THE EFFECTS OF THE ANTECEDENTS OF EWOM ON TOURISTS' DECISION-MAKING: PERCEIVED TRUST AS A MEDIATOR

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Abstract

Purpose - This study aimed to examine the relationships between the utilitarian perceptions (information quality), hedonic perceptions (pleasure) and social perceptions (social interaction and homophily) of tourists in eWOM - on the one hand and their decision-making processes on the other. Furthermore, this study explored how these perceptions determine the mediating effect of trust in eWOM.

Methodology/Design/Approach - A quantitative survey was conducted based on a random sample of American international tourists. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyse the collected data.

Findings - The results demonstrate a significant influence of bridging social capital, homophily and perceived enjoyment on tourists' decision making. Secondly, perceived trust was found to mediate the relationship between, on the one side, bridging social capital, information quality, and perceived enjoyment, and on the other, tourists' decision making.

Originality - Based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory, this study developed a new integrated model of the relationships between the eWOM antecedents and tourists' decision-making, with perceived trust acting as a mediator.

Keywords Electronic Tourism, Electronic Word of Mouth, Trust, Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory, Decision Making, Social Network Sites

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INTRODUCTION

With the emergence and spread of the internet globally, distances became shorter and people were brought closer together. The internet has made the world a global village, as it is considered a convenient virtual place for persons from different continents to exchange ideas, views and experiences (Tella & Kwanya, 2018). Through it, people can have access to any information of interest (Ogunlewe et al., 2014), interact, share, review and/or recommend electronically. This gives a rise to a new type of word of mouth which is called electronic word of mouth (eWOM) or "*Word of Mouse*". According to Kim et al. (2023), the analysis of eWOM could help understanding the consumers' needs and develop business environment for nurturing entrepreneurship.

During the last decade, the number of internet users worldwide is approximately doubled from USD 2.5 billion in 2013 to USD 5.3 billion in 2023 (Statista, 2024). Thus, there is an increasing number of consumers with eagerness of immersion in online communities. They increasingly share their experiences and information publicly on internet, which can be read by each and every one (Lee & Song, 2010). With the development and prevalence of new ways of reviewing products and services online, increasing numbers of travelers are using the Internet to look for tourist destinations information and tourism products and services to make the purchasing decision. The online travel market is expected to grow from USD 667.55 billion in 2023 to USD 1.569.25 billion by 2030, with a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 13% (Research and Markets, 2023). According to SiteMinder (2023), 81% of tourists often or continuously read online reviews before booking accomodations, and 96% consider them important in the planning phase. Consequently, as a type of eWOM, online reviews became nowadays an indispensable channel for those seeking views and experiences.

Due to the intangibility of tourism and hospitality services, eWOM helps tourists to thoroughly evaluate them before purchasing decisions. According to Leung et al. (2021), tourist behaviour studies were found to concentrate on examining how tourists perceive, use, and analyse the information obtained from Social Network Sites (SNSs) during their trip planning stage. This would reduce purchase risks, increase trust and support their decision making processes (Al-Saad & Gharaibeh, 2023). Since SNSs like TripAdvisor and Facebook are the main source of eWOM, tourists commonly look for reliable and dependable information provided by other former tourists. They turn to SNSs to search and post, whether texts, photos and/or videos about their travel and tourism experiences. The importance of social media in tourism lies in the fact that tourists frequently rely significantly on the up-to-date eWOM which are easily accessible to reduce travel uncertainties and guide their decision making processes (Hua et al., 2017).

Previous research have analyzed the eWOM antecedents as a trustworthiness source (Schoorman et al., 2007; Hu et al., 2017; Qazi et al., 2016). Some of them have considered the traits of the senders, e.g. level of expertise, ability, benevolence, and integrity (Schoorman et al., 2007), while others have considered both quantitative (review length) and qualitative (eWOM relevance) factors (Hu et al., 2017; Qazi et al., 2016). However, other antecedents of eWOM like hedonic, utilitarian and social values were not analyzed in relation to perceived trust in eWOM.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) Theory

The Stimulus-Organism-Response theory was developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) in an effort to explain the way environmental cues may affect behaviors. The stimulus is conceptualized as external environmental factors that influence individual internal states and thus affect consequent behaviors (Bagozzi, 1986). In the SOR theory, organism acts as an intervening element between the stimulus and the response (Bagozzi, 1986). The organism element (O) represents the internal perceptual and affective states that mediates the relations between the stimulus and the response (Jacoby, 2002). Response is the final behavioral outcomes resulting from the series of effects of stimulus and organism (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

Perceived enjoyment, information quality, homophily, and bridging social capital were hypothesized in this current model as stimulus elements. While trust was hypothesized as an organism, the tourists decision-making was logically regarded as a response. The antecedents represented in the theoretical model of this study include utilitarian perceptions (information quality), hedonic perceptions (enjoyment) (Gursoy et al., 2006; Purohit et al., 2022) and social perceptions (homophily) (Yadav et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2022). Individual interactions and use of SNSs may have hedonic, utilitarian (Purohit et al., 2022) and social aspects (Cheung & Lee, 2012). In this regard, tourists use SNSs and search for eWOM for utilitarian, hedonic, and social purposes.

1.2. Perceived Enjoyment and Decision Making

The term enjoyment refers to the level of satisfaction and pleasure persons feel in their favorite surroundings (Hamari et al., 2016). Searching for destination information may be considered a leisure activity that is done for fun and amusement. Previous research indicated that there is a link between perceived enjoyment and people's behavioral intentions (Di Pietro et al., 2012; Hsu & Lin, 2008). Indeed, SNSs users who find eWOM entertaining are more likely to feel positive about choosing a particular product or service (Di Pietro et al., 2012). Lee et al. (2021), and Sahli and Legohérel (2016) demonstrated that perceived enjoyment is positively associated with increased consumer booking intentions and repurchase intentions. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are articulated:

H1: Perceived enjoyment has a direct effect on trust.
H2: Perceived enjoyment has a direct effect on decision making.

1.3. eWOM Information Quality and Decision Making

eWOM quality is defined as "*the quality of the content of a consumer review from the perspectives of information characteristics*" (Park et al., 2007, p. 128). Within tourism industry context, quality is a key factor used to trust information presented by eWOM (Viglia et al., 2016). The quality of information presented by eWOM may affect the inclination of consumers to adopt eWOM (Filieri & Mcleay, 2014). Accordingly, eWOM information quality can be suggested to be an influential stimulus element within the SOR.

Several studies have indicated that eWOM quality positively influences visitors' trust while searching travel information online (Tseng & Wang, 2016; Viglia et al., 2016). For example, Tseng and Wang (2016) proposed information quality as a variable that influences how effectively users trust e-tourism websites. Additionally, empirical studies indicated that the quality of eWOM information influences the purchase intentions of consumers (Lee & Shin, 2014; Park et al., 2007; Wandoko & Panggati, 2022). Drawing upon literature discussed, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H3: eWOM information quality has a direct effect on trust.
H4: eWOM information quality has a direct effect on decision making.

1.4. Homophily and Decision Making

Homophily is "*the degree to which people who interact are similar in beliefs, education, social status, and the like*" (Eyal & Rubin, 2003, p. 80). Homophily is the degree of resemblance between people who share similar characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, and educational attainment (Rogers, 1983). Online homophily is mostly powered by similar interests and common values that may be evaluated at the website level rather than the individual level (Chu & Kim, 2011). In this sense, homophily promotes information exchange via eWOM (Chu & Kim, 2011). Accordingly, it is plausible to postulate that online homophily acts as a stimulus element in the SOR theory.

Homophily encourages customers to trust one another by boosting interpersonal connection and a feeling of common values (Packard et al., 2018). Previous studies have indicated that homophily influences trust (Ayeh et al., 2013a, 2013b). Evidence presented in the literature also suggests that homophily among tourists influence behavioral intentions and decision-making (Assaker et al., 2020; Ayeh et al., 2013a, 2013b). Accordingly, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H5: Homophily is positively associated with trust in eWOM.
H6: Homophily is positively associated with the tourists' decision making.

1.5. Social Capital and Decision Making

Social capital is the benefits, resources, and values ingrained in interpersonal relationships (Jones & Taylor, 2012). Social capital has been found to be an influential factor that affect individual decision-making process (Kim et al., 2019). Accordingly, the concept of social capital deemed suitable to be postulated as a stimulus within the SOR theory that arouse internal tourists' internal states and affects their decision-making process.

Consumers can get benefits from social capital through utilizing opinions and eWOM posted online to increase their trust toward brand (Jun et al., 2017). In this sense, through the SNSs, individuals can utilize their bridging social capital to get information and intensive feedback which in turns foster their trust in eWOM (Gvili & Levy, 2018). Several studies indicated that social capital influences behavioral intention and decision-making process (Kim et al., 2019; Horng & Wu, 2020). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H7: Social capital is positively associated with trust.
H8: Social capital is positively associated with decision-making.

1.6. Trust and Decision Making

Trust is an important component in understanding consumer behavior online, since there are difficulties appraising intangible items and services before consumption, as well as a lack of consumer protection (Baykal & Hesapci Karaca, 2022). It influences the extent to which people use and engage in online communities and share their opinions online. Consumers use online reviews for the judgment of products and services that they are looking for. In the tourism context, browsing online reviews may affect tourists perceived trust in destinations and accordingly stimulate their intention to visit (Pop et al., 2022). Since trust has both cognitive and emotional elements, it then could be postulated as an organism within the SOR theory (Seçilmiş et al., 2022). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is postulated:

H9: Trust has a positive effect on decision-making.

1.7. Trust Mediating Effect and Decision Making

In this study, trust acts as an organism element (Organism) that mediates the relationships between the independent variables (Stimulus) and the dependent variable (Response). It was reported in the previous literature that trust plays a mediating role between tourists' perception of homophily and their decision-making process (Assaker et al., 2020; Ayeh et al., 2013a, 2013b; Kim & Kim, 2021). Additionally, it was indicated by a number of researches that trust mediates the relationship between social capital and decision making (Baykal & Hesapci Karaca, 2022; Jun et al., 2017). Furthermore, evidence in the literature has suggested that trust has a mediating role pertaining to the relationship between information quality and decision-making (Ahmad et al., 2020; Wandoko & Panggati, 2022). Moreover, it was found in the previous literature that trust act as an intervening variable that mediates the relationship between perceived enjoyment and behavioral intentions (Patel et al., 2020). Based on the evidences found in the literature, the following hypotheses are articulated:

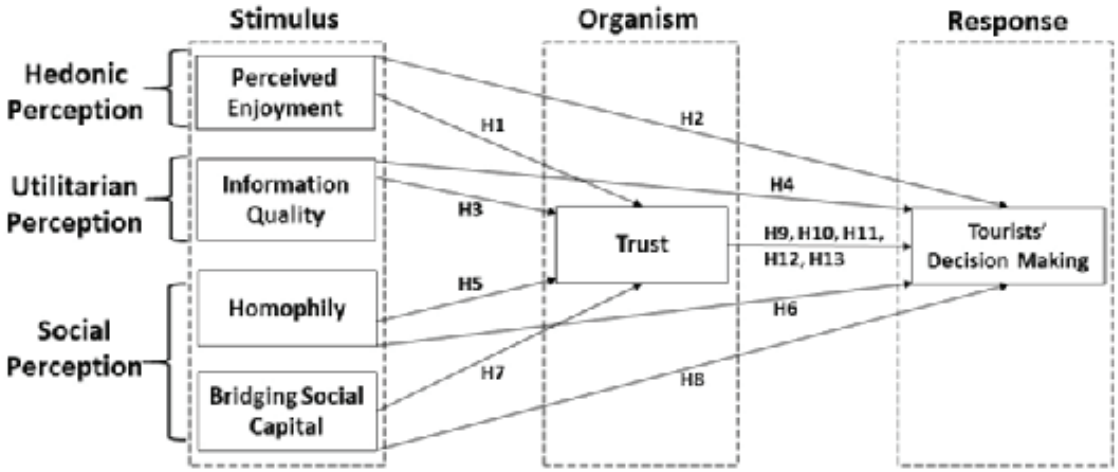
H10: Trust mediates the relationship between homophily and tourists' decision making.
H11: Trust mediates the relationship between social capital and tourists' decision making.
H12: Trust mediates the relation between eWOM information quality and decision-making.
H13: Trust mediates the relation between perceived enjoyment and decision-making.

The rationale for selecting the chosen antecedents was guided by the research aims and available literature about the study topic. The authors have developed an integrated model included three perceptions related to eWOM, which are utilitarian perceptions (information quality), hedonic perceptions (enjoyment) and social perceptions (social interaction and homophily) of tourists in eWOM. These four antecedents were chosen as influential factors of tourists' decision making. After extensive survey of literature in the fields of management and/or netnography, the authors found that these antecedents (information quality; enjoyment; social interaction and homophily) are the most common variables that influence decision making (Di Pietro et al., 2012; Hsu & Lin, 2008; Tseng & Wang, 2016; Viglia et al., 2016; Assaker et al., 2020; Ayeh et al., 2013a, 2013b; Kim et al., 2019; Horng & Wu, 2020). Furthermore, these antecedents are viewed as significant external factors influencing the trustworthiness of the eWOM source (Ayeh et al., 2013a, 2013b; Jun et al., 2017; Tseng & Wang, 2016; Viglia et al., 2016). On the other hand, in the context of the SOR theory, these variables were chosen because common sense assumption that perceived enjoyment, information quality, homophily, and bridging social capital could be used as stimulus elements. In addition, trust was hypothesized as an organism and tourists decision-making was logically regarded as a response. Accordingly, the variables of the conceptual model (Figure 1) are categorized according to the three elements the SOR Theory (Stimulus, Organism and Response).

Previous research indicated the validity of the SOR theory in assessing the effects of the antecedents of eWOM on tourists' behavioral intentions and decision-making (Nunthiphatprueksa & Suntrayuth, 2018; Purohit et al., 2022; Seçilmiş et al., 2022; Yadav et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2022). They have discussed the antecedents of eWOM which include utilitarian perceptions (information quality) (Nunthiphatprueksa & Suntrayuth, 2018; Ye et al., 2022), hedonic perceptions (enjoyment) (Gursoy et al., 2006; Nusair et al., 2008; Purohit et al., 2022) and social perceptions (social interaction and homophily) (Nunthiphatprueksa & Suntrayuth, 2018; Yadav et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2022). These antecedents are considered as important external determinants of the eWOM source trustworthiness. Tourists used to visit SNSs, post and read reviews and advices written by peers for different purposes. For instance, they might socialize with other tourists, enjoy reading funny or useful texts and see beautiful pictures and charming videos. Although their importance in the context of perceived trust in eWOM, the understanding of these determinants remains limited (Seçilmiş et al., 2022). While previous research highlighted the importance of eWOM as a trustworthiness source, few research explored how hedonic, utilitarian and social perceptions determine the mediating effect of trust in eWOM. To cover this gap in knowledge, this study developed a new integrated model that analyzes the relationships between, on the one side, the hedonic, utilitarian, and social perceptions of tourists in eWOM, and on the other, their decision-making processes.

In the context of this study, it is argued now that an integrated model is needed to advance both theoretical and practical research. Hence, this study integrated the three critical antecedents of eWOM (hedonic, utilitarian and social) and their influence (mediated by perceived trust) on tourists' decision making in one model. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model of the study. The model of the current study was developed using the SOR theory. The SOR theorizes that environmental stimulus (S) can generate cognitive and emotional reactions (O), resulting in behaviors (R) (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Therefore, and based on the SOR theory, the researchers suggested that trust (Organism) may mediate the relationship between, on the one side, the hedonic, utilitarian, and social perceptions of tourists in eWOM (Stimulus), and on the other, their decision-making processes (Response). Such an integrated model could help to comprehensively address hedonic, utilitarian and social issues specifically linked to tourists' decision-making behavior in the virtual world.

Figure 1: **Conceptual model**



2. **METHODS**

2.1. Sampling

The target population of the current study consisted of American international tourists. The study employed a convenience sampling method. The United States of America was selected for the survey as it represents the second top country, after China, by outbound tourism - travel in the world and reports high percentage of internet users. In 2023, the United States of America had slightly over 311 million internet users, that represent 92.9% of the total population (Statista, 2023). China was excluded because it bans some SNSs like Facebook and TripAdvisor, which constitute the core of the questionnaire items.

To seek quality data, this study set several performance metrics and indicators, and was made available to respondents who scored 90% or higher on the task acceptance rating through their work and tasks performed on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) (respondents with acceptance ratings less than 90% were unable to access or participate in the survey). Additionally, respondents must have completed at least 1,000 MTurk projects successfully.

The inclusion criteria for the participants were established using two screening questions: (1) participants must be at least 18-years old, and (2) must have travelled in the last 2 years. Respondents who answered "yes" to the screening questions were included in the study. This exclusionary threshold was chosen to ensure the sample was reflective of the US travel market, whereby individuals

travel internationally (Boley & Woosnam, 2021). Respondents were screened out based on their travel experience in the last 2 years. This procedure was chosen and deemed reasonable and relevant to the aim of this study. This criterion was set to ensure that respondents have travel experience. Then, it would seem plausible to investigate the effect of eWOM on their travel decision-making. Ninety-seven participants answered "no" to the screening question; thus, they were directed to the end of the study. Five hundred individuals accessed the online survey. Of those, 415 completed the survey (83.0% response rate). Twenty-four cases were deleted because they failed the attention-check questions. Thus, 391 valid responses were deemed suitable for the analysis.

2.2. Scale Measurement

A self-administrated online survey drowns upon the insights and information found in the relevant literature, more specifically, the study constructs were adopted form previously validated scales. A Likert scale consisting of five points was employed, with a range from 1, representing "strongly disagree," to 5, signifying "strongly agree.". Following are the details of the measurement items and the source of literature for them. Questionnaire items of the perceived enjoyment were adapted from Agarwal and Karahanna (2000) and Mohd Suki & Mohd Suki (2019). Questionnaire items of the homophily were adapted from Okazaki et al (2017) and Kusumasondjaja (2015); Questionnaire items of the bridging social capital were adapted from Zhang et al (2021) and Horng & Wu (2020); The questionnaire items measuring information quality were derived and modified from Cheung et al (2008); Questionnaire items of the trust were adapted from Wu (2013); while the items of the tourists' decision making were adapted from Lazar & Komolikova-Blindheim (2016). Some items were modified to fit the eWOM.

2.3. Data Collection

Prior to the researchers agreed on the final copy of the survey, a pilot test was conducted in order to avoid any confusing content in the questionnaire. Fifty responses were obtained in the first week, and were left out of the final dataset used in this study. At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to provide suggestions and comments pertaining to the questionnaire wording, clarity, vagueness, and redundancy. The average completion time during the pilot test was 11 minutes. Several comments were received. The comments addressed statement wording, clarity, and similarity among some questionnaire statements. The questionnaire was refined based on the feedback and responses obtained.

MTurk, an online platform that offers financial reward for completing various tasks, was used to recruit the study participants. The respondents were provided with a compensation of US$ 1.15 for their participation in the study, which is commonly referred to as "HITs" (Human Intelligence Tasks) on the platform. Among social scientists, MTurk is recognized as a highly popular crowdsourcing website (Chandler et al., 2014). The popularity of MTurk among social scientists can be attributed to the widespread recognition and trust that users have in Amazon, particularly in terms of privacy and security (Litman et al., 2015). To gather data for the study, a human intelligence task (HIT) was generated and made available on the MTurk platform. Data collection took four weeks in total, from October 5th to November 5th, 2022. The survey typically requires around 10 to 15 minutes to be completed. The introduction explained the study's topic clearly. Participants were allowed to complete the survey at their own pace. Anonymity was preserved by having participants fill out the survey online and not collecting any personal identifiers from them. Studies have indicated that MTurk workers are voluntary, and their confidentiality and anonymity are protected through privacy notices (Litman et al., 2015). MTurk prohibits the collection of personally identifiable information (Arch & Carr, 2016).

3. RESEARCH ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

3.1. Sample Profile

By the designated data collection deadline, a total of 391 valid questionnaires were received. As indicated in Table 1, approximately 62 percent of the respondents identified as males. Additionally, 34 percent of the participants fell within the age range of 30-35 years old.58 percent spend 2 – 3 hours a day on the Internet for leisure related purposes. 36 percent of the respondents frequently read the online reviews before traveling to a certain tourist destination. While 90% of respondents have shared their hotel-related experiences on SNSs at least once. The respondents highlighted that the most important motivation for visiting hotel review sites, travel forums, or social media websites was to save money, followed by gathering relevant information, staying up to date, and saving time.

Table 1: **General information (N = 391)**

Characteristics	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	244	62%
Female	147	38%
Age (Year)		
18 – 23	10	2.5%
24 – 29	88	22.5%
30 – 35	134	34%
36 – 41	55	14%
42 – 47	35	9%
48 – 53	36	9%
54 – 59	21	5.5%
Above 60	12	3%
Hour(s) spent on the internet for leisure		
Less than 1 hour	19	5%
2 hours – 3 hours	228	58%
4 hours – 5 hours	98	25%
More than 5 hours	46	12%
Reading online reviews		
Never	2	0.5%
Sometimes	138	35.5%
Frequently	141	36%
Always	110	28%
Posting experience on hotel review sites		
Yes	352	90%
No	39	10%

3.2. Testing Hypotheses

The collected data was organized and subjected to statistical analysis using PLS-SEM. Specifically, Smart PLS 3, a well-regarded software tool in the field of social sciences, was employed. It is known for its flexibility in handling measurement scales (Falk & Miller, 1992). The study examined ten primary hypotheses using a two-step analytical approach. Initially, the authors assessed the reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity of the measurement scales, as presented in Table 2. Convergent validity was assessed to determine how closely instruments designed to measure the same construct were interrelated (Malhotra et al., 2007). The researchers examined the following: (1) the composite reliability (CR) minimum value should be 0.70 (Chin, 1998); (2) the maturity of the item loadings should be more than 0.70 (Chin, 1998); and (3) the average variance extracted (AVE) should be larger than 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2 outlines the construct metrics of the study model, which comprises item loadings, composite reliability, AVE, mean, and standard deviation. As evidenced by composite reliability ratings with scores ranging from 0.82 to 0.89 and AVEs ranging from 0.53 to 0.64, all three convergent validity requirements were fulfilled. Furthermore, the item loadings for all items above the 0.7 criterion, suggesting their high maturity.

Table 2: **The measurement model's mean scores, CR, AVE, and factor loadings.**

Indicators and Factors	Mean (SD)	CR	AVE	Loadings
F1: Perceived Enjoyment	**5.79 (1.03)**	**0.88**	**0.64**	
ENJOYMENT1: It is fun to use social network sites (SNSs) (e.g. Facebook; Tripadvisor. com).	5.72 (1)			0.83
ENJOYMENT2: It is very enjoyable to use social network sites (SNSs) (e.g. Facebook; Tripadvisor.com).	5.90 (1.04)			0.81
ENJOYMENT3: It is exciting to interact with others about their travel experiences on the social network sites (SNSs) (e.g. Facebook; Tripadvisor.com).	5.80 (1.03)			0.77
ENJOYMENT4: It is a pleasure to acquire travel-related information from SNSs.	5.75 (1.03)			0.79
F2: Information Quality	**5.70 (1.02)**	**0.86**	**0.60**	
INFORMATION_QUALITY1: The eWOM provided the correct information for my travel plan.	5.67 (1.03)			0.81
INFORMATION_QUALITY2: The eWOM provided me with complete information set for my travel.	5.71 (1.05)			0.75
INFORMATION_QUALITY3: The eWOM on the travel review website was relevant to my travel plan.	5.72 (1.03)			0.75
INFORMATION_QUALITY4: The eWOM provided me with the most up-to-date information for my travel-related decisions.	5.71 (0.99)			0.79
F3: Homophily	**5.57 (1.14)**	**0.89**	**0.58**	
HOMOPHILY1: SNSs users and I (Facebook/TripAdvisor) seek similar travel information.	5.60 (1.04)			0.76
HOMOPHILY2: SNSs users and I (Facebook/TripAdvisor) share similar interests.	5.62 (1.11)			0.78
HOMOPHILY3: SNSs users and I have similar preferences (likes/dislikes).	5.52 (1.16)			0.74
HOMOPHILY4: SNSs users and I have similar travel tastes.	5.54 (1.19)			0.79
HOMOPHILY5: SNSs users and I have similar travel experiences.	5.54 (1.17)			0.76
HOMOPHILY6: SNSs users and I have similar travel expectations.	5.62 (1.18)			0.74
F4: Bridging SC	**5.70 (1.09)**	**0.85**	0.53	
BRIDGING_SC1: Interacting with SNS friends makes me interested in things that happen outside of my town.	5.77 (1.03)			0.82
BRIDGING_SC2: Interacting with SNS friends makes me want to try new things.	5.70 (1.15)			0.73
BRIDGING_SC3: Interacting with SNS friends makes me interested in what people unlike me are thinking.	5.52 (1.21)			0.72
BRIDGING_SC4: Talking with SNS friends makes me curious about other places in the world.	5.74 (1.01)			0.74
BRIDGING_SC5: Interacting with SNS friends reminds me that everyone in the world is connected.	5.77 1.06)			0.73
F5: Trust	**5.64 (1.02)**	**0.85**	**0.59**	
TRUST1: I believe the online reviews demonstrate the true service level and the quality of the tourism products and hospitality services.	5.56 (1.06)			0.82
TRUST2: I believe the tourism or hospitality firms must offer the same service level as described by the online reviews.	5.68 (1.04)			0.72
TRUST3: The online reviews are trustworthy for me to choose the tourism or hospitality firm.	5.63 (0.99)			0.79
TRUST4: The online reviews are trustworthy for me to choose the tourist destination.	5.69 (0.98)			0.77
F6: Decision making	**5.69 (1.05)**	**0.88**	**0.56**	
DECISION_MAKING1: Online reviews have motivated me to make travel decisions.	5.70 (1.05)			0.81
DECISION_MAKING2: Online reviews help me to make better travel decisions.	5.78 (1.03)			0.72
DECISION_MAKING3: I choose to visit a tourist destination based on online reviews which I read.	5.57 (1.14)			0.71
DECISION_MAKING4: Reading tourists' online travel reviews makes me confident in travelling to a certain tourist destination.	5.70 (1.02)			0.71
DECISION_MAKING5: Information which I received online helped me make a decision about buying a holiday.	5.63 (1.07)			0.75
DECISION_MAKING6: Information which I received online influenced my purchase decision of tourism products and hospitality services.	5.74 (0.98)			0.80

Discriminant validity means the extent to which the measurement is distinct and not just a reflection of another variable (Churchill, 1979). This study used the criteria proposed by (Gefen & Straub, 2005) to measure discriminant validity. It was necessary for a construct's correlation with other constructs in the study model to be bigger than the square root of the AVE. Table 3 shows the square root of the AVE for each construct, with the AVE being compared to the largest variance that each construct has with the other constructs in the study model. The findings presented are supported by low correlations between the measure of interest and the measurements of other variables.

Table 3: **Fornel–Larcker Criterion**

	Bridging SC	**Decision making**	**Homophily**	**Information Quality**	**Perceived Enjoyment**	**Trust**
Bridging SC	**0.785**					
Decision making	0.729	**0.744**				
Homophily	0.738	0.704	**0.759**			
Information Quality	0.708	0.716	0.725	**0.772**		
Perceived Enjoyment	0.704	0.723	0.721	0.716	**0.799**	
Trust	0.746	0.714	0.673	0.703	0.735	**0.766**

In addition, discriminant validity was tested by running Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) criterion test. HTMT is defined as "the mean value of the item correlations across constructs relative to the mean of the average correlations for the items measuring the same construct" (Hair et al., 2019). The results of the HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait) analysis indicate that all values are below 0.85, which indicates the absence of any issues with discriminant validity based on the HTMT criteria (Henseler et al., 2015). These findings affirm the study measures' adequate convergent and discriminant validity. Overall, the measurement model's results are acceptable, indicating that the structural model's evaluation can proceed.

3.3. Structural Model Results

The findings of the study model are presented in Table 4, featuring the R^2 values, estimated path coefficients, F square values, corrected bias confidence intervals (CI), t-values, and p-values. The proposed model exhibits a favorable fit to the data, as indicated by the model performance statistics. To assess the significance of each path, bootstrapping was employed. The model accounts for 64% of the variance in trust and 77% of the variance in tourists' decision making.

Table 4: **Results of PLS-SEM**

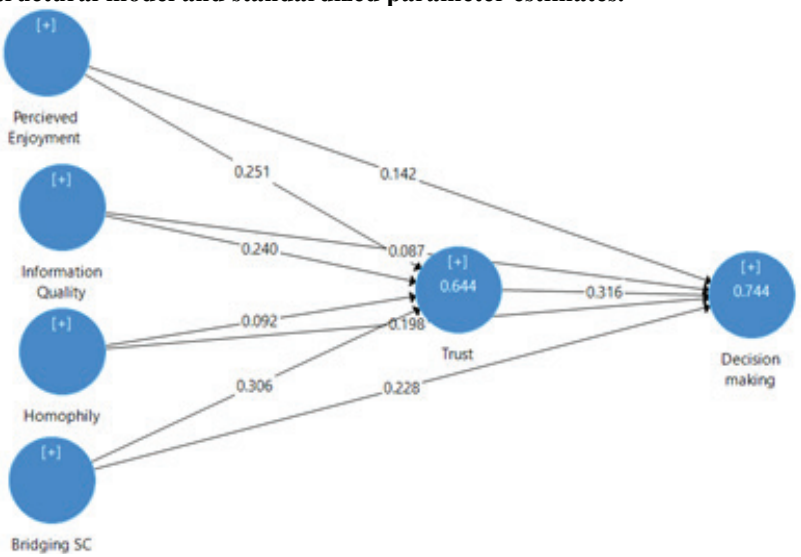
	Original Sample (O)	**Bias Corrected CI**	**F Square**	**T Statistics (|O/ STDEV|)**	**P Values**
Bridging SC → Decision making	0.228	0.233	0.055	0.005	**0.010**
Bridging SC → Trust	0.306	0.311	0.077	0.004	**0.001**
Homophily → Decision making	0.198	0.203	0.054	0.005	**0.004**
Homophily → Trust	0.092	0.104	0.008	0.012	**0.267**
Information Quality → Decision making	0.087	0.080	0.062	-0.007	**0.163**
Information Quality → Trust	0.240	0.229	0.091	-0.011	**0.008**
Perceived Enjoyment → Decision making	0.142	0.143	0.022	0.001	**0.031**
Perceived Enjoyment → Trust	0.251	0.248	0.053	-0.003	**0.000**
Trust → Decision making	0.316	0.313	0.139	-0.004	**0.000**
Information Quality → Trust → Decision making	0.076	0.073	-	-	**0.033**
Perceived Enjoyment → Trust → Decision making	0.079	0.078	-	-	**0.008**
Bridging SC → Trust → Decision making	0.097	0.095	-	-	**0.003**
Homophily → Trust → Decision making	0.029	0.033	-	-	**0.293**

The eWOM antecedents (bridging social capital, information quality, perceived enjoyment, except homophily), have significant impacts on perceived trust with P Values at 0.001, 0.008, 0.000, and 0.267 respectively (Table 4). In addition, bridging social capital, homophily, perceived enjoyment, except information quality have significant impacts on tourist's decision making with P Values at 0.010, 0.004, 0.031, and 0.163 respectively, and perceived trust also has significant impact on tourists' decision making with P Value at 0.000 (Table 4). This provides support for H1, H2, H3, H6, H7, H8, and H9.

Consistent with the SOR theory on the way environmental cues may affect behaviors, the result from the Sobel test confirmed that perceived trust variable acts as an organism element that significantly mediates the relationship between the eWOM antecedents (bridging social capital, information quality, perceived enjoyment, except homophily) and tourists' decision making with P Values at 0.003, 0.033, 0.008, and 0.293 respectively (Table 4). This provides support for H11, H12, and H13.

The evaluation of the research model involved testing hypotheses, estimating path coefficients, determining the variance explained (R2 value), and assessing statistical significance, as depicted in Figure 2. The factor loadings, ranging from 0.71 to 0.83, indicate a strong formation of the constructs.

Figure 2: **The ultimate structural model and standardized parameter estimates.**



4. DISCUSSION

Drawing upon the SOR theory, this study examined the critical relationships between, on the one side, the utilitarian perceptions (information quality), hedonic perceptions (enjoyment) and social perceptions (social interaction and homophily) of tourists in eWOM, and on the other, their decision-making processes. Furthermore, this study explored how these perceptions determine the mediating effect of trust in eWOM. The results demonstrated that the hypothesized SOR-based structural relations adequately fitted the data, further supporting the validity of the SOR theory in evaluating the effects of the antecedents of eWOM on tourists' behavioral intentions and decision-making (Nunthiphatprueksa & Suntrayuth, 2018; Purohit et al., 2022; Seçilmiş et al., 2022; Yadav et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2022).

In light of the PLS-SEM analysis results, most of the hypotheses were supported. In line with previous empirical studies, the results pointed out that tourists' decision making were predicted by the majority of the perceptions of the three eWOM antecedents (bridging social capital, homophily, perceived enjoyment, except information quality) (Ayeh et al., 2013a, 2013b; Assaker et al., 2020; Di Pietro et al., 2012; Horng & Wu, 2020; Hsu & Lin, 2008; Kim et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2021; Pop et al., 2022; Sahli & Legohérel, 2016; Seçilmiş et al., 2022). For instance, individuals who have positive beliefs about the regular interconnection through SNSs, the degree of resemblance between people who share similar characteristics, and eWOM as a leisure and fun activity, would have positive behavioral intention of using eWOM for travel planning, booking and purchasing if they realize that doing so is social, credible and fun. However, contrary to what most prior studies in other contexts suggest, the quality of information presented by eWOM has no effects on tourists' decision making (Lee & Shin, 2014; Park et al., 2007; Wandoko & Panggati, 2022).

The eWOM literature shows perceived enjoyment as a weak predictor and claim that bridging social capital and homophily are the dominant drivers of tourists' decision making (Ayeh et al., 2013a, 2013b; Assaker et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2019; Horng & Wu, 2020). The results indicated that bridging social capital can positively influence their decision making toward choosing tourist destination. This means that tourists with high interacting with SNS friends or relatives are more likely to make their decision about tourist destination and tourism services. Bridging social capital in this study may have been accrued by the prior studies that examined the offline and online interaction between friends and relatives, as more family members and elderly

people have started to use SNSs in recent years. Consequently, they place greater trust in information offered by close friends and relatives (Gvili & Levy, 2018; Jun et al., 2017). This came in line with the results that tourists with high interacting with SNS friends reported higher trust to choose tourist destinations and tourism services.

The results are in line with extant findings in the literature, in that tourists' homophily still exerts substantial impacts on their decision making (Assaker et al., 2020; Ayeh et al., 2013a, 2013b), suggesting that tourists with higher levels of homophily on SNSs are likely to have stronger decision making to choose a tourist destination and tourism services. This indicates that perceived similarity of interest is a critical determinant of tourist's behavioral intentions. People frequently perceive those who are similar to them as trustworthy sources. In the same context, the hedonic value of using SNSs, represented by social media user's enjoyment, is a stronger predictor for tourists' behavioral intentions and decision-making (Di Pietro et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2021; Sahli & Legohérel, 2016). This is consistent with the results of the study, which showed that tourists with more enjoyment on SNSs may have more positive feelings toward particular tourist destinations and tourism services. A probable explanation for these results is that SNSs, which represents a source of amusement, provide numerous interactive multimedia for connecting people, sharing experiences, gaining new knowledge and having fun (Oliveira et al., 2010). SNSs offer an enjoying and beneficial scenario that tour operators are required to adopt in order to promote tourist destinations and tourism services worldwide. Yet in the same setting, the quality of multimedia information plays a major role in how users trust e-tourism websites (Masri et al., 2020; Tseng & Wang, 2016; Viglia et al., 2016). This corresponded well with the results of the current study that information quality can positively influence tourists' trust toward eWOM, which in turn affects their behavioral intention and decision making.

Furthermore, the results emphasized the mediating role of trust. They indicated that perceived trust mediates the relationships between most of the perceptions of the three eWOM antecedents (bridging social capital, information quality, perceived enjoyment, except homophily) and tourists' decision making. For instance, the results pointed out that the effect of bridging social capital on decision making is fully mediated by trust. According to Baykal & Hesapci Karaca (2022), tourists build trust, based on social capital bridging ties, to carry out behaviors (e.g. the use of eWOM for purchasing decision). Moreover, social capital formed on SNSs has been found to be a predictor of perceived trust, which influences consumer loyalty to the product or service (Jun et al., 2017), which in turn, influences behavioral intentions. The influential role of trust in this study can be clarified by the fact that the tourism products are intangible and experiential, in which there are levels of risk associated with products or services to be purchased. Therefore, tourists cannot ascertain their quality prior to the time of purchase.

Gaining trust on e-booking or destination selection is daunting because tourists make their purchase decision away from the place where the service is provided. Tourist's decision might be affected by the quality of information provided by a remote seller, that's why e-tourism is impacted by tourist confidence. The results indicated that trust mediates the relation between eWOM information quality and decision-making. In general, the results of this section are similar to those shown in previous studies by (Ahmad et al., 2020; Wandoko & Panggati, 2022), as they confirmed that customer trust mediates the relationship between eWOM information quality and customer behavioral intention. Therefore, the higher the quality of eWOM information, the more the tourist trusts the services before purchase.

The results provided evidence that trust mediates the relationship between perceived enjoyment and decision-making. Related results were obtained by Ayeh et al (2013b), Mohd Suki & Mohd Suki (2020) and Patel et al (2020). For instance, Patel et al (2020) pointed out that trust act as an intervening variable between perceived enjoyment and behavioral intentions (Patel et al., 2020). Tourists may enjoy the process of using UGC for travel planning and look for amusement related with their tourist experience (Ayeh et al., 2013b). Enjoyable experiences make tourists feel comfortable among SNS users, and these feelings, in turn, build increased trust in travel-related UGC, which influence decision making. Although this study did not find any mediation role of trust between homophily and tourists' decision making (i.e., travel planning and online booking), it sheds lights on the direct relationship between homophily and tourists' decision making. According to Kim & Kim (2021), people visit SNSs to find similar others to interact with, as they regard them as credible sources. This same idea can be transmitted to tourists' search for UGC. SNSs enable online tourists to seek out "similar others" for travel tips.

CONCLUSION

The current study extends previous literature in the field of eWOM antecedents, both on methodological (the use of advanced statistical analyses) and theoretical levels (linking eWOM with SOR theory). The results have theoretical and practical importance because the study developed a new integrated model that analyzes the relationships between, on the one side, the eWOM antecedents (information quality, enjoyment, bridging social capital and homophily) of tourists in eWOM, and on the other, their decision making as mediated by trust. This study demonstrates the relevance of the SOR theory in understanding tourists' behavioral intentions toward the use of UGC in the context of travel planning and online booking. First, this study validates the important roles of perceived enjoyment, bridging social capital and homophily in predicting tourists' behavioral intention to use UGC for travel planning and online booking. Second, the structural equation model emphasizes the significant mediating role of trust of perceived trust in driving decision making perceptions. Furthermore, what distinguishes this study from earlier research on eWOM antecedents is the adoption of an another approach (PLS-SEM) to investigate the hypothesized theoretical relationships among the constructs.

As a result, this study has some managerial implications. Through the research model, eWOM antecedents are considered essential factors by tourists when making decisions. The model might help managers to understand how tourists behave when use SNSs for travel planning. The results showed that the strongest predictors of tourists' decision-making in eWOM context are perceived enjoyment, homophily and bridging social capital. To make the tourists' usage of UGC enjoyable, SNSs should provide well designed entertaining hedonic features. The importance of bridging social capital through eWOM for travel planning requires SNSs managers to integrate humane-computer-interaction (HCI) which would increase tourists' usage of eWOM in the travel planning context. In addition, to emphasize the homophily aspect, it is vital for SNSs managers to highlight digital signals that give tourists a similarity sense with persons who share and/or read travel-related UGCs on SNSs.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several drawbacks to this study. First, this study was conducted to analyze the effects of only four eWOM antecedents on tourists' decision making. Future research might explore additional antecedents such as the tourists' perceptions of usefulness, ease of use and authenticity. This would better help in understanding the influence of antecedents on the use of UGC in the context of travel planning and online booking. While this research illuminates the impact of perceived trust in mediating the relationships between eWOM antecedents and tourists' decision making, further investigation of these relationships will be beneficial because just a few studies have analyzed the factors and conditions that could influence the determination of the mediation outcomes. Furthermore, future research could also extend this study through exploring potential moderators such as socioeconomic variables (occupation, income, etc.) and social media usage (frequency posting etc.).

Second, MTurk was used as a platform for collecting the study data. Using MTurk may introduce selection bias. MTurk may involve respondent self-selection. Respondents may have decided to take part in the study after reading the title and explanation, the payment for the task, and the completion time. MTurk is often considered dominated by relatively young, well-educated, and frequent users (Matherly, 2019). Furthermore, MTurk is a platform that people utilize to obtain financial incentives for their engagement in several tasks, such as filling out questionnaires and taking part in research. This could imply that the sample acquired by MTurk is skewed or biased towards lower-income persons. Future research can be conducted using field research strategies. However, research studies have indicated that samples attained through MTurk are comparable with those of other online sample platforms and those attained via traditional methods (Bartneck et al., 2015; Clifford et al., 2015). Yet, it is argued that future research should consider using triangulated data sources (online and traditional data collection methods). A final limitation relates to the study sample itself. This study was carried out within the context of USA market. Accordingly, results may not apply to different countries or cultures. Studies conducted with respondents from different cultures and countries may yield varying results. Specifically, constructs such as social capital and homophily may be viewed and rated differently within different cultural context.

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