



HOW EWOM SHAPES ONLINE HOTEL BOOKING DECISIONS ON BOOKING.COM: AN INTEGRATED IAM-TPB APPROACH

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
DOI: 10.52932/jfmr.v4i3en.1285 <i>Received:</i> March 26, 2026 <i>Accepted:</i> July 04, 2026 <i>Published:</i> July 25, 2026 Keywords: Booking.com, EWOM, IAM, Online hotel booking decisions, TPB JEL codes: M30, M31, M37	Purpose – This study examines how electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) influences consumers' online hotel booking decisions on Booking.com. By integrating the Information Adoption Model (IAM) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the study explains how eWOM quality and source credibility are translated into booking decisions through information usefulness, attitude toward behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. Design/methodology/approach – A quantitative survey was conducted among Booking.com users in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Data collected from 263 valid respondents were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling with SmartPLS 4.0. Findings – All eight proposed relationships were statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. eWOM quality ($\beta = 0.360$) and source credibility ($\beta = 0.369$) positively influenced information usefulness. Information usefulness subsequently had positive effects on attitude toward behavior ($\beta = 0.613$), subjective norm ($\beta = 0.589$), and perceived behavioral control ($\beta = 0.501$). In turn, attitude toward the behavior ($\beta = 0.391$), subjective norm ($\beta = 0.358$), and perceived behavioral control ($\beta = 0.223$) positively affected online hotel booking decisions. Originality/value – The study extends eWOM and online tourism research by integrating the information-evaluation mechanism of IAM with the psychological determinants of TPB in a unified framework. It provides empirical evidence explaining the pathway through which eWOM characteristics influence hotel booking decisions in the context of an online travel agency platform in Vietnam. Practical implications – Online travel agencies and accommodation providers should enhance the relevance, clarity, and credibility of customer reviews, prioritize verified reviews, and improve platform usability. These measures can increase the perceived usefulness of online information, foster favorable attitudes and social influence, strengthen consumers' confidence in the booking process, and ultimately facilitate booking decisions.

1. Introduction

Vietnam's rapidly expanding digital tourism market provides a relevant context for examining how electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) shapes online hotel booking decisions. According to DataReportal, We Are Social and Meltwater (2024), Vietnam had 78.44 million internet users in early 2023, representing 79.1% of the population. This high level of internet penetration has created favorable conditions for the growth of online travel services and consumer-generated information. At the same time, Vietnam's tourism industry has strongly recovered after the pandemic. In 2023, the country welcomed nearly 12.6 million international visitors and served 108 million domestic tourists, generating approximately VND 678.3 trillion in tourism revenue (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2024). In this increasingly digitalized tourism environment, online travel agencies such as Booking.com have become important channels for accommodation search and reservation. Vietnamese consumers, particularly younger travelers, increasingly rely on online reviews, ratings, and platform-based information to reduce uncertainty before making booking decisions. Booking.com is especially relevant in this context because of its wide usage, reputation, and transparent review system (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2024). Therefore, investigating the key components of eWOM and their influence on online hotel booking decisions is both theoretically meaningful and practically important for understanding consumer behavior on OTA (Online Travel Agent) platforms.

Although most previous studies have confirmed that e-word-of-mouth (e-WOM) has a significant impact on booking decisions (Filieri & McLeay, 2014; Sparks & Browning, 2011), few studies have identified how travelers evaluate this information. In Vietnam, users may have difficulty determining the reliability of online reviews due to fake reviews, star ratings, or ambiguous feedback. To address these issues,

this study combines the Information Adoption Model (IAM) (Sussman & Siegal, 2003) with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) to process information and better understand the process of perceiving usefulness in digital user decision-making.

This study offers practical contributions both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the study builds on prior academic work by integrating two key theoretical frameworks, IAM and TPB, thereby providing a comprehensive view of how digital consumers behave toward eWOM. Practically, the findings will be a valuable source of knowledge to help managers, marketers, and R&D professionals in the hospitality industry maximize the benefits of e-WOM strategies to enhance engagement and drive booking decisions (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014), while also providing a basis for improving consumer trust in the online booking market.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. *Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)*

In the era of digital transformation and the rapid development of online platforms, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has become one of the key factors influencing modern consumer decision-making. Unlike traditional word of mouth (WOM), eWOM is disseminated through digital platforms such as social networks, forums, blogs, review sites, and e-commerce platforms, allowing information to quickly reach a large number of consumers in a short period of time (Hussain et al., 2020).

According to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), eWOM is defined as positive or negative opinions created by consumers based on their personal experiences with a product or service, shared on the Internet and not originating from any business organization. Compared to marketing information generated by firms, eWOM is often perceived as more credible due to its authenticity, independence, and subjective nature, as it reflects real consumer experiences (Godes

& Mayzlin, 2004). Furthermore, eWOM can remain accessible online for a long period and is easily searchable and shareable, thereby creating a powerful information dissemination network among individuals (Hoffman & Novak, 1997). Numerous studies have confirmed the important role of eWOM in influencing consumer decision-making. Specifically, consumers tend to trust reviews and feedback from customers who have experienced a service more than information provided by the business itself (Filieri & McLeay, 2014). This is particularly evident in the service sector, where consumers are unable to evaluate service quality before consumption, such as in tourism and hospitality. In this context, online reviews serve as a critical reference source in the decision-making process. Compared to WOM, eWOM possesses several outstanding advantages such as rapid dissemination, persistence, low search costs, and access to diverse perspectives (Hoffman & Novak, 1997). As a result, eWOM helps consumers save time, reduce perceived risk, and improve the quality of purchase decisions.

2.2. eWOM and Information Adoption Model (IAM)

In this study, eWOM is approached based on the Information Adoption Model (IAM) proposed by Sussman and Siegal (2003). IAM is an integrated model that combines the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which aims to explain how an individual evaluates information and subsequently forms attitudes and behaviors based on the information they receive.

According to IAM, the process of information adoption is mainly influenced by two factors: eWOM quality and source credibility. These two factors influence information usefulness, which serves as a key mediating construct leading to the acceptance and use of information in the decision-making process, especially in online hotel booking behavior. eWOM quality reflects the degree of logic, detail, objectivity, and relevance of the information to consumers' needs. On platforms such as Booking.com,

reviews that are clearly structured, describe actual experiences, and provide information relevant to consumers' personal concerns are often perceived as high-quality eWOM (Filieri & McLeay, 2014). Meanwhile, source credibility refers to the extent to which readers trust the reviewer, which depends on factors such as reputation, expertise, perceived authenticity, and experiential similarity (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

While prior Vietnamese studies, particularly Tu (2022), have demonstrated the relevance of the Information Adoption Model in explaining how eWOM influences online consumer behavior, his focus has mainly been on the information-adoption process itself. The present study extends this line of research by integrating IAM with TPB to explain not only how consumers evaluate eWOM information but also how perceived information usefulness is translated into attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and ultimately online hotel booking decisions. In doing so, this study provides a more comprehensive explanation of the psychological pathway from eWOM characteristics to booking behavior in the specific context of Booking.com.

2.3. Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), proposed by Ajzen (1991), is based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), by adding the element of Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) to overcome the limitations of TRA in explaining behaviors that are not entirely within an individual's control. According to TPB, actual behavior is formed by behavioral intention, which is influenced by three core components: Attitude Toward the Behavior (ATB), Subjective Norm (SN), and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) (Ajzen, 1991). When the level of perceived behavioral control is high, intention is more likely to be transformed into actual behavior. Therefore, TPB is considered a suitable theoretical framework for predicting consumer decisions, including online hotel booking decisions.

In online booking, consumers' attitudes toward booking decisions are strongly influenced by eWOM, where reviews and comments on e-commerce sites contribute to the formation of initial impressions and overall service evaluations (Goh et al., 2015). Subjective norm reflects perceived social pressure or expectations from influential others such as friends, family members, or online communities. On platforms such as Booking.com, review systems, comments, and rating mechanisms are regarded as a new form of social norm that significantly affects booking decisions (Park et al., 2007). Perceived behavioral control refers to the extent to which consumers perceive their capability to perform the behavior, including confidence in selecting a hotel, making secure payments, and effectively using an online platform. When consumers perceive that the booking platform is easy to use and that the provided information is trustworthy, they tend to move from intention to actual booking action (Goh et al., 2015).

Many recent studies have combined TPB with eWOM factors to explain online booking decisions. eWOM not only influences attitudes but also reinforces subjective norms and perceived behavioral control, thereby enhancing the likelihood of translating intention into behavior. Goh et al.'s (2015) study demonstrated that eWOM quality, source credibility, and information usefulness positively affect the three components of TPB, thereby increasing the likelihood of hotel bookings.

TPB was selected as the theoretical foundation for this study due to its strong explanatory power regarding the psychological determinants of hotel booking decisions. This theory has been widely applied in consumer behavior research, especially in the tourism and hospitality sector (Han et al., 2010). Moreover, extending previous research within the Vietnamese context (Tu, 2022) ensures the relevance and academic robustness of the proposed research model.

Information Usefulness (IU)

Information usefulness (IU) is understood as the degree to which consumers believe online information helps them make better decisions (Cheung et al., 2008). In the context of eWOM, IU represents the practical value of information in reducing uncertainty and supporting appropriate choices. According to the Information Adoption Model (IAM), IU is influenced by information quality and source credibility (Sussman & Siegal, 2003).

Quality of eWOM (QE)

Quality of eWOM (QE) reflects the degree of completeness, accuracy, usefulness, and clarity of information. High-quality information is more readily accepted and trusted by consumers, thereby influencing attitudes and behavioral intentions (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Filieri et al., 2015).

Hypothesis H1: Quality of eWOM (QE) positively affects the information usefulness (IU).

Source Credibility of eWOM (SC)

Source credibility (SC) is the degree to which readers rate the reviewer as trustworthy, honest, and knowledgeable (Ohanian, 1990). In the eWOM environment, when many reviews come from strangers or anonymous sources, SC becomes a decisive factor in whether users trust the information or not. Research shows that SC directly affects IU, as users only consider information useful when they trust the provider (Cheung et al., 2008).

Hypothesis H2: Source credibility of eWOM (SC) positively affects the information usefulness (IU).

Attitude Towards Behavior (ATB)

Attitude Towards Behavior (ATB) is the degree to which consumers have a positive or negative assessment of the performance of a behavior (Ajzen, 1991). When users perceive online reviews on platforms like Booking.com as helpful and trustworthy, they will have a more

positive feeling about online booking behavior. A high IU helps them reduce uncertainty about service quality and increase confidence that their decision is correct, thereby forming a positive attitude (Filieri et al., 2015).

Hypothesis H3: Information usefulness (IU) positively influences attitude towards behavior (ATB).

When users perceive relying on eWOM for booking as helpful, easy, and providing a good experience, they will form a positive attitude and tend to perform the behavior. Erkan & Evans (2016) demonstrated that a positive attitude towards eWOM leads to a higher purchase or booking decision.

Hypothesis H4: Attitude towards behavior (ATB) positively influences online booking decision (OD).

Subjective Norm (SN)

Subjective Norms (SN) are consumers' perceptions of social pressure or expectations from others regarding the performance of a behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of online booking, information usefulness can influence subjective norms through the mechanism of "social proof." When consumers believe eWOM information is useful, they tend to share or discuss it within social networks, thereby reinforcing consensus and encouraging others to follow suit. This increases positive social influence and forms group norms that support online booking (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Goh et al., 2015).

Hypothesis H5: Information usefulness (IU) positively influences subjective norm (SN).

In the online environment, when consumers perceive that booking through eWOM is supported by others, they tend to follow suit.

Studies (Goh et al., 2015; Chu & Kim, 2011) show that SN has a strong impact on consumer behavior, especially in the tourism sector, where users often rely on the experiences of others.

Hypothesis H6: Subjective norm (SN) positively influences online booking decision (OD).

Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)

Perceived behavioral control (PBC) reflects the degree to which consumers find it easy or difficult to perform a behavior, based on experience and control (Ajzen, 1991). When eWOM information is clear, detailed, and relevant, users feel they have sufficient knowledge and guidance to book effectively. Specific reviews of policies, payment processes, or hotel selection suggestions help reduce risk and increase confidence in action (Abdullah et al., 2017). Therefore, IU contributes to increasing consumers' perceived competence and behavioral control.

Hypothesis H7: Information usefulness (IU) positively influences perceived behavioral control (PBC).

In the context of eWOM, PBC is demonstrated by users feeling it easy to use the booking platform, access reviews, and complete transactions. When information is transparent, instructions are clear, and the user experience is convenient, they feel more confident and are more inclined to act (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011; Erkan & Evans, 2016).

Hypothesis H8: Perceived behavioral control (PBC) positively influences online booking decision (OD)

Based on the theoretical arguments and hypotheses discussed above, the proposed research model is presented in Figure 1.

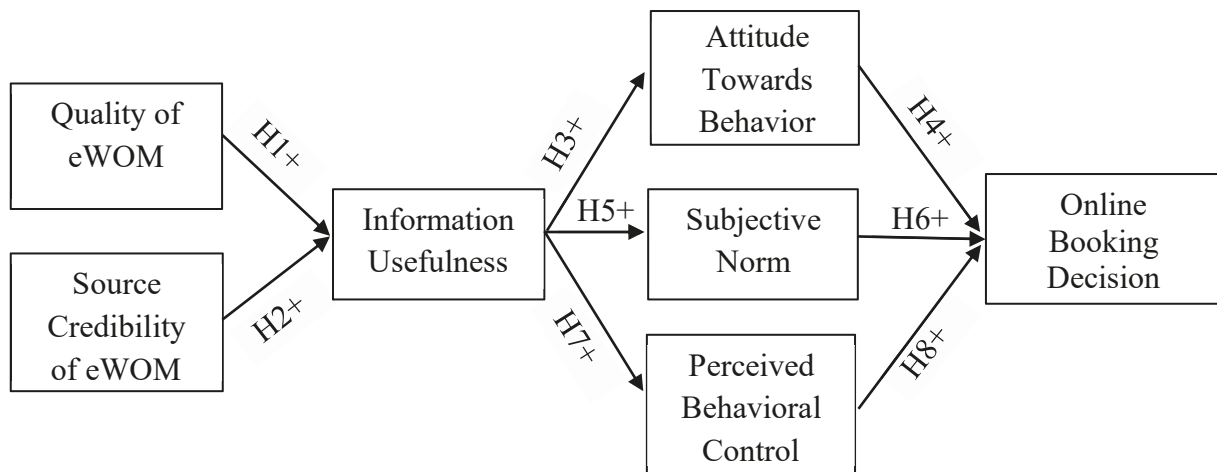


Figure 1. Proposed research model

3. Research methodology

This research used a quantitative approach, with data collected through an online questionnaire consisting of 24 items designed to measure seven constructs that include the Quality of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), Source Credibility of eWOM, Information Usefulness, Attitude Toward the Behavior, Subjective Norms (Influence of surrounding people), Perceived Behavioral Control, and Online Hotel Booking Decisions. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” In addition, the questionnaire included demographic questions such as gender, age, education level, occupation, and income. Furthermore, questions regarding respondents’ behavior in searching for reviews before booking a hotel and the factors they pay attention to on Booking.com online hotel review platforms were also included. These additional questions helped the researchers better understand real customer behavior and enhanced the study’s reliability and practical relevance. All questions were originally developed in English. However, since the target respondents were Vietnamese, the questionnaire was translated from English into Vietnamese and then back-translated into English.

After collecting the survey data, the results showed that when customers search for online hotel reviews, they tend to read many reviews

on Booking.com before making a booking decision. Specifically, 39.3% of customers reported reading more than 10 reviews, while 37.5% read between 7 and 9 reviews. This indicates that no respondents read fewer than four reviews before deciding to book a hotel.

The sample size was determined using an online calculator for SEM models (Soper, 2019) with the following parameters: statistical power level = 0.95, probability level = 0.03, effect size = 0.3, seven latent variables, and 24 observed variables. The results indicated that at least 247 valid responses were required to reliably detect the expected effects. After the data collection process, a total of 300 responses were recorded, of which 263 valid responses met the requirements and were used for analysis.

To minimize potential common method bias arising from the single-source, cross-sectional survey design, this study applied both procedural and statistical remedies. During data collection, respondents were assured of anonymity to reduce evaluation apprehension and response bias. In addition, Harman’s single-factor test was conducted using exploratory factor analysis with unrotated principal component extraction. The result in Appendix 5 shows that the first factor explained 44.823% of the total variance, below the 50% threshold. This indicates that common method bias was not a major concern in this study.

To test the proposed hypotheses and examine the relationships between electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and online hotel booking decisions, this study employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using the Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) approach. The PLS-SEM method was chosen for its flexibility and effectiveness in handling complex models. Non-parametric bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was applied to assess the statistical significance of the path coefficients.

4. Research results

4.1. Sample structure and characteristics

The study sample consisted of 263 valid survey responses with a balanced gender distribution (52.47% female, 47.53% male). In terms of age, the sample showed diversity but was primarily concentrated in younger age groups, with the 18-25 age group accounting for the majority (57.79%), followed by the 26-30 age group (16.35%), the 31-35 age group (11.03%), and the 36 years and older group (14.83%). Regarding occupation, university students accounted for the highest percentage (51.33%), followed by civil servants/government employees (25.48%), self-employed (11.03%), and freelancers (7.22%). Consistent with the occupational structure, the majority of educational attainment was a college/university degree (74.90%). Regarding income, the study sample leans towards the middle- or low-income group, with the group earning less than 5 million VND accounting for the highest percentage (38.02%) and the group earning between 5-15 million VND accounting for 24.33%.

4.2. Measurement model evaluation

Indicator reliability was assessed using outer loadings. As shown in Appendix 3, all indicators had loadings above 0.70, indicating acceptable indicator reliability and supporting the convergent validity of the measurement scales (Hair et al., 2019). Internal consistency reliability was then evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). The results in Appendix 4 show that Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.746 to 0.871, while CR ranged from 0.761 to 0.875, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. These results confirm the reliability and internal consistency of the constructs.

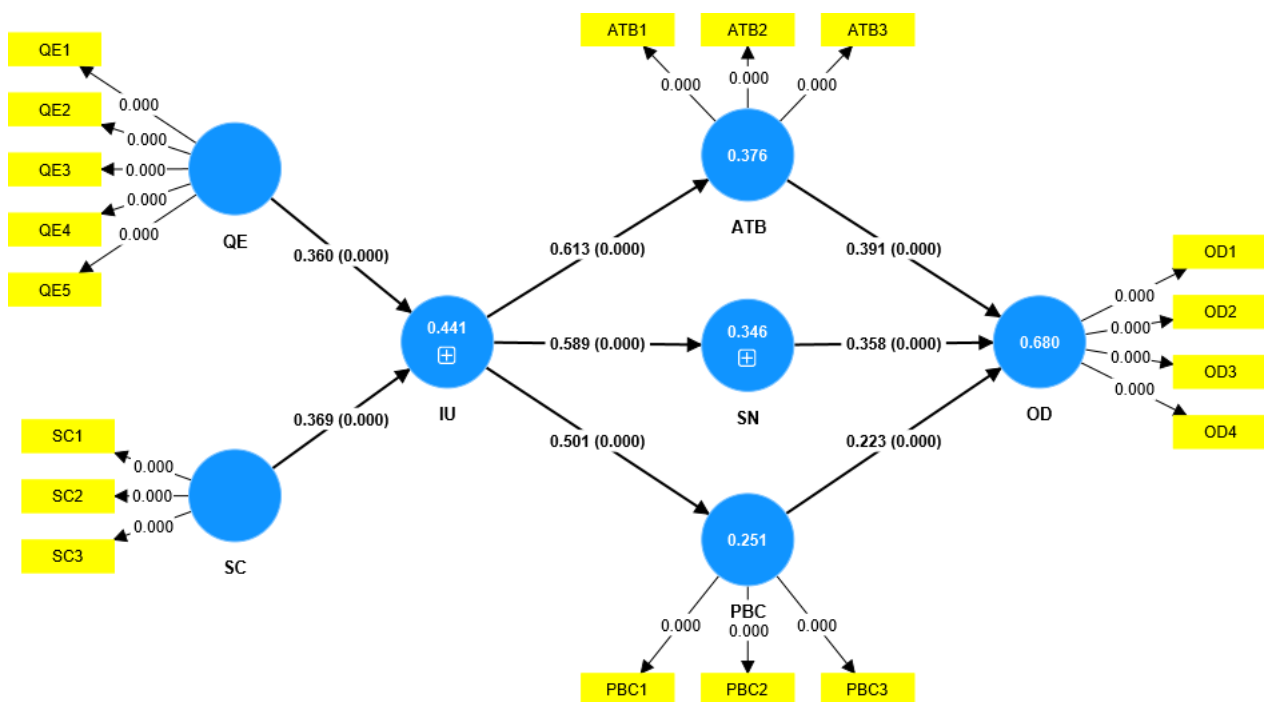
Convergent validity was further assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Following Fornell and Larcker (1981), AVE values above 0.50 indicate that a construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators. In this study, the AVE values ranged from 0.521 to 0.722, meeting the recommended criterion. However, the Quality of eWOM (QE) construct showed relatively borderline psychometric properties, with an AVE of 0.521 and two indicators, QE2 and QE5, having outer loadings of 0.706 and 0.703, respectively. Although these loadings were slightly below the recommended value of 0.708, they remained above 0.70 and were therefore considered acceptable. These items were retained because they capture theoretically important aspects of eWOM quality, namely the relevance and recency of online reviews. Removing them could reduce the conceptual coverage of the construct. Nevertheless, future studies should further refine and validate the QE items to strengthen the measurement of eWOM quality.

*Assessment of discriminant validity***Table 1.** HTMT ratio

	ATB	IU	OD	PBC	QE	SC	SN
ATB							
IU	0.806						
OD	0.898	0.793					
PBC	0.713	0.652	0.750				
QE	0.878	0.791	0.859	0.644			
SC	0.772	0.797	0.866	0.754	0.845		
SN	0.774	0.756	0.855	0.662	0.787	0.760	

Discriminant validity was assessed using the HTMT criterion. As shown in Table 1, all HTMT values ranged from 0.644 to 0.898,

below the 0.90 threshold (Henseler et al., 2015), confirming discriminant validity.

4.3. Evaluation of the research structure's model**Figure 2.** Results of structural model analysis*Assessment of VIF values*

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was used to examine multicollinearity among variables in the model. The analysis results show that all VIF values were below the threshold of 5. This indicates that there is no multicollinearity issue

among the latent or observed variables, thereby ensuring the stability and reliability of the structural model (Hair et al., 2019).

Assessment of path coefficients

As shown in Figure 2, the PLS-SEM results indicate that all eight hypotheses (H1–H8)

are statistically significant, with p-values of 0.000 for all relationships. Specifically, QE and SC both have positive effects on IU, with beta coefficients of 0.360 and 0.369, respectively. This demonstrates that eWOM quality and credibility significantly enhance the level of usefulness perceived by users. IU has a strong positive influence on ATB ($\beta = 0.613$) and SN ($\beta = 0.589$), with large effect sizes ($f^2 > 0.35$). These results indicate that useful information plays an important role in shaping users' positive attitudes and subjective norms. In addition, IU has a moderate effect on PBC ($\beta = 0.501$, $f^2 = 0.335$), suggesting that when users perceive information as useful, they feel more confident in their behavior. Regarding OD, both ATB ($\beta = 0.391$) and SN ($\beta = 0.358$) have moderate positive effects, implying that attitudes and social influence significantly affect users' booking decisions. Finally, although perceived

behavioral control had a statistically significant effect on online hotel booking decisions, its effect was weaker than those of attitude toward the behavior and subjective norm. This may suggest that Booking.com users already perceive online booking as relatively accessible and manageable, especially because the sample was largely composed of young and digitally familiar respondents. In such a context, basic control over the booking process may no longer be the main driver of decision-making. Instead, consumers' favorable evaluation of online booking and the perceived influence of others appear to play a more decisive role. In other words, once users feel sufficiently capable of using an OTA platform, their booking decisions may depend more strongly on whether they trust the information, feel positive about the booking option, and perceive social support for the decision.

Table 2. Hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	β	P values	f^2	Support
H1: QE→IU	0.360	0.000	0.132	Accepted
H2: SC→IU	0.369	0.000	0.139	Accepted
H3: IU→ATB	0.613	0.000	0.602	Accepted
H4: ATB→OD	0.391	0.000	0.269	Accepted
H5: IU→SN	0.589	0.000	0.530	Accepted
H6: SN→OD	0.358	0.000	0.235	Accepted
H7: IU→PBC	0.501	0.000	0.335	Accepted
H8: PBC→OD	0.223	0.000	0.099	Accepted

Assessment of R^2 values

The R^2 value is used to assess the explanatory power of the structural model. According to Chin (1998), a model is considered weak when the R^2 value is 0.33. When the R^2 value ranges from 0.33 to 0.67, the model is classified as having moderate explanatory power. If the R^2 value is 0.67 or higher, the model is considered to have strong explanatory power.

The results show that OD has the highest R^2 value of 0.68, indicating strong explanatory power. The variables ATB (0.376), IU (0.441), and SN (0.346) fall within the moderate range, while PBC (0.251) indicates relatively weak explanatory power. Overall, the model demonstrates good explanatory capability, particularly for the OD variable, suggesting that the independent constructs effectively explain the behavior examined in this study.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Summary of results and practical implications

This study analyzes the impact of eWOM on online hotel booking decisions on Booking.com in Vietnam, through integrating the Information Adoption Model (IAM) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). PLS-SEM results (N=263) support the hypotheses (H1-H8). Specifically, eWOM Quality (QE) and Source Credibility (SC) positively impact Information Usefulness (IU). The key point of the model is that IU greatly impacts all three psychological factors: Attitude (ATB), Subjective Norms (SN), and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC). The results highlight the central role of IU as a link connecting eWOM characteristics to the constructs in the TPB framework. Ultimately, ATB, SN, and PBC all drive Booking Decision (OD), with ATB having the strongest influence. As a practical matter, businesses and platforms like Booking.com must prioritize managing review quality and reliability to maximize IU. At the same time, marketing strategies need to focus on building positive attitudes (through quality eWOM), exploiting social influence (SN), and simplifying the booking process to improve Behavioral Control (PBC), thereby optimizing conversion rates.

5.2. Practical Implications

The survey results in this study clearly reflect the influence of eWOM-related factors on the Booking.com platform on the online hotel booking behavior of people in Ho Chi Minh City. Of the 263 survey participants, 233 (77.7%) considered room price to be the main influencing factor in their decision, followed by 207 (69%) who chose the number of reviews, 196 (65.3%) who chose the star rating, and 171 (57%) who chose the hotel's display ranking. Notably, only 96 respondents (32%) considered hotel feedback to be an important factor, indicating a major weakness in current eWOM management strategies, as businesses still do not prioritize two-way interaction

with customers on digital platforms. The results of the PLS-SEM model from the study also indicate that information usefulness (IU) plays a crucial mediating role between eWOM characteristics (QE, SC) and components of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), especially attitude (ATB) and subjective norm (SN) – two variables that strongly influence booking behavior (OD). Based on this situation, the study proposes several specific solutions for each relevant group.

First, for OTA platforms like Booking.com – which act as information intermediaries between consumers and accommodation providers – it is necessary to focus on improving the quality and accessibility of the rating system to optimize the perceived usefulness (IU) of users. The survey chart shows that users are very interested in the number of reviews (207 people, 69%) and the content of the reviews (168 people, 56%), and also have a relatively high level of interest in images/videos uploaded by customers (167 people, 55.7%). This is a clear signal that users value practical information derived from real experiences. According to research by Filieri and McLeay (2014), prioritizing detailed, specific, and objective reviews increases customer trust and decision-making. Therefore, OTAs should implement a mechanism to filter reviews by topic (price, location, amenities), sort by the level of usefulness rated by the user community, and prioritize verified reviews after a stay. Furthermore, encouraging users to upload real-life images also contributes to enhancing the perceived trustworthiness (SC) – a variable that significantly influences IU in this study. Sparks and Browning's (2011) research confirmed that visual and transparent information on OTA platforms is a factor driving trust and booking intentions.

For accommodation businesses such as hotels and guesthouses – a group directly impacted by eWOM reviews – the survey results revealed a notable paradox: while customers are very interested in reviews from previous guests (168 people chose this option – 56%), the “hotel

feedback” factor was only chosen by 96 people (32%). This shows that many businesses are still not proactively involved in online reputation management, leading to missed opportunities to build a positive image. The model results show that ATB and SN are two strong mediators in driving booking behavior – meaning that positive attitudes and social norms surrounding a hotel directly influence consumer decisions. Therefore, hotels need to build a professional and consistent review response process, instead of leaving reviews blank or responding emotionally. Research by Erkan and Evans (2016) demonstrated that proactive responses contribute to building credibility and increasing customer receptiveness to information. Additionally, solutions such as awarding reward points, discount vouchers for customers leaving reviews, or sending personalized post-stay emails to encourage feedback should be implemented – this helps increase the quantity and quality of reviews, while improving the hotel’s ranking on OTAs. These solutions are entirely consistent with user behavior reflected in the survey data.

Finally, for marketers and managers in the tourism and hospitality industry, this study provides clear evidence of the impact of subjective norms (SN) and behavioral attitudes (ATB) on booking decisions, thereby reorienting how messaging and communication content are constructed. Instead of focusing solely on promoting offers, marketers should emphasize leveraging the real-world customer experience – for example, sharing outstanding reviews, using images and videos posted by customers on OTAs for reuse in social media content. Successful communication campaigns in the eWOM context are often linked to emotional factors and social consensus, meaning when customers feel their choices are supported by the surrounding community or social group. Therefore, the media should fully leverage social

norms by inviting customers to leave reviews, publicly share their stay experiences, or create “referral programs” with incentives.

5.3. Limitations and future research

However, the results of this study still have certain limitations. Firstly, the representativeness of the sample is not high because the majority of survey participants are female students in Ho Chi Minh City, which may affect the generalizability of the results. Future studies should diversify the survey sample in terms of demographics (occupation, age, gender) and geographical context (other provinces or countries) to clearly consider gender differences in eWOM reception and to increase generalizability. Second, the cross-sectional survey design limits the ability to capture changes in consumers’ eWOM evaluation and booking behavior over time. Future studies could adopt longitudinal designs to examine how online reviews influence consumer decision-making across different booking stages. Third, this study focused only on Booking.com; therefore, future research should compare multiple OTA platforms, such as Agoda, Traveloka, TripAdvisor, or Airbnb, to identify whether the effects of eWOM vary across platform designs and review systems. Fourth, the current model integrates IAM and TPB but does not include additional psychological mechanisms such as trust, perceived risk, or perceived service quality. Future studies could examine these variables as mediators or moderators to provide a deeper explanation of how eWOM shapes booking decisions. Finally, future research may apply configurational approaches such as fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) to identify different combinations of eWOM quality, source credibility, trust, risk perception, and TPB factors that lead to high booking intention or actual booking behavior.

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