

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH AND GEN Z CONSUMERS' INTENTION IN SELECTING EATING PLACE IN HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

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Abstract: Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) is one of the prevalent forms of information interaction activities in the era of digital technology. In the F&B field, it can be understood as the method by which consumers share information, experiences and reviews about the products and services from individuals or businesses through various online channels such as social media, forums, personal blogs and other platforms. Reflecting current trends, this research aims to examine the factors and the extent to which eWOM influences the behaviour of Generation Z consumers in Ho Chi Minh City. The research methods employed include qualitative and quantitative approaches, serving the purpose of literature review, statistical data analysis and structural equation modelling to assess the relationship between eWOM and the decision-making process in choosing eating places. The study reveals that four factors, namely information quality, information credibility, relevance of information and attitude towards information, directly impact the acceptance of eWOM information, subsequently influencing the intention selection of Gen Z consumers in Ho Chi Minh City. Additionally, brand trust is identified as a positive factor in this research relationship. The findings provide valuable insights into the role of eWOM in the intention selection of Gen Z consumers. This information can be applied by managers and marketers to develop more intelligent management and marketing strategies in Ho Chi Minh City, providing a competitive advantage for businesses.

Keywords: Generation Z consumers, eating places, eWOM, eWOM information, intention selection

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INTRODUCTION

Online communication and advertising have become integral components of marketing strategies and customer engagement for businesses in the era of the 4.0 digital technology (Shankar et al., 2022; Leung et al., 2022). Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) is recognized as one of the effective marketing and brand promotion channels in the online landscape (Hussain et al., 2018). The diversity of devices and digital platforms allows businesses and consumers to create, share and evaluate various types of content to achieve individual goals. These objectives include information provision and retrieval, product evaluation, reflection on substandard products, provision of business remediation services and alerting other consumers about specific products or services (Shankar et al., 2022).

In the realm of the food and beverage industry, intangible factors, such as the ambience of a restaurant, cannot be assessed prior to the consumer experience. Consequently, purchasing intangible products and services carries higher risks, making consumers more reliant on the personal influence of eWOM (Yan et al., 2018). eWOM extends customers' choices in gathering information about products and services from other consumers; in other words, the digital environment plays a pioneering role in collecting reliable information. As a result, eWOM exerts a significant influence on the consumer decision-making process (Jeong and Jang, 2011). The rapid development of technology and the surge in social media have brought about significant changes in how consumers, particularly the Gen Z demographic, seek and make decisions about eating places. Gen Z has emerged as one of the most important and influential customer groups in the food service industry. They tend to utilize social media and electronic communication platforms to seek information, share experiences and provide reviews about dining establishments (Skinner et al., 2018). Currently, eWOM has become a crucial factor in the decision-making process of Gen Z consumers when selecting eating places.

The research aims to determine the impact of eWOM on the selection decision of Gen Z consumers in choosing eating places in Ho Chi Minh City. In addition, the study aims to provide managerial implications in the food service industry to maximize the potential of eWOM in attracting and retaining this consumers segment.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

eWOM and eWOM Information Acceptance

One of the widely used definitions of eWOM is provided by Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004 stating that “eWOM is any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made

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available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet”. The Internet has created a new environment for sharing opinions, reviews and feedback from consumers, facilitating the growth and proliferation of eWOM. Simultaneously, it has transformed the traditional form of word-of-mouth (WOM) into a new information-sharing form that can occur through various online platforms (Yang, 2013). Notably, the information can be accessed and viewed at any location and time, within a short timeframe (Abubakar and Ilkan, 2016; Cur et al., 2022). The robust development of the internet and online social networks has significantly expanded the potential impact of eWOM on consumer decisions (Almana and Mirza, 2013). It provides consumers with a reliable source of information and reflects others’ opinions and evaluations of products or services. Using personal social networks, they can now interact and share opinions and experiences about products or services with family, friends and even strangers through various methods (Chu and Kim, 2011).

This creates a multi-dimensional interactive environment, allowing consumers to receive detailed information and authentic perceptions of a specific service, product or location. Reviews and evaluations are important factors that help them make purchasing decisions (Almana and Mirza, 2013). When consumers read positive reviews from other users about a product, they are more likely to trust and are more inclined to make a purchase decision. If there are negative reviews, they may eliminate that product from their consideration list (Malika et al., 2022).

The acceptance of eWOM information is considered an essential theory in conducting research on eWOM. According to Zhang and Watts (2008), eWOM information acceptance is defined as the extent to which consumers accept online reviews after considering the validity of these reviews and using them to make consumption decisions. Research on the influencing factors of eWOM acceptance has been conducted both domestically and internationally, but there is no consensus on these factors. Filieri and McLeay (2014) identified factors including information timeliness, information understandability, information relevance, information accuracy, value-added information and information completeness. On the other hand, Sardar et al., (2021) suggested that information quality, information credibility, needs of information, attitude towards information, information usefulness and information adoption are the six main factors influencing eWOM acceptance. Identifying these factors helps to gain a deeper understanding of which elements may impact the process of eWOM acceptance and subsequently develop influencing strategies in shaping consumer decision-making processes.

Gen Z Consumers

Although numerous studies have been conducted on Generation Z (Gen Z), there is still no complete consensus on the age range of this group among researchers, particularly regarding differences in views on the starting and ending points of this generation. Some researchers argue that Gen Z began in the mid-1990s (Berkup, 2014), while others consider 2005 as the starting point. According to Bassiouni and Hackley (2014): Gen Z can mainly be classified as those born between 1995 and 2012. Another study on Gen Z by Priporas et al. (2017): “Generation Z are young adults who were born in 1995 or later”, without specifying the end birth year limit. Customers belonging to Gen Z exhibit tech-savvy characteristics and tend to embrace innovative services more readily (Bravo et al., 2020). With a passion for technology, innovative spirit and high standards for quality, Gen Z has initiated a consumer revolution. Current researches indicate that generational differences play an important role in technology adoption (Priporas et al., 2017; Lina et al., 2022). This is the first generation born into a fully digitized world, transmitting information and connecting through online platforms and social media. They seek freedom and exploration while demanding interaction and diverse experiences (Skinner et al., 2018). Gen Z consumers have created their own consumer world, placing high demands on the innovation, uniqueness and value of products or services. They have become a significant force in the modern consumer market. In this study, the authors adopt the age limit perspective of Bassiouni and Hackley (2014), implying that customers in the study comprises individuals born from 1995 to 2012.

Information Acceptance Model (IACM)

The Information Acceptance Model (Figure 1) by Erkan and Evans (2016) is an extension of the Information Acceptance Model (IAM) integrating the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). Erkan and Evans assert that the impact of information should not be limited solely by the characteristics of the information; in conjunction with this, consumer behaviour towards information also needs to be evaluated in combination when considering influencing factors. The study identifies four fundamental factors, namely information quality, information reliability, information needs, and attitude towards information, contributing to the impact on the utility of information and influencing the acceptance of eWOM information. Consequently, these factors affect the behaviour of consumers in the online context.

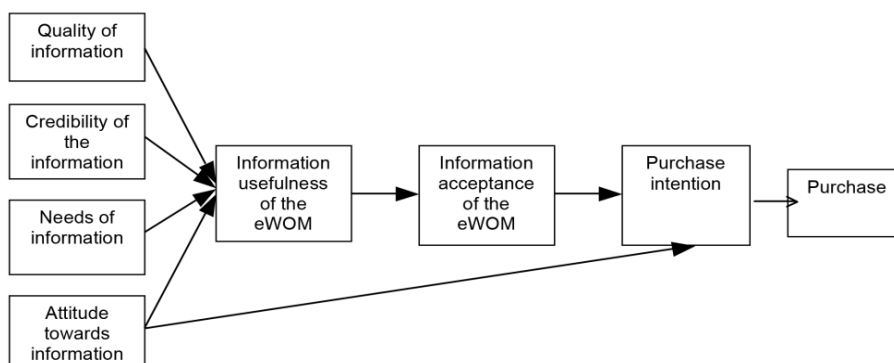


Figure 1. The Information Acceptance Model (IACM) (Source: Adapted from Erkan and Evans, 2016)

Information Quality

The internet enables people to share opinions and reviews about products and services from anywhere. However, this raises concerns about the quality of information and the difficulty in assessing accuracy (Sardar et al., 2021). Park et al. (2007) emphasize that information quality plays a crucial role in influencing consumer behavior and attitudes in the online environment. In the online context, information contributed by online consumers responds better to the information needs of users (Salaiin and Flores, 2001). Consumers perceive that the eWOM information provided is of high quality, they tend to accept and trust that information when engaging in online consumption (Sussman and Siegal, 2003; Lee et al., 2012). In the current Food and Beverage (F&B) industry, information quality is considered an important factor (Ho et al., 2015) for consumers to consider the eating places they plan to choose. They often rely on information to assess the quality of service and products of a specific F&B business. Based on these arguments, a hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Information quality positively influences the eWOM information acceptance of Gen Z consumers.

Information Credibility

The credibility of information stands as a crucial determinant in the acceptance of eWOM information by consumers (Sardar et al., 2021) and holds a significant role in consumer decision-making processes (Leong et al., 2022). In the digital landscape, consumers benefit from an environment where they can freely exchange information, utilizing anonymous accounts to share product experiences and reviews transparently without divulging personal details (DeNardis and Hack, 2015). This enables the provision of authentic reviews, including negative feedback, fostering user-generated content that aligns closely with reality (Mosteller and Poddar, 2017). Consequently, this contributes to enhancing information credibility and positively affecting the acceptance of eWOM information. Moreover, contemporary users exhibit a tendency to read and trust information from “profiles” perceived as reliable, such as individuals with credibility in the respective field or notable figures who garner substantial interaction within the community (Watts and Zhang, 2008; Putri, 2022). Therefore, it becomes evident that highly reliable information brings numerous benefits and establishes optimal conditions for the acceptance and utilization of information (Ko et al., 2005). The credibility of eWOM information further extends its impact to the psychological aspects of customers engaged in research related to places or services in the F&B field. Consequently, the subsequent hypothesis is postulated:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Information credibility positively influences the eWOM information acceptance of Gen Z consumers.

Relevance of information

The issue of information overload has become a concern in the information search activities of internet users (Chen et al., 2009). Online consumers always want to seek information quickly and effortlessly, with the relevance of information being a part in their decision-making process (Thảo and Tâm, 2017). Leong et al. (2022) point out that the appropriateness and relevance of information to users' opinions on social media have a positive relationship with acceptance information, indirectly affecting consumer intentions. When information on social media is relevant and meets the users' needs, it is considered valuable and affects the acceptance of information in the online environment. Therefore, the next hypothesis is proposed as follows:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Relevance of information positively influences the eWOM information acceptance of Gen Z consumers.

Attitude towards eWOM information

Erkan and Evan (2016) have indicated that the attitude of consumers towards information plays a crucial role in determining the impact of eWOM on their purchasing behavior through social media. A positive attitude of consumers can positively influence the application of eWOM information to their purchase intentions, recipients of information tend to utilize the information contained in messages as long as their attitude towards eWOM is positive (Sardar et al., 2021). Customers with positive attitudes are often willing to interact, ask questions or share opinions, thereby increasing interaction and the spread of eWOM information (Abedi et al., 2020). When an individual has a positive attitude and a need to seek information on social media, they are inclined to perceive this information as useful. Consequently, their likelihood of accepting the information is higher, positively impacting the final decision (Cao et al., 2021). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Attitude towards eWOM information positively influences the eWOM information acceptance of Gen Z consumers.

The relationship between WOM Information Acceptance, Brand Trust and Intention Selection

When customers embrace eWOM information, they systematically evaluate and scrutinize it as a pivotal factor in the product or service selection process (Srivastava and Sivaramakrishnan, 2020). This acceptance serves as an indicator of their trust in the information source, exerting a substantial influence on brand trust. eWOM information contributes significantly to building brand trust by fostering shared personal experiences, positive reviews and commendations for a brand's products or services (Lục, 2023). Positive reviews and recommendations from acquaintances, family or fellow users on social media enhance consumer integration and confidence (Porter and Donthu, 2008) when making purchase decisions or opting for the services of a particular brand. Research by Lục (2023) underscores the role of eWOM in amplifying brand trust and reducing barriers to purchasing decisions. Consequently, the acceptance of eWOM information assumes a pivotal role in shaping customer perceptions and purchasing decisions (Kaur and Singh, 2020).

Brand trust, functioning as a critical factor establishing commitment between customers and purchasing behavior (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001), instills consumer confidence in a brand's products or services meeting

stringent quality standards and being dependable. This confidence significantly influences their inclination to choose and contributes to the decision-making process in favor of adopting the products or services of that brand. Additionally, this trust-building mechanism aids consumers in perceiving their role in minimizing market uncertainty (Haefner et al., 2011) and serves as a strategy to mitigate risks in the consumer selection process (Anderson and Narus, 1990). Grounded in these arguments, the following hypotheses are postulated:

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Acceptance of eWOM information positively influences the brand trust of Gen Z consumers.

Hypothesis 6 (H6): Brand trust positively influences the intention selection of Gen Z consumers.

In addition, eWOM information acceptance is the result of positive reactions from consumers towards the provided information (Leong et al., 2021). The ability to engage positively and participate easily in online discussions makes information appealing and relatable to customers (Moran and Muzellec, 2017). Consumers particularly value opinions from those they trust or influential individuals, accepting eWOM information from these sources helps build trust and shape their decisions (Watts and Zhang, 2008; Chu and Kim, 2011; Putri, 2022).

After accepting and assimilating information about the product, they have a tendency to lean towards purchasing this product if there is a need (Cur et al., 2022). The decision-making process goes beyond accepting information; it also involves creating a link between this information and the personal values of customers (Simon, 1966). The acceptance of eWOM information is not merely a facet of information-seeking but also an interactive and positive experience that affect the final decisions of consumers. Therefore, the final hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 7 (H7): Acceptance of eWOM information positively influences the intention selection of Gen Z consumers.

Based on the research hypotheses, the proposed research model is as follows (Figure 2):

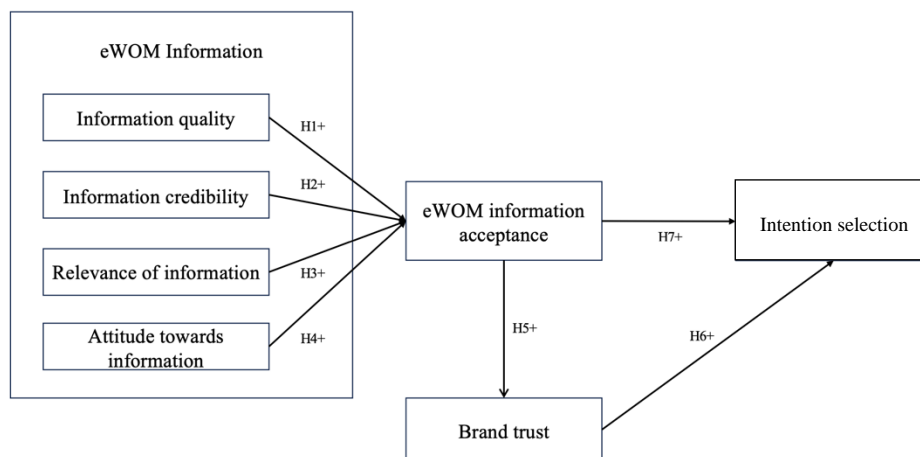


Figure 2. Research model

METHODOLOGY

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies. In the qualitative phase, a literature review is conducted to establish the theoretical foundation and research model, as well as construct measurement scales relevant to the research topic. This is complemented by expert discussions to refine and supplement the scales to align them with the research objectives. Likert scales are utilized in the study, comprising 5 levels from 1 to 5, corresponding to “Strongly disagree” to “Completely agree”. The survey questionnaire includes respondent information and 23 quantitative questions. The research is implemented through an online survey form and the collected valid primary data is then utilized for the subsequent quantitative analysis. The gathered data is analysed using quantitative methods, encompassing descriptive statistics, the reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM). This comprehensive methodological approach allows for a rigorous investigation of the research topic, integrating the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods to draw conclusions and make meaningful insights based on the collected data.

Sample and data collection

The primary data collection method utilized in this study is an online survey conducted through a survey form built using the Google Forms. The survey was then distributed to the target respondents through online links. The survey participants were selected based on age criteria, limited to individuals born between 1995 and 2012. Additionally, respondents were required to have actively sought and used eWOM information in the process of choosing eating places in Ho Chi Minh City. Based on these two fundamental screening criteria, a total of 315 valid samples were obtained from the 343 collected responses over a three-month period (from January to March 2024).

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The results include 315 valid samples utilized for the research project. Table 1 (below) show that the male proportion (43.5%) is lower than the female proportion (56.5%). The age of the participants is predominantly between the birth years of 2000 and 2004 (ranging from 19 to 23 years old). The income of the survey respondents, who belong to the Gen

Z consumer group, is relatively low, with a majority earning less than 3 million VND (50.5%) and between 3 to less than 6 million VND (25.7%). However, the frequency of dining out for this demographic is relatively high, with 47.3% eating out 6 to 10 times per month and 26% dining out more than 10 times per month.

Scale Reliability Tests

The measurement scales yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of ≥ 0.6 , and the variables within the scales exhibited a Corrected Item–Total Correlation coefficient of ≥ 0.3 , ensuring reliability. Therefore, the study retained all 23 items for further analysis.

Table 1. Profile of respondents

Characteristics		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	137	43.5
	Female	178	56.5
Age	1995 - 1999	86	27.3
	2000 - 2004	196	62.2
	2005 - 2009	31	9.8
	2010 - 2012	2	0.7
Frequency of dining out	Once	11	3.5
	From 2 to 5 times	73	23.2
	From 6 to 10 times	149	47.3
	More than 10 times	82	26
Income (VND/month)	Under 3.000.000	159	50.5
	From 3.000.000 to under 6.000.000	81	25.7
	From 6.000.000 to under 10.000.000	47	14.9
	Above 10.000.000	28	8.9

Table 2. The EFA of Intention Selection factor (* Total variance explained: 62.194 %)

Factors/items	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	% of variance explained	Cronbach's alpha	Overall mean
Intention Selection (QD)		2.242	62.194	0.831	
QD1	.813				3.77
QD3	.805				3.69
QD2	.747				3.75
KMO					0.721
Bartlett's Test	Chi-Square df Sig.				356.155 3 0.000

Table 3. The results of the EFA (* Total variance explained: 61.694%.)

Factors/items	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	% of variance explained	Cronbach's alpha	Overall mean
Information quality (CL)		2.562	11.220	0.868	
CL3	.858				4.05
CL1	.837				4.03
CL2	.782				4.07
Information credibility (TC)		1.601	6.650	0.851	
TC1	.861				4.13
TC2	.810				4.14
TC3	.750				4.15
Relevance of information (LQ)		1.207	4.438	0.795	
LQ1	.899				4.07
LQ3	.678				4.10
LQ2	.671				4.07
Attitude towards information (TD)		1.493	5.952	0.833	
TD3	.796				4.07
TD1	.788				4.10
TD2	.787				4.11
eWOM information adoption (CN)		1.092	4.161	0.791	
CN1	.931				4.10
CN2	.661				4.11
Brand trust (NT)		5.931	29.273	0.837	
NT2	.820				3.78
NT1	.750				3.80
NT3	.683				3.83
NT4	.660				3.81
NT5	.640				3.85
KMO					0.838
Bartlett's Test	Chi-Square df Sig.				2759.221 171 0.000

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Through the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) conducted initially, revealing that in the information credibility scale (TC), item TC4 did not meet the KMO criterion with a factor loading of $0.488 < 0.5$ and was consequently excluded. After re-running the analysis with the removal of the item TC4, the EFA results indicated that the remaining items, including TC1, TC2, and TC3, all met the necessary conditions.

The results of the analysis of the factor of selection decision are presented in Table 2, considering three observed variables, showed a total variance explained of 62.194%. The research model demonstrated a KMO index of 0.721, and Bartlett's Test with Chi-Square = 356.155; $df = 3$ and $Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05$, indicating a strong correlation among the variables.

The results of testing the independent factors (Table 3) with 19 observed items yielded a KMO measure of 0.838, exceeding the threshold of 0.5, and a significant significance level (Sig.) in the Bartlett's Test, with a value of 0.000, less than 0.05, equivalent to rejecting the null hypothesis that the factor model is not suitable. This demonstrates that the collected research data used for analysing the factors affecting the decision-making process in choosing eating places is appropriate. The total variance explained recorded is 61.694%, surpassing the 50% threshold. This implies that the factors in the study account for 61.694% of the variation in the research data. Most factor loading values exceed 0.6 and are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$ (Tabachnick et al., 2013). The research model is entirely fitting, with all these factors utilized to assess the decision-making process in choosing eating places.

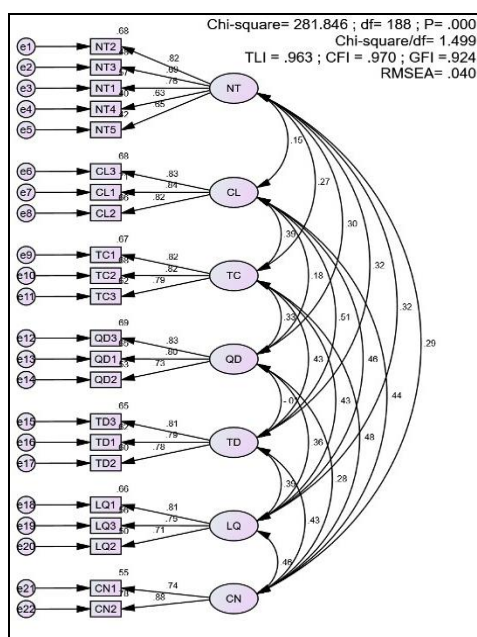


Figure 3. CFA results of the saturated model

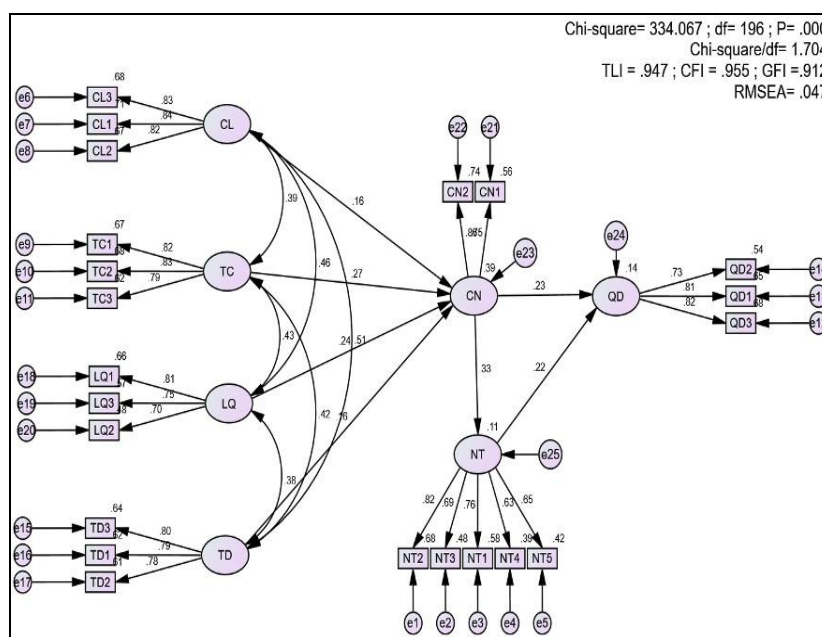


Figure 4. Standardized SEM model

Confirmatory factor analysis

Figure 3 demonstrates the results of the analysis through the Modification Indices (MI), show that: The research model has a P value of 0.000, Chi-square value = 281.846, degrees of freedom (df) = 188, Chi-square/ df = 1.499, which is less than 2. RMSEA = 0.040, less than 0.08; TLI = 0.963, CFI = 0.970, both greater than 0.9, and the GFI index = 0.924, greater than 0.9. Thus, the indices indicate that the constructed model is suitable for the research data and the research concepts introduced are convergent. Table 4 (below) shows that the CR coefficient is greater than 0.7 and AVE is greater than 0.5, satisfying the conditions for CFA analysis.

Table 4. Correlation matrix

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	NT	CL	TC	QD	TD	LQ	CN
NT	0.837	0.510	0.102	0.852	0.714						
CL	0.869	0.688	0.257	0.869	0.152*	0.829					
TC	0.851	0.657	0.230	0.852	0.271***	0.387***	0.810				
QD	0.830	0.621	0.131	0.837	0.301***	0.175**	0.325***	0.788			
TD	0.833	0.624	0.257	0.833	0.316***	0.507***	0.425***	-0.005	0.790		
LQ	0.799	0.571	0.214	0.806	0.319***	0.463***	0.435***	0.362***	0.385***	0.756	
CN	0.800	0.668	0.230	0.828	0.292***	0.439***	0.479***	0.275***	0.434***	0.458***	0.817

Structural Equation Modelling

Tests for model goodness of fit and hypotheses

Figure 4 briefly shows the SEM analysis results regarding the adequacy of the research data show values of Chi-square = 334.067, $df = 196$, $P = 0.000$, GFI = 0.912, TLI = 0.947, CFI = 0.955, RMSEA = 0.047. The proposed model is considered to meet the required criteria. It can be asserted that the research model is reliable.

Hypotheses tests using SEM model

Hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6, H7 are accepted based on the SEM analysis results, which demonstrate standardized coefficient (β) different from 0 and positive (+), indicating positive relationships between the factors (Table 5).

Table 5. Coefficients from SEM Model

Hypothesized relationship				Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient β	S.E	C.R.	P	Conclusion
H1	CN	←	CL	.141	.156	.068	2.058	.040	Supported
H2	CN	←	TC	.261	.271	.071	3.691	***	Supported
H3	CN	←	LQ	.240	.239	.077	3.111	.002	Supported
H4	CN	←	TD	.147	.156	.071	2.066	.039	Supported
H5	NT	←	CN	.482	.326	.101	4.779	***	Supported
H6	QD	←	NT	.218	.223	.068	3.203	.001	Supported
H7	QD	←	CN	.333	.231	.103	3.242	.001	Supported

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusion

The factor of information quality demonstrates a positive impact on the acceptance of eWOM information ($\beta = 0.156$). This finding aligns with the research conducted by Sardar et al. (2021). Consumers seek information and evaluate its quality before incorporating it into their individual decisions. When consumers highly value the quality of eWOM information, they are inclined to accept and utilize it in the decision-making process for selecting an eating place. This underscores the vital role played by both the availability and quality of information in shaping consumers' choices. The information credibility also exhibits a positive impact on information acceptance ($\beta = 0.271$). This indicates that, for Gen Z consumers, trust in online review sources plays an important role in the decision-making process. This result is consistent with previous research, particularly the study conducted by Sussman and Zhang (2008). Aspects of credibility, such as the reviewer's reputation, source reliability and transparency in the evaluation process, likely contribute to enhancing the acceptance of eWOM.

Furthermore, it is evident that the acceptance of eWOM information is influenced by the positively oriented relevance of the information ($\beta = 0.239$). This outcome is consistent with the research conducted by Choi-Meng Leong et al. (2022). These findings substantiate the hypothesis that Gen Z consumers are more likely to embrace online review information when it is pertinent to their decisions. Optimizing online messaging and ensuring its positive relevance to the needs and desires of Gen Z consumers can enhance the acceptance of eWOM information. In addition, it is found that a strong relationship exists between the attitude towards information and the acceptance of eWOM. Specifically, a positive attitude towards information has a constructive impact on the acceptance of eWOM ($\beta = 0.156$). The attitude towards information serves as a factor shaped by various elements, including personal experiences, prior brand relationships and the influence of others. This underscores that when Gen Z consumers possess a positive attitude towards information, they are inclined to accept and trust eWOM information positively (Sardar et al., 2021). The study's findings regarding the favorable influence of information acceptance on brand trust ($\beta = 0.326$) mark a noteworthy revelation, enriching our comprehension of how the acceptance of information can impact the trust that Gen Z consumers place in a brand. This substantiates that when Gen Z consumers embrace eWOM information positively, it concurrently fosters trust in the associated brand. The alignment of these outcomes with the research conducted by Porter and Donthu (2008) heightens the cohesiveness and reliability of the study. Brand trust emerges as a pivotal determinant shaping customer choices and fostering loyalty. Hence, recognizing the interconnection between eWOM information acceptance and brand trust is imperative for establishing and sustaining positive relationships with Gen Z customers. Furthermore, brand trust exerts a positive influence on the decision-making process for selecting a dining place ($\beta = 0.223$). This outcome underscores that the capacity to cultivate and uphold brand trust in customers' minds can significantly impact their decision-making regarding the choice of an eating establishment.

Finally, grounded on the research findings, the acknowledgment of eWOM information emerges as a pivotal factor influencing the decision-making process in the selection of dining establishments among Gen Z consumers ($\beta = 0.231$). This observation is in congruence with the extensive research conducted by Erkan and Evans (2016). The notable role played by eWOM information acceptance in shaping the decisions of Gen Z consumers concerning their eating choices underscores the substantive impact of online reviews and recommendations on their preferences. The alignment of this result with preceding studies further substantiates the robustness and reliability of the research outcomes. Gaining an in-depth understanding of how the acceptance of eWOM information directly contributes to the decision-making process offers valuable insights for businesses striving to align with the preferences and choices of Gen Z consumers within the dining industry.

The research results identified four factors affecting the acceptance of eWOM information in the process of selecting eating places among Gen Z customers in Ho Chi Minh City. The impact levels from high to low are as follows: information reliability ($\beta = 0.271$), relevance of information ($\beta = 0.239$), the quality of information and attitude towards information with equal impact levels ($\beta = 0.156$). The acceptance of eWOM information is considered a significant factor affecting the decision-making process for selecting eating places among Gen Z customers, with a standardized coefficient of 0.231. These results affirm that the distinctive characteristics of information through eWOM positively influence information acceptance and impact the decision-making process for selecting eating places. Furthermore, the study has identified that the brand trust factor has a positive impact on the Intention Selection ($\beta = 0.223$).

Managerial implications

Online communication channels such as websites, fan pages and social media are considered effective means of communication for businesses. Transmitting information on these channels requires completeness, detail, and clarity. To

meet these requirements, interface design activities need to organize information clearly and be easy to navigate, avoiding difficulties for users. Businesses can use category bars or collections to classify information about products and business services. Aesthetic appeal also plays a crucial role, as a well-designed interface will attract and engage visitors for a longer period. Information on communication channels needs to be updated regularly to maintain freshness and continuity. Ensuring the accuracy of shared information is the most important aspect, as misleading information can affect the assessment and reputation of the business in the perception of social media users. Expanding eWOM communication channels is an effective way to enhance the credibility of online information about products and services. This helps businesses reach and raise awareness of their brand to a larger customer. The success of expanding eWOM communication channels depends on several critical factors. Firstly, businesses need to build a robust communication strategy, including defining objectives, content and communication formats suitable for the target customers. The content should accurately and sincerely reflect the products and services, fostering trust and encouraging customers to engage in brand discussions. Secondly, businesses should create a vibrant information-sharing network by encouraging current customers and potential customers to share their experiences and reviews of products or services on social media platforms, personal blogs or industry forums. This creates a trustworthy information exchange environment and enhances trust from real users. Finally, businesses need to create positive interaction and feedback regarding opinions and feedback from consumers. Responding promptly, sharing knowledge and addressing questions help build trust and foster positive interaction from customers.

In addition, contemporary consumers rely on sharing and advice from others, especially from product reviewers on social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, etc. "Food reviewers" on these platforms have become famous and have a significant impact on consumers' selection decisions. Consumers often watch short videos on TikTok or read reviews on Facebook to learn about the quality and experience of products. The popularity of food reviewers on social media has changed how customers seek information and evaluate products or services. They trust the experiences and opinions of real users, signalling to businesses that having a good reputation on social media and receiving positive reviews from food reviewers can impact the success of a product and brand. Establishing an online community is a way to enhance the relevance of eWOM information and create a positively interactive environment between businesses and consumers. By creating an online community, businesses provide customers with a space to interact with each other and share information between businesses and potential customers, fostering interaction within potential customers themselves. This helps create a convenient small community where people can meet, exchange opinions and share their experiences. They can ask questions, provide opinions or review products; businesses can respond and interact directly with them on specific topics, products or services.

Furthermore, using hashtags (#) is an effective way to increase the connectivity of eWOM information in the online community. By using hashtags, businesses can create thematic links between posts and related information. When customers use hashtags in their posts, it automatically links to other posts with the same hashtag. This helps enhance the connectivity of eWOM information and allows customers to easily find information related to a specific topic. Additionally, hashtags allow businesses to easily track and participate in conversations around a specific topic. By searching for hashtags related to their products or business area, businesses can find customer posts and opinions. This allows businesses to engage in the conversation, answer questions, provide opinions and offer official information. Participating in the conversation creates a positively interactive environment and increases the connectivity of eWOM information.

Businesses need to adopt an open and flexible attitude towards eWOM information. Instead of viewing eWOM as a negative factor or avoiding opinions and reviews from consumers, businesses should see eWOM as an important source of information to understand customer opinions, expectations and needs. A positive acceptance attitude helps businesses grasp feedback information from customers and adjust their business strategies accordingly. The business's attitude towards consumer information can be likened to a two-way mirror. When a business has a positive attitude and accepts information in a favourable direction, consumers will recognize the value and usefulness of eWOM information. In addition, consumers perceive that eWOM information can provide important and reliable information about a product, they are more likely to trust and give it significant consideration when making their final choice.

Analysing and evaluating eWOM information is also an important aspect of using this factor effectively. Businesses need the ability to differentiate between reliable and unreliable opinions and reviews, making strategic decisions wisely. By evaluating the credibility of the contributors, relevance to the target reader and the quantity and quality of reviews, businesses can filter and understand important information to improve products, services and the overall customer experience.

Effectively building and strengthening consumer trust through eWOM involves harnessing the power of reviews and real user sharing. This stands as one of the most crucial factors for consumers to trust a business's product or service:

Firstly, businesses should encourage current and potential consumers to share their experiences through reviews and comments on social media channels, the company's website or specialized forums. This creates a reliable source of information for other consumers researching the product or service.

Secondly, leveraging the effect of influencers and opinion leaders can contribute significantly to building consumer trust through eWOM. Collaborating with individuals with a large following and the trust of consumers can enhance brand recognition. Users often tend to trust and pay attention to what they say about products or services.

Thirdly, implementing multi-channel advertising and marketing campaigns is another crucial factor for building brand trust through eWOM. By utilizing various communication channels such as websites, social media, email marketing or online advertising, businesses can achieve a broader reach and enhance brand awareness across the online consumer community.

Lastly, actively listening and responding positively to customer reviews and comments is highly important. A positive attitude from the business helps build trust and fosters positive interactions with consumers. When a business responds and engages positively with eWOM from consumers, they create a trustworthy environment and establish a connection with

customers. This increases consumer trust and encourages them to make final selection decisions based on the eWOM information. This reflects the business's commitment to quality and continuous improvement.

Research limitations

While the research has achieved its initial goals, it has limitations. Focusing solely on Ho Chi Minh City may limit the study's representativeness and not be indicative of other regions nationwide. Future research should broaden the geographical scope to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how eWOM influences Gen Z consumers nationwide.

Moreover, the study concentrated on dining establishments in general, requiring further exploration into the impact of eWOM on specific businesses like restaurants, eateries and cafes. This would enhance understanding of how Gen Z consumers interact with eWOM and provide insight into its impact on decision-making in different business models. Finally, the research examined only four influencing factors on eWOM acceptance, limiting the scope. While it provided detailed insights into these factors, numerous other factors impacting eWOM acceptance have remain unexplored. Subsequent studies could identify new factors, filling gaps and providing more insight into customer decisions regarding eWOM acceptance.

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