

# The Impact of Electronic Word-of-Mouth on the Purchase Intention of Tourists on Online Hotel Booking Applications

Dao Thi Bich Nguyen, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ton Duc Thang University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam\*

Van Thi Khanh Nguyen, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ton Duc Thang University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

## ABSTRACT

The study emphasizes the growing significance of electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) in marketing, especially in service industries like tourism. Employing a research model combining the information adoption model (IAM) and the theory of reasoned action (TRA), the study investigates factors influencing EWOM adoption on online travel agency (OTA) platforms using data from 286 Ho Chi Minh City tourists. Analyzing the data through exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modeling (SEM), the results highlight positive relationships between information quantity and product ranking with EWOM adoption. However, information credibility, quality, and reviewer expertise do not directly impact adoption. EWOM adoption directly influences purchasing intention and indirectly affects it through attitude and subjective norm. The findings offer insights for managers to develop effective strategies and enhance competitiveness in the hospitality industry.

## KEYWORDS:

Electronic word-of-mouth, Online travel agency, Information adoption model, Theory of reasoned action, Purchase intention

## INTRODUCTION

According to Buhalis et al. (2020), the use of e-commerce is increasingly widespread, especially in the field of tourism. A growing number of travel consumers, especially young tourists, are using internet search engines and social network platforms and booking service applications for tourism activities. The presence of e-commerce in the travel industry—in OTAs (online travel agencies), for instance—has been continuously influencing the behavior of the community and the consumer purchasing model. (Cham et al., 2020). Many customers are starting to consider using online booking whenever they need anything related to travel, especially hotel and transportation services (Zahratu & Hurriyati, 2020). It is crucial for OTAs to understand the factors influencing customer satisfaction in order to implement strategies that strengthen customer impact (Dutta et al., 2017).

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\*Corresponding Author

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Additionally, the emergence of OTAs has transformed the way consumers search for and book travel services. As observed, OTAs appeared in the late 1990s and continued to thrive over the subsequent decade, becoming a vital part of the online travel industry. The development of industrial revolution 4.0 has brought many opportunities for online commerce. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought difficulties to the tourism industry. However, OTAs have had the opportunity to develop as Vietnamese consumers have changed traditional shopping habits by ordering services from direct travel agents and tour operators. The presence and growth of OTAs have become more crucial than ever in the context of the post-COVID-19 world, as OTAs play a significant role in connecting tourists with travel services and facilitate their online search, price comparison, and booking.

In Vietnam, the development of OTAs has provided travelers with more options and created a vibrant, competitive environment among travel service providers. According to statistical data from Grant Thornton (2019), over 30% of bookings for luxury hotels come from travel companies and tour operators. Second ranking are OTAs, contributing nearly 26%, and their influence is steadily increasing. In this sector, cross-border service providers such as Agoda.com, Booking.com (both under Booking Holdings), Trivago.com, and Hotels.com (under Expedia Group), as well as Airbnb.com, TripAdvisor and Traveloka (Indonesia), are dominating the market. Additionally, according to a survey by Statista 2021, targeting individuals aged 16–64, consumers' needs when using the internet extend beyond search engines. Other sources, such as word-of-mouth recommendations, comments on social media, and consumer review websites, also play a significant role in meeting their demands.

For the Vietnam market, currently, popular OTA channels are mostly international online channels. However, to reach the market, OTA channels also need to learn the behaviors of customers and the differences among them to be able to build appropriate websites (Huang et al., 2021). In addition, one of the challenges for businesses involved in online travel services is retaining customers, or in other words, ensuring customer satisfaction through the quality of the services provided, leading to service purchase behavior and continued use of OTA services. However, up to this point in Vietnam, studies have focused mainly on consumers' online shopping intentions in the general e-commerce sector. There have been limited studies in the field of tourism, especially research related to online travel services, specifically OTAs in online hotel booking. OTAs are important because they help increase the visibility of hotel brands on websites, thereby enhancing tourist interest and occupancy rates (Ling et al., 2015). According to Sardar et al. (2021), from the consumer's perspective, booking through OTAs provides benefits related to convenience, financial advantages (such as lower prices), speed, enjoyment, and variety of products/services (Liu & Zhang, 2014). Previous research has predominantly emphasized channel cooperation or channel competition (Yang et al., 2013). Although the subjects examined in previous studies included various channels, these channels were all affiliated with the same business organization.

In the competitive context of the tourism industry, especially with the development of the OTA system, OTA channels need to invest in quality factors to attract customers. Furthermore, intangible products can pose challenges in terms of quality measurement from pre-consumption to purchase (Yan et al., 2018). Consumers, in general, often rely on word-of-mouth (WOM) information from family or acquaintances to learn about product attributes and quality (Kamalasena & Sirisena, 2021). Nowadays, in the digital age, consumers tend to utilize WOM through a form of social media communication known as EWOM (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018). Before the rise of digitalization and the widespread use of EWOM by consumers, these studies didn't clearly explain how the factors influencing EWOM affect travelers' intentions to book through OTA channels. Many studies (e.g., Pinto and Castro, 2019) have explored the influence of positive and negative reviews on purchase intentions. Meanwhile, some researchers have shifted their focus to travel blogs and online diaries as a form of EWOM, often using content analysis or narrative analysis techniques (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000). In addition, previous research also suggests that EWOM yields different impact outcomes on different platforms and different approaches (Yan et al., 2018). However, the antecedents affecting customer EWOM adoption are inconsistent across studies. Furthermore, with the popularity of social

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