

## Electronic Word of Mouth, Attitude, Motivation, and Travel Intention in the Post-COVID-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted individuals to spend more time searching for information on social media channels. Although most countries have entered a new normal, these channels still play a crucial role in people's decisions. Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the relationship between electronic word of mouth and the attitude, motivation, and travel intention of potential tourists. To achieve this objective, an online survey has gathered 431 valid responses for analysis. Structural equation modeling was employed to investigate the relationships between variables in the proposed model. We find evidence to show that eWOM positively affects potential tourists' travel intentions, while attitude and motivation play positive mediating roles in the effect of eWOM on customers' travel intentions. These results suggest the received information from online reviews, along with optimistic attitudes and motivations, can promote potential tourists' decisions. Moreover, while eWOM can be a useful source to grasp customers' demands, it may also spread unfavorable reviews about the destination. Hence, stakeholders should try to well manage eWOM because if eWOM conveys positive messages, it can help boost tourism in the post-coronavirus pandemic. The paper contributes to the current literature by identifying a critical variable affecting customers' travel intention during the post-pandemic era.

**Key Words:** eWOM, travel behaviour, tourism intention, customer psychology.

**JEL Classification:** Z32, L83, O20

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### 1. Introduction

The tourism sector is popularly acknowledged as a vital source of economic development (Van der Schyff, Meyer, and Ferreira, 2019; Enilov & Wang, 2022), and it contributes to creating livelihoods, income, and wealth for households worldwide (Destek & Aydın, 2022). Since the end of 2019, tourism has been one of the service sectors hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic (Tung, 2021; Wang et al., 2022). With some efficient responses at the world level (for example, urgently created and widely delivered high-quality vaccines), global tourism has recovered and provided economic opportunities to households and businesses in this sector (Robina-Ramírez et al., 2022). But in the long-term perspective, tourism should well prepare to create a post-pandemic “new normal” period. In recent months, tourism has restarted and increased in many destinations, however, challenges have been raised for a sustainable recovery (Villacé-Molinero et al., 2021). Obviously, a real recovery of this sector is

possible when tourists return, and the travel companies well prepare their business plans (Destek & Aydın, 2022). It requires some urgent evidence-based solutions from empirical studies for supporting the decision-making process in travel enterprises (Sobaih et al., 2021).

The statistics of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) have robustly reflected a strong increasing trend in the international travel demand in this current year. In detail, an estimated 474 million tourists travelled internationally over the first **seven** months of 2022, up to 2.7 times higher compared to the number in the same months of the previous year (UNWTO, 2022). Because the lifting of travel restrictions in most countries worldwide, global travel has come back toward a recovery pathway, but this process is not a same speed among countries. It is no doubt that policymakers and practical people in companies should have urgent analyses regarding the customers' perspective and their behavior in travel for supporting the recovery of the tourism industry (Oana, 2020; Sobaih et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2022).

In the booming period of internet in the world communication, customers highly prefer to employ the online information for their decision-making processes (Alalwan, 2018; Confente & Vigolo, 2019). In this context, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) plays a critical role in affecting the intention purchase of customers with products or services (Ismagilova et al., 2020; Hoang & Tung, 2023; Jain, Dixit and Shukla, 2023). Regarding the tourism field, eWOM has been considered not only to furtherly understand the decision-making process of customers but also to predict the travel behavior of tourists (Jalilvand et al. 2012; Doosti et al., 2016; Yi et al., 2021). Nowadays, social media networks are popular and help to create a huge of communicative information, enhance experience sharing, and make eWOM in the virtual platforms. During the coronavirus pandemic, under the social distancing policy and remote working environment, eWOM played a critical role in information sharing and decision-making processes among customers. Notably, Balamoorthy and Chandra (2023) show that people with strong psychological effect are highly motivated to engage in customer engagement activities to join eWOM communication. In the tourism field, social media network is the most suitable environment for exchanging eWOM between tourists in the travel decision-making process. Travel intention behavior of tourists is a huge study field and eWOM maybe affect it in both direct and indirect ways. Under the context of post-pandemic, the attitude and motivation of customers can have a potential mediating role in the decision-making process of travelers. Therefore, these two variables may deliver some helpful information for managers in preparing their business schedules. In this regard, Tandon (2023) discovers that eWOM is positively connected with attitude, which in turn can promote continued intention toward online purchases. Meanwhile, there is little research on the role of motivation in the link from eWOM to travel intention in the post-covid period. Nevertheless, we argue that with the rapid development of social networks, potential tourists will increase their search for information about the destination. Barton et al. (2021) indicate that this use of social media can affect an individual's motivation.

This study investigates the impact of eWOM, attitude and motivation on travel intention in Vietnam in the post-coronavirus pandemic. Vietnam is one of the countries where tourism makes an important contribution to the economy (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2019). Therefore, the country has implemented various policies to revive the sector. As a result, in 2021, Vietnam has nearly 3.9 million jobs in this sector, ranking 12<sup>th</sup> worldwide regarding the travel & tourism employment (WTTC, 2022). Tourism was found to robustly reduce the poverty in this country (Tung & Cuong, 2020). Furthermore, Vietnam has experienced significantly increase in the number of Internet users with more than 72.1 million users in 2022, ranking 13<sup>th</sup> worldwide (Vietnam Government Portal news, 2022). Altogether, Vietnam provides a proper context to analyze the impact of factors such as eWOM on travel decisions. Despite the importance of promoting tourism recovery and the growing effects of digital platforms on individuals' behavior, there is a lack of extensive studies on the link from eWOM, attitude, and motivation to post-pandemic travel intentions in Vietnam. The present research, therefore, is expected to fill this knowledge gap.

The paper has some contributions to the existing literature. First, by focusing on eWOM, the result helps to identify a critical variable affecting the travel intention of customers in the context of the post-coronavirus pandemic. Second, by adding the attitude and motivation variables in the proposed model, the paper delivers not only the direct but also the indirect impact of eWOM on the intention to travel of tourists. Third, the result is very helpful for practical businesspeople in the tourism sector for preparing business plans in the situational context that the pandemic will be stopped shortly. Good policies will well support the tourism sector in having a sustainable recovery in the future.

The rest of the study is constructed as follow. Section 2 describes the literature review, while section 3 shows the methods used to analyze collected data. Section 4 highlights descriptive statistics, model fitness assessment, and hypothesis testing. Section 5 is about discussion, while section 6 mentions theoretical implication and practical implication. The last section is a conclusion.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Electronic Word of mouth and Travel intention

Basically, word of mouth (WOM) is understood as the communication regarding products and services among customers based on their received experiences from the using process of the products or services (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). WOM is considered as the individual and private comments from customers. The internet and the application of the internet in business are very popular nowadays (Alalwan, 2018). The Internet has revolutionized the way companies practice their business. The booming of electronic commerce (commerce on the internet) in recent years has created a huge volume of electronic word of mouth (WOM) (Hoang & Tung, 2022). The eWOM can be accessed and seen easily and significantly increased the information sources related to the products and services. Tourism is a service, therefore, eWOM can influence the tourism decision-making process of the customers (Hernández-Méndez et al., 2015).

In the tourism field, customers always find a varied amount of information regarding the target destinations before they make a travel trip (Kim & Hyun, 2021). Besides, the utility of social networks has become a popular habit of most people, the tourism customers may be referring the eWOM in these online platforms as free or cheap resources to know as much as possible about potential destinations. Because of the high variety of the received information, the tourists may have various levels of expectation regarding a destination, the exact expectation depended on the eWOM that they interacted with the previous time (Chang & Wang, 2019). During the pandemic, under the social distancing policy for combating the risk of the virus, customers prefer to employ eWOM as a reference source for buying goods and services through online tools. As a habit, people will use eWOM when they are preparing for their tourism trips. Hence, based on discussion coming in prior studies, the first hypothesis is established.

H1: eWOM positively affects the travel intention of customers.

### 2.2. Electronic Word of mouth and Attitude

eWOM not only affects intention but it can also influence tourist attitude. Attitude is commonly understood as a private psychology of a person and the response of this person to an object positively or negatively (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). Customer's attitude plays a critical role in purchase intention for goods and services. Besides, eWOM is found to have an effect on the attitude of the customers (Teng et al., 2017; Tandon, 2023). The attitude of traveler is an emerging study topic in the tourism field, it can help to predict the travel behaviour of customers (Zainal et al., 2017). Attitude is a factor in the customer decision-making process (Anubha & Shome, 2021). Before a trip, the tourists will find

and read eWOM to have a fast review of the destinations. The information received from eWOM can influence the attitude of travelers, and as consequence, they affect the decision of customers. Some previous studies revealed that the information on eWOM communication provides a positive effect on tourists' attitudes during the selection process for tourism trips (Teng et al., 2017; Anubha & Shome, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic will be ended shortly, the travelling activities have increased robustly in recent months. Tourists easily access huge information and comments regarding tourism trips. The attitude of travelers can change if they are influenced by eWOMs and consider the comments regarding the experiences of other customers. To test the relationship between eWOM and the attitude of travelers, the second hypothesis is shown below:

H2: eWOM positively affects the travel attitude of customers.

### 2.3. Electronic Word of mouth and Motivation

Another factor related to eWOM is motivation. Motivation in tourism is known as the reason that convinces customers to make travel decisions and the content of their future trips. Therefore, travel motivation plays a fundamental factor in tourists' decision-making process. On the other hand, travel motivation and its effect on the destination selection of customers are impacted by the psychographic types of these customers (Yoo et al., 2018). Through the priority in the digitization of business activities, for example, in the collection process of customers' opinions, the previous experiences of customers are online shared, circulated, and expanded robustly in social media networks or online newspapers (Chen & Law, 2016). In the tourism field, eWOM plays a prominent element in affecting the motivation of travelers when some aspects of tourism products are intangible, thus the customers cannot have experiences before they consume the services. Tourist motivation is quite an important issue for identifying the main reasons that enhance the travel decision (Cajiao et al., 2022). Under the context of the post-COVID-19 pandemic, the health risks are reducing, but customers are quite careful in doing their travel plans (Gavurova et al. 2023). Obviously, they find, read, and consider the eWOMs from potential destinations such as a critical information source for the making decision (Cajiao et al., 2022). Hence, for examining this potential relationship, the hypothesis is established as below:

H3: eWOM positively affects the travel motivation of customers.

### 2.4. Attitude and Travel intention

Our next hypothesis concerns the link from attitude to travel intention. In the business environment, a better understanding of the consumer's attitudes towards the choice of product types is connected with higher positive outcomes of selling activities. The attitude of the customer is a critical study objective in the business area because it reflects the composite of the buyer's beliefs, and feelings toward the products or services of enterprises, then, it is a necessary information input to explain the behavioral intention of the customer. Basically, attitude is a variable that helps to predict the purchase intention of customers for products and services (Ajzen, 1991). The previous studies suggested that attitude is the main driver of tourism intention under the sight of the traditional Planned Behavior Theory (TPB) (Jalilvand et al., 2012; Rua, 2020; Wang et al., 2022). Study findings show that the attitude of tourists can make a positive content and can create higher travel intention levels (Confente & Vigolo, 2019; Sharma et al., 2022). A higher intention to travel maybe is due to the positive attitude to a destination recommended on the internet made by eWOMs. Thus, the next hypothesis will focus on the association between the attitude and travel intention of customers.

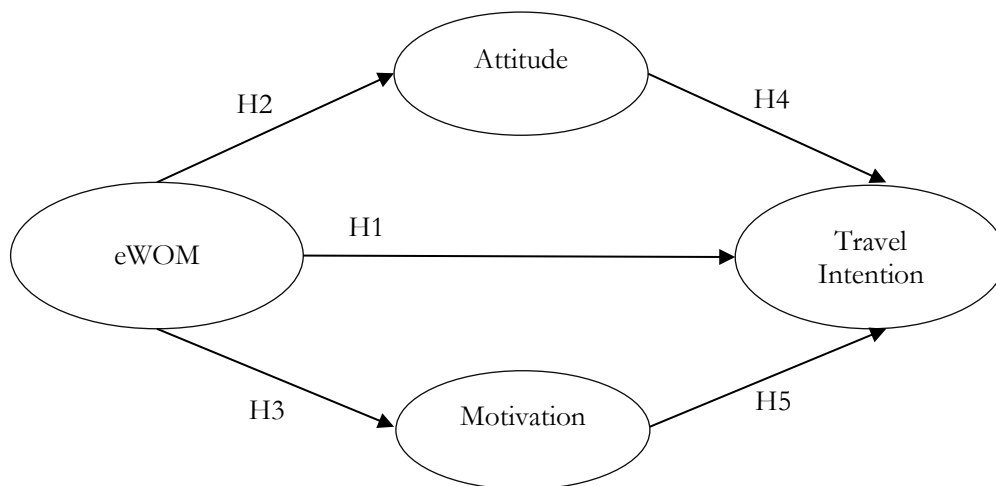
H4: Attitude positively affects the travel intention of customers.

## 2.5. Motivation and Travel intention

Previous studies state that travel intention can also be affected by motivation. Motivation is a critical factor that explains the private behaviour of customers (Nwankwo et al., 2014). In the tourism sector, some empirical results suggested the existence of a link from the motivation to the future travel intention of tourists (Jang et al., 2009). On the other hand, purchase motivation can make a mediating effect on customers' purchase intention (Kim & Oh, 2022). The understanding of customers' motivation provides theoretical and practical implications on how managers can effectively make business schedules and optimally drive their businesses. Considered as an important business sector for economic development in many countries (Enilov & Wang, 2022), tourism includes a huge number of customers. When a customer has a high motivation, the travel decision-making process can be more robust (Yoo et al., 2018). In some cases, tourism motivation was found to have an impact that reduced the negative effect of the physical risk on visit intention (Khan et al., 2019). For examination of this relationship, the final hypothesis is shown below.

H5: Motivation positively affects the travel intention of customers.

Figure 1. The proposed model



Source: Authors.

## 3. Methods

Before assessing the impact of factors on travel intention, we checked the validity and reliability of the scale and specific items. Particularly, we first estimated Cronbach's Alpha value to measure the internal consistency of questions. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) applying the Principal axis factoring and the Promax rotation methods was then applied to discover the underlying constructs of variables. In the next step, we employed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate the fitness of the proposed theoretical model. Only items that satisfy the required criteria were subjected to further analysis. In detail, values of Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability should be not lower than 0.7, while Factor Loading and Average Variance Extracted should be higher than 0.6 and 0.5, respectively (Hair et al., 2010). Following suggestions by Hair et al. (2010), we also calculated model fit indices, namely Chi-square/df ( $\chi^2/df < 5$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI  $> 0.9$ ), Goodness-of-Fit Index and Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI  $> 0.8$ , AGFI  $> 0.8$ ), Comparative Fit Index (CFI  $> 0.9$ ), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA  $< 0.08$ ). Finally, SEM was applied to explore

the impact of factors on tourist intention. We employ the maximum likelihood method to build the structural equation model for analysis.

The questionnaire consists of two main parts. We begin by collecting their personal information, such as gender, education, occupation, and income. Participants were then asked about their travel intention and the factors influencing this intention. All items followed previous literature and were modified to fit the new context. Specifically, the eWOM of the coronavirus pandemic (4 items) was based on the survey by Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011). Questions regarding attitude (4 items) and motivation (4 items) were developed from those by Sánchez-Cañizares et al. (2021) and Chung et al. (2021), respectively. Finally, travel intention (5 items) was structured following research by Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021). The 5-point Likert scale, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, is used to gather respondents' assessment on these items. After translating into Vietnamese, 10 individuals were invited to read the survey questions. This action aims to guarantee that the wording and meanings of the questionnaires are unambiguous and appropriate to the local language.

It appears that an online questionnaire is a reasonable and effective tool, and more proper for spreading electronic information when there are concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic (Kurfalı et al., 2017; Chung et al., 2021). Hence, we developed an online questionnaire for the present study using a 5-point Likert scale. All the items employed in the present paper are derived after a comprehensive review of previous research. Before reaching the official survey, we consulted with 3 experts and conducted a pilot study with 20 individuals to assess the appropriateness and understandability of the questionnaire. Respondents were randomly selected and agreed to join the study. Their identities were anonymized to ensure the objectivity of the answers. In October 2021, we received 437 responses from participants in Ho Chi Minh city. We chose this city to conduct our research because it is one of the leading cities in recovering Vietnam's tourism and travel industry after the pandemic. Indeed, Ho Chi Minh City's tourism revenue in the first half of 2023 leads the country with VND80.8 trillion (\$3.39 billion) (Communist Party of Vietnam Online Newspaper, 2023). After data cleaning, because 6 responses were excluded due to missing values, the final data has 431 responses. As the survey period occurred when Vietnam started to relax anti-pandemic measures and adopted measures to promote tourism, the results from the analysis suggest some determinants of travel intentions under the post-COVID-19 period.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics Analysis

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of respondents. The proportion of participants is quite balanced between males (49.9%) and females (50.1%). The majority of respondents (54.8%) are between the ages of 18-22, and most of them have participated in or obtained a bachelor's degree (60.3%). Regarding occupation, as much as 53.1% of the respondents are students, while around 34.1% of them are either employed or self-employed. More than 70% of these tourists receive a monthly income lower than 10 million VND. On October 30, 2021, one USD can be exchanged for about 22,600 VND. Finally, as much as 85.6% of respondents claim that they travel up to three times annually.

On average, the variables' values range between 3.2 and 3.9, while the standard deviations are from 0.9 to 1.3. Among the variables, motivation shows the highest mean value, while attitude has the lowest one. Meanwhile, attitude and motivation receive the highest and lowest standard deviations, respectively. Moreover, the results report significant positive correlations among eWOM, attitude, motivation, and travel intention at 1%. Information on the mean values and corresponding standard deviations are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Sub-variable	Number	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	215	49.9
	Female	216	50.1
Age	18-22	236	54.8
	23-29	58	13.5
	30-39	92	21.3
	40 and higher	45	10.4
Education	Bachelor's degree	260	60.3
	Master's and PhD's degree	117	27.1
	Others	54	12.5
Occupation	Student	229	53.1
	Employed	92	22
	Self-employed	52	12.1
	Others	55	12.8
Monthly income	≤ 5 million VND	216	50.1
	Over 5 - 10 million VND	88	20.4
	Over 10 - 20 million VND	80	18.6
	Over 20 - 30 million VND	24	5.6
	Over 30 million VND	23	5.3
Travel frequency	0 - 1 times annually	188	43.6
	2 - 3 times annually	181	42.0
	4 - 5 times annually	41	9.5
	≥ 6 times annually	21	4.9
	Total	431	100

Source: Authors.

Table 2. Descriptive summary and correlation matrix

Construct	Mean	SD	eWOM	Attitude	Motivation	Travel intention
eWOM	3.775	0.889	1			
Attitude	3.19	1.273	0.553*	1		
Motivation	3.93	0.884	0.554*	0.400*	1	
Travel intention	3.566	1.048	0.647*	0.701*	0.546*	1

Notes: N=431; SD=Standard Deviation. \*Significance at 1%

Source: Authors.

## 4.2 Model fitness assessment

Table 3 exhibits the result from analyzing the validity and reliability of the theoretical model. Notably, all variables gain Cronbach alpha values of higher than 0.7, reporting acceptable reliability of the scale. The EFA reports that the variables can be extracted into four factors as proposed. We then employ the CFA to further evaluate the research instrument. Table 4 indicates that CR values of all variables fall between 0.869 and 0.953, higher than the required minimum level of 0.7. Likewise, no value of AVE is below the threshold of 0.6. Moreover, the square roots of AVE regarding one construct is not lower than the correlations with others as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981).

Table 3. Results of confirmatory factor analysis

Construct/Items	$\alpha$	Loading	CR	AVE
<i>Electronic word of mouth of COVID (eWOM)</i>	0.897		0.953	0.835
When planning my travel, I often refer to online information about the pandemic at a destination		0.700		
Online reviews and assessments of the pandemic at a destination are reliable information sources		0.827		
Online assessments about the pandemic at a destination are truthful		0.906		
I trust online travel reviews when choosing a travel destination amid the pandemic		0.848		
<i>Attitude (ATT)</i>	0.953		0.869	0.624
Traveling is good for the community		0.914		
Traveling helps maintain social relationships		0.930		
Traveling improves physical health		0.915		
Traveling helps relieve stress and improve mental health		0.896		
<i>Motivation (MOV)</i>	0.866		0.900	0.693
I travel to be physically healthy		0.764		
I travel to relieve stuffiness in my environment		0.828		
I travel to decrease stress and maintain a work-life balance		0.808		
I travel to escape the boring daily routine of my family		0.759		
<i>Travel Intention (INT)</i>	0.891		0.898	0.639
When the pandemic ends, I will travel as soon as possible		0.760		
When I want to make a trip, I plan to do it instantly		0.873		
If the pandemic ends, I will try to travel without delay		0.785		
Even during the pandemic, I intend to travel as soon as possible		0.793		
The probability that I will travel forthwith when the covid-19 pandemic ends is high		0.814		
<i>Notes: Loading=Standardized Regression Weights; <math>\alpha</math>=Cronbach's Alpha; CR=Composite Reliability; AVE=Average Variance Extracted.</i>				

Source: Authors' calculations.



The analysis also reveals indices measuring the model's fitness. These indices include Chi-square/df ( $\chi^2/df < 5$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), GFI = 0.921, AGFI = 0.891, TLI = 0.958, CFI = 0.966, and RMSEA = 0.065. Results show that the proposed instruments are reliable and valid, and other analytical steps can be proceeded to uncover the determinants of tourists' intentions.

### 4.3 Hypothesis testing

The present study tests hypotheses on the relationship between variables. It is reported that the p-values of all cases are less than 0.01, revealing that the results support the proposed hypotheses (Table 4). Particularly, eWOM is significantly and positively associated with travel intention ( $\beta = 0.356$ , SE = 0.068, p-value < 0.01), attitude ( $\beta = 1.246$ , SE = 0.111, p-value < 0.01), and motivation ( $\beta = 0.700$ , SE = 0.070, p-value < 0.01). The analysis also reveals that attitude has a significant and positive impact on potential tourists' intentions ( $\beta = 0.293$ , SE = 0.028, p-value < 0.01). Similarly, motivation is an important factor driving the travel intention of people ( $\beta = 0.232$ , SE = 0.048, p-value < 0.01). It is evident from the results that all five hypotheses, H1 to H5, are supported.

Table 4. Results of the structural model

Independent variable → Dependent variable	Unstandardized coefficient	SE	P-value	Conclude
eWOM ---> INT	0.356	0.068	***	H1 - Supported
eWOM ---> ATT	1.246	0.111	***	H2 - Supported
eWOM ---> MOV	0.700	0.070	***	H3 - Supported
ATT ---> INT	0.293	0.028	***	H4 - Supported
MOV ---> INT	0.232	0.048	***	H5 - Supported
<i>Goodness-of-fit indices</i>	$\chi^2/df= 2.832$ $p<0.001$	CFI = 0.966 GFI= 0.921 RMSEA= 0.065		TLI = 0.958 AGFI = 0.891

Notes: \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ . SE=Standard Error. eWOM of COVID-19 (eWOM), Attitude (ATT), Motivation (MOV), Travel Intention (INT).

Source: Authors' calculations.

Therefore, the constructs including eWOM, attitudes, and motivation can significantly predict individuals' travel intentions during the post-coronavirus pandemic. Indeed, these indicators can explain about 69.2% ( $R^2 = 0.692$ ) of the variance regarding such intention.

## 5. Discussion

The present study aims to re-investigate the influence of eWOM on the travel intention of individuals during the post-coronavirus pandemic period. After gathering and cleansing data, we calculate the indexes to assess the reliability and validity of the proposed theoretical model. We then apply SEM to examine the hypotheses about the effects of eWOM, attitude, and motivation on potential tourists' decision-making. The results uncover that all five hypotheses are supported, and the model's predictive capacity is high as it can explain 69.2% ( $R^2 = 0.692$ ) of the variance related to one's travel intention.

Particularly, eWOM significantly and positively affects the travel intention of individuals. It means that the received information from comments on the internet has a critical role which leads to a higher demand for travelling in the future. In the estimated result, firstly, this effect exists and is a direct path and clear because the coefficients are significant at 1%. The finding contributes to the current literature when it brings a post-pandemic context to the study. This contribution also expands and enriches the connection between eWOM and travel intention discussed by previous results such as Hernández-Méndez et al. (2015), Chang and Wang (2019), and Kim and Hyun (2021). In the post-COVID-19 pandemic, due to the social distancing policy applied and just removed in many countries, potential tourists may face with lack of information regarding destinations. As a consequence, they can rely on eWOM as a free, cheap, and diverse resource for reference. In addition, during the coronavirus pandemic, individuals had to spend more time at home because of government regulations, and they were concerned about the spread of the virus. This further promotes the habit of using social media channels and contacting eWOM to find information about a place, a product, or a service.

The estimated result finds that eWOM causes not only a direct impact but also indirect impacts on the travel intention of customers. The channel of this effect is through the attitude of potential tourists. This result is consistent with that by Tandon (2023). By indicating that eWOM can affect attitudes about tourism, the managers have another choice to influence the travel intention of customers. If online information through social media networks fosters an optimistic attitude towards travelling, individuals are more likely to travel (Teng et al., 2017). The evidence for this managerial implication is that in the research model, there are statistically significant positive connections between eWOM and attitude as well as between attitude and travel intention.

Another mediating channel by which eWOM can influence individual intention in tourism is travel motivation. As mentioned above, the usage of social media can affect motivation of a person (Barton et al., 2021). In recent years, there have been more and more in the number of review sites or social media networks for customers to comment, vote, and share their feelings and experiences about previous travel trips or tourist attractions. These activities can deliver an impact on the individual's motivation to travel intention. Indeed, the results indicate that eWOM has related to travel motivation which has a mediating effect on travel intention. All coefficients are positive and statistically significant in the proposed model and suggest helpful implications. Under a recovery time after a pandemic, the findings also extend the current literature made by previous studies, for example, Chen and Law (2016) and Yoo et al. (2018).

## 6. Theoretical implication and practical implication

The results report that eWOM has a statistically significant impact on travel intention. This factor can also promote positive (or negative) attitudes and motivation toward travel. Attitudes and motivation, in turn, will encourage (or inhibit) an individual's travel decision to a destination. These findings suggest that travel and tourism companies, government agencies, and other stakeholders should pay more attention to the communication and control of information on social media networks. Potential visitors may lack information about a certain tourist destination. In this context, they can search for information about the reviews and experiences of previous travelers. The role of eWOM in the post-covid-19 new normal is perhaps even more important as the pandemic has prompted individuals to become more exposed and more familiar with online tools. For example, Dušek and Sagapova (2022) indicate that the time that young people in the Czech Republic spend on Instagram every day is about 1-3 hours longer than it was before the pandemic.

The above results suggest some implications for boosting the tourism industry. First, positive electronic word-of-mouth communication, along with optimistic attitudes and motivations, are essential factors in driving one's travel intention. Travel and tourism companies and other stakeholders should

thus develop online tools to communicate beneficial messages and images about a destination. Policy makers can create innovative approaches to increase local development (Potluka et al., 2023). Governments can also set close ties with companies and create a network to present more benefits for businesses (Civelek, & Krajčák, 2022). Second, eWOM is a useful source to increase understanding of customers' demands. Online review sites or social media networks provide travel agencies and local authorities with visitors' feedback and opinions about hospitality and tourism products and services. In this way, they can raise the quality of their products and services to better satisfy the needs of customers. Third, a negative experience, such as in terms of fairness, may leave a bad impression on tourists, prompting them to make reviews that are unfavorable to the company or the destination spots. Therefore, companies should constantly receive customers' opinions in different forms. Timely feedback on social networks can help reduce the negative impact of such reviews. In this regard, our research echoes prior studies pointing the importance of social media in driving tourists' intention (Păunescu and Moraru, 2018; Asyraff et al., 2023). Another important implication involves the marketing of small and midsize enterprises (SMEs), including travel agencies. As suggested by Žufan et al. (2023), social media has given these companies opportunities to overcome financial barriers by allowing them to implement marketing and promotional activities.

## 7. Conclusion

The coronavirus pandemic has no longer resulted in many deaths, but its effects on individuals may persist for a long time. One of them can be the increased exposure and use of information on social media channels. Individuals' travel decisions are no exception. This implies that under the new normal, eWOM can play a vital role in driving potential tourists' intentions. To explore this relationship, we collected 431 valid responses regarding their travel decision-making process. We also checked the scale to ensure that the analytical instrument is suitable for analysis. We discover that eWOM has a positive influence on travel intention. Moreover, this indicator was found to be positively linked with both attitude and motivation, which in turn can enhance one's intention. That is, if eWOM creates positive attitudes and increases travel motivation, individuals will be more inclined to do so. Hence, stakeholders should concentrate more on communicating and controlling positive information to promote individuals' travel intentions. In fact, Vietnamese government agencies have issued various policies and campaigns to revive the tourism industry, such as the Resolution No. 82/NQ-CP and the Program No. 4698/BVHTTDL-TCDL. Notably, the Viet Nam Tourism Marketing Strategy for 2030 by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism emphasizes the role of social networking platforms, as well as digital marketing activities. This is consistent with our finding on the role of eWOM in promoting travel intentions.

Although the paper sheds some light on the role of eWOM in fostering travel intention under the new normal context, it is no exception from limitations. First, this research was performed in a developing country. It is unclear whether the effects of eWOM on travel decisions are the same between developing and developed countries. Future research may compare the role of eWOM in different country groups. Second, the effect of eWOM may be more complex than what we have shown in the model, especially with the rapid increase in the scope and speed of the Internet. We acknowledge that this is a limitation that needs further studies to incorporate and investigate different determinants of tourists' behavior. Third, in our study, we only focus on the direct effects of variables, therefore, in the next studies, the mediating effects of variables, eg., attitude and motivation, should be discussed. Fourth, due to limited resources, the survey sample consists of 431 responses, a large number of which are young people, and do not include individuals from all provinces and cities in Vietnam. Another study could analyze more diverse topics and cover more geographical areas or combine surveying with other forms of research to gain more in-depth information.

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