

THE IMPACT OF ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH ON TRAVEL INTENTION THROUGH FACEBOOK

W.N. Prasadini^{1,*} and Mihiri Wickramasinghe²

^{1,2}Department of Information Systems, Faculty of Management Studies, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Mihintale, Sri Lanka

*Corresponding author (email: is1617233@mgt.rjt.ac.lk)

INTRODUCTION

This study is about to identify the impact of e-WOM on travel intention through Facebook related to the Sri Lankan context. The Sri Lankan tourist industry has faced a few obstacles in demonstrating its inadequacy in tourism-related marketing operations. According to Shamini (2020), the first is that Sri Lanka's tourism industry's marketing and communication efforts are not trend-conscious or dynamic in response to consumer demands. It demonstrates a lack of embrace of global trends such as social media marketing. Second, failing to promote the lesser-known destinations on social media while continuing to highlight the same attractions and events shows a lack of effort in raising tourist expectations and curiosity. Overall, Sri Lanka evidently needs enhancement in terms of social media marketing (Shamini, 2020). Furthermore, Ahmad et al. (2019) stated that some studies propose that more research be done on e-WOM, the reason for this is that the subject of e-WOM is still underdeveloped, and they need to pay more attention to it to provide comprehensive information for future researchers, professionals, and users. As a result, experts recommend assessing the effects of e-WOM on travel intention capabilities. e-WOM, on the other hand, had a significant positive impact on travel intention, city image, and attitude toward the city. According to Alsheikh et al. (2021), the main problem is to fill in the gaps as to what kind of results such research will bring in Sri Lanka, as there are different views on each research. Here, the researcher examines the relationship between intention to travel and e-WOM quality, e-WOM quantity, e-WOM trust, and timeliness of reviews.

METHODOLOGY

This study goes under the basic research concept, which is exploratory. In this study, a survey was used as a research strategy. In educational research, online questionnaires are becoming more popular (Roberts & Allen, 2015).

Online surveys were carried out among Facebook users in the Sri Lankan context. It cannot justify the population as no recorded statistics on Facebook users in Sri Lanka exist. The study used snowball sampling. Because the sample has characteristics that are hard to come by. (Etikan, 2016).

The research study takes a quantitative inline approach. Independent variables are e-WOM quality, e-WOM quantity, e-WOM trust, and timeliness of reviews. The dependent variable is the intention to travel (Ahmad et al., 2019; Malkanthie, 2018).

In this study, the following hypotheses are proposed;

H₁: There is a significant impact of e-WOM quality on Travel intention among Facebook users

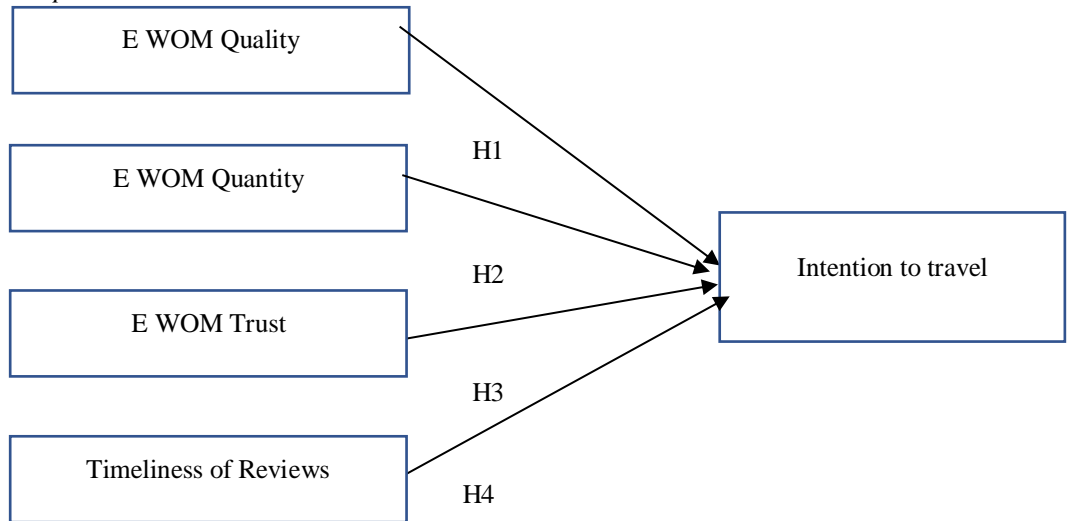
H₂: There is a significant impact of e-WOM quantity on Travel intention among Facebook users

H₃: There is a significant impact of e-WOM trust on Travel intention among Facebook users

H₄: There is a significant impact of timeliness of reviews on Travel intention among Facebook users

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Source: (Ahmad et al., 2019; Malkanthie, 2018)

RESULTS AND DESCUSSION

In this study, the data collected and results generated from the statistical analysis for the impact of e-WOM on travel intention. Analysis was performed with the assistance of IBM SPSS statistics 28.0.1.1. Responder’s demographic factors were primarily analyzed to get a basic idea about the selected sample (not tabulated). Two hundred twenty questionnaires got responses. All responses are correct, and 100 % of the response rate was recorded for the present study.

The first section captures demographic information such as gender, age, occupation, Facebook usage frequency, and trips per year

In this study, all the Cronbach's alpha (α) values were more significant than 0.7 ($\alpha > 0.7$), and the constructs used to evaluate research variables are accepted for the present study. All KMO Bartlett's test values were more significant than 0.5, and the research instrument used to collect data is valid for the present study.

Table 1

Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis	No. of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha
E WOM Quality	4	0.858
E WOM Quantity	5	0.884
E WOM Trust	4	0.873
Timeliness of reviews	3	0.815
Intention to travel	4	0.877

Table 3*Validity Analysis*

Validity analysis	No. of Items	KMO Bartlett's test
E WOM Quality	4	0.813
E WOM Quantity	5	0.880
E WOM Trust	4	0.821
Timeliness of reviews	3	0.711
Intention to travel	4	0.834

Table 4*Correlation Analysis with Travel Intention*

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E WOM Quality	0.806**
E WOM Quantity	0.825**
E WOM Trust	0.785**
Timeliness of reviews	0.833**

From the above results, it was evident that travel intention was more moderately positive with the timeliness of reviews rather than other variables.

In regression analysis, the P-value for e-WOM trust is 0.084 because the P-value is higher than 0.05. Hence, this dimension of e-WOM does not impact travel intention via Facebook. The P values for the e-WOM quality, e-WOM quantity, and timeliness of reviews are .001, .003, and .001, respectively. Thus, these independent variable dimensions affect travel intention via Facebook.

According to the findings of study H1, H2, and H4 were supported while H3 was not supported.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results were consistent with the researcher's expectations, and H₁, H₂, and H₄ were supported. H₃ was not supported because the p-value was higher. The research results indicate a significant impact on e-WOM quality, e-WOM quantity, and timeliness of reviews on the intention to travel via Facebook among Sri Lankan Facebook users.

The findings of this study show that e-WOM quality, e-WOM quantity, and timeliness of reviews positively and significantly impact Facebook users' travel intentions. According to previous researchers' findings, e-WOM positively impacts travel intention (Krishnapillai & Ying, 2020). On the other hand, considering the overall e-WOM impact on travel intention has a positive and significant impact through social media (Gosal et al., 2020). This study confirmed the same findings.

This study explores travel intention and factors influencing it, offering recommendations for tourism organizations, Facebook users, and trip planners. It suggests increasing Facebook usage in tourism activities and promoting tourism development, benefiting the government and citizens in Sri Lanka. The study also suggests implementing communication processes among domestic travelers.

This study emphasizes only a Sri Lankan Facebook user. Also, this study identifies the impact of e-WOM on travel intention through Facebook. The result cannot get the opinion of other social media users. Another limitation of this study is the sampling process. Research on e-WOM's impact on travel intention in the Sri Lankan context is limited, and future studies can be expanded to cover all social media platforms, thereby enhancing understanding.

Keywords - e-WOM quality, e-WOM quantity, e-WOM trust, timeliness of reviews, travel intention

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