The eWOM Effect Towards Travel Destination Decision-Making Process

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Abstract

This research aimed to investigate the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on chosen travel destinations through theory of planned behavior (TPB) as well as explore the relationship between destination preference and intention to travel. The research was carried out using non-probability, quota, convenience sampling method, and snowball technique. Data collected was analyzed by simple linear regression (SLR), multiple linear regression (MLR), analysis of covariance structures and analysis of variance (ANOVA) to investigate the relationship, impact, and differences. The total of 414 respondents were Bangkok residents who had experience travelling outside Thailand. Results found that eWOM, attitude towards the selected international destination, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control had significant impacts towards intention to travel; and each selected destination had a different effect on intention to travel.

Keywords: Electronic Word of Mouth, eWOM, Tourism, Theory of Planned Behaviour

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อิทธิพลของการสื่อสารแบบปากต่อปากผ่านทางอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ต่อกระบวนการตัดสินใจในการเลือกสถานที่ท่องเที่ยว

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยฉบับนี้จัดทำขึ้นเพื่อค้นหาและพิสูจน์อิทธิพลของการสื่อสารแบบปากต่อปากผ่านทางอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ต่อการเลือกสถานที่ท่องเที่ยวโดยการอธิบายด้วยทฤษฎีพฤติกรรมตามแผน และค้นหาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างความพึงพอใจต่อสถานที่กับความตั้งใจที่จะไป การวิจัยนี้เลือกสุ่มตัวอย่างโดยไม่ใช้ความน่าจะเป็น โดยการเลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่างแบบโควตา เลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่างตามสะดวก และใช้เทคนิคการเลือกตัวอย่างโดยวิธีการชักชวนต่อๆ กัน มีการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลและนำมาวิเคราะห์ด้วยการวิเคราะห์การถดถอยเชิงเส้นอย่างง่าย การวิเคราะห์การถดถอยพหุคูณ การวิเคราะห์เส้นทาง และการวิเคราะห์ความแปรปรวน เพื่อใช้ในการพิสูจน์ความสัมพันธ์ ผลกระทบ และความแตกต่าง กลุ่มตัวอย่างทั้งสิ้น 414 คน เป็นผู้ที่อยู่อาศัยในเขตกรุงเทพฯ และปริมณฑล และเป็นผู้ที่เคยท่องเที่ยวในต่างประเทศ ผลจากงานวิจัยพบว่า การสื่อสารแบบปากต่อปากผ่านทางอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ ทัศนคติต่อสถานที่ท่องเที่ยว ค่านิยมและความเชื่อ และการรับรู้ความสามารถในการควบคุมพฤติกรรม มีผลกระทบต่อความตั้งใจในการไปท่องเที่ยวสถานที่แต่ละแห่ง และสถานที่แต่ละแห่งมีผลแห่งความตั้งใจที่จะไปแตกต่างกัน

คำสำคัญ: การสื่อสารแบบปากต่อปากผ่านทางอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ การท่องเที่ยว ทฤษฎีพฤติกรรมตามแผน

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Introduction

The advancement in communication technology through the internet as a medium has led businesses and people to change their way of life. The power of internet and its connectivity has enabled the connection to communicate to people nearby and around the world alike at the fingertips. Most of the younger generation today grew up learning their interested subjects through the internet, similarly, how they decide on same decisions are also partially based on the information presented online. With the enormous amount of information available online, some of the most trusted sources of information comes from ordinary people, whether it is the products or services such as online reviews, opinions, guides, and walkthroughs. This is also true in the tourism industry. The impact of eWOM has increased its influence towards consumers' decision regarding holiday destinations. Thus, the thought processes towards digesting online information have been developed to select the trustable information based on certain characteristics and behaviours. Tourism behaviour analysis has been considered as an essential topic to glimpse into the factors (image, experience, and satisfaction) that effect their behaviours (Gallarza, Arteaga, Floristán & Gil, 2009)

Thailand has been quite a popular choice as tourist destinations. Although, there is a large influx of the tourist flowing into Thailand, there is a sizable outflux of Thai travellers going out to international destination. In 2017, the total number of departures of Thai travellers were 8.96 million departures with expenditure of over USD 5.9 billion, and in January to June 2018, the total number of departures were 5.07 million departures with expenditure of USD 3.2 billion ("Ministry of Tourism & Sports," n.d.). Ministry of Tourism & Sports separate major groups of Thai travellers into different sectors of Asia (South and East Asia), Europe, and several others, for the purpose of this research, the groups will be separated into 3 major groups, Asia, Europe, and Others.

Understanding the influence of eWOM towards international destination may provide an insight to understand the influence of the information available online in the forms of eWOM which can be review, blogs, experience sharing, and many other forms towards the effect of selecting the international destination for their vacation purposes. The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) has proven to be an effective model in understanding the relationship of the past behaviours that leads to a patterned future behaviour. Although there have been studies of the TPB in the tourism sector, there have been very little insights about the effect of eWOM in the tourism industry in Thailand. This leads to the research objective to understand the impact of eWOM on the selected international destination choice using the TPB. Furthermore, this research investigates the magnitude of the preferred international destination from the impact of eWOM.

Literature Review

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

Word-of-mouth (WOM) communication has always been an informal information source directed at other consumers that influence the process of purchase decision-making (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Westbrook, 1987). Traditional WOM has advanced to eWOM in this new information age, the major contrast between WOM and eWOM is the reach to other consumers who can be influenced with the interaction speed of the online reviews (Sun, Youn, Wu, & Kuntaraporn, 2006). In 2004, Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, and Gremler defined eWOM as any positive or negative statement about a product or a company made available to many people through the internet by former, actual or potential customers. Arguably, eWOM is considered to have more influence than the traditional WOM because of the wide reach to individuals globally and instantly (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Phelps, Lewis, Mobilio, Perry, & Raman, 2004). Since then, eWOM experienced overwhelming growth due to exponential increase in user-generated content (UGC) created by ordinary users that are distributed with ease and fast through the internet (Internet Advertising Bureau, 2008). Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2008) expressed that online opinions, online reviews, online recommendations, which are all considered as eWOM, have become important with introductions of new technology tools.

In the service industry, WOM can play an essential role since prior experience of service is impossible (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996) and due to the independent nature of the sender, it is seen as a valuable information (Silverman, 2001). Previous studies showed that positive eWOM can have influence over hotel's price and occupancy levels (Yacouel & Fleischer, 2012); Anderson, 2012). Cleveland and Laroche suggested that decisions and choices are also influenced by culture (2007). Vermeulen and Seegers' experimental study showed that positive eWOM can improve travelers' attitudes towards hotels (2009).

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

According to Ajzen, formed behaviour can be described by TPB (1991). Attitude toward a behaviour, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and behavioural intentions are the factors that can affect intention of individuals when a given behaviour is performed (Ajzen, 2011). TPB was used in many social science studies such as risk-orientated behaviour (Quinlan, Jaccard, & Blanton (2006), internet activity (Hsu & Chiu, 2004), and ethical behaviour (Flannery & May, 2000). According to Truong's review, TPB was ranked as second in usage for social marketing (2014). Lin's research model was developed in 2006 to understand the influential factors of online communities' members participation intentions. Results showed that perceived behavioural control and attitude were extremely influential towards the behavioural intentions. Several studies have found that future behaviour is directly impacted by past

experiences in Tourism and hospitality fields as an additional factor to the TPB original factors (Lam & Hsu, 2004, 2006; Giantari, Zain, Rahayu & Solimun, 2013).

Attitude Towards the Selected International Destination

Attitude is formed psychologically by affection, cognition, and values towards a certain subject. (Hoyer & Maclnis, 2004; Dossey & Keegan, 2008; Jung, 1971). Azjen (1991) defined attitude in the TPB as degree of evaluation whether favourable or unfavourable of the questioned behaviour. Attitude is considerably firm and semi-permanent summary of a subject, its psychological construct has significant influence towards many behaviours (Kraus, 1995; Jung 1971). Results from previous studies have shown that intention and attitude can be affected by eWOM (Soderlund & Rosengren, 2007; Ying & Chung, 2007). Positive WOM generates favourable attitude when targeting a product (Ying & Chung, 2007). Smith and Vogt (1995) showed that the initial WOM information are not affected by subsequent information regardless of positivity or negativity context of the information.

Subjective Norms

The conceptual context that relates behaviour and social context are referred to as subjective norm. A Decision to display certain behaviours are affected socially through this concept (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). The TPB defined subjective norm as the decision acted upon performing or not performing the behaviour that is influenced by perceived social pressure (Azjen, 1991). TPB perception states that higher degree of social pressure directly influences the importance of decision to comply (Mathieson, 1991). Subjective norm can be influential to the intention of playing online games (Hsu & Lu, 2004), online purchase decision (Pavlou & Fygenson, 2006), and engaging in advance mobile services (Lopez-Nicolas, Molina-Castillo & Bouwman, 2008). Subjective norm is extremely influential over participation intention of online community (Zhou, 2011).

Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC)

Perceived behavioural control is the envision of own's judgement of capabilities to participate in a specific behaviour. PBC is affected by perceived prediction outcome of future results combined with the past experiences of exact or similar scenarios (Azjen, 1991). Confidence has direct influential affect towards the ability to execute. When obstacles or challenges are perceived difficult, PBC becomes essential when predicting outcomes (Bandura, 1982). Perceptions of travelling opportunities, suitable destinations, and ability to travel to the determined destination directly relates to PBC, which is a crucial factor of travel intention (Martin D.S., Ramamonjiarivelo & Martin, W.S., 2011). PBC has a large influence on information technology usage (Mathieson, 1991). PBC also shows importance in other studies, intention to consume soft drink (Kassem, Lee, Modeste & Johnston, 2010), intention to retire early (van Dam, van der Vorst & van der Heijden, 2009).

Behavioural Intentions

Behavioural intentions determine the decision extent of whether a specific behaviour will be executed or not (Azjen, 1991). TPB model states certain behaviours can be predicted using the combined information of behavioural intention and PBC (Azjen & Fishbein, 1980). In any organization, the success is dependable upon the behavioural intentions as one of the important contributing factors (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Behavioural intention in the service industry determines the possibility of future repurchase and positive WOM (Hutchinson, Wellington, Saad & Cox, 2011).

Methodology and Framework

Framework

This conceptual framework (Figure 1) is adopted from the theoretical framework of Mohammad & Neda, (2012) whom studied 'The impact of electronic word of mouth on a tourism destination choice: Testing the theory of planned behaviour (TPB)' that aim to see the significance of eWOM in relation to TPB directed towards a destination, Isfahan, Iran. The influence of attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and behavioural intentions are investigated. Thus, this conceptual framework is adapted to understand the influence of eWOM in relation to TPB for Bangkok residence and their preferred choice of international destination.

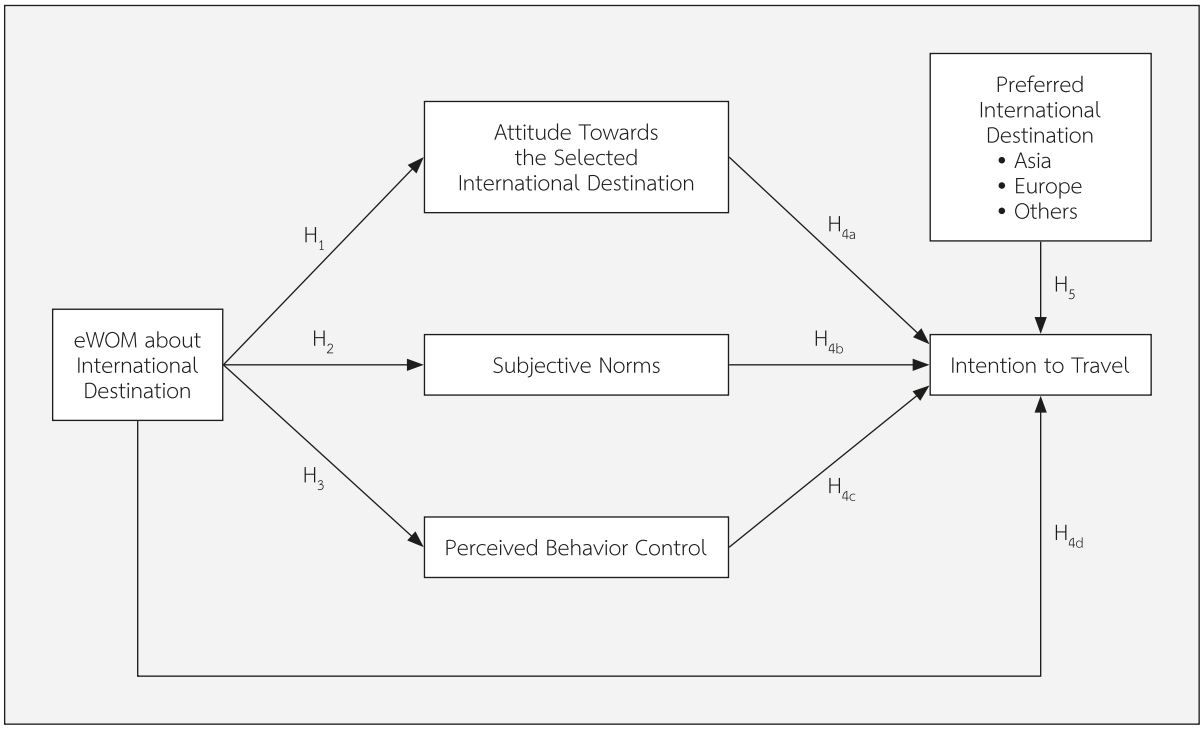

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Table 1 Defined Hypotheses

No.	H	Hypothesis
1	H1	eWOM has a significant impact on attitudes towards visiting the selected international destination (ATT).
2	H2	eWOM has a significant impact on subjective norms (SN).
3	H3	eWOM has a significant impact on perceived behavioural control (PBC).
4	H4	Attitudes towards visiting the selected international destination (H4a), Subjective norm (H4b), Perceived behavioural control (H4c), eWOM (H4d) has a significant impact on intention to travel (INT).
5	H5	There is a significant mean difference among the preferred international destination towards the intention to travel (INT).

Research Methodology

This research utilizes the quantitative approach to describe the hypothesis related to eWOM in relation to attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and behavioural intentions. Samples were collected using non-probability, quota, convenience sampling method, and snowball technique to collect data from target respondents who resides in Bangkok through online channels. The structure of questionnaire separated into three parts, screening questions, Likert scale, and demographics. The Likert scale used was a five-point scale with 5 as 'Strongly Agree' to 1 as 'Strongly Disagree' as measured variables. The screening part in this research is to screen people who resides in Bangkok that has travelled outside of Thailand. Additionally, quota sampling was intentionally used to find out the difference among the preferred international destination towards the intention to travel.

Measurement of Variables

The target respondents of this research were people who reside in Bangkok who have experience in travelling to international destination outside of Thailand. The Likert scale used was a five-point scale with 5 as 'Strongly Agree' to 1 as 'Strongly Disagree' as measured variables. Simple Linear Regression (SLR) was used to test hypothesis H1, H2, and H3. Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) was used to test hypothesis H4a, H4b, H4c, and H4d. One-way ANOVA is employed to analysed the significance of international preference destination towards the intention to travel.

Population and Samples

The questionnaire was distributed through online channels to respondents who reside in Bangkok. The sample size of the respondents that define the confidence level of 95% was calculated according to the formula of Cochran (1977).

Estimated sample size technique:

$$n = \frac{Z^2}{4e^2}$$

Which:

N is the sample size

E is the level of precision = 0.05

Z is the statistic for a level of confidence Z = 1.96

Hence:

$$n = \frac{(1.92)^2}{4(0.05)^2}$$
$$n = 384.16 \approx 400$$

The required sample size is 400 respondents with 95% confidence level to represent the Thai population. Sampling techniques used were non-probability, quota, convenience sampling methods, and snowball techniques through online channels and mobile applications such as Facebook and Line. Convenience sampling technique was conducted through friends which enables snowball sampling techniques as the sample group refers their friends to participate in this study. Quota sampling technique was used to gauge the amount of collected data from participants based on the preferred international destinations. The questionnaire was separated into three parts, screening questions, Likert scale, and demographics.

Reliability Test

Reliability test was established using 30 sets of the pilot questionnaires and examined using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient to determine the reliability level of each group of items whether it is consistent and higher than 0.6 or not (Cronbach, 1951). Table 2 shows that the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient ranges between 0.704-0.905 with the minimum value greater than 0.7, which indicates internal consistency is met for all research constructs (Nunnally, 1978). The developed questionnaire for this study achieved the standards required in the reliability test and acceptable to proceed.

Table 2 Consistency of the scales test (N=30)

Variables	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
eWOM About International Destination (eWOM)	5	0.704
Attitudes Towards Visiting the Selected International Destination (ATT)	3	0.899
Subjective Norms (SN)	3	0.882
Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC)	3	0.861
Intention to Travel (INT)	3	0.905

Result and Discussion

Demographic Profile Summary

Table 3 Demographic Profile

Demographic	Characteristics	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	271	64.7
	Female	152	35.3
Age	Lower than 20 years old	0	0.0
	21-30 years old	193	44.4
	31-40 years old	174	41.8
	41-50 years old	42	10.1
	51-60 years old	9	2.2
	61 years old and above	6	1.5
Income	Less than 15,000 THB	26	6.3
	15,001-25,000 THB	100	22.0
	25,001-35,000 THB	122	29.5
	35,001-45,000 THB	87	21.0
	45,001-55,000 THB	35	8.4
	More than 55,000 THB	53	12.8
Education	Lower than High School	0	0.0
	High School	22	5.3
	Bachelor's Degree	309	72.5
	Master's Degree	92	22.2
	Doctorate Degree	0	0.0

Table 3 summarises the characteristics of demographic factors. The total collected samples from respondents were 414. Respondents were mostly male with 64.7% and female 35.3% of the total sample size. The respondents ages between 21 to above 60 years old with 21-30 years old as the largest sample size of 44.4% followed closely by 31-40 years old (41.8%). The rest of the respondents were 41-50 years old (10.1%), 51-60 years old (2.2%), above 60 years old (1.5%), respectively. The income range varies from less than 15,000 THB (6.3%), 15,001-25,000 THB (22.0%), 25,001-35,000 THB (29.5%), 35,001-45,000 THB (21.0%), 45,001-55,000 THB (8.4%), and more than 55,000 THB (12.8%). Most of the respondents holds a bachelor's degree (72.5%), followed by master's degree (22.2%), and high school (5.3%). None of the participants hold doctorate degree or anything below high school.

Pearson's Correlation

Table 4 Pearson's Correlation Matrix

Pearson's Correlation	Mean	SD	eWOM	ATT	SN	PBC
eWOM	4.1164	0.69510				
ATT	4.0282	0.68026	0.599*			
SN	3.7029	0.94965	0.300*	0.228*		
PBC	4.0427	0.73320	0.478*	0.500*	0.354*	
INT	4.3519	0.58169	0.583*	0.537*	0.348*	0.594*

The Pearson's Correlation Matrix exhibits in table 4 shows that all variables have positive correlations among each other with P-values less than 0.05. According to Mukaka (2012), the size of correlation between 0.0-0.3 refers to negligible correlation, 0.3-0.5 refers to low correlation, 0.5-0.7 refers to moderate correlation, 0.7-0.9 indicates high correlation, and value greater than 0.9 reveals a very high correlation. There are no pairs that display high or very high correlation.

Inferential Analysis and Multicollinearity Validation

Table 5 Simple Linear Regression (SLR) Result (H1); Dependent Variable: ATT

Hypothesis	Variables	Standard Coefficient (β)	Sig.	VIF	Result
H1	eWOM	0.599	0.000	1.000	Supported
R Square		0.358			
Adjusted R Square		0.357			

The exhibited results in Table 5 shows the adjusted R^2 at 0.357 which implied that the independent variables of which is electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) could explain the dependent variable, attitudes towards visiting the selected international destination (ATT) around 35.7% at the significant level of 0.05 or the 95% confident level. Furthermore, the P-values of independent variable is less than 0.05 which means the hypothesis of H1 is supported with the high positive influence of Standard Coefficient at 0.599. The multicollinearity problem was also validated and no critical issues were found because variance inflation factors (VIF) is less than 5.

Table 6 Simple Linear Regression (SLR) Result (H2); Dependent Variable: SN

Hypothesis	Variables	Standard Coefficient (β)	Sig.	VIF	Result
H2	eWOM	0.300	0.000	1.000	Supported
R Square		0.090			
Adjusted R Square		0.087			

The exhibited results in Table 6 shows the adjusted R^2 at 0.087 which implied that the independent variables of which is electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) could explain the dependent variable, subjective norms (SN) around 8.7% at the significant level of 0.05 or the 95% confident level. Furthermore, the P-values of independent variable is less than 0.05 which means the hypothesis of H2 is supported with the high positive influence of Standard Coefficient at 0.300. The multicollinearity problem was also validated and no critical issues were found because variance inflation factors (VIF) is less than 5.

Table 7 Simple Linear Regression (SLR) Result (H3); Dependent Variable: PBC

Hypothesis	Variables	Standard Coefficient (β)	Sig.	VIF	Result
H3	eWOM	0.478	0.000	1.000	Supported
R Square		0.229			
Adjusted R Square		0.227			

The exhibited results in Table 7 shows the adjusted R^2 at 0.227 which implied that the independent variables of which is electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) could explain the dependent variable, perceived behavioural control (PBC) around 22.7% at the significant level of 0.05 or the 95% confident level. Furthermore, the P-values of independent variable is less than 0.05 which means the hypothesis of H3 is

supported with the high positive influence of Standard Coefficient at 0.478. The multicollinearity problem was also validated and no critical issues were found because variance inflation factors (VIF) is less than 5.

Table 8 Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) Result (H4)

Hypothesis	Variables	Standard Coefficient (β)	Sig.	VIF	Result
H4a	ATT	0.175	0.000	1.717	Supported
H4b	SN	0.105	0.006	1.173	Supported
H4c	PBC	0.332	0.000	1.519	Supported
H4d	eWOM	0.288	0.000	1.706	Supported
R Square		0.496			
Adjusted R Square		0.491			

The exhibited results in Table 8 shows the adjusted R^2 at 0.491 which implied that all independent variables of which are attitudes towards visiting the selected international destination (ATT), subjective norms (SN), perceived behavioural control (PBC), and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) could explain the dependent variable, intention to travel (INT) around 49.1% at the significant level of 0.05 or the 95% confident level. Furthermore, all the P-values of independent variables are less than 0.05 which means all the hypotheses of H4 are supported with the Standard Coefficient of 0.175 (ATT), 0.105 (SN), 0.332 (PBC), and 0.288 (eWOM). The results showed that perceived behavioural control (PBC) has the most impact towards intention to travel (INT) followed by electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), attitude towards visiting the selected international destination (ATT), subjective norms (SN) respectively. The multicollinearity problem was also validated and no critical issues were found because variance inflation factors (VIF) is less than 5.

Analysis of Covariance Structures

Table 9 Path Coefficients

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
Electronic Word of Mouth	Attitudes Towards Visiting the Selected International Destination	.586	.039	.599	15.170	.000
Electronic Word of Mouth	Subjective Norm	.409	.064	.300	6.372	.000
Electronic Word of Mouth	Perceived Behavioral Control	.505	.046	.478	11.055	.000
Electronic Word of Mouth	Intention to Travel	.241	.038	.288	6.286	.000
Attitudes Towards Visiting the Selected International Destination	Intention to Travel	.149	.039	.175	3.799	.000
Subjective Norm	Intention to Travel	.064	.023	.105	2.755	.006
Perceived Behavioral Control	Intention to Travel	.263	.034	.332	7.670	.000

The paths showing in Figure 2 reflect the impact of eWOM on attitudes towards destination ($\beta = 0.599$, $p < 0.05$), eWOM on subjective norm ($\beta = 0.300$, $p < 0.05$), eWOM on perceived behavioral control ($\beta = 0.478$, $p < 0.05$), eWOM on intention to travel ($\beta = 0.288$, $p < 0.05$), attitudes towards destination on intention to travel ($\beta = 0.175$, $p < 0.05$), subjective norm on intention to travel ($\beta = 0.105$, $p < 0.05$), and perceived behavioral control on intention to travel ($\beta = 0.332$, $p < 0.05$).

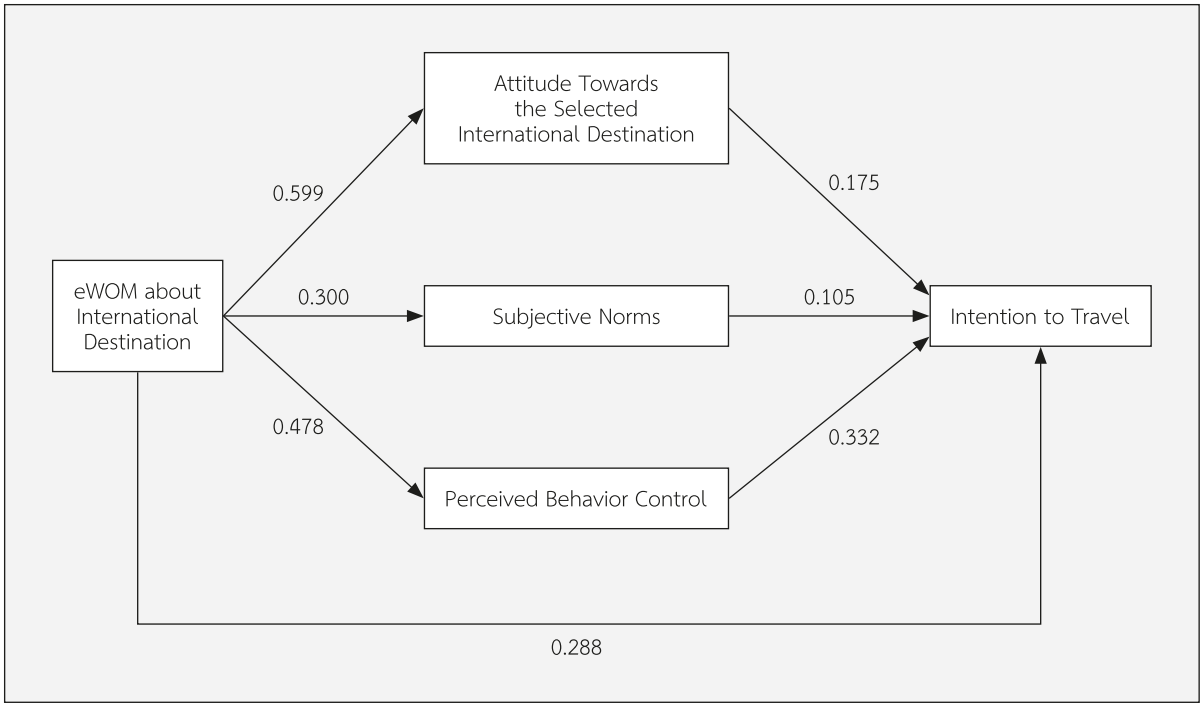

Figure 2 Path Coefficients

The analysis indicates that:

Direct Path Coefficient = 0.288 (eWOM → Intention to travel)

Indirect Path Coefficient = 0.105 (eWOM → Attitude → Intention to travel) + 0.032 (eWOM → Subjective norms → Intention to travel) + 0.159 (eWOM → Perceived behavior control → Intention to travel) = 0.296

All Path Coefficient (Total Effect) = 0.288 + 0.296 = 0.584

Table 10 One-Way ANOVA (H5); Dependent Variable: INT

ANOVA					
Intention to Travel (INT)					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	29.495	2	14.747	54.976	0.000
Within Groups	110.252	411	0.268		
Total	139.747	413			

This research aims to find if there is mean difference among the preferred international destinations towards the intention to travel (INT). The exhibited results of one-way ANOVA show the P-value (0.000) of less than 0.05 and F-value (54.976) is greater than F-statistic or F-critical value (26.775). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

There is mean difference among the groups and H5 is supported since there is a significant mean difference in the preferred international destinations towards the intention to travel, F (2,411) = 26.775, P-value = 0.000. The researcher then conducted S-Method Post-hoc Analysis (Scheffe's Post-hoc Test) to determine the significant differences of mean scores between each group of the preferred international destination and figure out its rank.

Table 11 Scheffe's Post-Hoc Test

Destination (I)	Destination (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)
Asia	Europe	-0.415*
	Others	0.229*
Europe	Asia	0.415*
	Others	0.645*
Others	Asia	-0.229*
	Europe	-0.645*

Note: *Represents the mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The exhibited results in Table 11 indicates that Europe ($\overline{X}$ = 4.705) is the top preferred destination for Thai tourists, followed by Asia ($\overline{X}$ = 4.290) and Others ($\overline{X}$ = 4.060) respectively.

Conclusion

Products related to hospitality, including tourism are intangible and therefore, difficult to measure or evaluate and only after consumption that any evaluation can be done (Litvin et al., 2008). Previous tourism researchers had found that eWOM is critical in the virtual interactions of online communities that helps to pull in and retain consumers (Litvin et al., 2008; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). This study gave insights to the factors that can affect the selection of travel destinations. The Theory of Planned Behaviour allowed us to see how the details of the individual components influenced towards the selection of international destination.

This research studied the impact of eWOM towards the decision to select an international destination using the TPB theory. The research framework was separated into two parts; the first part was to see the impact of eWOM towards attitude towards visiting the selected international destination (ATT), subjective norms (SN) and perceived behavioural control (PBC). The second part was to see the combined impact of attitude towards visiting the selected international destination, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and eWOM towards intention to travel (INT). Analyses through Pearson's Correlation Matrix, Simple Linear Regression (SLR), Multiple Linear Regression (MLR), and one-way ANOVA provided insights which led to the conclusion of this study.

The total number of samples was 414 respondents to represent the population samples in this study. The Pearson's correlation matrix showed that all of the variables were linked and had positive relationships which showed the contributing effects to one another. However, there were no variables that displayed significant correlation which meant that they were combined to contribute to the impact towards the intention to travel (H4).

eWOM could explain the impact towards the three dependent variables, attitude towards visiting the selected international destination (ATT), subjective norms (SN) and perceived behavioural control (PBC) at 35.7%, 8.7%, 22.7% respectively.

The intention to travel (INT) from hypothesis 4 (H4) consisted of four independent variables; electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), attitude towards visiting the selected international destination (ATT), subjective norms (SN), and perceived behavioural control (PBC). The result could be summarized that 49.1% of the variance in intention to travel (INT) could be predicted from these four independent variables; electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), attitude towards visiting the selected international destination (ATT), subjective norms (SN), and perceived behavioural control (PBC).

The analysis of one-way ANOVA applied with H5 to observe if there was any mean differences of three groups; Asia, Europe, and others, on the preference of international destination towards intention to travel. The results revealed that the intention to travel were all different when considering the final selected international destination.

Theoretical Contribution

This research studied the impact of eWOM on the selected international destination choice for Bangkok residence. Finding in other studies suggested that electronic word-of-mouth was considered influential in the TPB construct; however, those findings were generic or specified to a certain destination. This study used the TPB to analyse the impact of eWOM on the selection of international destination choice for Bangkok residence and the preferred international destination to understand the impact of eWOM towards Bangkok residence and the selected international destination. This research also studied the relationship of the preferred international destination and the intention to travel.

Implications and Recommendations

Studying the impact of eWOM was an advantage to understand and interpret the power of online reviews and online content curations for public and private entities such as tour organizers, tourism boards, and online platform providers. Certain destination might gain online influence when there were large volumes of information provided online and online reviews. Furthermore, these online contents could help to build confidence towards selecting an international destination for the tourists. Hence, positive reviews were encouraged and incentives such as complimentary or money might help increase the reviews and in turns increasing the amount of online information. Although, positivity in the reviews were encouraged but should not be forced upon the reviewers as over positivity might results in negative effects; some of the most influential posts or reviews were considered as biased. In the more transparent present, the congregation of online reviews from tourists could shape the public image of the international destinations in the scope of Thai culture. The increasing trend of independent travellers and the rise of social media influencers have direct influences on how a tourist destination may succeed or fail (the power that social media as an online source of tourist information has become increasingly more valuable to the general public). However, the close circle of people whom tourists were in constant contacts also showed influence under the subjective norms. This showed that even the power of social media and online influences were not in complete isolation to the power of the inner circle or closed relationship; people who considered as important still had influences in many cases.

Another important aspect to consider is that to the ease of access to the selected international destination in both tangible and intangible aspects. The tangible aspect may include the difficulties in raising enough budget to travel, transportation, accessible medium to access information both offline and online platforms. The intangible aspects are those subjective online reviews towards international tourist destinations from general public users as well as social media influencers, together with photos and other media might shape the overall public image of that international tourist destination. The rise of big data from various sources could provide valuable analytical information when planning promotional campaigns to promote tourism in those international tourist destinations.

Public sector in travel and tourism, Ministry of Tourism and Sports, or the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TTT) might apply the results from this research to develop their tourism improvement plan. As the research showed that Europe is the top destination amongst other Asian countries or countries in America or Africa (for Bangkok residences). They could do further research to figure out why Europe destination was the most preferred destination. Since social media influence is one of the most interesting for marketing terms at the present; nice photos, exciting short clips, or online Guerrilla marketing campaign might be an interesting option.

For private sector, such as travel operators or tour companies, might focus on online marketing and online promotional campaign. In case of spending some budgets on Facebook ads or any other social media ads, they might advertise their European trips or promotions on European routes as well as obviously show European packages in their Landing Page once audiences clicked on the links of an ad. Then they could prioritize the sequence of their packages starting from European trips, followed by Asian destinations and others. Besides, the activities that could be shared and posted online (especially on Facebook) would be a great idea to spread the intention to travel and increase their sales correspondingly. They could attract 26,000 Thai Facebook users since this social media platform ranked first among the leading social media networks in Thailand (Statista Research Department, 2019). Not only Facebook is widespread in Thailand, but also the Japanese instant messaging service Line and the video portal YouTube could be another option for the business to design their marketing and promotional campaigns.

Limitation and Future Research

Limitation of this research was the scope of area covered which was concentrated in Bangkok only. Since this study only focused in Bangkok, this study might only describe people who resided in Bangkok (mostly Thai) and was unable to describe people outside of Bangkok or Thailand. The geographical, cultural, and other demographical differences might reflect differently to people in other provinces of Thailand. Thailand is still considered as a developing country; therefore, the reach of online information is still limited in some areas. Also, standards of living in the Bangkok metropolitan is quite different to upcountry where the general standards of living are better in comparison to the average living standards in other provinces. Further studies are recommended for an in-depth understanding of overall Thai residence to include representative samples from other provinces in Thailand (not just Bangkok). This study also excluded people who had never travelled internationally before; therefore, the impact of eWOM in this study could only apply to people who had experienced travelling internationally.

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