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Effect of electronic word-of-mouth on customers' booking intention at online travel agencies: case in Vietnam

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Abstract: Consumers now have an intriguing approach to obtain information about products and services, known as e-WOM. Due to its rapid spread, e-WOM is both an excellent promotional tool and a burden for organisations not properly controlling this information channel. The study's goal was to highlight how e-WOM elements influence online booking intention and measure their impact in order to provide recommendations to help OTAs grow their business. The poll was based on 466 people living in Vietnam who used e-WOM as a source of information to refer to an online booking service via an OTA. SPSS 26 and AMOS 24 are used to analyse the information. According to the findings, online booking intention is influenced indirectly by six factors: tie strength, source credibility, e-WOM quality, e-WOM quantity, expertise, and participation, and is influenced directly by e-WOM acceptance. In fact, there are several other factors that make up e-WOM. Further research is recommended to measure the impact of more e-WOM factors on customers' booking intention at online travel agencies (OTA) with an expanded research scale in different Asian countries famous for tourism industry.

Keywords: e-WOM; online booking intention; tie strength; source credibility; e-WOM quality; e-WOM quantity; expertise; participation; e-WOM acceptance; Vietnam.

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1 Introduction

In service industries such as the hospitality industry, word-of-mouth (WOM) has long been the primary means of communication between customers and service firms (Harrison-Walker, 2001). It's also known as the "verbal exchange of positive and negative information about a company's products and services" (Haywood, 1989). As technology advances, the internet has become more frequently employed in various parts of the hospitality industry and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) has gradually overtaken traditional WOM, which was passed down verbally from one person to the next (Teng et al., 2017). One type of e-WOM is online user reviews on travel destinations, hotels, and tourism services, which has become a vital source of information for other visitors (Pan et al., 2007). The growing number of social media platforms allows them to share e-WOM about their service experiences with other customers, therefore, aids potential customers in making decisions, as well as managers in optimising management practices (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Senecal and Nantel, 2004).

The online booking service business through online travel agencies (OTA) in Vietnam has become highly active in recent years as more and more foreign OTA enter the market, giving customers additional options. Customers must thoroughly investigate information from various sources to make the most sensible conclusion when facing with so many options (Phau et al., 2017). Many customers, in particular, employ the method of searching through publicly available information on the internet (Senecal and Nantel, 2004). This search tendency is expanding, especially during the current pandemic period, when practically all actions are carried out in an internet environment (Zhao, 2020). Therefore, if businesses take advantage of this e-WOM communication channel in their advertising activities, business efficiency will be significantly increased (Erkan and Evans, 2016).

Although studies on the impact of e-WOM on purchase intention are common in the globe and in Vietnam, but most of them exclusively focus on tangible items instead of intangible items. Furthermore, findings from e-WOM research on the impact of e-WOM on customer purchase intention have not always been cumulative, and some studies have reported conflicting results about the impact of factors such as participation (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Sohn, 2009), expertise (Yeh and Choi, 2011; Nagy et al., 2017), involvement (Yoo et al., 2013; Alhidari et al., 2015), brand perception (Magalhaes and Musallam, 2014; Rialti et al., 2017), to name a few, on customer's purchase intention. As a result, the purpose of this study was to re-examine the impact of some e-WOM factors on consumers' purchase intentions in the sector of hospitality service, as well as to present a comprehensive view of e-WOM factors affecting purchase intention based on three key components. The study will also conclude some practical recommendations for OTAs to improve their business efficiency.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Theories on communication

According to the one-way communication model by Lasswell (1948), communication is divided into the following elements: Who speaks? Say something? How to say? and Who

receives it?. Those elements are specified as: Source, message, channel and receiver. Based on this theory, Hovland et al. (1949) indicated several factors that make up persuasive communication based on three types of variables. Context variables include: source, message, channel and receiver. Target variables include: change in attitude, change in behaviour. Mediating variables include: attention, understanding, and acceptance. A persuasive communication activity that causes the receivers to change in perception, attitude and behaviour must first come from the approach to the receivers, then the message must be attractive, have a relationship with the message receivers and the receivers understand these messages (McGuire, 1985). The receiver's level of awareness or expertise will influence the change in their information-receiving behaviour (Hovland, 1949; McGuire, 1985). Specifically, based on the level of awareness or expertise, Petty and Cacioppo (1986) argued that the level of persuasion for receivers to release behaviours is influenced by two paths: the central path and the peripheral path. The centre path will strongly influence the receivers when they have the motivation as well as the ability to evaluate information. The lower the receivers' ability to evaluate information, the stronger the peripheral path influence on them (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986).

Developed from the central path the peripheral path formerly proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) in the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), the information adoption model (IAM) by Sussman and Siegal (2003) explains the process by which individuals are influenced by the information they receive. Specifically, Sussman and Siegal point out four factors affecting the information adoption of receivers: quality of the message (representing the central path), the reliability of information (representing the peripheral path), the usefulness of information. IAM is highly appreciated by many researchers when applied in e-WOM studies (Cheung et al., 2008; Shu and Scott, 2014). Specifically, Cheung et al. (2008) applied IAM when studying receivers' behaviour on online discussion forums. The IAM was also reviewed by Shu and Scott (2014) in social media research.

2.2 Electronic word-of-mouth

According to Bickart and Schindler (2001), e-WOM is comparable to WOM but includes computer applications, can be positive or negative, can be pre- or post-purchase, and has a confidential relationship with consumer trust. These positive or negative statements by past, current, or potential customers about any product or service, or a firm are communicated to people and organisations across a globally connected network environment (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). The global network here can be understood as information exchange forums, product review sites, social networking sites, personal blogs, etc. (Davis and Khazanchi, 2008). McGuire (1985) further identified four components of e-WOM: announcer, message, receiver and communication environment. Specifically, announcers who give a statement in the form of text, images or video can be past, current or potential customers. Message is a positive or negative statement about a product, service or company. Receivers are individuals or organisations that receive information from the sender in an active or passive manner. Communication environment is online media such as forums, groups, websites, social networking platform (McGuire, 1985). This study will examine the attributes of e-WOM in three main components: sender, E-WOM message and receiver.

Consumers can advocate for a product or services online through e-WOM, and these remarks can serve as social influence or subjective norm (Comerio et al., 2019). A product's attitude toward purchasing and purchase intention can be influenced by online consumer recommendations (Cheung et al., 2009). Consumers can share positive experiences with one another through e-WOM, which boosts brand trust and buying intention, negative e-WOM, on the other hand, has the reverse effect (Park and Lee, 2009; Seifert and Kwon, 2015). E-WOM is a powerful tool for promoting companies and products, both on the company's website and on social media (Huete-Alcocer, 2017; Teng et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2018).

2.3 Theories on purchasing behaviour

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) is one of the pioneering theoretical foundations and plays an extremely important role in discovering customer behaviour (Puschel et al., 1995). In the study, Ajzen and Fishbein (1967) concluded that "the stronger the behavioral intention is, the higher the tendency to perform that behavior is". This also shows that one of the important factors for predicting customer behaviour is through their behavioural intentions. Ajzen (1991) also emphasised that "behavioral intention can manifest into behavior when the behavior in question is under the control of the will".

As an extension of the TRA, the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) was investigated to predict an individual's intention to engage in a particular behaviour on the basis of imperfect behavioural control. In particular, TPB further considers the lack of resources or opportunities to engage in a successful behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). In other words, actual behaviour is influenced by both behavioural intention and perceived behavioural control. TPB theory is claimed to be more thorough than TRA when explaining and analysing customer behaviour because it addresses the shortcoming of TRA when adding cognitive factors to control behaviour. However, the TPB theory still has some limitations. Firstly, the intention factor is not limited only by attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control (Ladhari and Michaud, 2015). Secondly, the TPB theory makes predictions about individual actions based on a number of certain criteria, while many individuals do not take the action as predicted (Luo and Zhong, 2015).

In general, the TRA and the TBP mentioned the nature of the persuasive communication process, which is changes in the beliefs, attitudes and actions of the information receivers (Ladhari and Michaud, 2015). In order for people to have purchase intention under the influence of e-WOM, the arguments of information must be directed towards beliefs, thereby leading to a change in the attitude and behaviour of the receivers (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1967). TBP theory is frequently applied to model the relationship between e-WOM and purchase intention (Prendergast et al., 2010; Reichelt et al., 2014; Erkan and Evans, 2016).

3 Hypotheses development and research model

3.1 Relationship between tie strength and e-WOM acceptance

Tie strength refers to the emotional bond that individuals have with others, which is based on their shared interests or lifestyles (Pauliene and Vaiginiene, 2020). Based on this fact, it is evident that consumers trust e-WOM and are more likely to make a

purchase when their friends or relatives share e-WOM information with them (Phau et al., 2017). However, in the online world, relationships are not only restricted to friends or relatives, but also include people the receivers do not know, however, they share common interests with each other such as similar hobbies or lifestyles (Arenas-Márquez et al., 2014). In many circumstances, strangers' e-WOM information is still trusted and judgments from receivers are made based on it (Karimi et al., 2017). Tie strength, according to Hansen and Lee (2013), plays an important part in a variety of information exchange and idea-sharing situations. As a result, e-WOM behaviour is aided by perceived tie strength (Chu and Kim, 2011). Pauliene and Vaiginiene (2020) discovered that the relationship between senders and receivers had a beneficial influence on the acceptance of e-WOM.

Based on the analysis, we proposed the following hypothesis about the relationship between tie strength and e-WOM acceptance:

H1 Tie strength positively influence e-WOM acceptance.

3.2 The relationship between source credibility and e-WOM acceptance

Consumers' perceptions of the information credibility, as well as the trustworthiness of comments and assessments surfacing in the online environment determine the source's credibility (Magalhaes and Musallam, 2014). Because most consumers do not have the opportunity to touch the products or merchandise or come into direct contact with the transmitter of information in this environment, they tend to judge the source's credibility by evaluating the level of trust received from the media and the relationship between them and the people who transfer information (Maria et al., 2016). Albayrak and Ceylan (2021) argued that the credibility of the source of information is an important predictor at an early stage when consumers are searching for information about the products they want to buy. Source credibility promotes consumers' recognition of e-WOM messages spreading across online environments and thus influencing their purchase intention (Filiari et al., 2015; Horng, 2016; Nusair et al., 2017).

Based on the analysis, we proposed the following hypothesis about the relationship between source credibility and e-WOM acceptance:

H2 Source credibility positively influence e-WOM acceptance.

3.3 The relationship between e-WOM quality and e-WOM acceptance

The power of meaning represented in the communication is the quality of e-WOM (Filiari et al., 2020). When people judge the information being sent to them, this is a critical issue, as the quality of the information has a direct impact on the receivers' attitudes, particularly about the online environment (Cheng, 2015). The content of e-WOM positively affects brand awareness of receivers (Raharja and Dewakanya, 2020). The receivers will have a positive attitude towards the information received and believe that it is real and dependable if the information is able to be reasoned convincingly (Denysa et al., 2021; Erkan and Evans, 2016). In reality, a perceived high-quality message will favourably influence the desire to purchase products or services, but a low-quality message will leave customers with a vague impression of items and services, reducing their purchase intention (Zangeneha and Mohammadkazemi, 2014). This is due to the fact that the quality of information has a good impact on its acceptance, which in

turn has a positive impact on customer's purchase intention (Park et al., 2007; Cheung and Lee, 2012; Alhidari et al., 2015).

Based on the analysis, we proposed the following hypothesis about the relationship between e-WOM quality and e-WOM acceptance:

H3 E-WOM quality positively influences e-WOM acceptance.

3.4 The relationship between e-WOM quantity and e-WOM acceptance

The number of e-WOM refers to the number of online comments, reviews, or suggestions on any product or service (Wang, 2020). Only a small amount of e-WOM information has a major impact on human behaviour consumption, according to Abrar (2021). The number of e-WOMs associated with certain products and services is substantial and more consumers will be aware of them (Abubakar et al., 2016). Receiving a large number of reviews from customers indicates that products or services are well-liked (Bataineh, 2015). Xie et al. (2011) argued that the number of comments can be used as an indicator of how well items and services are performing in the market so users will be able to make broad assessments of product and service quality thanks to these comments. According to Cheung and Thadani (2010) and Fang (2018), the greater the number of e-WOM is, the more popular the products are.

Based on the analysis, we proposed the following hypothesis about the relationship between e-WOM quantity and e-WOM acceptance:

H4 E-WOM quantity positively influences e-WOM acceptance.

3.5 The relationship between expertise and e-WOM acceptance

Expertise is the individual extent of knowledge, experience about products or services, and ability to process information (Shen, 2021). Expertise, according to Fan and Miao (2012), reflects a person's level of understanding about products or services they intend to purchase. Consumers' trust in e-WOM is greatly influenced by their expertise especially consumers are capable of selecting credible e-WOM information for purchase decision-making (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). According to Mousavi (2020), the more expertise consumers have, the more information are processed based on their knowledge and experience, as they have a high level of product understanding. In other words, the higher their perceived value of the goods is, the more likely they are to make purchasing decisions independently rather than being affected by e-WOM information from others (Cheung et al., 2008; Pham, 2016).

Based on the analysis, we proposed the following hypothesis about the relationship between expertise and e-WOM acceptance:

H5 Expertise negatively influences e-WOM acceptance.

3.6 The relationship between participation and e-WOM acceptance

Participation is linked to the desire to process information about products. Participation can be defined as a personal need, an interest, or a connection to any consumers, products or services (Fan and Miao, 2012). As a result, according to Fan and Miao (2012), when people have a low level of participation, they frequently have limited information,

therefore they don't know much about the product or service. People with a high degree of participation, on the other hand, will be able to access a great amount of information, and the amount of information they have will enable them to make faster decisions (Filiari and Mcleay, 2014). Consumers are more likely to seek information about a product on social networking sites, organisations, and online exchange forums if they are enthusiastic about it (Yang, 2016). Therefore, Wangenheim and Bayon (2004) argued that participation positively affects the e-WOM acceptance of customers. Cheung and Thadani (2012), and Saleem and Ellahi (2017) all came to the same result.

Based on the analysis, we proposed the following hypothesis about the relationship between participation and e-WOM acceptance:

H6 Participation positively influences e-WOM acceptance.

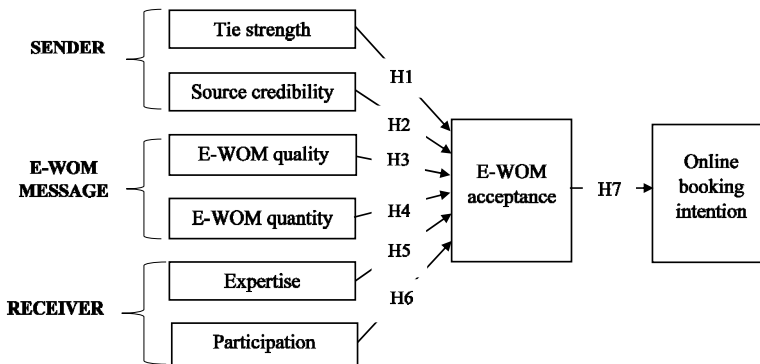
3.7 The relationship between e-WOM acceptance and online booking intention

Acceptance of e-WOM is a psychological behaviour that influences individual online consumption via social norms or online comments and reviews (Fan and Miao, 2012). Acceptance criteria acknowledge e-WOM as societal standards, as well as opinions and judgments in the online community. During the evaluation process, the receiver establishes the e-WOM acceptance. When receivers believe an opinion or comment is credible, they are more inclined to accept the e-WOM and use it to make purchasing decisions. In his experimental investigation, Fan and Miao (2012) and Zhao (2020) all mentioned positive influence of e-WOM adoption on customers' purchasing intention. Pham (2016) and Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) used empirical studies to reach the same conclusion.

Based on the analysis, we proposed the following hypothesis about the relationship between e-WOM acceptance and online booking intention:

H7 e-WOM acceptance positively influences online booking intention.

Figure 1 Conceptual model



4 Research method

4.1 Data collection

This research employs non-probability sampling technique in selecting respondents. The criteria used in the sampling process are customers who currently live in Vietnam and intend to book online at OTA through reference information shared on the internet.

This study's data was gathered through online surveys. The survey was shared on Facebook, Line Group, and WhatsApp, among other social media platforms. The information was gathered between October 1st and November 10th, 2021. We received 466 responses, all of which are valid. As a result, the total number of data analysed in this study is 466.

Table 1 Demographic of respondent

<i>Demographic</i>		<i>Percentage</i>
Gender	Male	42%
	Female	58%
Age	18–25	27%
	26–35	58%
	36–45	13%
	>45	2%
Academic level	Undergraduate	86%
	Postgraduate	14%
Occupation	Student	27%
	Employee	46%
	Entrepreneur	10%
	Housewife	2%
	Pensioner	1%
	Others	14%
Income in a month (in thousand dong)	<5,000	19%
	5,000–10,000	56%
	10,000–20,000	14%
	>20,000	11%
Time spent on the internet (hours per day)	<1	3%
	1–3	49%
	3–5	41%
	>5	7%

4.2 Measures

The constructs utilised in this investigation were modified based on previous research. Modifications were made to fit the research context. The items in this study were rated on a Likert scale of '1 = strongly disagree' to '5 = strongly agree'.

5 Data analysis and results

To examine the sample characteristics, descriptive statistics were used to begin the data analysis. The measurement model was then put to the test in order to determine construct reliability, validity, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and model fit. Finally, SEM was carried out by doing path modelling and testing the postulated relationships in the conceptual model.

5.1 *Measurement of constructs' mean, reliability, validity and model fit*

Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the structures' reliability. Table 2 shows that all of the constructions were above the recommended threshold of 0.70, with Cronbach alphas ranging from 0.788 to 0.844. As a result, all of the measures utilised in this study were appropriate. Factor loadings (indicating convergent validity), correlation matrix, and average variance extracted were used to assess the measurement instruments' validity (measuring discriminant validity). The CFA factor loadings in Table 1 all exceeded the recommended 0.5, and the AVE figures were all above 0.5 as well, proving the validity of convergent and discriminant constructs. All of the correlation coefficients in Table 2 were less than the recommended 0.8, demonstrating discriminant validity (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Table 3 further demonstrates that all of the model fit indices were within acceptable thresholds based on Kline's (2011) recommended criterion, showing that the model fit the data.

Table 2 Constructs' mean, reliability and validity test results

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Factor loading</i>	<i>CA</i>	<i>AVE</i>
Tie strength (GK)	I often receive information that is shared directly online from friends and relatives	0.727	0.798	0.570
	I often receive information that is shared directly online from people with the same purpose of booking services	0.748		
	I often receive information that is shared directly online from people with similar views and interests	0.775		
Source credibility (TC)	I assume that the information about the service is displayed on clear, conspicuous and well-known websites	0.724	0.809	0.515
	I believe that information shared online is true	0.735		
	I assume that the information shared online is not a bias on the part of the sender	0.692		
	I think information shared online is easy to check accuracy extent	0.703		
e-WOM quality (CL)	I assume that the information shard online is easy to understand	0.689	0.808	0.512
	I assume that the information shard online is clear	0.737		
	I assume that the information shard online is detailed	0.719		
	I assume that the information shard online is updated	0.711		

Notes: CA = Cronbach's alpha; AVE = average variance extracted

Table 2 Constructs' mean, reliability and validity test results (continued)

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Factor loading</i>	<i>CA</i>	<i>AVE</i>
e-WOM quality (SL)	The topic of booking service getting more and more comments is more trustworthy	0.717	0.788	0.522
	The information about the service highly rated on the different websites are more trustworthy	0.726		
	In the same website, the more reviews about the service, the more reliable the information is	0.711		
Expertise (TT)	I already have a lot of knowledge about online booking service at OTA	0.702	0.802	0.504
	I have a lot of experience in finding information online about booking services at OTA	0.683		
	I have the ability to select useful information about the booking service at OTA	0.713		
	I can make my own decision based on my personal opinion	0.742		
Participation (TG)	I concerned about the information shared online about booking service at OTA	0.677	0.802	0.504
	I am very interested in the information shared online about booking service at OTA	0.722		
	Information shared online about booking services at OTA is important to me	0.698		
	If someone submits information online about the reservation service at OTA for me then I appreciate that.	0.741		
e-WOM acceptance (CN)	I agree with the information shared online about the booking service at OTA	0.755	0.844	0.576
	The information shared online has contributed knowledge and understanding for me about booking service at OTA	0.754		
	The information shared online gives me confidence when choosing to book at OTA	0.757		
	The information shared online motivates me to choose to book online at OTA	0.769		
Online booking intention (YD)	After reviewing the information shared online, I consider booking at this OTA in the future	0.757	0.807	0.514
	After reviewing the information shared online, I will choose to book a room at this OTA in the future	0.676		
	After reviewing the information shared online, I definitely choose to book at this OTA in the future	0.697		
	After reviewing the information shared online, I am willing to recommend this OTA booking service to others.	0.733		

Notes: CA = Cronbach's alpha; AVE = average variance extracted

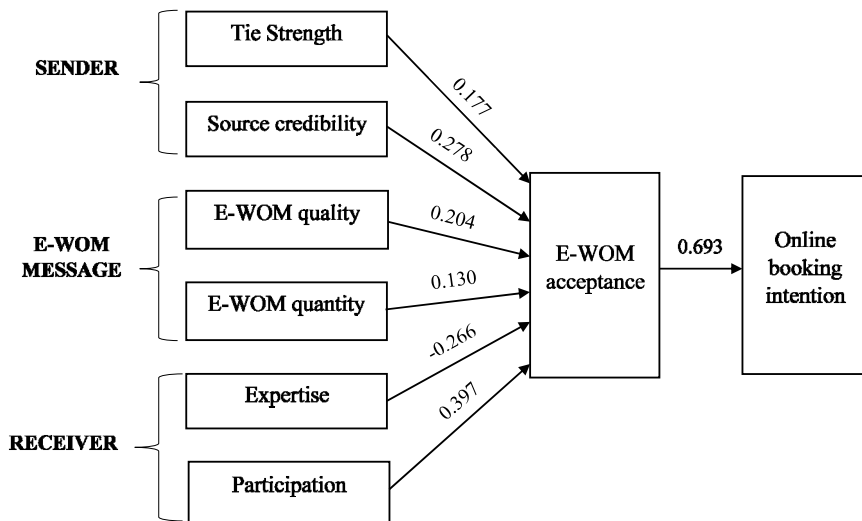
Table 3 Inter-construct correlation matrix and model fit

<i>Correlation</i>		<i>Model fit indices from CPA</i>										
		<i>TC</i>	<i>TT</i>	<i>CN</i>	<i>TG</i>	<i>YD</i>	<i>CL</i>	<i>GK</i>	<i>SL</i>	<i>Fit index</i>	<i>Fit (MM)</i>	<i>Accepted threshold</i>
<i>TC</i>	.717										1.028	<3.0
<i>TT</i>	.167	.710									0.998	>0.90
<i>CN</i>	.536	-.102	.759								0.950	
<i>TG</i>	.284	.212	.509	.710							0.998	
<i>YD</i>	.394	.089	.657	.612	.717							
<i>CL</i>	.360	.108	.510	.305	.433	.716						
<i>GK</i>	.431	.124	.463	.197	.374	.371	.755				0.008	<0.08
<i>SL</i>	.360	.100	.485	.280	.346	.484	.435	.723				

5.2 SEM path model for hypothesis testing

This section provides the SEM path model results from testing the proposed hypotheses. The results are in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Hypotheses testing results



Tie strength had a positive impact on e-WOM acceptance with (0.177; $p < 0.1$), thus supporting H1. Source credibility had a positive and significant impact on e-WOM acceptance with (0.278; $p < 0.1$) thus supporting H2. E-WOM quality positively and significantly affected e-WOM acceptance with (0.204; $p < 0.1$) thus supporting H3. Hypothesis H4 was also supported because e-WOM quantity had a positive impact on e-WOM acceptance with (0.130; $p < 0.1$). Hypothesis H5 was supported with (-0.266 ; $p < 0.1$) meaning that the greater the knowledge about online booking services at OTA is, the less possibility of e-WOM acceptance is. Participation had a positive and greatest impact on e-WOM acceptance with (0.397; $p < 0.1$) thus supporting H6. E-WOM acceptance had a positive and significant impact on online booking intention with (0.693; $p < 0.1$) meaning that the greater the possibility of e-WOM acceptance is, the greater intention of online booking at OTA is, thus supporting H7.

6 Discussion and recommendations

6.1 Discussion

Although not a new concept, e-WOM marketing still receives little attention from researchers in Vietnam. With a combined approach between WOM components and behavioural factors for messages, this study is expected to contribute new points to the general understanding of the relationship between e-WOM and online booking intention at OTA of tourists. This study also approaches analysing e-WOM factors based on three

main components, which is new compared to most of the previous studies such as Wangenheim and Bayon (2004), Cheung et al. (2012) and Saleem and Ellahi (2017).

Factors associated with e-WOM include: tie strength, source credibility, e-WOM quality, e-WOM quantity, expertise, participation have an impact on the customer's acceptance of e-WOM information. Among them, there are five factors that have a positive influence namely 'participation' with a highest degree of influence, 'source credibility' has the second most influence, 'e-WOM quality' has the third degree of influence, 'tie strength' is fourth, and 'E-WOM quantity' ranks fifth. Particularly, the factor 'expertise' has the opposite effect on e-WOM adoption.

The relationship between factors related to e-WOM and e-WOM acceptance drawn from the study is also similar to the research results of Cheung et al. (2008), Cheung and Thadani (2010, 2012), Fan and Miao (2012) and Filieri and Mcleay (2014). It can be seen that when customers are more enthusiastic to participate in e-WOM through comments on social networking sites, forums, associations and groups, etc., they are able to find more information and know more about online booking services at OTA, therefore, their possibility of e-WOM acceptance is also higher (Cheung et al., 2012; Saleem and Ellahi, 2017). Along with that, the fact that customers have trust in e-WOM information also makes them more inclined to accept e-WOM information (Maria et al., 2016; Reyes-Menendez et al., 2019). Research results also show the important role of 'tie strength', 'e-WOM quality' and 'e-WOM quantity' to customers' e-WOM acceptance as the research results of Arenas-Márquez et al. (2014), Erkan and Evans (2016), Denysa et al. (2021). However, even if huge e-WOM quantity but poor e-WOM quality is not easily accepted by customers (Bataineh, 2015; Saura et al., 2019).

Besides, the acceptance of e-WOM has a positive influence on the online booking intention of customers with a coefficient of 0.693. Once customers have confidence in the e-WOM information, they tend to have an intention to book online (Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009; Xie et al., 2011). Research results on the influence of 'e-WOM acceptance' on 'online booking intention' are similar to the research results of Cheung and Thadani (2010, 2012), Fan and Miao (2012), Bataineh, (2015) and Pham (2016). Indeed, in the process of customer buying behaviour, of course, when a need arises, the intention to buy will arise, however, the transition period from need to purchase intention is long or short depending on the type of product or service (Manes et al., 2018). The buying process from the moment of demand to purchase intention is influenced by many factors, and the impact of e-WOM is one of them (Hansen and Lee, 2013). However, in products and services of great value, the process will take longer for products and services of small value (Filieri and Mcleay, 2014).

6.2 Recommendations

From the analysis results, it can be seen that if businesses know how to take advantage of this e-WOM channel, it can significantly promote customer purchase intention. In order to do that, businesses need to focus on training their marketing staff so that they are really skilled in studying the psychology, behaviour and consumption habits of customers to edit information displayed. In the process of searching for information, consumers will target certain keywords (Hossain et al., 2019). By using a number of analytical tools from Google and online social networking sites, marketers will be able to know the keywords and include them in their web pages. In addition, OTA should take measures to check the accuracy of e-WOM information such as tracking bad accounts and suspicious IP

addresses so that they can promptly prevent and remove these signs of potential unfair competition. Travel companies can also set up communication channels in the online environment such as fan pages, forums, groups, etc., and call for the participation of loyal customers because they are the ones who have experienced the service many times so they are able to provide accurate and useful information. Businesses should focus on improving and optimising the value of convenience and reliability, as these factors are highly appreciated by customers and strongly influence satisfaction (Quan et al., 2022). However, in order for customers to be convenient in making their comments and assessments, OTA should design a sample form to collect evaluation information and send it via e-mail to customers. In particular, to increase the trust level of customers with OTA, taking advantage of the participation of KOLs in communication activities is an extremely effective way. Consumer idolatry for KOLs will trigger their acceptance of e-WOM. Moreover, reputable press is also an effective channel that OTA should focus on to be able to put information about the service on it. With a large number of readers and verified credibility, communication through press channels not only helps OTA reach a large number of customers, but also makes them feel that the information is trustworthy, reliable and useful for reference in decision making.

7 Contributions, limitations and future directions

7.1 Contributions

The study has systematised theoretical frameworks on the influence of e-WOM factors on purchase intention and built a model showing the impact of those factors on online booking intention at OTA of customers in Vietnam. On the basis of proposed model and collected data, this study discovered the direction and extent of impact of e-WOM factors on online booking intention. Based on the direction and impact level of e-WOM factors on customers' online booking intention, this study has proposed a number of solutions for OTA in particular and businesses operating in the field of tourism in general to make uses of these advantages that e-WOM bring to business development.

7.2 Limitations and future directions

Some limitations should be considered when generalising the findings of this study.

Firstly, about the sampling method: The author chooses a non-probability sampling method with the form of convenient sampling. The use of this sampling method makes the survey sample not highly representative of the overall population. Therefore, the value of the research will be enhanced if the studies carried out later use a more representative sampling method.

Secondly, about the scope of the survey: The study is only based on a survey of people living, studying and working in Vietnam. Therefore, the following studies can conduct surveys on some other countries to make the results of the study more comprehensive and also have data to compare the difference in the level of influence of e-WOM to online booking intention of customers in different parts of the world.

Thirdly, in the research model, the new author focuses on examining the influence of 6 e-WOM factors on booking intention at OTA online booking services. In fact, there are several other elements that make up the e-WOM. Therefore, the following studies can

build models measuring the impact of more e-WOM factors on customers' intention to book online at OTA.

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