

Role of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM) in Shaping Customer Perceptions and Behavioral Intentions in Hospitality Services: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) has surfaced as a convincing element impacting user experience and buying intention in the hospitality sector. With the rise in digital infrastructure and evaluation mechanisms, customers highly depend on user-driven content to assess services, minimize improbability and take judicious choices. This paper explores how several components of eWOM like review valence, authenticity, emotional prosody and visual prompts mold the mindset and purpose of the clients towards hospitality services. It also analyses the facilitating role of element like user experience, trust, ethnic contrasts and technical knowledge. The results identify that the praise and criticism notably impact on customer feedback with trust and perceived value functioning as key factor in decision-making. Additionally, factors like review depth, credibility and company awareness increase the impact of eWOM. The study points out that the calculated significance of handling virtual feedback and utilizing eWOM to improvise client experience, brand value and market edge in the hospitality industry. A sample of 297 was collected to find the result of the study. The factor studying the Role of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM) in Shaping Customer Perceptions and Behavioral Intentions in Hospitality Services are Source Credibility, Review Quality, Emotional Content and Visual Content. The study concludes that there is significant of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM) in Shaping Customer Perceptions and Behavioral Intentions

Keywords: credibility, eWOM, functioning, authenticity

Introduction

The swift evolution of virtual platforms has changed the way customers collect info and change their purchasing habits, especially in the hospitality sector., Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), refers to the virtual feedback and suggestions by users, which has become an important basis for knowledge affecting customer experience and buying intention. In contrast to conventional word of mouth, eWOM provides a larger scope, ease of access, stability, resulting in a very dominant technology in affecting user's choices.

Customers highly rely on virtual feedback to minimize improbability and probable threat while booking hotels or choosing restaurants. Factors like trust in virtual sphere, accessibility of feedback and probable value remarkably affect the chances of customers implementing eWOM knowledge (Fileri & McLeay, 2022). In addition, the number and valence of feedback serve a critical role in moulding brand value and client's mindset (Purnawirawan et al., 2022; Xie et al., 2023).

Research points that emotional content, accuracy, and reliability of feedback impact their efficacy. For example, long and detailed feedback are considered more real and accurate (Purnawirawan et al., 2022), whilst negative feedback mostly presents extravagant emotional tones (Fileri & McLeay, 2022). Graphic elements like images and videos again develop customer engagement and insight (Casaló et al., 2022).

Additionally, demographic and behavioural elements like generational gaps and technical knowledge impact on the ways customers understand eWOM. Though millennials are smart providers, Gen X have a tendency to be carried away by digital feedback (Sparks et al., 2023). Ethnic disparities and previous knowledge also shape the mindset and perspective towards reviews (Xie et al., 2023).

Considering the growth in the significance of eWOM in affecting consumer decision-making, it is imperative to comprehend the way several elements work together to change customers' mindset and buying purpose. This research tries to serve an inclusive analysis of this changing aspect in the hospitality industry.

Literature Review

While leaving reviews, women were found to use words related to family, comfort, staff's approach, and personal occasions more as well as descriptive positive terms while men used quality of service, accessibility and more technical terms to express their experience (Rahimi, Thelwall, Okumus & Bilgihan, 2022). EW in an abundance of positive reviews and SNW in that of negative reviews have a significant influence on improving brand evaluations and under specific frames, it is best to go for EW in negative frames and SNW in positive frames (Jeasha & Purani, 2021).

Consumers take advice from communities they think are useful but do not influence their intentions when they are familiar with technology and those who do not have enough experience are influenced easily. While ease of access to these restaurant reviews and advice determines the perceptions of usefulness by the members. trust in that community has the strongest influence on the intention to follow the advice (Shaker, Mostafa & Elseidi, 2021). Premium prices are seen as more reasonable in a good location even when the location is with a large pool of competitors. Hotels in bad locations, when provide compensations in the form of discounts and such, saw an improvement in online reputation especially in places with lot of competitors (Illescas-Manzano, Martínez-Puertas & Sánchez-Pérez, 2021).

Fake reviews show more sentimental values than original reviews and it is easier to fabricate positive reviews. In negative reviews there is no relation between cognitive cues and review fakeness (Wang, Fong & Law, 2021).

Welcoming and reception personnel show significant role in creating positive perspectives in consumers; 5-star hotels' customers 'are more concerned on adequate welcoming than quality reception, moderate star level hotels customers' values reception over welcoming by a small margin while lower star hotels' customers are focused on the service quality of reception (Hu, Trivedi & Teichert, 2022).

Consumers who stay for a longer time in hotels tend to post longer online reviews with numerical ratings as well as with detailed experience of their stay. Longer reviews with more analytical details cause other consumers to perceive it as more authentic than the reviews left by people with shorter periods of stay (Kim & Han, 2022).

Premium hotel employees show higher positive reviews than economy hotel employees and workplace bullying, and cleaning work had a larger influence in creating negative sentiments in employees in economy hotels than those in premium hotels (Shi & Chen, 2021).

Hotels with AI-enabled hospitality services have a higher customer satisfaction shown by its positive influence in reviews on eWOM valence. Reviews with explicit mentions of interactions with the AI services shows a bigger association to online ratings especially the reviews with the robot or AI service's specific name (Mariani & Borghi, 2021).

Consumers' anger is mostly triggered by factors like negative local characteristics, inaccessible and downbeat location and unfair or incorrect food options while love is triggered by positive local characteristics, comfortable and satisfying dining experience, and good supporting services (Liu, Yu, Mehraliyev, Hu & Chen, 2022).

Online reviews given by expert reviewers are not affected by customer sentiments while the ones by novice reviewers are affected more. Customers who write reviews with photos have a better objective evaluation of a hotel (Lai, Wang & Wang, 2021).

Hotel guests who stayed at a high-tech hotel because of the pandemic also had experiences of pleasant and unpleasant human interactions and thus high-tech nature exclusively does not have much influence on customers' experience (Davari, Vayghan, Jang & Erdem, 2022).

Reviews with pictures posted by firms and reviewers have an effect on consumer's attention and perception but they do not use all the aspects of reviews to make a decision. In negative valence conditions, customers tend to need more content and read up more detailed reviews with specific information and have a closer reading of the content and ratings than the mediocre ones with pictures (Simonetti & Bigne, 2022).

When the effect on bottom line profitability instead of just top line revenues are examined, there is no relationship between review valence and profitability in the restaurant industry (Abdullah, Van Cauwenberge, Vander Bauwhede & O'Connor, 2022).

Cultural differences have a significant effect on consumers' online behavior. The greater the familiarity is with the destination; the lower the consumer's online ratings are. The consumers' experience in giving online reviews has a negative effect on the online ratings (Mariani & Borghi, 2021).

Consumers tend to disclose their privacy concerns when travelling to places or countries with higher privacy intrusions and people travelling with family or friends, elderly guests, guests travelling to countries tend to disclose their privacy concerns compared to their respective counterparts. Cultural proximity also influences the development and expression of privacy concerns (D'Acunto, Volo & Filieri, 2021).

Sales promotions do not impact all customers equally. Coupons are preferred over discounts by regular customers as well as new customers given there is positive perceived price and trust on the reviews and when negative the situation differs (Pan, Liu & Ha, 2022).

Professional reviewers are more likely to give lower rating with a longer review than a novice reviewer. There is higher influence of reviewer on helpfulness of review for moderate hotels while it influences review rating largely for luxury hotels (Hlee, 2020).

Positive valence rate of reviews creates a preference for traditional hotels and number of online reviews makes a preference for P2P accommodations. Discount tactics have little to no effect on consumers' decision in choosing between conventional hotels and peer-to-peer accommodations. The characteristics of property listings have a

different impact on how potential customers choose between hotels and P2P lodging sharing (Fu, Cheng, Bao, Bilgihan & Okumus, 2020).

The factor that influences the intention of consumer to consult online WOM are mostly about convenience and risk reduction in decision making. The volume of online reviews a hotel gets is contributed by the intention of the consumers to consult online WOM and adopt it. The impact of these reviews on consumer choices and perceptions is influenced by the volume of WOM from customers (Moliner-Velázquez, Fuentes-Blasco & Gil-Saura, 2021).

eWOM has a higher influence on Generation X than on Millennials. Millennials constitute the majority of the eWOM broadcasters making them have better interpretations of the eWOMs in different websites. Positive reviews cause more positive customer attitudes in both Generation X as well as Millennials while negative reviews have a larger immediate impact on their consumer responses, especially in Generation X (Ruiz-Equihua, Casalo & Romero, 2021).

Reviews with UGPs give a preview of the target hotel leading to better management of the guest's expectations. While positive reviews and negative reviews enable better perceptions, negative reviews create an overall negative image or bias of below average quality and unreasonable pricing and thus hotels should respond tactically to improve the negative engagements (An & Ozturk, 2022).

Higher online ratings and emotional appeal of online reviews lead to an increased restaurant visit intention. The emotional aspects of these reviews have a larger impact on customers with low restaurant involvement and benefits restaurants with low ratings. And the functional comments or the available information is used by customers to increase the knowledge of products and services to make sound decisions about the purchase (Aureliano-Silva, Leung & Spers, 2021).

The most important factors affecting message usefulness are valence, relevance, understandability and visual cues while it also has a significant influence on reader's behavioural intentions. Source credibility becomes the factor that influences reader's intentions in terms of the sender element. Receiver or reader's intentions are also influenced by consumer's susceptibility to interpersonal influence (Akdin, 2021).

Online responsiveness is a powerful and enabling strategy and UGC is an important tool for value co-creation and better innovation in hotel businesses. Using a reductionist or less tactical use of UGC and E-WOM management proves to be an inefficient exploitation of UGC which can otherwise be used for better quality improvement and improving hospitality service (Ciasullo, Montera & Palumbo, 2021).

Online reviews of hotel visits during COVID- 19 pandemic consisted mainly of eight themes related to hotel services, COVID-19 protocols, and personal components. Among the themes, terms related to staff service, entertainment and location are found to have a higher satisfaction while those related to waiting, protocols, hygiene, and restrictions had a lower satisfaction. Hotel staff attitudes and customer service have a significant influence on customer experience even during circumstances which seem exclusive of their influence (Saydam, Olorunsola, Avci, Dambo & Beyar, 2022).

Objective

1. To Explore the “Role of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM) in Shaping Customer Perceptions and Behavioral Intentions in Hospitality Services”
2. To know the impact of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM) on Customer Perceptions and Behavioral Intentions in Hospitality Services

Methodology

297 participants were surveyed from different hotel type. The method of sampling was “Random sampling” for collection of data and examination was done by “Explanatory Factor Analysis” for results.

Findings

Table 1 demonstrates demographic details, it shows that 53.87% are Male, 46.13% are female. Looking at the age, 32.66% are between 30 to 35 years of age, 46.13% are between 35 to 40 years of age, and 32.66% are above 40 years of age. With regards to Hotel Type, 30.64% are 3-star hotel, 36.03% are 5-star hotel, and 33.33% are 7-star hotel.

Table. 1 Respondent’s Details

Variables	Participants	Percentage
Gender		
Male	160	53.87%
Female	137	46.13%
Total	297	100
Ages in years		
30 to 35	97	32.66%
35 to 40	103	34.68%
Above 40	97	32.66%
Total	297	100
Hotel type		
3-star hotel	91	30.64%
5-star hotel	107	36.03%
7-star hotel	99	33.33%
Total	297	100

Table 2 “Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy”

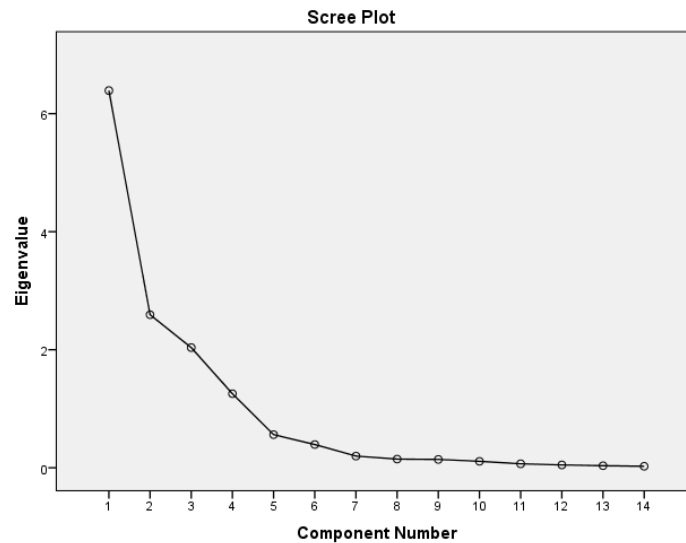
“Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy”		.763
“Bartlett's Test of Sphericity”	“Approx. Chi-Square”	5311.787
	df	91
	Significance	.000

“KMO and Bartlett's Test”, value of KMO is .763 (Table 2).

Table 3 “Total Variance Explained”

“Component”	“Initial Eigenvalues”			“Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings”		
	“Total”	“% Of Variance”	“Cumulative %”	“Total”	“% Of Variance”	“Cumulative %”
1.	6.391	45.650	45.650	3.919	27.992	27.992
2.	2.593	18.522	64.172	3.604	25.742	53.734
3.	2.036	14.544	78.717	2.400	17.140	70.875
4.	1.255	8.964	87.680	2.353	16.805	87.680
5.	.562	4.011	91.692			
6.	.394	2.814	94.505			
7.	.198	1.414	95.919			
8.	.146	1.046	96.965			
9.	.141	1.009	97.974			
10.	.109	.781	98.755			
11.	.067	.480	99.235			
12.	.048	.343	99.578			
13.	.035	.248	99.826			
14.	.024	.174	100.000			

The four factors contribute towards explaining total 87.680% of variance. Variance explained by Source Credibility is 27.992%, Review Quality is 25.742%, Emotional Content is 17.140%, and Visual Content is 16.805%. (Table 3).



“Scree Plot”

Table. 4 “Rotated Component Matrix”

S. No.	Statements	Factor Loading	Factor Reliability
	Source Credibility		.950
1.	Online reviews from experienced users are found to be trustworthy	.954	
2.	Reviews written by verified customers are reliable	.911	
3.	Reviewers are proved to be trustworthy providing detailed experience	.846	
4.	Reviewers who seem to be more knowledgeable are highly influencing	.839	
	Review Quality		.960
1.	Provide clear and useful information through online reviews about hospitality services	.962	
2.	Detailed reviews are enough to make decisions	.899	
3.	High-quality reviews increase confidence in choosing a hotel or service	.891	

4.	Reviews provide sufficient details about service and facilities	.867	
	Emotional Content		.864
1.	Reviews expressing strong emotions influence perception	.911	
2.	Reviews describing real experience are more influencing	.856	
3.	Emotional reviews help in relating to service experience	.729	
	Visual Content		.843
1.	Photos and videos in reviews increase trust and confidence	.934	
2.	Visual content help in better understanding of the quality of hospitality service	.933	
3.	Reviewers prefer uploading videos and images to share their response	.655	

Factors of the study and its related variables

The first factor of the study is Source Credibility, the variables it includes are Online reviews from experienced users are found to be trustworthy, Reviews written by verified customers are reliable, and Reviewers who seem to be more knowledgeable are highly influencing. Review Quality is the second factor, it includes variables like Provide clear and useful information through online reviews about hospitality services, Detailed reviews are enough to make decisions, High-quality reviews increase confidence in choosing a hotel or service and Reviews provide sufficient details about service and facilities. The third factor of the study is Emotional Content, the variables are Reviews expressing strong emotions influence perception, Reviews describing real experience are more influencing and Emotional reviews help in relating to service experience. The last factor is Visual Content, its variables are Photos and videos in reviews increase trust and confidence, Visual content help in better understanding of the quality of hospitality service and Reviewers prefer uploading videos and images to share their response.

Table 5 “Reliability Statistics”

“Cronbach's Alpha”	“Number of Items”
.897	14

Total reliability of 14 items that includes variables for Factors exploring the “Role of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM) in Shaping Customer Perceptions and Behavioral Intentions in Hospitality Services” 0.897 (Table 5).

“Table 6 Model Summary”

“Model”	“R”	“R Square”	“Adjusted R Square”	“Std. Error of the Estimate”
1	.857 ^a	.735	.731	.40031
Predictors: (Constant), Source Credibility, Review Quality, Emotional Content, and Visual Content				

The adjusted R-squared value is 0.731 with approximately 73% of the variation.

“Table 7 ANOVA”

“Model”	“Sum of Squares”	“df”	“Mean Square”	“F”	“Sig.”	
1	“Regression”	129.639	4	32.410	202.249	.000 ^b
	Residual	46.792	292	.160		
	Total	176.431	296			
a. Dependent Variable: Overall impact of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM) on Customer Perceptions and Behavioral Intentions						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Source Credibility, Review Quality, Emotional Content, and Visual Content						

Value under significant column indicates a significant relationship between “Source Credibility, Review Quality, Emotional Content, and Visual Content” and Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM).

“Table 8 Coefficients”

“Model”	“Un standardized Coefficients”		“Standardized Coefficients”	“t”	“Sig.”
	“B”	“Std. Error”	“Beta”		
(Constant)	3.956	.023		170.320	.000
Source Credibility	.333	.023	.432	14.333	.000
Review Quality	.051	.023	.066	2.190	.029
Emotional Content	.262	.023	.340	11.267	.000
Visual Content	.505	.023	.655	21.721	.000
DV: Overall impact of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM) on Customer Perceptions and Behavioral Intentions					

All the factors Source Credibility, Review Quality, Emotional Content, and Visual Content are showing significant impact of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM) on Customer Perceptions and Behavioral Intentions. Highest impact is shown by Visual Content with beta value .655 followed by Source Credibility (.432), Emotional Content (.340), and Review Quality (.066).

Conclusion

The research shows that eWOM serves as a central function in molding customer experience and buying intention in the hospitality sector. Virtual feedback impacts not just client’s mindset but also their decision-making procedure by minimizing improbability and offering valuable knowledge. Both types of feedback, be it praise or criticism notably affect customer experience, with criticisms mostly having an effective and spontaneous effect. Major elements like trust, authenticity, emotional tone and features of feedback comprising length, information, and visual factors increase the value of eWOM. In addition, demographical changes, ethnic differences, technical knowledge affect the ways customers decode and react to virtual feedback. The research also points out that

strategic planning of eWOM, that includes on-time response and utilizing consumer-generated content, are able to improve brand value and customer experience. Altogether, the results accentuate the necessity for hospitality sector to properly handle and track their presence on virtual platforms. By considerably using eWOM, businesses are able to develop bonds with customers, boost standard of service, and have an upper hand in a progressively digitalized market sphere. The factor studying the Role of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM) in Shaping Customer Perceptions and Behavioral Intentions in Hospitality Services are Source Credibility, Review Quality, Emotional Content and Visual Content.

The aims to Explore the “Role of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM) in Shaping Customer Perceptions and Behavioral Intentions and the impact of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM) on Customer Perceptions and Behavioral Intentions in Hospitality Services. It is found that Source Credibility, Review Quality, Emotional Content, and Visual Content are different role of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM). The study concludes that there is significant impact of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM) on Customer Perceptions and Behavioral Intentions.

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