

The Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth on Hotel Booking Decision

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Abstract

The objectives of this research were 1) to study the influence of electronic communications through word-of-mouth through hotel reservation towards decision making. 2) To compare income factors, travel behaviors, and budget per hotel booking towards hotel booking decision, and 3) To identify factors influencing perceived benefits of information towards hotel booking decisions. Data were collected through online questionnaires with respondents from populations that had experiences booking hotels through online platforms. Total of 665 respondents were randomly selected based on selected criteria and analysis of the data collected was performed using structural equation model and two variable analyses. The result from this research showed that firstly, the influence of the word-of-mouth communications through electronic channels had a positive influence and affected the decision for respondents to select and book the hotels based on the perceived factors in terms of hotel quality and credibility of the source of information that impacted the perceived benefits of eWOM. Second, the results based on the comparison of income factors, travelling behaviors, and budget showed that the level of knowledge, involvement, and perceptions towards the hotels significantly affected the decisions for booking hotels. Lastly, behaviors of solo travelers or travelers who traveled as a couple tend to accept the information that was provided as the main factors for their hotel booking decision more than behaviors from the groups of travelers who would travel with their family or friends.

Keywords: Electronic Word of mouth, Hotel Booking Decision, Information Adoptions, Acknowledge Benefits of Information.

1. Introduction

In present days, technologies can reach diverse range of people in all groups of society which results in closer connection between each other and linking people to be able to communicate more conveniently to each other no matter the distance. Not only that, but Business Model also needs to change and adapt to keep themselves updated with the changes in technologies in our world as well. Based on the data from Electronic Transactions Development Agency (ETDA), Ministry of Digital Economy and Society had presented their research on behaviors of all internet users in Thailand in 2020 and it was found that Thai people used the internet on average of 11 hours and 25 minutes per day. During weekdays, Thais spend 11 hours and 23 minutes per day while during the weekends, they spend 11 hours and 29 minutes each day. Based on this research, it was discovered that the most popular activity on the internet was from social media [1]. Thus, Information and Communications Technology turns into one of the most important tools in creating differentiation and value of the products. Especially in Tourism Industry, younger generation of travelers tend to utilize different online platforms as a channel to compare the price, to communicate, and to utilize online channels as means for any sales and transaction such as buying electronic tickets,

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making hotel reservations through application etc. Another crucial role of online channels is for doing research and finding any information that will impact the decisions of the travelers such as accommodation information and hotel reviews. Based on the past research, it was found that 92% of all customers trust in the information based on word-of-mouth of their friends and family as their number one choice, while 70% of the customers would believe in the recommendation given through different online channels [2].

The research also explored different platforms that are most popular for Thai people for selling products or services online this year. ETDA had increased the platform options in the research to include platforms that were owned by Thais since they recognized the importance of online business although Thai platforms are not as well-known as they should be. The results from surveys showed that top online commerce platforms in Thailand are Kaidee (at 12.6%), followed by LnwShop (3.9%), Weloveshopping (2.5%), O Shopping (1.79%), Thailand Mall (1.4%), Thailand Postmart (1.3%), and Digital OTOP/TaiTamBon/Otopthai.shop which accounts for 1.1%. Based on the survey, 26.7% or 1 out of 3 survey participants sell their products or services through Facebook Fanpage only. Thus, it is apparent that the most powerful media for marketing at the moment is through online channels or E-Commerce.

Information and Communications Technology now become important through creating the differentiation and improving the value of your products and services. Based on the information obtained from Hotels.com, Mobile Travel Tracker showed that based on the survey with a total of 9200 consumers in 31 countries all over the world, it was found that younger generation of travellers would travel at an average of 4 times per year and staying in the hotel at an average of 13 nights per year. Besides that, almost 1 in 10 of the survey participants would spend more than 31 days in the hotel each year. 52% of the survey participants admitted that they had made reservations for the accommodation and transportation more than before when referring to the mentioned survey result.

Thus, it is not surprising that on average, 67% of Thais would use their mobile phones to book hotels especially at the age group of 30-39 years old at 76%. Moreover, Thai people who participated in this survey mentioned that most of the hotel reservations that are booked through mobile phones are mostly for short trips. 60% are travelling domestically with 54% for business purposes while 36% travels internationally for a short period of time.

Based on the mentioned findings, the question whether communications through electronic word-of-mouth form would significantly impact the hotel booking decision of consumers or not. So, the scope of this research is to cover the survey with samples that had experiences booking hotels through online platforms in the Greater Bangkok Metropolitan area. The data for this research was acquired through online surveys with three main objectives:

1. To study the influence of electronic communications through word-of-mouth through hotel reservation towards decision making.
2. To compare income factors, travel behaviors, and budget per hotel booking towards hotel booking decision, and
3. To identify factors influencing perceived benefits of information towards hotel booking decisions.

2. Theoretical background and related researches

2.1 Word-of-Mouth Marketing

This form of electronic word-of-mouth communication, or eWOM [3], [4] takes place on forums, emails, newsgroups or on popular social platforms [5] by which the messengers might turn into potential customers. When current or past customers of any company or product brands [6] had read the product information, reviews, and suggestions, it is dependent on one's own attitude and the credibility of eWOM resources whether this information have been cross-checked. The credibility of the source determines the trust in the information source and customer's attitudes will influence the intentions. Moreover, Lee and Lee (2009) [7] conducted a study on Understanding of the Process of Product

Information from Electronic word-of-mouth communication. The results showed that consumers will use information about the product that was obtained through electronic search of word-of-mouth communication in which the types of information are classified according to consumer perception.

A sense of coherence and compatibility of the audience leads to higher purchase intent. Therefore, accessibilities and the use of websites by consumers presents challenges for business as “Technology Access” continues to rise [8]. The focus was on the relationship and the importance of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) research studies. This research studies the factors that consumers used to analyze the credibility of online articles and reviews, and determine whether consumer trusts in the reviews can results in further consumer use of the information.

2.2 Elaboration Likelihood Model

Elaboration Likelihood Model, or ELM, explains how the thought process and change one’s own perception and thought process based on individual’s attitude. Attitudes lead to decisions and individual’s behaviors and attitudes.

Motivation is the most important factors. ELM also describes the level of individual’s thoughts towards the information when they were received. Once the information is received, will be processed by two different thought processes depending on the individual’s cognitive processes. The decision to select the type of thought process is determined by person’s motivation and the ability of individuals. Motivation means that information can be either high involvement or low involvement towards individuals. Capability refers to the individual’s ability to process information or the individual’s expertise to process the information received by two thought processes:

2.2.1 Central route has a high thought process which requires high ability to process information and sufficient information that can prove with evidence to be true and is based mainly on rational thinking.

2.2.2 Peripheral route has a cognitive process which focuses more on emotions and feelings towards information

processing. People process information from symbols and its environment of that data. People then make decisions and analyze the symbolism of that data.

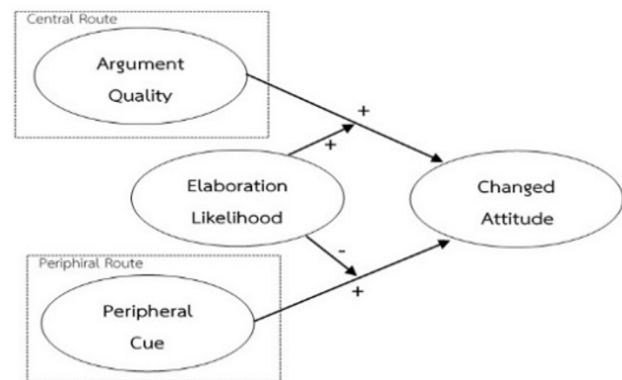


Figure 1. Elaboration Likelihood Model [9].

2.3 Information Adoption Model (IAM)

Information Adoption Model is a theory developed by Sussman and Siegal, 2003, to study the acceptance of instructions in electronic mail and their implementation by employees in an organization. The IAM theory is based on Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and applying the ELM theory to explain the variables that affect the thought process and reflect on the usefulness of the theoretical information. The IAM analyzed the independent variables of the perceived usefulness of information under different conditions and the level of fundamental knowledge of the audience’s information leading to different ways of thinking which can be categorized into two approaches:

2.3.1 The main approach is to think based on the principle of cause and effect, that is, the audience will be skilled and knowledgeable about the content, therefore considering the quality and facts of information or opinions.

2.3.2 The secondary approach focuses on the use of emotions and feelings in processing the information. This means that the audience is not knowledgeable about the information. Therefore, the credibility and the source of opinions are considered to determine the perceived usefulness of the information for both processes. This impact the perception

of the usefulness of the information. Once the user knows that the information is useful, he or she would then apply this information for various activities.

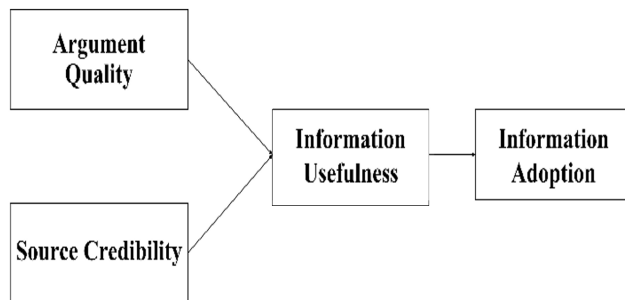


Figure 2. Information Adoption Model [10].

2.4 Buying Decision Process Theory

The Buying Decision Process Theory is a sequence of steps in consumer's purchasing decision through a five-step process: 1) problem recognition, 2) information search, 3) evaluation of alternative, 4) purchase decision, and 5) post-purchase behavior.

2.5 Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

Theory of Reasoned Action, TRA, is a theory that describes rational human action developed by Ajzen and Fishbein in 1980. This theory describes human behavior as a model that can predict and explain. The behaviors that occurred present how a person is usually reasonable and uses useful information for consideration to make a systematic decision. These factors influencing decision making are attitudes and subjective norm before impacting behavioral intentions which resulted as behaviors in the end. And in the present, the change in communications technology causes change in behaviors in daily life. Almost all types of daily activities have changed the usage patterns into online channels such as booking accommodations, watching movies, or listening to music, and the use of product logistic services or transportation. This also includes various media channels that consumers have changed their behavior to utilize social media significantly that it has now become the mainstream media. The opinions based on product information influences the audience's acceptance of the product. The past experiences of

the electronic word-of-mouth communication greatly depends on the reliability of the eWOM sender, especially if it comes from experts which will greatly affect the purchase intention of consumers [11], [12].

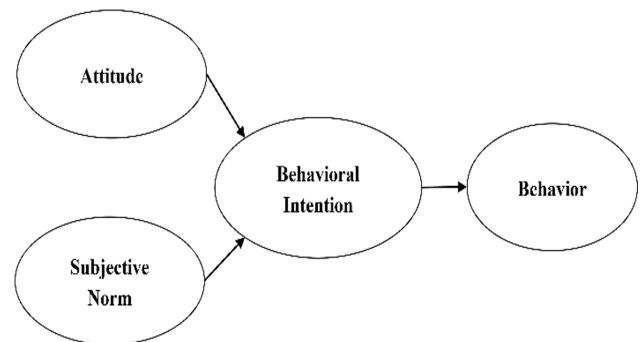


Figure 3. Theory of Reasoned Action : Fishbein and Ajzen [13].

3. Conceptual Framework of the Research and Hypothesis

Referring to Cheung et al., 2009b [14], Duan et al., 2008 [15], based on the ELM theory, when the recipient of the message is unable or unwilling to engage in thoughts about the message, he or she decides to agree with the message based on other factors. Reading a large number of eWOM by other consumers can reduce anxiety when making purchase decisions because by reading a lot of information from other consumers' past experiences regarding the purchase, several assumptions can be made as follows:

H1: eWOM Volume has a positive influence on the perceived benefits of eWOM

Cheung & et al., (2009) [16]; Lis, (2013) [17], states that eWOM score given by other readers will let readers know how other readers feel about the eWOM. Getting a high rating means that other readers agree and trust in the source. On the other hand, if an eWOM receives low rating, it means that most of the readers disagree with it. Therefore, it may cause the reader to be skeptical which affects the perception of eWOM. Thus, the following assumptions can be made:

H2: Rate Extremism have positive influence on the perceived benefits of eWOM

Doh and Hwang, (2009) [18] states that both positive and

negative data covers the pros and cons of the products or services. It affects the credibility of eWOM. There might be some negative data. Although if the amount of negative data is small when compared to positive data, it does not affect the eWOM that is useful in promoting a positive attitude towards the product. Sometimes consumers may not trust in the reviews and see that these positive data may be part of the marketing strategy of that company which was created to build credibility or company may remove negative information which greatly impact the attitudes toward eWOM's credibility. In other words, company that is perceived to have high integrity can greatly make eWOM more credible [19], [20]. Thus the hypothesis is as follow:

H3: The integrity of eWOM has a positive influence on the perceived reliability of eWOM

Wu & Wang, (2011) [21] stated that the perception of the audience, whether a source is reliable or not without directly related to that information, is the extent to which the source is perceived to be credible, with integrity, and can be trusted by the receiver. The credibility of source of information consists of three dimensions: expertise, credibility, and experiences of the source. These three dimensions impact the credibility and confidence along with the development of acceptance with the source by the audiences. Therefore, the assumptions can be made as follows:

H4: Perceived credibility of eWOM has towards the use of eWOM in decision making

Ferren and Watts (2008) [22] stated that when a person receives a rational information, that individual would evaluate and assess whether the information is relevant to their needs. This allows the individual to know whether the information he or she had received is usable. In addition, information communicated on the internet in a proper format is clear, easy to understand, and reasonable enough. As a result, the audience believes that they can utilize this information as source for them to make decisions [23]. The following assumptions can be made as follows:

H5: The rationality of the comments based on eWOM

positively influences the perceived usefulness of the eWOM comments

The credibility of the source of information occurs from the level which the audience perceives the information to be reliable. The credibility of these data significantly impacts consumer's perception to believe that the data is reliable [24] and is useful. Once consumers perceives that the information comes from a credible source, they are more likely to accept the benefits from that information more, which is consistent with Wilemsen et al. (2011) [25] that states that these savvy messengers create credible information which enable the receiver to appreciate the benefits of product search on the website. Thus, the following assumptions can be made:

H6: The credibility of the eWOM source positively influence on the perceived reliability of the eWOM

The effects of eWOM differ for different individuals when it comes to eWOM. At the same time, consumers may respond differently due to different levels of cognition, experiences, and levels of engagement [26]. Researchers agree that consumer-related factors, such as consumer cognition and engagement levels, have a strong influence on the impact of eWOM [27], [28]. Doh and Hwang (2009) [29] pointed out that consumer engagements and some of their prior knowledge scrutinize the relationship between the message ratio and the eWOM effect. Consumers tend to expand data collection as engagement with products increases. Higher engagement may lead consumers to wonder about positive messages and the impact of negative messages may increase. Therefore, the following assumptions can be made:

H7a: The level of consumer's understanding affects scores on perceived benefits of eWOM data

H7b: The level of consumer's understanding affects the amount of eWOM data

H7c: The level of consumer's understanding affects the perception of the integrity of eWOM data

H7d: The level of consumer's understanding affects the credibility of eWOM

H8a: The level of consumer's engagement affects the scores

on perceived benefits of eWOM data

H8b: The level of consumer's engagement affects the amount of eWOM data

H8c: The level of consumer's engagement affects the perception of the integrity of eWOM data

H8d: The level of consumer's engagement affects the credibility of eWOM

The perception of everyone that receives the information will be useful or enhance decision-making. Individuals tend to engagement with the information that they think is useful, which results in the person's willingness to accept the information and put it into action [30], [31]. Consequently, this is consistent with Sussman and Siegal (2003)'s [32] research which mentioned that the usefulness of the information obtained is the main factor that could predict the acceptance of the information. Therefore, the following assumptions can be made:

H9: The perceived benefits of eWOM can positively impact the acceptance of eWOM

Lee et al. (2009) [33] states that attitude is something that consumer uses the knowledge, understanding, and feelings to evaluate and consider reviews on the internet in which receiving these reviews and information is beneficial and affects their attitudes. Consequently, online reviews and positive content can contribute to a more positive attitudes towards the brands for the readers, which align with the research mentioned by Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) [34]. They found that both positive and negative reviews drive readers to have different attitudes which can be hypothesized as follows:

H10: The perceived benefits of comments and reviews based on eWOM can positively influence the attitudes towards hotels and accommodations

Acceptance of information occurred based on changes in an individual's personal knowledge after receiving the information. The information obtained is used and transformed into knowledge and creating meaning for that person [35]. Most social media users who intend to purchase

a product or service will evaluate the information first [36], [37]. Therefore, if consumers become more accepting of eWOM data, consumers will increase their purchase intentions. The Consumer Decision Making Theory [38] states that when consumers search information based on their own source, they will evaluate their choices by comparing products. This helps consumer to determine their satisfaction in selecting the product they prefer the most, thus leading to decision to buy. Thus, the following hypothesis can be made:

H11: Acceptance of the comments from eWOM positively influence decision to buy

Attitudes are the results of evaluating a person, object, or actions [39]. Word-of-mouth communication on the internet is considered the most popular method for collecting information about the brand. This influences the evaluation and purchase intention of consumers. That means, if consumers have positive attitude towards the brand, Not only will it make consumer love the brands, but also make consumer decide to buy it [41]. P.Kotler and K.L.Keller, 2012 [42] states that before making a purchase decision, consumers will take into account the attitudes of the people involved which can result in either positive or negative effects before making a purchase. Therefore, the assumptions can be made as follows:

H12: Attitudes towards hotels have a positive effect on purchasing decisions:

The concept of this research are applied from the Word-of-Mouth marketing Theory, Elaboration Likelihood Model, Information Adoption Model, and Theory of Reasoned

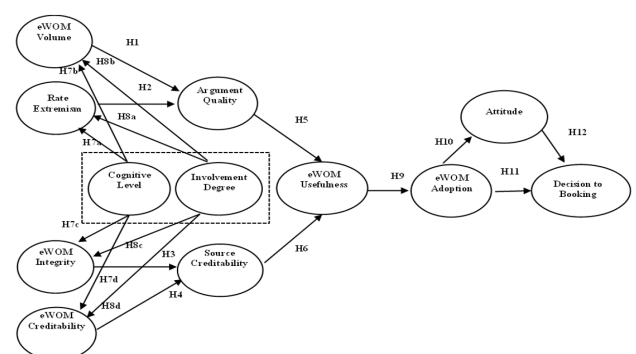


Figure 4. Conceptual Framework of the Research and Hypothesis.

Action. The Conceptual framework of this research can be presented as shown in Figure below.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Population and Samples

The population used in this research is the Thailand population who use social networks which has been influenced by both electronic word-of-mouth communication and booked a hotel in Thailand. The total of 665 samples were randomly selected and categorized based on their travel behavior as follows: 9.77% solo travelers, 46.17% traveled with family, 20.75% traveled with loved ones, and 23.31% traveled with friends (Figure 5).

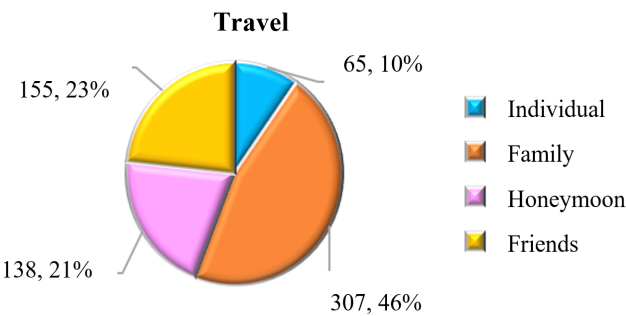


Figure 5. Characteristics of tourism behavior of sample group.

4.2 Research Tools

Questionnaires were used as tool for conducting the research and it was divided into 3 parts: Part 1 consists of general information of the respondents, part 2 consists of hotel booking information, and part 3 consists of hotel booking information asked as questions using linear scale with scoring system of 1 to 7.

4.3 Instrument Tests

All 665 data sets collected were used to calculate the Reliability of the questionnaires via Factor Analysis, Total variance, and 12 components of Cronbach Alpha by using 0.7 criterion. Based on the questions, there were total of 44 variables.

5. Result

5.1 Compare booking decisions

There is no significant difference in terms of income level, amount of data, data score, and acceptance of information. However, there's a statistically significant difference of 0.01 with the level of knowledge, level of participation, data integrity, credibility of eWOM, and attitudes towards the hotel. Moreover, the acknowledgement of the quality of eWOM, credibility of the information source, and perceived benefits of eWOM has a significant difference in statistic at 0.05, while decision to purchase has a significant difference in statistic at 0.1.

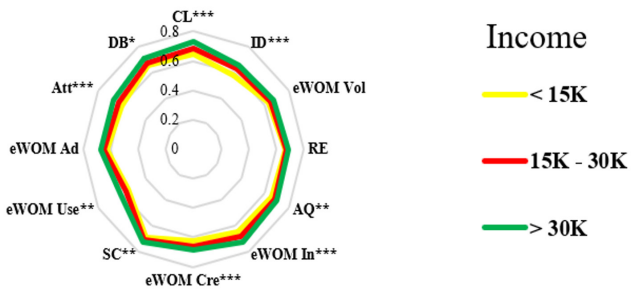


Figure 6. Comparison of factors affecting hotel booking decisions (1).

In terms of tourism behavior, there are no significant difference for knowledge level and acceptance of information. Although the amount of information, the perception of data integrity, credibility of the data source, and purchase decision showed significant difference in statistics at 0.01 point. Recognition of eWOM quality, credibility of eWOM, and attitudes towards the hotel showed significant difference at 0.05 and level of participation and perceived benefits of eWOM showed significant difference at 0.1.

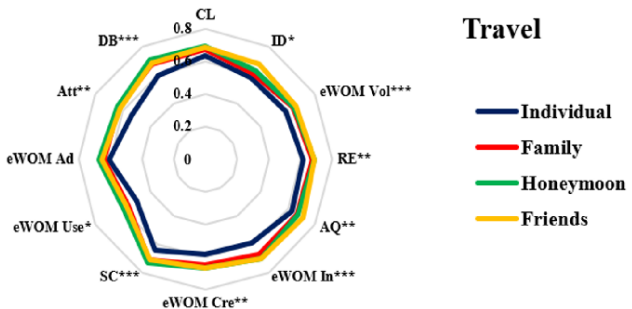


Figure 7. Comparison of factors affecting hotel booking decisions (2).

In terms of data volume budget, data score, perceived quality of eWOM, credibility of the information source, perceived benefits of eWOM, and acceptance of the data showed no difference, while the perceived data integrity and attitudes towards the hotel showed significant difference in statistics at 0.01. The level of knowledge and purchase decision showed significant difference at 0.05 and level of participation showed significant difference at 0.1.

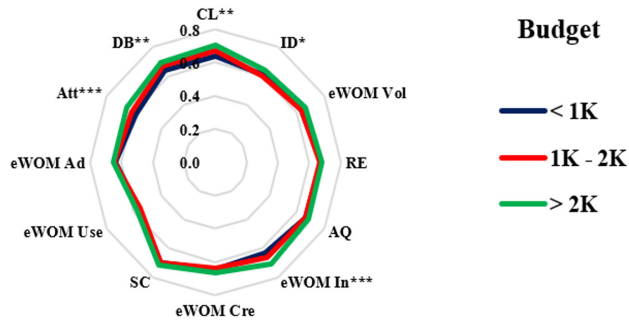


Figure 8. Comparison of factors affecting hotel booking decisions (3).

5.2 Perceived benefits towards hotel booking decisions

Based on the results of the analysis of the perceived benefit model for hotel booking decisions, it was found that the characteristics of solo travelers perceived completeness of the information at the value of 0.093 with no statistical difference. Solo travelers also tend to perceive quality of data equal to 0.11 with no statistical difference which was different from other forms of travel such as with family and friends with the acceptance of information with value equal to 0.072 and 0.099 consequently with no statistical difference. This also showed difference from solo travelers and couple travelers which accept the information with significant statistical value (figure 7).

5.3 Hypothesis Test Results

The result from checking the accuracy and linearity of the structural model showed the statistical values as followed: Chi2_{ms} = 3501.1 RMSEA = 0.067 SRMR = 0.169 CFI = 0.882 TLI = 0.874

Most of these statistics passed the specified criteria. Thus, the model was consistent with the empirical data.

Table 1. Shown example.

Hypothesis	Parameter	Total effects	Result
H1	eWOM Vol ----> AQ	0.779***	Supported
H2	RE -----> AQ	0.283***	Supported
H3	eWOM In -----> SC	0.267***	Supported
H4	eWOM Cre ----> SC	0.699***	Supported
H5	AQ-----> eWOM Use	0.115***	Supported
H6	SC -----> eWOM Use	0.773***	Supported
H7a	CL -----> RE	0.195***	Supported
H7b	CL -----> eWOM Vol	0.237***	Supported
H7c	CL -----> eWOM In	0.356***	Supported
H7d	CL -----> eWOM Cre	0.256***	Supported
H8a	InD -----> RE	0.922***	Supported
H8b	InD -----> eWOM Vol	0.912***	Supported
H8c	InD -----> eWOM In	0.698***	Supported
H8c	InD -----> eWOM Cre	0.831***	Supported
H9	eWOM Use ----> eWOM Ado	1.048***	Supported
H10	eWOM Use ----> Att	0.953***	Supported
H11	eWOM Ado ----> BH	- 0.030***	Not Supported
H12	Att -----> BH	1.008***	Supported

6. Discussion

6.1 Comparison of factors influencing the hotel booking decisions

In this research, 3 factors influencing the decision to book a hotel accommodation were selected. This includes income level, travel behavior, and budget per night. It was found that

the decision to book hotel accommodations was based on data quality, credibility that affect the usefulness of the information, as well as making consumers accept the information and affect the attitude which contribute to purchase decision. However, when comparing the results of data analysis, it was found that the attitude towards hotel was the main factor in influencing decision to book a hotel. This is in line with research done by Dennis et al. (2009) [43] which states that positive attitudes towards electronic stores affect the willingness to buy the electronic products from electronic retailers.

6.2 Perceived benefits of information for hotel booking decisions

It was found that for solo traveler's behaviors, the perception of data integrity did not impact the attitude towards the evaluation and consideration unlike other types of travelers. It was observed that the larger the number of travel companions, the more valuable the perception of information and reflection affects the attitudes in evaluation and consideration which align with Lee et al. (2009) [44] which states that consumer's attitude derives from the use of knowledge, understanding, and feelings to evaluate and consider the reviews on the internet. By recognizing that review data is useful, it will affect readers' attitudes. Therefore, positive online reviews contributed to increase brand awareness among viewers which align with research conducted by Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) [45] which found that both positive and negative reviews resulted in different opinions among viewers.

6.3 The hypothesis test results revealed that 1 hypothesis did not conform to the set assumptions.

The acceptance of the information directly affected the decision to book a hotel. However, this research found that hotel booking decisions were statistically significantly positive based on the perceived quality factor of eWOM and the reliability of eWOM data source which affect the perceived usefulness of the eWOM. These findings suggested that, in terms of the perceived quality factors of eWOM, consumers

assess whether the information received is relevant or not when rational information are given to them. This enables consumers to perceive and use the information which is consistent with research conducted by Wixom & Todd (2005) [46] which states that consumers are more interested in the rating of the data (Rate Extremism). This gives viewers an idea of how others feel about this eWOM which is consistent with research by Cheung & et al (2009) [47]; Lis (2013) [48].

7. Recommendation for future research

7.1 For hotel business operators, Social Media Marketing strategy should be planned by designing the use of both strategies and techniques that are suitable for target group of establishments through online marketing tools, since content can be created or promote to a wider target audience.

7.2 For social Media Influencers, it is recommended to write the content that describes your brand, business, experience, and product descriptions. Stories can be told through texts, videos, or images. There are many forms of content creation which can be done through both online and offline channels.

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