Effects of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) drivers on customers' behaviour

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Abstract

In today's world, eWOM has become increasingly important in the tourism sector because it is considered far more influential than advertising and marketing messages. Since it is usually information spread by friends or relatives, it is perceived as a more credible and reliable source than service providers' advertising. Due to the fact that eWOM occurs when customers exchange information online, it can take many forms, such as user-generated content, online product reviews, personal emails, and social media posts. More and more travellers are turning to social media platforms like Facebook, You Tube, Instagram and blogs to get first-hand information, learn about others' experiences and their reviews and recommendations for different destinations. Users' interaction with one another influences their behaviours and travel decision-making. The purpose of this study is to identify the factors of eWOM information, which affect consumers' behaviour, compare the influences of these factors on different platforms and their impact on destination choice through the moderating role of age and experience.

Keywords: eWOM, social media, customers' behaviour, impact, destination selection

Introduction

The Internet has transformed the way people gather and provide information, as well as how they communicate with others. Since the invention of Web 2.0 in 2004, the Internet has no longer been only about content browsing and finding information. Internet users have turned from passive readers into active creators and sharers of content and information (Lo & Yao, 2019). With eWOM, customers have the opportunity to spread their opinions and experiences with products or services on various platforms such as social media, review websites and brand websites and thus influence other customers' behaviour. This change is also reflected in the way travel-related information is acquired, as well as the way tourist journeys are planned (Latif et al., 2020). Because of the intangible characteristic of the tourist products,

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prospective tourists begin to use social media before traveling more and more. They use eWOM platforms to search for ideas for destinations, accommodation options, and other visual evidence provided by corporate sources, mass communication, and other eWOM platforms (Amaro et al., 2016). Ready access to information helps users make faster decisions and find products which best fit their preferences, relying on travellers with previous experience in the context of tourism (Yu et al., 2014). On the other hand, the unlimited sources of information and the increasing number of options make it increasingly difficult for customers to be confident that they are making the right purchase decision.

This study, therefore, proposed the following question: Which eWOM information is more influential on consumers' destination choice - the official information from hotel websites, the information from the people we know or want to follow or the information from professional bloggers whose expertise we trust? The answer to this question is valuable for practitioners as well as researchers since it reveals which eWOM platforms are more influential on customers' behaviour. In this study, we empirically test and compare the influence of friends' recommendations on social media, anonymous reviews and information on hotel websites and the information from video and discussion forums from professional tourist bloggers; we expect the eWOM on social media to be more influential than the information from official hotel websites, but not as influential as the information from tourist bloggers on customers 'destination choice.

In order to compare the influences of eWOM on different platforms, we first identify which factors of eWOM information affect consumers' behaviour, and then examine their impact on customers' choice through the moderating role of age and experience.

In the following sections we explore the three different platforms that are examined and review in detail the constructs selected for this study. We introduce the model and results from the carried-out research.

1. Literature review

eWOM (electronic word of mouth)

As Internet usage has increased and phenomena such as the "participative web" and "user-created content" (UCC) have emerged, the possibilities and development of communication has expanded simultaneously. Electronic peer-to-peer communication has enabled users to share information and opinions with others more easily than before (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In turn, this has given customers the opportunity and power to influence other consumers through posting content related to their experiences with products and services. Electronic peer-to-peer communication, which is often referred to as eWOM (electronic word of mouth) is described as "Any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or

former customers about a product or company, which is made available to many people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

eWOM is believed to lead to a strong desire to pass on information as it becomes easy for customers to have conversations online and allows information to be transmitted quickly and broadly. Due to the impact of eWOM on customers' behaviour, academic research on eWOM has been documented in disciplines such as advertising, marketing, communication, management, and e-commerce.

eWOM is a key part of any effective marketing strategy for the hospitality business, as well. Due to the intangible nature of the tourism product, it is very difficult for hospitality to market its services and hence previous customer experience appears to be one of the best strategies that allows some quantification of product quality. Word of mouth (WOM) also has a large impact on consumer purchasing behaviour and is often considered as a critical aspect of brand building because as consumers share their experiences and opinions, the need for advertisements decreases (Keller, 2013).

Bickart and Schindler (2001) suggested that compared to regular marketing, information on Internet forums should have a greater influence on consumer behaviour due to credibility, appropriateness, and empathy. Customers often feel that traditional marketing and advertising are manipulative and indifferent to the consumer's well-being (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). In contrast, research has shown that both WOM and eWOM are perceived as more credible and trustworthy because the authors are other consumers and therefore, they do not have hidden motives for persuading others to buy a particular product (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Nowadays, customers regularly turn to online forums or customer reviews when considering a purchase. There are many different platforms, which they can use to publish statements about a product, brand or company. The most common are personal blogs, discussion forums, review websites, official websites and social networking sites. In this article, we will discuss eWOM on three different platforms: hotel websites, social media, and travellers' blogs and forums.

The hotel website itself can be a powerful channel for driving eWOM. Integrating customer reviews, social media feedbacks and testimonials on the hotel page can create a positive first impression of the hotel. As with traditional advertising, an effective website should not only share information, but also create a desire to learn more about the product or destination and ideally trigger a desire to visit. eWOM can be generated online by offering web visitors access to the opinions of satisfied guests. To achieve this, positive product reviews and posting customer comments on the company's web pages should be emphasized. Furthermore, guests should be provided with links to company bulletin boards where they are invited to express their own views and share their personal experiences about the destination, the hotel, the restaurant, etc. Loyal customers should also be encouraged to post links on their personal websites that direct visitors to the tourism provider's website. The key idea is to create a community of interest in which visitors and potential visitors

talk about the destination product as part of their shared interest in travel. Making it easy for customers to post their vacation pictures on both the company's web site as well as their own web site encourages eWOM.

Travellers' blogs/video content

At the dawn of the Internet era, online discussion forums encouraged users to talk about everything. However, over time, these forums have become more specialized and only deal with specific topics. On these websites, users can share their knowledge and experience while learning about others; they even end up developing relationships with people who share similar interests (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). Gradually, a new phenomenon has emerged: blogs. People started writing their own opinions, experiences, diaries and comments on their blogs which, in turn, were open to the benefit of those who read them. Although the initial aim of these websites was not to talk about products, services or brands, researchers have noticed that half of all bloggers provide brand-related information at least once a week (Chu & Kamal, 2008). In fact, even companies have begun to follow this blogging wave, as they consider blogging as an opportunity for instant feedback from consumers and for initiating positive WOM (Hsu & Tsou, 2011).

The popularity of blogs has grown rapidly in recent years and today they are one of the most popular social media. Most people share travel-related user-generated content on integrated social applications through travel blogs/notes. Blogs and notes can be presented in a variety of formats, such as texts, images, videos, and/or a combination of all, which is more engaging than other text-based user-generated content (Huang, 2012). Townsend and Kahn (2014) emphasized that users perceive visual presentation format as easier, faster and more enjoyable than other form of communication. This suggests that the visual form of eWOM can also influence consumer perception and purchase decision (Lin et al., 2012). Videos may be able to remove possible credibility doubts raised by online text reviews. Because eWOM is mostly anonymous, the reader does not know who has posted the text review, and this gives an opportunity for marketers to flood the market with fake eWOM that are designed to be perceived as user-generated content (UGC). Videos, on the contrary, are able to bring back the human element, thus demonstrating the validity of the content to the viewer.

Social media

Weber (2007) defines social media as "an online place where people with common interests can connect with each other to share their thoughts, comments and ideas". It has a significant role in communication between people, communities and institutions (Kietzmann et al., 2011) and has become a channel where people can search and get information from various sources, excluding traditional ones. It is also

a tool through which they can create new content, express their thoughts and experiences, and share information (Dickey & Lewis, 2011).

Social media is transforming the way customers see and perceive destinations, especially those which they have not visited yet. The expanded time they spend on social media means that more of their "beliefs, ideas and impressions" about destinations are influenced by the posts, images and videos they see online (Bizirgianni & Dionysopoulou, 2013). Social media platforms are often used in travel arrangements as they serve as a communication link between tourists and tourist destinations. People begin more and more to use social media prior to their trip, during the trip and at the end of the trip, making it an effective tool for tourists and for advertising the visited destinations (Ketter, 2016). The use of social networking services (SNS) by hotels, restaurants and other organizations at different levels increases both the possibilities of spread of information and the effect on customers. Photos posted on social media platforms are considered significant factors that engage social media users in cognitive, emotional, and behavioural activities.

According to We Are Social Digital's 2022 report, the number of social media users has reached 4.62 billion (We Are Social, 2022). Nilashi et al., (2018) noted that "Trivago and TripAdvisor are some of the most popular social media platforms for tourism, enabling hospitality and tourism businesses to promote their brand to customers and connect with tourists beyond service encounter." The many-to-many nature of social media is the advantage that has effectively transformed the processes of advertisement and usage. The statement is proven by the way consumers create an image or mental picture of what the destination and its tourism products will look like even before the visit (Ilieva & Han, 2022).

Destination selection

Choice and decision-making processes determine behavioural intention; as McCormick (2016) suggested, travellers base their decisions on social influence (the degree to which their companion approves of the particular choice the individual makes) and their perceived benefits that the particular decision (to visit a destination or purchase a product, for example) may provide. Consideration of these factors, along with an evaluation of an alternative course of action, is essential to the decision-making process. The role of eWOM in consumer decision making is also widely recognized in the marketing literature. Decision making refers to the process of gathering and analysing information to select an ideal choice among predetermined alternatives (Harrison & March, 1984).

In the context of travel, tourist decision making can be divided into three phases: pre-trip, during-trip, and post-trip (Cox et al., 2009). Tourism products are complex, intangible and often considered high risk if there is no prior experience. Therefore, tourists constantly look for information for their decision making (Fodness & Murray, 1999). At the pre-trip stage, tourists evaluate alternative

destinations and potential tourism activities by seeking information which will help them reduce the risk and, in this case, personal sources, such as word of mouth, would be preferred over impersonal ones (Murray, 1991).

Pearce and Packer (2013) used the case of TripAdvisor to explain how people read reviews and make destination-related decisions in different ways, either through a process of rational choice elimination or through an emotion-based heuristic approach. Tourists also need information during the trip, mainly regarding destination decisions such as transportation, dining, accommodation and attractions (DiPietro et al., 2007). Finally, tourists may share information at the post-trip stage, mainly to express their experiences and/or their concerns (Dwityas & Briandana, 2017). Search for information during the decision-making process can be further divided into internal and external, based on different sources (Gursoy & Umbreit, 2004). Internal search includes prior experience and knowledge of tourism products or destinations (Fodness & Murray, 1999) while external search refers to gathering information from a tourist place, for example, travel agents and the Internet (Gursoy & Umbreit, 2004).

In addition, the fast development of information and communication technologies in recent decades has led to the growing popularity of social media among tourists, which facilitates their external information search and allows them to have two-way communication with businesses and other customers (Navío-Marco et al., 2018).

2. Design/methodology/approach

eWOM conversations consist of basic transfer of information. However, bearing in mind that the impact of information may vary from person to person, the same content may evoke different ideas among recipients (Cheung et al., 2008). To understand how people personalize the information they receive, previous studies have focused on the Information Adoption Model (IAM) (Nonaka, 1994). IAM aims to demonstrate how people tend to be impacted by eWOM from different platforms by addressing four factors: argument quality (which represents the central route), source credibility (which represents the peripheral route), information usefulness, and information adoption. Thus, IAM explains how people are affected by information on computer-mediated communication platforms**.**

Information quality

Information quality is an important construct for the success of an information system model. It refers to customers' subjective evaluation of whether the characteristics of the information meet their own needs and requirements. The quality of information in online reviews has received considerable attention in the existing literature. Studies have confirmed that high-quality reviews strongly

influence product evaluation (Park & Lee, 2008), website evaluation and purchase prediction (Park et al., 2007). Customers value information that they can trust and rely on so as to make informed decisions. Information quality is enhanced when it provides a comprehensive and detailed perspective on the topic at hand. Users appreciate information that covers various aspects, features, or dimensions of a product, service, or experience. Complete and in-depth information allows them to gain a more thorough understanding and make well-informed choices.

In summary, we could say that information quality in eWOM is crucial for consumers to make well-informed decisions. It encompasses accuracy, reliability, source credibility, relevance, timeliness, completeness, objectiveness, user-generated content evaluation, transparency, and liability. Consumers rely on high-quality information to gain insights, reduce risks, and form reliable opinions about products, services, and brands in the online environment.

Based on that, we can conclude that information quality will affect destination choice. However, since the eWOM information that occurs in social media is less anonymous, we predict that the information on social media is considered to be of higher quality than the information from hotel websites. Furthermore, keeping in mind that the information on travellers' blogs is provided by industry experts, we could expect that it would be perceived as of the highest quality.

H1a: Information quality will have a positive correlation with destination choice
H1b: Information quality on blogs will have the highest influence on destination choice while websites will have the lowest

Credibility of information

With the development of Internet communication technology, almost anyone can post online reviews on social media platforms. Therefore, users can be distrustful of the quality of review information on social media and unsure whether the feedback information presented is true and reliable. The credibility of information is a compound conception that is widely discussed in the scientific literature. In the research on media credibility, Self (1996) defines it as a complex of several various concepts such as believability, trust and perceived reliability. Even though there is no familiar agreement on the definition of credibility, it commonly represents the perceived reliability of the information and/or the source of the information (Kaye & Johnson, 2011). The existing literature has also defined it as a subjective perception rather than an objective evaluation of information (Fogg et al., 2001). Because credibility is determined by receiver judgments (Kaye & Johnson, 2011), it does not necessarily correspond to the true quality of the message (e.g., accuracy). Based on the general concept of credibility, the perceived credibility of eWOM can be described as the extent to which the customer perceives online information as credible, factual and objective (Cheung et al., 2009). As with any form of communication, the credibility of eWOM can vary significantly depending on

various factors. Nevertheless, regarding the credibility of eWOM, there are some key points we could summarize:

- Source expertise: the credibility of eWOM depends on the expertise and knowledge of the source providing the information. If the source is recognized as an industry expert, professional, or trusted entity, the eWOM is more likely to be perceived as credible.
- Reputation and trustworthiness: the reputation and trustworthiness of the source play a crucial role in determining the credibility of eWOM. Established influencers, respected bloggers, or individuals with a history of providing accurate and objective information are often considered more credible than unknown or untrustworthy sources.
- Consistency and corroboration: credible eWOM is often supported by multiple sources or verified evidence. When several independent sources share similar information or opinions, it strengthens the credibility of the eWOM.
- Context and appropriateness: che credibility of eWOM can also depend on the context and applicability of the information to the recipient. If the eWOM corresponds to the recipient's needs, preferences, or specific situation, it is more likely to be considered credible.

To summarize, based on the general concept of credibility, the eWOM's perceived credibility can be defined as the extent to which the receiver perceives the online information as believable, factual and unbiased and it is an essential factor to be considered when consumers evaluate the value of eWOM information.

Previous research has shown the positive relationship between information credibility and consumers' purchase intentions (Hsu & Tsou, 2011; Prendergast et al., 2010). Therefore, we regard information credibility as one of the factors which affect consumers' purchase intentions; and, within the context of this study, we predict that eWOM information on social media will be perceived as more credible than eWOM information on hotel websites, but not as credible as the information on travel blogs.

H2a: Information credibility will have a positive correlation with destination choice

H2b: Information credibility on blogs will have the highest influence on destination choice, while websites will have the lowest

Information usefulness

In the context of eWOM, information usefulness refers to the extent to which information shared by individuals online is perceived as valuable, relevant, and useful by others.

Information usefulness indicates customers' perceptions that using this information will improve their performance (Cheung et al., 2008). Erkan and Evans (2016) and Sussman and Siegal (2003) mentioned that information quality was a

major predictor of information usefulness. Consumers believe that high-quality information produces useful information (Jiang et al., 2021). Besides, Alhemimah (2019) also mentioned that if the customer perceives the information as accurate, complete and recent, they will acknowledge it as useful.

Sussman and Siegal (2003) designated source credibility as another strong predictor of information usefulness. Erkan and Evans (2016) also stated that consumers' perception of the usefulness of any information is significantly impacted by source credibility. Information usefulness is closely tied to the credibility and trustworthiness of the source because users are more likely to perceive information as useful when it comes from a reliable and knowledgeable source, such as industry experts, reputable influencers, or individuals with relevant experience. All these statements show that information usefulness is closely interrelated with the other two components - information quality and information credibility.

The usefulness of information in eWOM plays a vital role in influencing consumer decision-making and shaping perceptions about products, services, brands, and experiences. In eWOM, useful information acts as a decision support tool for consumers. It provides them with insights, opinions, recommendations, and firsthand experiences from others who have already used or purchased these products or services.

To summarize, in eWOM, information usefulness plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions, influencing purchase decisions, reducing perceived risks, and facilitating informed choices. It acts as a valuable resource for consumers seeking advice, recommendations, and opinions about products and services in the online environment. As usefulness is associated with credibility, we predict that, similarly to the previous construct, blogs by experts will have the best perception.

H3a: Information usefulness will have a positive correlation with destination choice

H3b: Information usefulness on blogs will have the highest influence on destination choice, while websites will have the lowest

Information adoption

Information adoption is considered as another factor which might influence consumers' purchase intentions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Consumers who engage and adopt eWOM information are more likely to have purchase intentions. However, the information adoption process may change on different platforms (Cheung et al., 2009).

Information adoption in the context of eWOM refers to the process by which individuals receive and incorporate information shared through eWOM into their own knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. It involves the acceptance, internalization, and utilization of the information by consumers.

The ultimate goal of information adoption in eWOM is to influence consumers' behaviours. When consumers adopt information and incorporate it into their decision-making processes, it can lead to changes in their actual purchasing behaviour, product usage, or other related actions.

It is important to note that this process can vary among individuals due to factors such as their personal characteristics, prior experiences, social influence, and the perceived usefulness of the information. Based on their unique needs and contexts, different consumers may interpret and adopt information differently.

In conclusion, we could say that information adoption in eWOM involves the reception, evaluation, internalization, and utilization of information shared through online platforms and ultimately influencing consumers' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours.

Therefore, we predict that the adoption of eWOM information from social media, travellers' blogs and hotel websites could have different influence on consumers' purchase intentions (destination choice). In fact, as eWOM information has been exchanged among friends on social media instead of anonymous people on hotel websites, we anticipate that the adoption of eWOM information from social media is better perceived than that from hotel websites. However, as eWOM information on travellers' blogs comes from experts and professionals, it is perceived as more trustworthy and is expected to have better adoption results.

H4a: Information adoption will have a positive correlation with destination choice
H4b: Information adoption on blogs will have the highest influence on destination choice, while that on websites will have the lowest

In order to determine the influence of information, it is not sufficient to only look into the characteristics of information; consumers' behaviours towards information should also be considered. That is why to explore the determinants of eWOM information on the three chosen online information platforms which influence customers' destination choice (purchase intentions), we adopted a theoretical model based on the integration of the Information Adoption Model (IAM) and related components of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) model. The TRA postulates that behavioural intentions which predetermine behaviour are decided by attitude and subjective norms (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) has been frequently used by the previous research regarding the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Prendergast et al., 2010). The study also introduces two moderators, age and experience, proven to be relevant when analysing electronic platforms (source).

Age and experience

Previous research shows that age can have both a direct and moderating role on behavioural intention, adoption, and acceptance of technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Czaja and Sharit (1993) also suggest that age differences in information processing has an impact on older workers' performance of computer-based tasks. Thus, gaining a better understanding of the role of age is important-particularly as it relates to user acceptance and usage of new information technologies and should be analysed in the context of eWOM.

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) state that a user's experience with a given item can have a decisive impact on the current behaviour toward that item. The existing literature has proven that, in the context of online purchases, individuals with previous experience are more likely to buy products online, as they face fewer difficulties (Venkatesh et al., 2012). Therefore, in this study, experience has been taken as moderator and we examine its role in eWOM.

H5: Age will have a moderating role on the relationship between the eWOM constructs and destination choice

H6: Experience will have a moderating role on the relationship between the eWOM constructs and destination choice

Figure 1. Conceptual framework
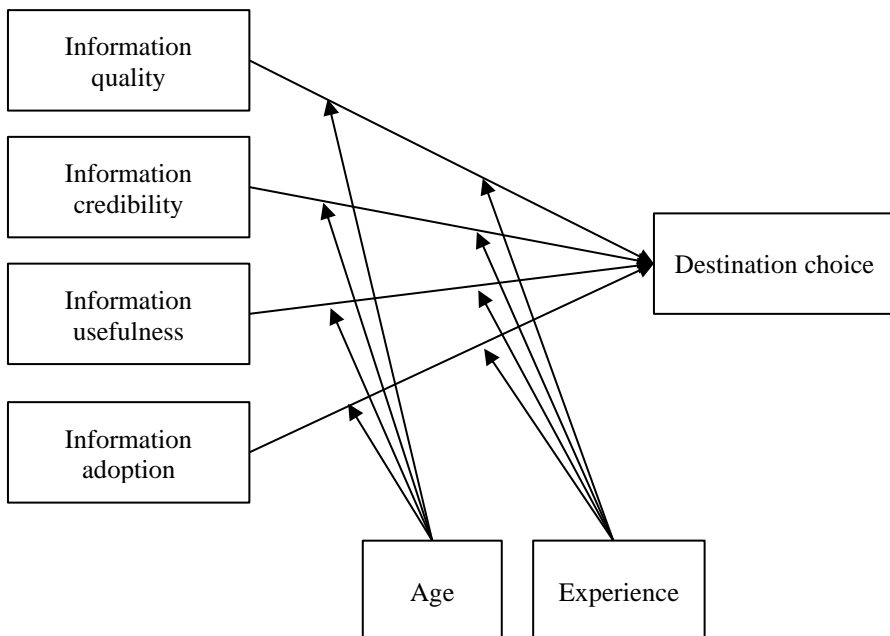
Source: adoption of IAM and TRA Models

Each of the arrows in the model represents a relation that is examined in order to evaluate the effect of different factors of eWOM on the destination choice. The four constructs are reviewed in the context of all three different platforms. Finally, age and experience are used as moderators and we examine their effect on the relationship between the other constructs.

3. Results

The empirical research was conducted in the period May - July 2023. The survey was distributed online by email through the Google Form platform. It has been sent to 200 participants from different age groups. From the received responses, only 150 surveys were fully completed and suitable for use. Sample characteristics are demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample characteristics (n = 150)

Measure	*Frequency*	*Percentage*
Gender		
Male	54	36%
Female	96	64%
Age		
From 19 to 28	21	14%
From 29 to 38	57	38%
From 39 to 48	45	30%
From 49 to 58	15	10%
Above 59	12	8%
Experience		
Daily	120	80%
Twice a week	6	4%
Thrice a week	12	8%
Most of the time	12	8%

Source: authors' representation from SPSS data

From the previous studies and IAM model, we choose the four constructs for eWOM information to measure their influence on three online platforms. All variables were assessed with a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. To test the influence on these factors on the three online platforms we use descriptive statistics to calculate their mean value. The descriptive analysis of empirical data shows that respondents rated all four factors on the hotel website with the highest rating, which rejects our hypothesis that information on travellers' blogs from experts will receive the highest score. This is positive news for hoteliers, as despite the average age being below 40 and the expectation that younger users trust other platforms more, the official information on hotel websites is still considered the most reliable and useful for choosing a tourist destination. Despite the fact that eWOM information on social media is less anonymous and it is expected

to be considered as higher quality than the information on other online platforms, and especially on the official brand website, the respondents gave the lowest score for the information quality on this popular eWOM platform.

Table 2. Results of descriptive statistics- Mean value

	Quality	Credibility	Usefulness	Adoption
Website	3.5840	3.5250	3.9100	3.8150
Social Media	2.9320	3.0150	3.1700	3.1350
Travel blogs and forums	3.4440	3.3000	3.4700	3.4950

Source: authors' representation from SPSS data

For the purpose of this study, we aim to examine the correlation between the eWOM constructs and destination choice for the three platforms. Pearson correlation analysis is used to show the strength and direction of the correlation between the analysed variables. This will show whether a change in the perception of either construct (quality, credibility, usefulness and adoption) corresponds to a change in destination choice.

Table 3. Results of Pearson correlation analyses

		Quality	Credibility	Usefulness	Adoption
Website / Destination choice	Pearson Correlation	0.647^{**}	0.301^{**}	0.542^{**}	0.735^{**}
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Social Media / Destination choice	Pearson Correlation	0.668^{**}	0.696^{**}	0.726^{**}	0.724^{**}
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Travel blogs and forums / Destination choice	Pearson Correlation	0.557^{**}	0.492^{**}	0.474^{**}	0.553^{**}
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Source: authors' representation from SPSS data

The results reveal a statistically significant linear correlation between the constructs of eWOM information on all three platforms and the destination choice with a sig value less than 0.05. The data analysis shows that the strongest correlation is observed in the relationship between the website information adoption and the destination choice. The Pearson Correlation coefficient is 0.735. The sign of this coefficient is positive, which indicates the presence of a positive relationship. According to the conditional scale of interpretation of correlation coefficients, the Pearson Correlation falls in the interval from 0.7 to 0.9, which reveals a strong relationship between the variables. The weakest relationship is observed for the

credibility construct (again on the website platform) and its correlation with the destination choice with a 0.301 coefficient.

Table 4. Results of multiple regression analyses

Independent variable	Dependent variable	(β) Website	(β) Social Media	(β) Travel blogs and forums
Information quality	Destination choice	0.269	0.195	0.387
Information credibility		-0.193	0.162	0.023
Information usefulness		0.139	0.227	0.015
Information adoption		0.564	0.262	0.365

Note: *p < 0.001
Source: authors' representation from SPSS data

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to test the influence of the four factors of eWOM information on each of the studied platforms on destination choice.

The results show a moderate impact of these factors on the destination choice. According to the data analysis, the largest value of R Square = 0.541 is found for the variable "adoption" and its influence on the destination choice through the information on websites. This coefficient reveals 54.10% influence of this variable. The construct with the least effect, the information credibility is again from the website platform. Its coefficient reveals 9.1% influence on the destination choice. The results show that the eWOM information quality from Travel blogs and forums was found more influential on the destination choice than website information quality (β = 0.269) and information quality on Social Media (β = 0.195), which partially rejects our hypothesis that the quality of social media information is more influential than the one from website, but not as influential as the one from travel blogs. Besides, the credibility of eWOM information on Social Media (β = 0.162) was found more effective than the one in Travel blogs and forums (β = 0.023) and on Websites (β = -0.193). In this case, our hypothesis is partially accepted as social media information credibility is more influential than website information credibility, but travel blogs information credibility is not more influential than the social media information credibility. Similarly, eWOM information usefulness on Social Media (β = 0.227) was found more effective than that on Travel blogs and forums (β = 0.015) and on Website (β = 0.139). Here, our hypothesis is again partially accepted as the social media information usefulness impact is stronger than Website information usefulness, but the one from travel blogs is not stronger than that from social media. Finally, the adoption of eWOM information on Websites (β = 0.564) was found to have a higher impact than the one on Travel blogs and forums

($\beta = 0.365$) and Social Media ($\beta = 0.262$) on consumers' destination choice. In this case, our hypothesis is partially accepted because travel blog information adoption has a higher influence than social media information adoption, but not as high as website information adoption.

Compared to a similar study carried out in 2016 by Erkan and Evans, which looks into the effect of social media and shopping websites on purchase intention, there are a few similarities. Overall, official websites are still more influential regarding purchase intention; however, the role of social media has notably increased over the last 7 years. The influence of social media has increased on all four constructs and even surpasses websites regarding information usefulness. For example, for adoption, the multilinear regression analysis shows $\beta=0.096$ for 2016, notably lower than $\beta=0.262$ for this study. Meanwhile, official websites show a weaker effect in terms of quality, credibility and usefulness, and a stronger one for adoption in comparison to 2016. While some of the differences could be accounted for by a difference in samples, is clear that the role of social media is increasing and has become a lot more prominent factor for decision making. Considering the rapid development of social media, we can expect that its influence will continue to grow and to even eventually surpass the role of official websites.

For the purpose of this study, we examined the moderating effect of age and experience on the interrelation between eWOM information factors on studied online platforms and destination choice. To test this relationship, each independent and moderating variable was initially cantered to minimize multicollinearity, and interaction terms were formed as the product of the cantered variables. The results of the moderation regression analysis are presented in Tables 5, 6 and 7.

Table 5. Moderating effect of age and experience on eWOM factors of hotel website and destination choice interrelation

	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
INT_WQxAGE	0.070	0.067	0.076	1.043	0.299
INT_WQxEXP	-0.158	0.069	-0.174	-2.299	0.023
INT_WCxAGE	-0.283	0.070	-0.293	-4.020	0.000
INT_WCxEXP	0.260	0.116	0.457	2.239	0.027
INT_WUSExAGE	-0.178	0.095	-0.169	-1.882	0.062
INT_WUSExEXP	-0.509	0.098	-1.042	-5.174	0.000
INT_WADOPxAGE	0.127	0.065	0.158	1.961	0.052
INT_WADOPxEXP	0.306	0.084	0.363	3.624	0.000

Source: authors' representation from SPSS data

As shown in Table 5, age moderator dampens the positive relationship between information credibility of website and destination choice. Experience

moderator also dampens the positive relationship between all factors of eWOM information on website and destination choice.

Table 6. Moderating effect of age and experience on eWOM factors of social media and destination choice interrelation

	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
INT_SMQxAGE	0.006	0.146	0.007	0.044	0.965
INT_SMQxEXP	0.813	0.864	1.183	0.941	0.348
INT_SMCxAGE	0.070	0.131	0.087	0.536	0.593
INT_SMCxEXP	-1.749	1.553	-2.513	-1.126	0.262
INT_SMUSExAGE	-0.278	0.211	-0.360	-1.313	0.191
INT_SMUSExEXP	2.030	1.562	3.177	1.300	0.196
INT_SMADOPxAGE	0.286	0.161	0.359	1.776	0.078
INT_SMADOPxEXP	-1.073	0.905	-1.613	-1.186	0.238

Source: authors' representation from SPSS data

The results in Table 6 show that age and experience moderators do not dampen the positive relationship between factors of eWOM information on social media platforms and destination choice.

Table 7. Moderating effect of age and experience on eWOM factors of travel blogs and forums and destination choice interrelation

	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
INT_BLOGQxAGE	-0.258	0.085	-0.196	-3.053	0.003
INT_BLOGQxEXP	0.250	0.231	0.210	1.081	0.282
INT_BLOGCxAGE	-0.112	0.141	-0.102	-0.793	0.429
INT_BLOGCxEXP	0.967	0.252	1.128	3.843	0.000
INT_BLOGUSExAGE	0.229	0.087	0.345	2.634	0.009
INT_BLOGUSExEXP	0.058	0.085	0.096	0.684	0.495
INT_BLOGADOPxAGE	0.379	0.176	0.362	2.146	0.034
INT_BLOGADOPxEXP	-1.157	0.445	-1.265	-2.603	0.010

Source: authors' representation from SPSS data

As shown in Table 7, age moderator dampens the positive relationship between quality, usefulness and adoption of information on travel blogs and forums and destination choice. Experience moderator also dampens the positive relationship between credibility and adoption of information on travel blogs and forums and destination choice.

Based on this analysis, we can conclude that, due to its popularity and widespread distribution, the information from social media is the most familiar to users and, for this reason, neither age nor experience affects the relationship between

its information and the customer's decision to choose a destination. Although the hotel website is the primary source of information about the hotel, we see that the user's experience with such information is the basis of the relationship between it and the decision to choose the destination. When perceiving the credibility of hotel information, age is still the main criterion. the interrelation of information from travel forums and blogs and destination choice is most influenced by the moderating role of user's age and experience. Although increasingly popular among users of travel services, its credibility and adoption in choosing a destination is strongly influenced by the experience of users; moreover, their age determines the perception of three of the four factors of eWOM information.

Conclusions

eWOM is gaining increasing popularity and plays an important role in marketing the hospitality industry. As more and more people use eWOM to make informed purchase decisions, the process by which they evaluate the factors of eWOM information becomes increasingly relevant. The present study makes several important contributions on this topic. Despite the spreading role of social media and other eWOM information sources, the research findings show that information on hotel websites is highly regarded and has the strongest influence on information adoption. Contrary to our predictions, the travel blog information is still not as influential on customers' destination choice. Furthermore, the research findings show that social media information is not affected by the age and experience of the users. Because of its widespread popularity, it is equally accepted by all customer categories; however, the unlimited amount of information on social media, as well as the increasingly frequent sponsored advertising contents of influencers hinder users' confidence in its trustworthiness and credibility and weakens its effect on customers' destination choice.

Despite its contributions, this research is subject to some limitations that should be addressed in future studies. First, the present study considers data collected from only three eWOM sources. Future research could compare the influence on other eWOM sources on destination choice. Also, since the study was conducted only in Bulgaria, it might be difficult to generalize the findings to other countries, as results do not consider other consumers' behaviours and attitudes.

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