

**HUE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM**



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**THE IMPACT OF ELECTRONIC WORD OF
MOUTH VIA SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE
DESTINATION CHOICE DECISION OF
GENERATION Z TRAVELERS TO HANOI,
VIETNAM**

**Major: Tourism
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**SUMMARY OF TOURISM DOCTORAL
DISSERTATION**

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INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale

1.1. *Theoretical rationale*

Research on tourists' destination choice behavior has attracted substantial scholarly attention because it helps clarify the factors shaping travel behavior and thus provides a theoretical basis for developing effective destination marketing and management strategies. Destination choice is influenced not only by tangible factors such as price and amenities, but also by psychological, social, and cultural dimensions, which require a comprehensive understanding of tourists' motivations and consumption patterns. A deeper examination of this behavior can help destinations optimize tourism products, meet diverse tourist needs, anticipate future travel trends, enhance competitiveness, and support the sustainable development of the tourism industry.

Word of mouth (WOM) has long been recognized as an important marketing channel that significantly influences how consumers obtain information and make purchasing decisions. However, the rapid development of information technology, particularly the emergence of the Internet, together with changes in the social structure of Generations X, Y, and Z, has fundamentally transformed consumer behavior and traditional approaches to customer engagement. The Internet has created a new way for consumers to search for product information, enabling them to obtain advice from other consumers through electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Through eWOM, consumers can share information and knowledge while also building social relationships and online communities. As a result, eWOM is widely regarded as a powerful tool in modern marketing, exerting considerable influence on consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.

Tourism is a highly information-intensive service industry and depends heavily on the Internet for product distribution, market access, and customer communication. In addition, because tourism products are intangible and cannot be directly evaluated before consumption, they are often perceived as high-risk choices. This characteristic makes it difficult for tourists to assess tourism services before experiencing them. Consequently, eWOM has become a valuable source of reference in tourists' decision-making processes, helping them reduce uncertainty and perceived risk when selecting a destination.

Statistics from the Scopus and Web of Science databases for the period 2000–2025 indicate a continuous increase in the number of studies on eWOM and tourism destinations, reflecting the growing scholarly interest in this rapidly developing field. Nevertheless, the existing literature remains fragmented across research themes, scope, units of analysis, and theoretical foundations. In terms of content, current studies primarily examine the effects

of eWOM on destination attitudes, destination image, loyalty, and tourists' destination choice intentions and behaviors. At the same time, some extend the discussion to the roles of online platforms, cultural factors, information quality, and source credibility. Although these studies have provided important evidence on the influence of eWOM in tourism, most have focused mainly on psychological responses or behavioral intentions and have not examined in depth the mechanisms through which eWOM is processed and transformed from information reception into destination choice decisions, particularly among Generation Z tourists.

From a theoretical perspective, most prior studies rely on widely used foundational theories, such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model, and the Model of Goal-Directed Behavior (MGB), to explain behavioral intention in tourism. While these theories are valuable for predicting behavioral responses, they generally do not allow for a deeper analysis of the potentially different effects of various forms of eWOM as persuasive communication in digital environments. Notably, most studies continue to treat eWOM as a relatively homogeneous construct and assess its overall impact on tourists' attitudes, intentions, and behaviors. However, this approach does not fully capture the nature of information reception and processing in digital communication environments, where users may not receive or process all information through the same cognitive mechanism.

According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), individuals may receive and respond to information through two routes: central and peripheral cues. Central cues refer to information directly related to a product or destination's attributes, quality, and value, requiring relatively deep analysis and evaluation because they directly affect the benefits and experiences consumers expect when deciding to purchase a product or service. By contrast, peripheral cues are suggestive and affective signals, such as presentation format, popularity, or source reputation, which may influence intuitive perceptions and judgments without conveying information directly related to the benefits or value consumers may obtain. Thus, applying the ELM perspective to the analysis of eWOM is expected to provide deeper insights into the mechanisms through which persuasive information affects consumers' purchase decision-making.

This gap becomes even more evident in research on Generation Z tourists' destination choice behavior. As a generation that has grown up with the Internet, smart devices, and social media, Generation Z has a high level of online presence and frequently uses digital platforms to search for, receive, and share travel-related information. Recent studies suggest that digital environments play a significant role in shaping Generation Z's perceptions and guiding their behavior. However,

most current studies focus only on the general influence of technology, social media, or eWOM on travel behavior, or on comparisons of Generation Z's characteristics with those of other generations. At the same time, the mechanisms by which this group processes eWOM in the context of destination choice have not been sufficiently examined. Specifically, there is still a lack of empirical evidence regarding whether Generation Z responds to eWOM primarily through central cues, peripheral cues, or a combination of both. Meanwhile, destination choice is an information-processing decision-making process in which individuals receive, filter, evaluate, and transform information into judgments and behavioral choices. Therefore, investigating the mechanisms through which different types of eWOM information influence Generation Z tourists' destination choice decisions is both necessary and timely.

1.2. Practical rationale

According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the number of Internet users worldwide reached 6 billion in 2025, accounting for approximately 74% of the global population. In Vietnam, there are currently about 79.8 million Internet users, representing 78.8% of the total population and ranking the country eighth among Asian nations in terms of Internet penetration. In addition, the number of social media users in Vietnam has exceeded 80 million, accounting for 80% of the total population, and this figure continues to rise. On average, each user spends approximately 6 hours and 18 minutes per day on online activities, of which around 2 hours and 25 minutes are devoted to social media use. These figures not only reflect the rapid growth of the Internet and social media in Vietnam, but also indicate an increasing dependence on technology in everyday life, especially among Generation Z.

Vietnam's population was estimated at 102.5 million in 2025, of which approximately 15.5% were between the ages of 15 and 29, totaling 15.9 million people belonging to Generation Z. This group is highly proficient in technology and exerts considerable influence across economic sectors, particularly tourism. Research indicates that Generation Z is not only a highly promising customer segment, but also one that significantly shapes future consumption trends and destination choices. Despite the growing importance of this tourist group, empirical research clarifying the impact of eWOM on Generation Z tourists' destination choice decisions in Vietnam remains limited.

Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, with an area of 3,328.9 km² and a population of 8.4 million, is not only the political, economic, and cultural center of the country but also a destination with considerable tourism potential. According to the Hanoi Department of Tourism, the city's tourism industry has experienced rapid growth in recent years. In 2025, the total number of tourist arrivals to Hanoi was estimated at approximately 33.7

million, an increase of 20.9% from 2024. This figure included more than 7.82 million international visitors, up 22.8%, and more than 25.9 million domestic visitors, up 20.32%, with the visitor structure becoming increasingly younger. Total tourism revenue was estimated at over VND 134.46 trillion, up 21.5% from 2024. Although this growth is a positive signal, intensifying competition among destinations, both domestically and regionally, makes it essential to understand tourists' motivations and destination-choice behavior, particularly those of Generation Z, in the context of rapidly advancing information and communication technologies. Such understanding would not only help Hanoi develop effective marketing strategies but also support policymakers in formulating sustainable tourism policies and responding to the growing demands of the young tourist market. Understanding and leveraging eWOM would give Hanoi's tourism sector a significant competitive advantage amid globalization and intense destination competition worldwide.

Given the theoretical gap concerning the impact of social media-based eWOM on Generation Z tourists' destination choice decisions, together with the practical demands arising from tourism development and the significance of this issue for expanding the tourist market of tourism businesses and state tourism management agencies in Hanoi, the author selected the topic **“The impact of electronic word of mouth via social media on the destination choice decision of generation Z travelers to Hanoi, Vietnam”** for this dissertation.

2. Research objectives

2.1. General objective

The general objective of this study is to identify and analyze the effects of central and peripheral information conveyed through eWOM on Generation Z tourists' decisions to choose Hanoi as a tourism destination in Vietnam. Based on these findings, the study also proposes managerial implications for relevant stakeholders to more effectively manage and leverage eWOM to attract a greater number of young tourists to Hanoi.

2.2. Specific objectives

- Systematize the theoretical foundations of eWOM and clarify its influence on Generation Z tourists' destination choice decisions.
- Propose a theoretical model and develop measurement scales to assess the impact of eWOM on Generation Z tourists' destination choice decisions.
- Examine the effects of eWOM-related factors on eWOM adoption and on the decision to choose Hanoi as a tourism destination among Generation Z tourists in Vietnam.
- Provide managerial implications and recommendations for stakeholders involved in Hanoi's tourism destination management, as well as for comparable destinations, to effectively leverage eWOM in shaping Generation Z tourists'

destination choice decisions in Vietnam.

3. Research questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

Question 1. How do central and peripheral cues from social media-based eWOM influence Generation Z tourists' attitudes toward and adoption of eWOM?

Question 2. How do attitudes toward and acceptance of eWOM affect the actual destination choice behavior of Generation Z tourists?

Question 3. Are there differences across age groups and genders within Generation Z in the reception of eWOM information and in actual destination choice behavior?

Question 4. What managerial implications can be proposed to optimize eWOM in support of destination choice decisions among Generation Z tourists in Vietnam?

4. Research subject and scope

4.1. Research subject

The research subject of this dissertation is the influence of eWOM factors on the destination choice decisions of Generation Z tourists in Vietnam.

The study population consists of Generation Z tourists in Vietnam who visited Hanoi within 1 year before the survey and used social media information in making their destination choice decisions.

The survey respondents were tourists born between 1996 and 2005 who were surveyed at well-known tourist attractions in Hanoi and had used social media-based eWOM to make their destination choice decisions.

4.2. Research scope

4.2.1. Scope in terms of content

The dissertation focuses on analyzing the effects of different information groups, namely central information and peripheral information, conveyed through eWOM on Generation Z tourists' perceptions and destination choice behavior.

4.2.2. Scope in terms of space

The dissertation was conducted in Hanoi, a designated tourism destination (hereafter referred to as the Hanoi destination).

4.2.3. Scope in terms of time

Secondary data: Information and statistics on the state of tourism development in Hanoi during the 2020–2025 period were collected from reports issued by the Hanoi Department of Tourism and relevant studies to provide the necessary research background for the dissertation.

Primary data: Primary data were collected directly from tourists born between 1996 and 2005 who used eWOM information to choose their tourism destinations. The survey was conducted at major tourist attractions in Hanoi, including the Temple of Literature, the Presidential Palace

Historical Site, the Imperial Citadel of Thang Long, Hoa Lo Prison, Hoan Kiem Lake, and its surrounding area, from December 2024 to March 2025.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1. SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA–BASED ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH ON GENERATION Z TOURISTS’ DESTINATION CHOICE DECISIONS

1.1. Word of mouth and electronic word of mouth

1.1.1. Word of mouth (WOM)

WOM refers to the informal exchange of information about products and services through verbal communication between consumers regarding their experiences with those products or services. Such communication may influence their attitudes and lead to either positive or negative purchasing behavior.

1.1.2. Electronic word of mouth (eWOM)

The existing academic literature offers various definitions of eWOM from different perspectives. However, in the context of this dissertation, eWOM is defined as online comments, reviews, and evaluations of tourism destinations shared on social media platforms.

1.2. Central cue and Peripheral cue

1.2.1. Concepts and approaches in tourism research

This study conceptualizes central cues that enhance the usefulness and diagnosticity of information about a destination or tourism service, including argument quality, specificity, relevance, timeliness, clarity, and consistency. In contrast, peripheral cues are those that enable tourists to quickly assess the credibility, popularity, attractiveness, and social authenticity of information, such as a poster’s reputation, the number of reviews, ratings, interaction indicators, and the reviewer’s level of self-disclosure.

1.2.2. Components of central and peripheral cue in social media–based tourism eWOM

The components of central information are treated as a group of variables that primarily predict the usefulness and diagnosticity of eWOM. In contrast, the components of peripheral information are considered a group of variables that primarily predict credibility, the degree of social validation, and rapid inferences regarding the value of information. On this basis, both groups of cues jointly influence information adoption and tourists’ destination choice decisions in the social media environment.

1.3. Social media

1.3.1. Concept

Social media is a user-centered digital communication environment that enables users to establish and maintain relationships, create and disseminate content, and participate in either public or private interactions, while also being shaped by platform-governed mechanisms of information distribution.

1.3.2. Classification and Characteristics

1.3.3. The relationship between eWOM and social media

In the contemporary digital communication context, the relationship between social media and eWOM is structural. Social media is not merely the setting in which eWOM appears, but also a socio-technical infrastructure that shapes how eWOM is created, disseminated, and received.

1.4. Tourists and generation Z tourists

1.4.1. Concepts of tourists and Generation Z tourists

According to the 2017 Vietnam Tourism Law, a tourist is a person who travels, or combines travel with other purposes, except when the primary purpose is studying or working for income at the destination. Accordingly, tourists include domestic tourists, international tourists visiting Vietnam, and outbound tourists.

Generation Z is the generation associated with the greatest variety of labels, including Post-Millennials, iGeneration, Gen Tech, Gen Online, Gen C (connected generation), and Gen R (responsible generation). Seemiller and Grace (2021) suggest that Generation Z includes individuals born from the mid-1990s to around 2010. Consistent with previous scholars, this study defines Generation Z as individuals born between 1996 and 2010 (Randstad, 2017; God & Lee, 2018; Seemiller & Grace, 2021).

1.4.2. Characteristics of Generation Z tourists

First, unlike previous generations, Generation Z is highly familiar with and dependent on the Internet (Kapil & Roy, 2014; Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015; McKinsey, 2020; Seemiller & Grace, 2021).

Second, Generation Z has a clear understanding of its own needs, desires, and expectations (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015).

Third, Generation Z places great importance on social connectedness during travel.

1.5. Generation Z tourists' destination choice decisions

1.5.1. Tourism destination

Most tourism activities take place at destinations. At present, there are various definitions of tourism destination derived from different theoretical and practical approaches. In this dissertation, a tourism destination is understood as a place that possesses tourism resources and can satisfy tourists' needs and desires.

1.5.2. Destination choice decision

A tourism destination choice decision is a complex process that involves receiving, evaluating, comparing, and filtering information about competing destinations on the basis of personal needs, destination attributes, and cues from the digital communication environment, ultimately resulting in a preference for a specific destination. This process is influenced not only by objective factors but also profoundly shaped by individual emotions and psychological states. These elements may affect how tourists search for, evaluate, and compare destinations, thereby leading to their final choice.

1.6. Literature review on the impact of social media based eWOM on Generation Z tourists' destination choice behavior

A synthesis of domestic and international studies indicates that research on social media based eWOM and its effects on destination choice has grown rapidly, with an increasingly diverse range of research themes (Figure 1.1). This expanding literature has enhanced the understanding of multiple dimensions of tourists' destination choice behavior.

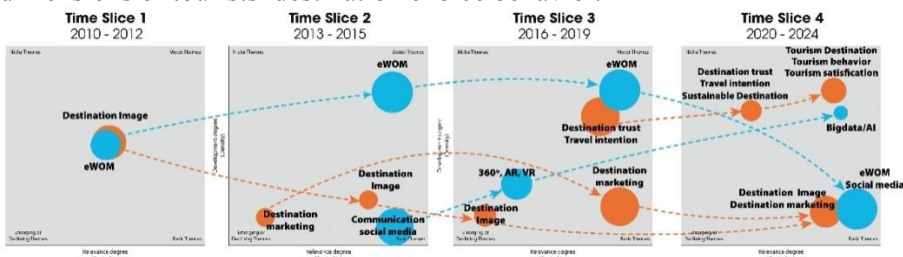


Figure 1.1. Evolution of research themes over time (2010-2024)

The cluster analysis of the keyword co-occurrence network revealed two prominent research themes: (1) studies examining the factors influencing the adoption of eWOM, and (2) studies investigating the impact of eWOM on destination choice behavior (Figure 1.2).

Prior studies consistently demonstrate that factors such as information quality and source credibility are critical antecedents of eWOM adoption. These findings have contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of how eWOM influences travel-related decisions and have provided practical implications for tourism marketing. Nevertheless, the literature also suggests that notable gaps remain in explaining how eWOM shapes destination choice behavior particularly among Generation Z tourists in Vietnam.

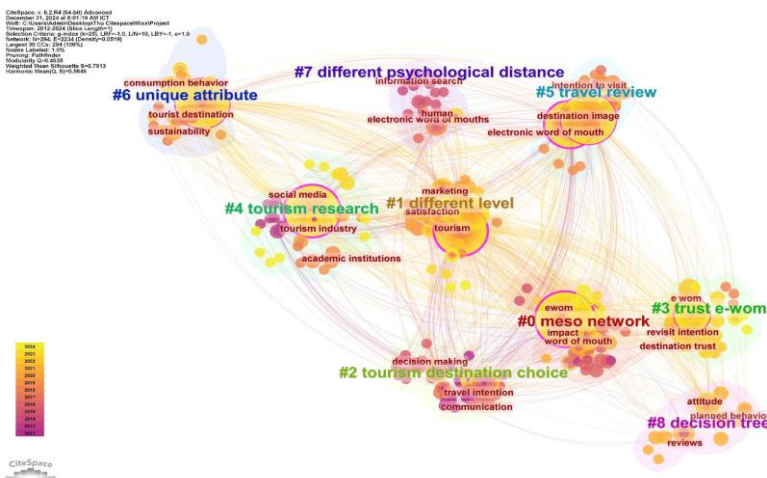


Figure 1.2. Network of research theme clusters

1.7. Research gaps

First, although previous studies have established the influence of eWOM on tourism-related attitudes, intentions, and behaviors, they have not yet provided a comprehensive and systematic explanation of the intermediary process through which information reception, credibility assessment, perceived usefulness, and eWOM adoption lead to destination choice decisions.

Second, from a theoretical standpoint, most existing studies continue to treat eWOM as a unified construct and do not clearly distinguish between central and peripheral information. Consequently, there remains insufficient theoretical grounding and empirical evidence to determine which information route exerts a more prominent influence, or to explain the specific mechanism by which each route affects destination choice decisions.

Third, although Generation Z tourists have attracted increasing attention in studies on social media, digital technology, and eWOM, how this group receives, evaluates, and utilizes eWOM cues in the destination choice process remains insufficiently understood. In particular, there is still a shortage of studies examining the differing effects of central and peripheral information on the destination choice decisions of this group.

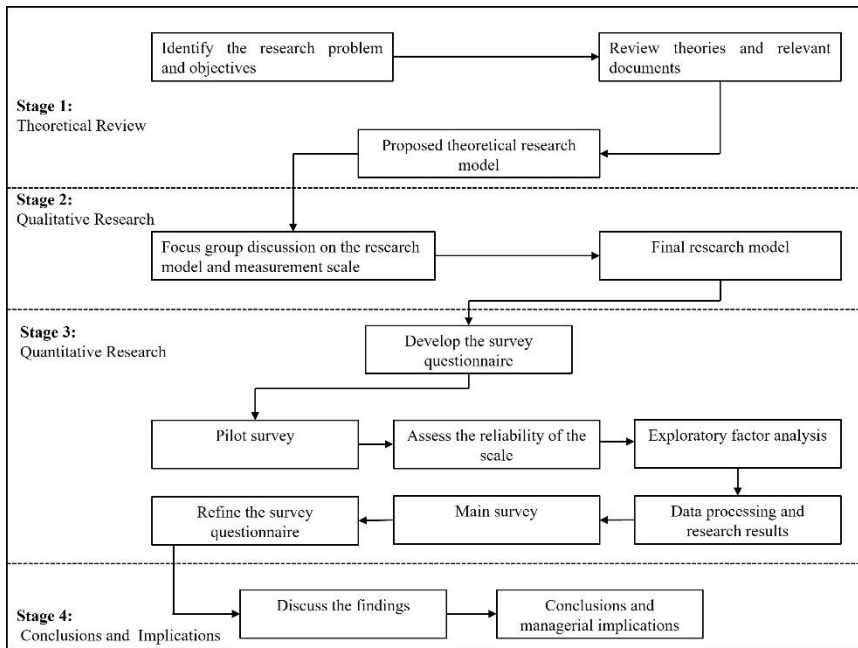


Figure 2.2. Research process of the dissertation

2.3. Research hypotheses and research model

2.3.1. Research hypotheses

H1. Argument quality has a positive effect on the perceived usefulness of eWOM.

H2. Information perception has a positive effect on the perceived usefulness of eWOM.

H3. Source credibility has a positive effect on the credibility of eWOM.

H4. Source expertise has a positive effect on the credibility of eWOM.

H5. The quantity of eWOM information has a positive effect on the credibility of eWOM.

H6. Greater perceived usefulness of eWOM leads to a higher level of eWOM adoption.

H7. Greater credibility of eWOM leads to a higher level of eWOM adoption.

H8. Greater perceived usefulness of eWOM has a positive effect on tourists' destination choice decisions.

H9. Greater credibility of eWOM has a positive effect on tourists' destination choice decisions.

H10. The perceived usefulness of eWOM mediates the relationship between argument quality and Generation Z tourists' destination choice behavior.

H11. The credibility of eWOM mediates the relationship between argument quality and Generation Z tourists' destination choice behavior.

H12. eWOM adoption mediates the relationship between the perceived usefulness and credibility of eWOM and Generation Z tourists' destination choice decisions.

2.3.2. Research model

The final research model proposed by the doctoral candidate comprises nine research constructs and twelve specific hypotheses, as presented below:

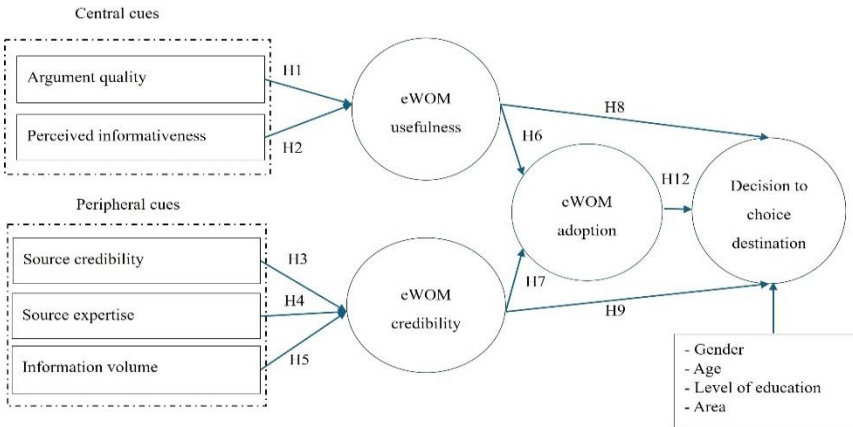


Figure 2.2. Research model

2.4. Scale development and questionnaire design

2.4.1. Scale development

The scale development procedure in this study followed four stages (Figure 2.3):

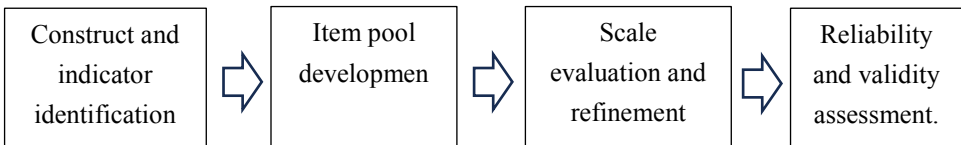


Figure 2.3. Scale development procedure

2.4.2. Questionnaire design

Based on the measurement scales for the constructs in the proposed research model, revised through expert review, the doctoral candidate prepared a pilot survey instrument. The questionnaire was designed in two sections:

- Section 1: Measuring Generation Z tourists' evaluations of the

constructs in the proposed model.

- Section 2: Collecting respondents’ demographic information at tourist attractions (including gender, educational attainment, income, and area of residence).

2.5. Data collection methods

2.5.1. Survey respondents

The target respondents for this dissertation were identified as Generation Z tourists (aged 18-26) who visited major tourist attractions in Hanoi and used social media based eWOM to inform their destination choice decisions. The lower age threshold of 18 was applied because, under Vietnam’s Youth Law (2020), individuals at this age are considered to have reached a certain level of maturity and are capable of independent thinking and judgment. To ensure compliance with the sampling criteria, questionnaires completed by Generation Z respondents who were under 18 years old were excluded.

2.5.2. Determining sample size

Following the guidelines suggested by Cochran and Hair, the required sample size ranged from 330 to 390 observations. However, to mitigate potential data loss due to incomplete or invalid responses, the author distributed 660 questionnaires.

Data collection was conducted from December 2024 to March 2025 using face to face surveys at key tourist sites in Hanoi, including the Temple of Literature (Van Mieu - Quoc Tu Giam), the Thang Long Imperial Citadel, Hoa Lo Prison Relic, the Presidential Palace Historical Site, and the Hoan Kiem Lake area.

2.6. Data analysis methods

In this dissertation, the measurement model and the structural model were evaluated using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4, with the specific procedures summarized in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Analyses conducted using SmartPLS 4

No.	Model evaluated	Procedures
1	Measurement model	Internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s alpha; Composite reliability); Convergent validity (AVE; outer loadings); Discriminant validity (cross-loadings; Fornell–Larcker criterion; HTMT); for exogenous constructs: Convergent validity (residual analysis); Collinearity (VIF); Significance and relevance of formative indicators (significance testing of outer weights).

2	Structural model	Collinearity (VIF); Significance and relevance of structural relationships (path coefficients); Mediation analysis (indirect effects); Explained variance (R^2); Out-of-sample predictive power (Q^2_{predict}).
3	Additional analysis	Multi-group analysis (MGA).

(Source: Compiled by the doctoral candidate)

2.7. Preliminary study results

The preliminary analysis confirmed the reliability of the measurement scales, as assessed by Cronbach's alpha, for the latent constructs. Three indicators were removed due to inadequate performance: PI3 (measuring *information perception*), EU2 (measuring *perceived usefulness of eWOM information*), and SC4 (measuring *source credibility*). The results indicate that the refined scales adequately represent the underlying constructs. The preliminary study also included EFA, and the results suggest that the measurement scales met the required conditions to proceed to the main study phase.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1. Sample description

A field survey was conducted by the doctoral candidate at major tourist attractions in Hanoi including the Van Mieu - Quoc Tu Giam), the Thang Long Imperial Citadel, the Ho Chi Minh Presidential Palace Historical Site, Hoa Lo Prison Relic, and the Hoan Kiem Lake area from December 2024 to March 2025. A total of 660 questionnaires were distributed to Generation Z tourists, and 640 were returned, resulting in a response rate of 96.7%. After excluding incomplete or near-identical answer patterns, 621 valid questionnaires were retained for subsequent analysis.

3.2. Measurement model results

3.2.1. Assessment of internal consistency reliability

The survey data analysis indicates that the constructs employed in this study AQ, PI, SC, SE, EV, EU, EC, EA, and DE demonstrate satisfactory reliability and adequacy (Table 3.1). Accordingly, subsequent analyses and findings based on these constructs can be interpreted with an acceptable level of measurement precision and robustness.

Table 3.1. Outer loadings and internal consistency reliability of the measurement scales in the proposed research model

Variables	AVE	CR (rho_a)	Cronbach's alphas
AQ	0.625	0.801	0.800
PI	0.727	0.814	0.812
SC	0.715	0.801	0.801
SE	0.697	0.857	0.855
EV	0.672	0.845	0.838
EC	0.695	0.855	0.853
EU	0.741	0.828	0.825
EA	0.644	0.817	0.815
DE	0.666	0.835	0.832

(Source: Processed from survey data, 2025)

3.3.2. Assessment of discriminant validity among latent constructs

Discriminant validity among the latent constructs was assessed using the heterotrait monotrait ratio (HTMT). The results report HTMT values for all pairs of constructs in a correlation matrix. All HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.85, indicating that the latent constructs in this study are empirically distinct from one another.

In addition, the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion was applied to evaluate discriminant validity further. The results show that the square roots of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct (diagonal elements) are greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations (off-diagonal elements in the same

column). Therefore, the measurement scales demonstrate satisfactory discriminant validity (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2. Square roots of AVE (Fornell-Larcker criterion)

	AQ	DE	EA	EC	EU	EV	PI	SC	SE
AQ	0.791								
DE	0.459	0.816							
EA	0.494	0.699	0.803						
EC	0.485	0.652	0.682	0.833					
EU	0.657	0.627	0.658	0.591	0.861				
EV	0.473	0.529	0.608	0.651	0.593	0.820			
PI	0.518	0.489	0.539	0.473	0.614	0.471	0.852		
SC	0.451	0.547	0.564	0.613	0.562	0.602	0.421	0.846	
SE	0.440	0.595	0.563	0.678	0.564	0.613	0.468	0.580	0.835

(Source: Processed from survey data, 2025)

All nine research constructs AQ, PI, SC, SE, EV, EU, EC, EA, and DE demonstrate satisfactory reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

3.3.3. Assessment of multicollinearity

Table 3.3 reports that the variance inflation factor (VIF) values for all endogenous constructs and their corresponding exogenous predictors are below 3.0. Therefore, multicollinearity among the predictive constructs is not a concern in the proposed research model.

Table 3.3. VIF values in the research model

	AQ	DE	EA	EC	EU	EV	PI	SC	SE
AQ					1.367				
DE									
EA		2.297							
EC		2.002	1.537						
EU		1.889	1.537						
EV				1.876					
PI					1.367				
SC				1.765					
SE				1.803					

(Source: Processed from survey data, 2025)

3.3.4. Hypothesis testing

The structural model assessment results indicate that all research hypotheses (H1- H10) are supported at the 1% significance level.

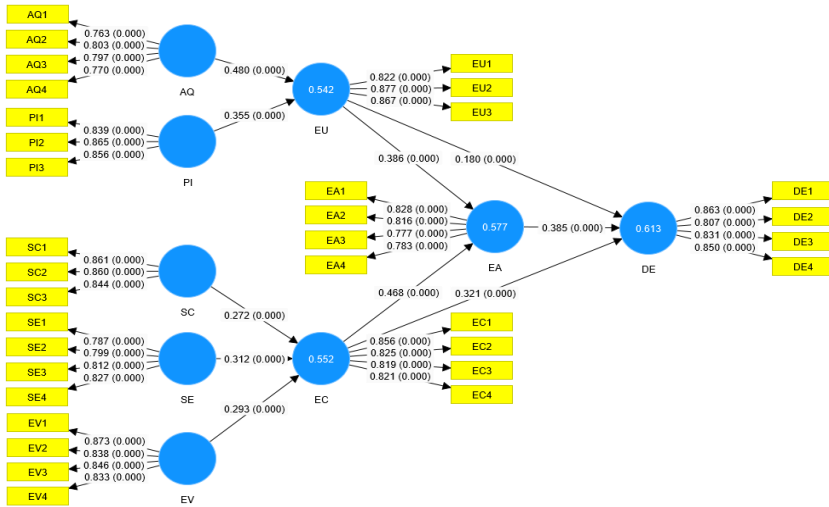


Figure 3.1. Structural model results

(Source: Processed from survey data, 2025)

3.4.5. Model explanatory power: R^2 assessment

The developed model demonstrates substantial explanatory power. The results are summarized in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4. Coefficients of determination (R^2)

Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Interpretation
DE	0.574	0.571	Moderate explanatory power
EA	0.565	0.613	Moderate explanatory power
EC	0.577	0.575	Moderate explanatory power
EU	0.534	0.532	Moderate explanatory power

(Source: Processed from survey data, 2025)

3.4.6. Effect size (f^2) assessment

The f^2 effect size indicates the magnitude of each exogenous construct's contribution to an endogenous construct.

Table 3.5. Effect sizes (f^2) of relationships in the model

Relationship	f^2	Interpretation
AQ → EU	0.355	Large effect
EA → DE	0.162	Medium effect
EC → DE	0.132	Medium effect
EC → EA	0.344	Medium effect
EU → DE	0.045	Small effect
EU → EA	0.233	Medium effect
EV → EC	0.113	Small effect

PI → EU	0.194	Medium effect
SC → EC	0.093	Small effect
SE → EC	0.126	Medium effect

(Source: Processed from survey data, 2025)

3.4.7. Out-of-sample predictive assessment

The model's predictive performance was evaluated using the blindfolding procedure. The results show that all Q² predict values are below 0.5, indicating a high level of predictive accuracy.

3.5. Mean difference tests and multi-group structural analysis

3.5.1. Results of mean-difference tests

The results indicate statistically significant differences in the actual destination choice behavior (DE) of Generation Z tourists by gender and birth cohort. In contrast, no meaningful differences were found across education level, occupation, average monthly income, or area of residence (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6. Summary of mean differences in the impact of eWOM on Hanoi destination choice among Generation Z tourists in Vietnam

No	Control variable	Test	Mean difference in destination choice
1	Gender	T-test	Significant difference
2	Education level	ANOVA	No significant difference
3	Birth year	T-test	Significant difference
4	Occupation	ANOVA	No significant difference
5	Average monthly income	ANOVA	No significant difference
6	Area of residence	ANOVA	No significant difference

(Source: Processed from survey data, 2025)

3.5.2. Multi-group analysis (MGA) results

3.5.2.1. Gender-based differences

The multi-group analysis (MGA) results indicate statistically significant differences between male and female groups for several relationships in the research model.

3.5.2.2. Birth-cohort differences within Generation Z

The MGA results further show that birth cohort also produces statistically significant differences in several relationships within the model.

CHAPTER 4. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1. Discussion of research findings

4.1.1. The impact of different types of information on generation Z tourists' destination choice decisions

The empirical results derived from the PLS-SEM analysis indicate that both central and peripheral information in eWOM significantly influence Generation Z tourists' attitudes and destination choice behavior, particularly within the context of digital communication and social media. This finding is consistent with the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), which suggests that tourists receive and evaluate eWOM through two primary routes: first, by assessing information based on its quality and logical strength (central cues), and second, by relying on peripheral cues such as source credibility and information popularity (peripheral cues). These findings also reinforce Hedhli and Zourrig's (2022) argument that the dual-process information model (ELM) is a more useful, widely applicable, and appropriate framework for persuasion research than single-route models.

By distinguishing between central and peripheral information in eWOM, the study clarifies the mechanisms by which these two groups of cues affect tourists' information processing and behavioral decisions. For Generation Z tourists, peripheral information exerts a stronger influence on destination choice than central information. This finding is consistent with Cheung and Thadani (2012), who argue that in online environments, where information cannot be directly verified, social cues play an important role in establishing information credibility, thereby enabling consumers to make decisions more quickly and with greater confidence. The results suggest that, in processing information, Generation Z tourists do not rely solely on informational content; they also depend on social cues and source-based validation, particularly from influencers or reputable experts within online communities.

By integrating the ELM and the Information Adoption Model (IAM), the study further clarifies the mediating role of perceived usefulness and credibility in eWOM, thereby providing a more comprehensive explanation of tourists' decision-making processes. Specifically, central information, reflected in information quality, strongly influences information adoption, whereas peripheral information, particularly source credibility, plays a decisive role in encouraging destination choice behavior. This is especially relevant for Generation Z, a consumer group characterized by rapid

information processing and a strong sensitivity to social cues and source reputation, both of which directly shape their travel decisions.

Finally, distinguishing eWOM into central and peripheral information not only extends eWOM theory but also provides a more detailed explanation of the persuasive mechanisms through which eWOM influences destination choice behavior. Peripheral cues, such as the prominence of the information source on social media, may strengthen trust and reduce tourists' uncertainty, especially among Generation Z, a consumer group highly responsive to social signals. This finding not only adds theoretical depth to eWOM research but also provides a strong conceptual basis for digital tourism marketing strategies, in which credibility and social interaction increasingly shape consumers' destination choices.

4.1.2. Differences by gender and age group within generation Z in destination choice decisions

The MGA results indicate that gender is an important moderating variable in the mechanisms by which eWOM information is received and processed, with males and females showing significant differences in the cognitive processes that lead to eWOM adoption. Specifically, male tourists tend to be more strongly influenced by information credibility in their acceptance of eWOM, whereas female tourists are more sensitive to information usefulness and quality. These findings are consistent with prior research on gender differences in online behavior and eWOM adoption (Hoàng Thị Phương Thảo & Trần Diệu Hằng, 2023; Kim et al., 2007; Leong et al., 2024; Vinerea et al., 2025).

The analysis also shows that tourists born between 2001 and 2005 are more strongly influenced by information credibility in their acceptance of eWOM than those born between 1996 and 2000. This suggests that younger tourists are more likely to accept eWOM from online sources, consistent with the increasingly widespread use of social media and other online platforms among Generation Z.

4.2. Managerial implications

First, the findings indicate that, for eWOM to influence destination choice decisions effectively, destination managers need to enhance the usefulness of information by improving argument quality, optimizing content organization, and strengthening the updating, filtering, and personalization of information. This confirms that the value of eWOM lies not in the quantity of information, but in its ability to help tourists evaluate and choose destinations more effectively.

Second, regarding peripheral information, the study suggests that eWOM effectiveness depends heavily on the ability to build trust in digital

environments. Accordingly, destination management should focus on developing knowledgeable information sources, reinforcing mechanisms for information verification, and maintaining a stable presence of credible eWOM across digital platforms. In this sense, managing eWOM is not merely a matter of communication management, but also of managing trust and the social validation of information.

Third, gender differences indicate that eWOM should be managed more flexibly across tourist segments. Specifically, male tourists tend to be more sensitive to information credibility, whereas female tourists place greater emphasis on content quality, clarity, and practical value. This finding implies that destination communication activities should adjust their persuasive focus in accordance with the information-processing characteristics of each gender group.

Fourth, differences between age groups within Generation Z suggest that eWOM management should adopt a micro-segmentation approach rather than relying solely on generational segmentation. While younger tourists respond more strongly to source credibility and source expertise, older tourists place greater value on information usefulness and practical relevance. Therefore, content strategies and communication approaches should be tailored to the specific characteristics of each age subgroup.

Fifth, based on the current situation and Hanoi's tourism development goals through 2030, the study indicates that eWOM should be regarded as a strategic component of destination development in the digital era. Accordingly, Hanoi should encourage tourists' participation in content dissemination, develop a digital content ecosystem that is visually engaging, integrated, and experience-rich, and intensify the use of technology to expand pre-trip interaction. This provides an important foundation for enhancing the destination's attractiveness and competitiveness, particularly among young tourists.

CONCLUSION

1. Conclusion

The dissertation, entitled “*The impact of electronic word of mouth via social media on the destination choice decision of Generation Z travelers to Hanoi, Vietnam,*” was conducted to comprehensively examine the influence of eWOM on this group’s destination choice behavior. Based on a review of relevant theories and an analysis of previous domestic and international studies, the dissertation identified the key dimensions of eWOM. It synthesized the psychosocial mechanisms through which eWOM influences tourists’ destination choice behavior.

Drawing on the IAM and ELM theoretical frameworks, the dissertation developed a two-stage, dual-process model to examine the effects of two types of central and peripheral cues on eWOM adoption and the destination choice behavior of Generation Z tourists. Specifically, five factors related to eWOM characteristics, drawn from both the central and peripheral information groups, were included in the analysis: information quality, information perception, source credibility, source expertise, and information quantity. Two key mediating variables, namely the perceived usefulness and perceived credibility of eWOM, were identified as playing important roles in the relationship between eWOM characteristics and the information adoption behavior of Generation Z tourists. The results of model testing using factor analysis and structural equation modeling indicate that these factors significantly influence the level of eWOM adoption, which in turn directly affects Generation Z tourists’ decisions to choose Hanoi as a destination.

Based on these findings, the dissertation proposes a set of managerial implications for stakeholders involved in managing Hanoi as a tourism destination. For public authorities, especially the Hanoi Department of Tourism, the findings provide a scientific basis for developing digital communication campaigns targeting Generation Z, in which eWOM plays a central role. For tourism businesses and service providers, the results help shape customer engagement strategies through online social communities by leveraging the organic diffusion of user-generated content (UGC). At the same time, similar destinations in Vietnam may adopt this model to develop modern marketing strategies better aligned with the travel behavior of the digital consumer generation.

2. Novel contributions of the dissertation

2.1. Theoretical contributions

From a theoretical perspective, the dissertation advances eWOM research in tourism by moving beyond viewing eWOM as a homogeneous construct and conceptualizing it as a structure comprising two distinct

groups of information: central cues (CC) and peripheral cues (PC). This approach not only complements previous studies, which have largely emphasized the overall impact of eWOM on tourists' attitudes, intentions, and behavior, but also helps clarify the distinct roles of each information group in the destination choice process. At the same time, integrating ELM and IAM within a single analytical framework enables the dissertation to provide a deeper explanation of the mechanisms by which eWOM exerts its influence, mediated by variables such as usefulness, credibility, and information adoption. On this basis, the study also adds further theoretical evidence concerning Generation Z tourists in the context of digital tourism.

2.2. Practical contributions

From a practical perspective, the dissertation provides a valuable reference framework for destination management authorities, tourism businesses, and communication stakeholders to identify and leverage the role of social media-based eWOM in Generation Z tourists' destination choice decisions. The findings show that, in the context of digital tourism, young tourists' decisions are shaped not only by destination-related informational content but also significantly by source credibility and the accompanying signals of social validation. In this way, the dissertation contributes to a clearer understanding of the mechanisms through which eWOM operates in digital environments, supports the development of tourism marketing and communication activities that are better aligned with the information-processing characteristics of young tourists, and provides a useful basis for future research, comparison, and application across different destination contexts, markets, and tourist groups.

3. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although the dissertation was conducted with considerable methodological rigor, several limitations remain, suggesting directions for future research. First, the study focuses exclusively on Generation Z tourists in Vietnam; therefore, the generalizability of the findings to other cultural and national contexts should be considered with caution. Future studies should thus be extended toward cross-cultural or cross-national comparisons using more diverse datasets, including both domestic and international tourists. Second, the current model examines only eWOM on social media and does not address other online platforms. Accordingly, future research could expand by comparing the effects of central and peripheral processing routes on the reception of eWOM across different platforms to assess their relative influence and effectiveness in shaping tourist behavior.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION

1.1. Article in the journal of Hue University

- (1). **Vu Dinh Hoa**, Tran Huu Tuan, Nguyen Thi Ngoc Anh, Doan Van Tuan, (2025). eWOM in the tourism and hospitality industry: a bibliometric analysis using Citespace, *Hue University Journal of Science: Economics and Development*, Vol. 134, No. 5D, 2025, pp. 55–71, <https://doi.org/10.26459/hueunijed.v134i5D.7653>.
- (2). Nguyen Dinh Tien, **Vu Dinh Hoa**, Nguyen Thi Ngoc Anh. (2025). Destination choice behavior of generation Z tourists in Vietnam: assessing the role of Tiktok short videos, *Hue University Journal of Science: Economics and Development*, Vol. 134, No. 5S, 2025, pp. 87–104, <https://doi.org/10.26459/hueunijed.v134i5S.7839>

1.2. Articles indexed in Web of Science (ISI) and Scopus

- Hoa Vu Dinh**, Tuan Tran Huu, Ngoc Nguyen Thi Bich, Anh Nguyen Thi Ngoc, Tuan Doan Van (2025). Effects of eWOM toward tourism destination: a bibliometric analysis and future research directions. *Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality* 2025; <https://doi.org/10.1108/CBTH-10-2024-0358> (Scopus, Q1)
- (2) **Vu Dinh H**, Mai Le Q (2026;), "Central or peripheral? The effect of cognitive elaboration cues on eWOM and destination choice of gen Z travelers to Hanoi, Vietnam". *Journal of Tourism Futures*, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JTF-04-2025-0085> (Scopus, Q1)

1.3. Article Published in a Scientific Journal Recognized by the State Professorial Council

- Vu Dinh Hoa (2026), "The Influence of Electronic Word-of-Mouth on the TikTok Social Media Platform on Generation Z Tourists' Decisions to Choose Hanoi as a Destination in Vietnam," *Economics–Finance: Online Special Issue on Economic and Financial Research*, e-ISSN: 3093-334X, No. 102. Article available at: <https://nghienccuu.tapchikinhthetachinh.vn/anh-huong-cua-truyen-mieng-dien-tu-tren-mang-xa-hoi-tiktok-denquyet-dinh-lua-chon-diem-den-hanoi-cua-du-khach-the-he-z-o-viet-nam-142366.html>