measuring the dependent variable "EWOM Acceptance" with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.798 and the highest being the scale measuring the independent variable "Engagement" with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.889. This indicates that the survey data is highly reliable.

The composite reliability (CR) of all observed variables represented by each scale is also greater than 0.7, with the highest being the scale measuring the independent variable "Engagement" and the lowest being the dependent variable "Acceptance".

In addition, the convergent validity (AVE) of all variables has an AVE value of 0.5 or higher, indicating that the independent variable explains more than half of the variance of its observed variables, at which point the scale has good convergent validity. Thus, the scales in the study have achieved high convergent validity. Therefore, the scales and factors are retained for further analysis. The extracted variance value is also greater than 50%, thus meeting the analysis requirement.

Table 2: Summary of Scale Measurement Results

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Information quality (CL)	0,867	0,878	0,918	0,790
Acceptance (SCN)	0,778	0,780	0,871	0,692
Connectedness (SGK)	0,816	0,819	0,891	0,731
Amount of information (SL)	0,807	0,821	0,872	0,632
Source credibility (STC)	0,828	0,830	0,897	0,744
Involvement (STG)	0,833	0,841	0,900	0,749
Expertise (STT)	0,889	0,914	0,931	0,817
Destination choice intention (YD)	0,841	0,850	0,893	0,677

Source: Data Analysis Results

Assessment of Indirect Relationships

All individual indirect effects have a P-value less than 0.05. Therefore, the variable "SCN" plays a mediating role in the relationship between "CL", "SGK", "SL", "STC", "STG", and "STT".

The mediating variable "SCN" has the strongest mediating role in the relationship STC -> SCN -> YD with a regression coefficient of 0.288; the second strongest mediating role in the relationship SGK -> SCN -> YD

with a regression coefficient of 0.144; the third strongest mediating role in the relationship STG -> SCN -> YD with a regression coefficient of 0.117; the fourth strongest mediating role in the relationship CL -> SCN -> YD with a regression coefficient of 0.09; the fifth strongest mediating role in the relationship SL -> SCN -> YD with a regression coefficient of 0.072; and the weakest mediating role in the relationship STT -> SCN -> YD with a regression coefficient of 0.066.

Table 3: Individual Indirect Effects

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
CL -> SCN -> YD	0,09	0,09	0,024	3,743	0
SGK -> SCN -> YD	0,144	0,141	0,052	2,792	0,005
SL -> SCN -> YD	0,072	0,075	0,036	2,004	0,045
STC -> SCN -> YD	0,288	0,287	0,044	6,54	0
STG -> SCN -> YD	0,117	0,12	0,046	2,571	0,01
STT -> SCN -> YD	0,066	0,068	0,03	2,243	0,025

Source: Data Analysis Results

IX. Discussion of Research Findings and Implications

Electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) has become an important and popular source of information for tourists seeking information about travel programs. With 290 questionnaires collected, of which 267 were valid (95.36% of the total), the study found that the factors of electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) include: expertise, involvement, engagement, source credibility, EWOM information quality, and number of EWOM all impact consumer acceptance of EWOM information. Among these, the factor "Credibility" has the strongest impact, which shows that EWOM information is increasingly becoming popular and trusted by tourists, and most people will trust and the information they read and learn on electronic media channels. In addition, EWOM acceptance also has a strong impact on people's destination choice intentions. When people have fully trusted and accepted the EWOM information about Hoi An tourism information provided through the EWOM channel, then the intention to travel will arise.

Based on the elements of electronic word of mouth, the research team proposes a number of functions to attract more tourists to Hoi An destination as follows: Increase the level of EWOM participation of people and increase trust of people about EWOM; improve the quality of EWOM information; increase the amount of EWOM; strengthen the relationship between the sender and receiver; proactively exploit and control EWOM information sources.

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