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Exploring factors affecting the adoption of electronic word-of-mouth in culinary tourism: A case study of Vietnamese youth

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ABSTRACT
The rapid growth of social media has made electronic word of mouth (eWOM) a vital source of information for young consumers, especially in food tourism, where experiences are highly visual, emotional, and socially driven. This study explores the key factors influencing young Vietnamese consumers' adoption of eWOM in their food-related travel choices. Based on the Information Adoption Model and UTAUT2, five factors, including information quality, source credibility, information need, attitude toward eWOM, and hedonic motivation, were examined through a survey of 765 respondents. Multiple regression analysis shows that all five predictors have significant positive effects on eWOM adoption, with attitude toward eWOM and hedonic motivation being the most influential. The results highlight the combined role of cognitive evaluations (quality, credibility, information need) and emotional drivers (attitude, hedonic motivation) in shaping eWOM-based decisions. This research advances understanding of eWOM adoption in food tourism. It provides practical insights for marketers, food businesses, and destination managers aiming to boost consumer engagement through credible, high-quality, and emotionally engaging online content..

Keywords: *Electronic word-of-mouth, information adoption, food tourism, younger, Vietnam.*
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1. INTRODUCTION:

The rapid growth of digital technology and social networks has fundamentally altered how travelers seek information and make decisions. In this environment, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has become one of the most influential sources of information affecting perceptions, attitudes, and destination choices, especially in food tourism, where experiences are driven by personal feelings, emotions, and trust (Litvin et al., 2008; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). For the younger generation, who frequently use digital platforms and often rely on online reviews to select restaurants or food destinations, the importance of eWOM has grown even more (Song et al., 2024).

International studies have identified many factors influencing the adoption and use of eWOM in tourism, such as content reliability, usefulness, information quality, social motivation, influence from online communities, and the technological features of the platform (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Filieri, 2015). In food tourism, eWOM not only helps tourists assess the quality of food and services but also sets expectations for cultural and culinary experiences at the destination (Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2019; Farzin & Makvandi, 2025). However, eWOM adoption behavior can vary greatly depending on age, cultural background, and social media engagement levels.

In Vietnam, food tourism is becoming a key driver of growth, especially attracting young people who are sensitive to trends and eager to explore new experiences. Young travelers rely on eWOM as their main source of information when choosing where to eat, searching for "real experiences," or following recommendations from KOLs, food reviewers, or the review community (Dang et al., 2018). However, despite the rising demand for eWOM in food tourism, academic research on the factors influencing young people's adoption of eWOM in Vietnam remains limited, mainly focusing on online shopping or tourism in general (Hoang et al., 2023; Bui et al., 2025).

Furthermore, studies on eWOM in food tourism rarely combine personal factors, technology platforms, and content characteristics into a single model. Additionally, the influence of specific psychological factors of young people, such as the need for self-expression, perceived trust, attachment to the platform, or sensitivity to social image, has not been thoroughly examined. Moreover, most current research is conducted in developed countries, while there is a lack of empirical evidence in emerging markets like Vietnam, especially regarding digital culture, consumer behavior, and the fast-changing trends in "food reviews."

Therefore, this study aimed to explore the factors affecting the adoption of eWOM in food tourism among Vietnamese youth by developing suitable research models and validating them with empirical data. The findings are expected to enhance the theoretical framework of eWOM in tourism and offer significant governance insights for food and beverage businesses, destination managers, and digital media platforms.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

Word of mouth (WOM) involves direct interpersonal communication among consumers where individuals share their experiences with products or services. Early studies show that WOM plays a significant role in shaping consumer behavior, especially in everyday purchases like groceries and household items (Chang et al., 2013). With the rise of the Internet, eWOM allows consumers to exchange opinions digitally, without physical interactions. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), Dam (2024), and Ngo et al. (2024) describe it as any consumer-generated positive or negative statement about a product or company shared through online platforms. Dellarocas (2003) highlights that these messages often carry collective credibility and a sense of neutrality, having been shared by many users over time. eWOM spreads across various digital channels, including blogs, forums, review sites, and especially social networks (Hennig Thurau et al., 2004; Ngo et al., 2024).

The structure of eWOM can be broken down into five key components: Content (positive, negative, or neutral messages), Source (the current or past speaker, or potential consumers), Object (product, service, or brand), Recipient(s) (readers, viewers, or listeners), Platform (internet-based environments, mainly social media). Unlike traditional WOM, eWOM reaches much larger audiences by sharing consumer insights through text, images, or multimedia with many unknown individuals across digital platforms.

Social media is particularly effective for eWOM because of its visually rich content and the ability for viral sharing. Platforms enable users to share opinions through various media like text, images, videos, likes, and comments, which encourage rapid spread across extensive networks (Abbasi et al., 2023; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Chu & Kim, 2011). Consequently, consumers increasingly turn to social media to read peer reviews and make informed purchase decisions.

2.2. Analytical framework

This study employs two foundational theories, the Information Adoption Model (IAM) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), to develop the analytical framework. The IAM highlights the importance of message quality and the credibility of the information source in influencing users' perceptions of information usefulness. It suggests that when information comes from a trustworthy source and is perceived as high quality, individuals are more likely to accept and be influenced by that information. This framework has been widely recognized for its relevance in eWOM research (Tapanainen & Nguyen, 2021). Building on this, Sussman and Siegal (2003) proposed a dual-process theoretical framework to further explore the mechanisms behind eWOM, incorporating IAM as a key component in understanding how people evaluate and accept online information.

The IAM suggests that people process persuasive messages through two separate paths: the central route and the peripheral route (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). The central route focuses on evaluating the main content and argument strength of a message, while the peripheral route pertains to secondary cues, such as the credibility or attractiveness of the message source, which are not directly related to the core message itself (Cheung et al., 2008). The IAM framework includes four main constructs: argument quality, source credibility, information usefulness, and information adoption. In this model, argument quality represents the central route of information processing, whereas source credibility corresponds to the peripheral route.

IAM has been widely recognized for its applicability in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) research contexts. For example, Cheung et al. (2008) utilized the model to examine users' behavioral responses in online discussion forums, and Shu and Scott (2014) extended its use to social media communication. Since this study focuses on eWOM within social networking platforms, IAM offers a relevant theoretical foundation. In this research, the constructs based on IAM include information quality, source credibility, information need, and attitude. These elements collectively help explain how young consumers process and respond to user-generated content on social media.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), first introduced by Davis (1989), provides a theoretical framework for understanding how users accept and use new technologies. TAM is especially relevant in the realm of information systems and has been widely used to explain user behavior in human-computer interactions (Legris et al., 2003). The model suggests that users' intentions to adopt a technology are mainly determined by two key factors: perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEU). Perceived usefulness is the extent to which an individual believes that using a specific system will improve their job performance, while perceived ease of use relates to the degree to which the user thinks that using the system will require minimal effort (Davis, 1989). These factors not only directly influence behavioral intention but also affect each other. PEU can indirectly impact usage intentions by shaping perceptions of usefulness. TAM has been supported by numerous empirical studies demonstrating its moderate to strong ability to predict users' acceptance of technology across various settings. Its flexibility has allowed researchers to apply the model to a wide range of technological contexts, including mobile apps, e-commerce, and social media platforms. In this study, TAM is beneficial for understanding how consumers interact with electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) content shared on digital platforms. The analysis framework is shown in Figure 1 below:

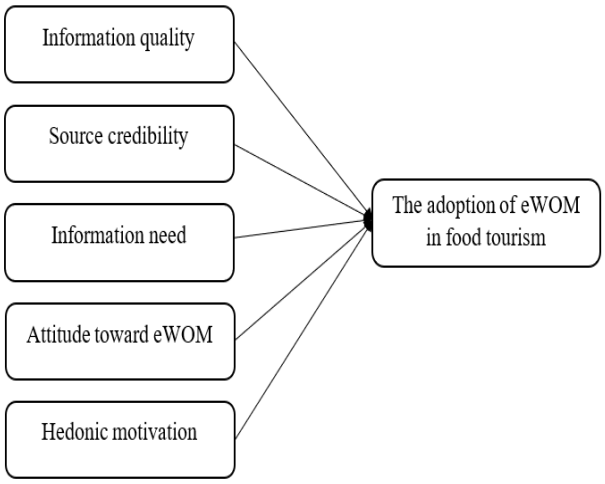

Figure 1: Research model

Source: Proposed by the author

2.3. Hypothesis development

Information quality refers to the persuasive strength embedded in a message's content, especially in the context of eWOM. Park et al. (2007) further define information quality as the extent to which message content provides objective, helpful information that supports consumer purchase decisions. Therefore, information quality is a key factor influencing consumers' attitudes and acceptance of eWOM, particularly within digital communities and on social media platforms. Lee and Hong (2019) suggest that information quality is perceived based on how well a message presents convincing arguments that recipients find relevant or helpful in justifying their viewpoints. Typically, information quality is evaluated using several attributes, including content accuracy, relevance, format, and timeliness. The Information Adoption Model (IAM), proposed by Sussman and Siegal (2003), along with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), has laid the groundwork for examining how persuasive communication affects attitude change and behavior. These models highlight the importance of message quality in facilitating information processing and acceptance, especially when individuals have enough cognitive motivation to evaluate the content critically. In this context, consumers are more likely to adopt information when they perceive it as high in quality, particularly in environments like social media, where a large volume of user-generated content requires evaluative judgment. Erkan and Evans (2016) expanded IAM into the Information Acceptance Model (IACM) to assess how eWOM on social media influences consumer decision-making. Their findings emphasize that information quality, along with source credibility, is a vital feature of effective eWOM. Empirical studies confirm that information quality is a central antecedent influencing consumers' acceptance of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Rahaman et al., 2022; Sardar et al., 2021). Additionally, Ngo et al. (2024) demonstrate that high-quality information significantly increases perceived usefulness, which, in turn, promotes information adoption and leads to greater acceptance of eWOM on social media platforms. Based on the above arguments, the research hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H1: Information quality has a positive effect on the adoption of eWOM in food tourism.

Source credibility is defined as the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of the information source, rather than the content itself (Chaiken, 1980). It is a multidimensional construct comprising the source's competence and reliability in delivering accurate and unbiased information. Consumers are more inclined to trust and act upon eWOM when the source is perceived as credible, especially in online environments where the sender is not always known personally. Trustworthy sources are expected to provide accurate and relevant evaluations, supporting consumers in their decision-making process. According to Lis (2013), source credibility refers to the positive qualities of the communicator that influence the receiver's willingness to accept the message. Eagly and Chaiken (1993) also emphasize the persuasive effect of credible sources in shaping favorable consumer attitudes, particularly in contexts involving product reviews and recommendations. Zhang and Watts (2008) offer empirical evidence supporting this view, showing that the credibility of eWOM sources significantly impacts information adoption during consumers' travel planning. Source credibility, along with information quality, forms the basis of the IACM proposed by Erkan and Evans (2016), where both are seen as essential features of effective eWOM communication. Follow-up studies in various cultural settings, including research by Le and Le (2017) in Vietnam and Nyagadza et al. (2023) in Zimbabwe, have incorporated source credibility as a key factor in evaluating the influence of social media-based eWOM. Consistent with these findings, this study suggests that, in the social media context, source credibility is a crucial driver of eWOM acceptance among users. Based on the above arguments, the research hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H2: Source credibility has a positive effect on the adoption of eWOM in food tourism.

In recent years, the growing importance of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on social media platforms has become a key factor influencing consumer purchase decisions. This trend mainly stems from the increasing role of information need as a driving force behind consumers' engagement with eWOM (Sundaram et al., 1998). When consumers feel that a social media platform effectively meets their information needs, they tend to develop more positive attitudes toward the platform (Jimenez-Barreto & Campo-Martínez, 2018). This favorable perception not only boosts user satisfaction but also strengthens the perceived usefulness of eWOM in guiding purchasing decisions. In the case of fast-moving consumer goods, the need for information, when combined with a positive consumer attitude, can significantly influence purchase intentions (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Nyagadza et al., 2023). Therefore, including the construct of information need in this study is justified by the practical observation that consumers often turn to social media platforms to find actionable and reliable

information. Past empirical studies have shown similar relationships, indicating that consumers' information-seeking behavior on social platforms directly affects their purchasing processes (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Based on the above arguments, the research hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H3: Information need has a positive effect on the adoption of eWOM in food tourism.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), posits that behavioral intentions are shaped by two primary components: individual attitudes and subjective norms. While the role of attitude in the context of eWOM has been widely acknowledged in prior studies (e.g., Park et al., 2007), the influence of subjective norms has often been underexplored or omitted. In the digital age, consumers frequently express and exchange opinions and experiences via social media platforms (Chu & Kim, 2011), indicating that a user's attitude toward shared information may play a crucial role in their overall engagement with eWOM. Both the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) have been employed in numerous empirical studies to examine consumer behavior across diverse contexts and geographic regions. These theories emphasize that consumer attitudes, alongside information needs, are fundamental behavioral drivers that shape the processing and acceptance of eWOM and the eventual purchase decision. Consistent with earlier research (Erkan & Evans, 2016), this study argues that when consumers perceive eWOM as valuable and relevant, they are more likely to develop a positive attitude, thereby increasing the likelihood of information acceptance. Based on the above arguments, the research hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H4: Attitude toward eWOM has a positive effect on the adoption of eWOM in food tourism.

Hedonic motivation, which involves seeking enjoyment, entertainment, and emotions, is considered a key factor influencing how people use digital platforms, especially in tourism and food-related activities. According to hedonic consumption theory (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982), consumers seek not only functional value from information but also desire enjoyment, entertainment, and positive emotions during consumption and content sharing. In the realm of technology and social media, hedonic motivation shows itself when users feel inspired, enjoy reading reviews, watch food videos, or participate in online communities (Song et al., 2024). Recent research emphasizes that hedonic motivation significantly impacts young people's behavior in the online world. Venkatesh et al. (2012), within the UTAUT2 framework, found that hedonic motivation is a strong predictor of the intention to use consumer technology services. In the food and tourism sectors, young people frequently rely on eWOM to satisfy curiosity, generate interest, evoke positive feelings, and gain a sense of "first-hand" experience through reviews, photos, or videos (Sun et al., 2024). This is especially true on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, which offer engaging entertainment experiences, making users more attracted and consequently more receptive and trusting of eWOM. When young users feel that receiving eWOM provides enjoyment, entertainment, and positive emotions, they are more likely to incorporate that information into their food-related decisions. Based on the above arguments, the research hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H5: Hedonic motivation has a positive effect on the adoption of eWOM in food tourism.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

Data for this study were gathered through a quantitative survey designed to examine the factors that influence eWOM adoption among young Vietnamese consumers in food tourism. The target population included individuals aged 18-35 who actively use social media platforms when searching for food-related information or making dining and travel decisions. This age group was chosen because young consumers are the most active users of eWOM and are highly engaged with digital food-review communities, as noted in prior studies.

A structured questionnaire was created using validated measurement scales from previous research and tailored to fit the food-tourism context. Before collecting main data, a pilot test was carried out with 30 respondents to verify clarity, relevance, and reliability of the survey items. Minor wording adjustments were made based on participant feedback. The final questionnaire had two sections: (1) demographic and behavioral details related to food-tourism activities and social media use; and (2) measurement items for all latent constructs, evaluated with a five- or seven-point Likert scale.

Data were gathered from April to June 2025 through an online survey shared on popular social media platforms in Vietnam, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and online food-review communities. A mix of convenience and snowball sampling methods was used to reach young users who actively consume or interact with eWOM content. To ensure data quality, filtering questions were included to confirm that participants had used online reviews for food-related decisions within the last six months.

A total of 950 responses were collected. After screening for incomplete answers, straight-lining, and not meeting eligibility criteria, 765 valid responses were kept for analysis. This sample size exceeds the minimum needed for structural equation modeling and aligns with recommended levels for quantitative studies on consumer behavior.

3.2. Measurement scales

The measurement instrument was developed based on established scales from previous studies on eWOM. Information quality was adapted from Pauliene et al. (2020), source credibility was derived from Le and Le (2017), information need was measured using items adopted from Nyagadza et al. (2023), attitude toward eWOM was adapted from Erkan and Evans (2016), hedonic motivation was measured based on UTAUT2 by Venkatesh et al. (2012), and the adoption of eWOM in food tourism was adapted from Pauliene et al. (2020). A pilot survey was conducted with 30 Vietnamese young

people to evaluate the clarity of the questions and the initial reliability of the scale. Based on feedback from the mock survey, some questions were linguistically adjusted to reduce ambiguity and improve relevance to the local context. Preliminary test results indicate that the scales have acceptable reliability (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.7), making them suitable for formal survey implementation. Table 2 provides details of the measurement scales.

3.3. Data analysis

The data is encoded and analyzed using SPSS 26 software with tests including descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Alpha, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), correlation analysis, and regression analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Descriptive statistics

A total of 765 valid responses were included in the final analysis. The sample reflects key demographic and behavioral traits of young Vietnamese consumers who engage with electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in food tourism. Regarding gender, 54.9% were female and 45.1% male, indicating a fairly balanced distribution. In terms of age, most respondents were between 18 and 25 years old (63.4%), followed by those aged 26 to 30 (27.9%), and 31 to 35 (8.7%), showing that the sample closely matches the target group of young social media users.

Regarding social media use, 92.8% of participants reported daily activity on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube. Notably, TikTok and Facebook were the top platforms for searching food-related information. Additionally, 87.3% said they relied on online reviews, food blogs, or influencer recommendations to decide where to dine or travel for food within the past six months, confirming their importance to the study.

Regarding food tourism involvement, 71.5% of respondents said they actively follow food-related pages or review communities, and 64.8% often try new dishes or food destinations based on online recommendations. These traits demonstrate a high level of engagement with eWOM and confirm the sample's suitability for studying the factors that influence eWOM adoption in food tourism among Vietnamese youth.

Table 1: Sample characteristics

Characteristics	Items	Ratio
Gender	Male	45.1
	Female	54.9
Age	18-25 years old	63.4
	26-30 years old	27.9
	31-35 years old	8.7
Social media usage frequency	Daily	92.8
	Several times per week	5.5
	Once a week or less	1.7
Primary platform for food-related eWOM	TikTok	40.6
	Facebook	34.5
	Instagram	15.9
	YouTube/Others	9.0
Used eWOM for food decisions (Past 6 months)	Yes	87.3
	No	12.7
Food tourism involvement	High involvement	71.5
	Low involvement	28.5
Engagement with food review communities	Yes	64.8
	No	35.2

Source: Analysis results from survey data (2025)

4.2. Reliability and Validity

After conducting the Cronbach's Alpha reliability test, all values are above 0.7, and no observed variables have a Corrected Item - Total Correlation below 0.3. Therefore, all scales meeting the Cronbach's Alpha requirements are included in the EFA analysis, as recommended by Hair et al. (2010).

The results of EFA of the independent variable shows a KMO of 0.856 (greater than 0.5), a significance level of 0.000 (less than 0.05), an Eigenvalue greater than 1, and factor loadings for the 20 observed variables greater than 0.5. These variables were extracted into 4 factors as originally proposed by the model. Additionally, the total variance explained reached 70.36%, which is greater than 50%, indicating that these 5 factors accounted for 70.36% of the variation in the data of the 20 observed variables participating in the EFA (see Table 2).

The EFA results for the dependent variable show that the KMO value of 0.834 is above 0.5, and the significance of Bartlett's Test is 0.000, which is less than 0.05, indicating that the factor analysis is appropriate. One factor was extracted with an Eigenvalue of 2.361, which is greater than 1, and the cumulative explained variance is 66.54%, exceeding 50%. This factor accounts for 68.57% of the variance in the four observed variables involved in the EFA (see Table 2).

Table 2: The results of EFA

Scales	Sign	Items	Loadings
Information quality	IQ1	Information about food venues on social media is clear and easy to understand.	0.898

Scales	Sign	Items	Loadings
	IQ2	The culinary reviews provide complete and detailed information.	0.883
	IQ3	eWOM content is directly related to my dining/food travel decisions.	0.872
	IQ4	The information I find on online platforms is of high quality.	0.866
Source credibility	SC1	Food information on social media is reliable.	0.883
	SC2	People provide reviews with practical knowledge.	0.871
	SC3	I think eWOM content isn't manipulated or overhyped.	0.860
	SC4	I believe in the online community's opinion in the food sector.	0.855
Information need	IN1	I often seek advice on social media when considering food tourism.	0.892
	IN2	I frequently use eWOM on social media for culinary tourism.	0.888
	IN3	I collect eWOM reviews before making a food travel decision.	0.861
	IN4	I often consult others' opinions on social media about food tourism that interests them.	0.850
Attitude toward eWOM	AT1	I'm very interested in exploring new dishes and culinary destinations.	0.897
	AT2	Food tourism is a big part of my hobbies.	0.875
	AT3	I usually spend time researching food before traveling.	0.856
	AT4	I'm always willing to try new dishes or experiences based on eWOM.	0.847
Hedonic motivation	HM1	I feel excited when I watch food reviews on social networks.	0.890
	HM2	Watching eWOM about food gives me a sense of entertainment.	0.877
	HM3	I feel excited to explore food places through reviews.	0.865
	HM4	eWOM makes the experience of searching for food information fun.	0.859
The adoption of eWOM in food tourism	AD1	I often rely on online reviews to choose places to eat.	0.889
	AD2	I'm willing to change my trusted eWOM-based eating plan.	0.870
	AD3	I applied the information I found from eWOM to my food travel decisions.	0.861
	AD4	I feel confident when making decisions based on online food reviews.	0.850

Source: Analysis results from survey data (2025)

4.3. Correlation and multivariate linear regression analysis

The results of the correlation analysis showed that the significance of the Pearson correlation between the

independent and dependent variables was less than 0.05. Therefore, there is a linear relationship between all five independent and dependent variables. Attitude toward eWOM had the strongest correlation with the adoption of eWOM in food tourism, with an r of 0.540, while source credibility had the weakest correlation, with an r of 0.345.

The regression results in Table 3 show that the adjusted R^2 reached 0.685, indicating that the independent variables in the model could explain 68.5% of the adoption of eWOM in food tourism. At the same time, the analysis showed that the VIF was less than 5, indicating that the data did not violate the multicollinearity assumption. Additionally, the Durbin-Watson value of 1.923 falls within the range of 1.5 to 2.5, indicating no violation of the assumption of error independence. Furthermore, the t-values for the independent variables are less than 0.05, suggesting they are statistically significant.

Table 3: Regression results

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	Constant	0.324	0.076		2.382	0.003		
	IQ	0.321	0.078	0.368	2.647	0.021	0.778	1.903
	SC	0.156	0.070	0.276	2.839	0.005	0.798	2.187
	IN	0.256	0.072	0.313	2.273	0.002	0.790	1.988
	AT	0.367	0.075	0.402	2.803	0.007	0.787	1.909
	HM	0.345	0.077	0.397	2.839	0.015	0.732	1.983
Adjusted R^2 = 0.685, Sig. F = 0.000, Durbin-Watson = 1.923								
Notes: *IQ = Information quality, SC = Source credibility, IN = Information need, AT = Attitude toward eWOM, HM = Hedonic motivation, AD = The adoption of eWOM in food tourism*								

Source: Analysis results from survey data (2025)

Therefore, hypotheses from H1 to H5 are supported. The analysis results showed that information quality, source credibility, information need, attitude toward eWOM, and hedonic motivation positively affect the adoption of eWOM in food tourism.

4.4. Discussion

Supporting H1, information quality positively influences eWOM information adoption (β = 0.368, p = 0.021), although with a modest impact. This aligns with the findings of Tran (2016) and the theoretical insights by Erkan and Evans (2016), Pauliene et al. (2020), and Nyagadza et al. (2023), suggesting that quality content slightly encourages consumers to trust and adopt eWOM. H2 is also supported, with source credibility having a stronger effect (β = 0.276, p = 0.005) on eWOM adoption. This highlights the importance of credible information sources and backs prior research by Le and Le (2017), Erkan and Evans (2016), and Pauliene et al. (2020).

H3 indicates that information need significantly influences eWOM adoption (β = 0.313, p = 0.002), suggesting that consumers with a strong desire for product-related knowledge are more likely to engage with eWOM. This supports the motivational role of consumer behavior, as discussed by Erkan and Evans (2016), Le and Le (2017), and Nyagadza et al. (2023). Attitude toward eWOM, the most influential factor (β = 0.402, p = 0.007), further confirms H4. Consumers who see eWOM as useful and reliable are more likely to adopt it. This finding aligns with previous research (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Le & Le, 2017; Nyagadza et al., 2023) and highlights the importance of behavioral constructs in eWOM studies. Finally, hedonic motivation (β = 0.397, p = 0.015) also demonstrated a strong influence, indicating that the emotional aspect and enjoyment of consuming eWOM significantly affect youth behavior. This aligns with UTAUT2 (Venkatesh et al., 2012) and research on Gen Z's digital habits, which show that entertainment is a key driver for using online information. Particularly in food tourism, where the experience is highly emotional, hedonic motivation easily attracts young people through vivid reviews, short videos, and appealing images.

5. Implications

The study theoretically makes a significant contribution to the field of eWOM in food tourism by simultaneously confirming the influence of information factors (information quality, source credibility), personal factors (information need, hedonic motivation), and attitude (attitude toward eWOM) in predicting the acceptance of eWOM among Vietnamese youth. The findings support the arguments of the Information Adoption Model (Sussman & Siegal, 2003) and UTAUT2 (Venkatesh et al., 2012), indicating that eWOM reception is not a straightforward process but is affected by both rational and emotional elements. Notably, the identification of Attitude toward eWOM as the most significant variable highlights the central role of attitude in turning information perception into actual consumer behavior. Additionally, emphasizing the influential role of hedonic motivation helps expand understanding of how Gen Z makes decisions in the digital environment, where

emotions, entertainment, and content appeal directly influence behavior.

Practically, the results of the study provide many important implications for food businesses, travel destinations, and marketing managers. First, it is essential to focus on improving the quality of information on online platforms by offering authentic reviews, clear images, detailed content, and regular updates. Second, businesses should work on increasing the reliability of information sources, such as collaborating with reputable reviewers, KOLs specializing in food, or encouraging genuine customers to leave authentic reviews. Third, fostering a positive attitude towards eWOM is crucial; businesses can achieve this by creating truly quality experiences for organic reviews and actively engaging with the online community. Fourth, since young people are strongly drawn to hedonic motivation, marketing content should center on emotions, creativity, and entertainment, such as short videos, beautiful images, and authentic experiential content. Lastly, it is important to identify and meet the high information needs of young customers by providing detailed food tourism suggestions, experience maps, or information packages specifically tailored for food tourists. These strategies will help optimize the impact of eWOM on young travelers, thereby enhancing communication effectiveness and attracting more customers.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the factors affecting the adoption of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in food tourism among Vietnamese youth using a regression model with five key predictor variables. The results indicate that all factors, including information quality, source credibility, information need, attitude toward eWOM, and hedonic motivation, have a positive and statistically significant effect on eWOM adoption. This suggests that young people are not only concerned with the quality and trustworthiness of information but are also heavily influenced by their need for information, personal attitudes, and especially their entertainment motivation when engaging with online content.

However, limitations include the non-stratified sample of 765 respondents and the cross-sectional design, which may limit generalizability and causal inference. Future studies should improve construct measurements, investigate platform-specific behaviors, and broaden demographic scope.

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