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Antecedents of travellers' electronic word-of-mouth communication

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Abstract Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is recognised as a means of interpersonal communication and a powerful marketing tool. However, previous studies have focussed on related motivations, and limited attention has been given to understanding the antecedents of eWOM communication behaviour in the travel industry. This study proposes a full and partial mediation model, which brings together for the first time three key antecedents: adoption of electronic communication technology, consumer dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experience, and subjective norm. The model aims to understand the impact of these antecedents on travellers' attitude towards eWOM communication and intention to use eWOM communication media. The data were collected from international travellers ($n = 524$), and structural equation modelling is used to test the conceptual framework. The findings of the study suggest that overall attitude towards eWOM communication partially mediates the impact of the traveller's adoption of electronic communication technology and subjective norm, and fully mediates the impact of consumer dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experience on travellers' intention to use eWOM communication media.

Keywords electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM); attitude; adoption of electronic communication technology; consumer satisfaction; subjective norm; structural equation modelling (SEM)

Introduction

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is an interpersonal communication between consumers sharing their opinions about their consumption experience (Brooks, 1957; Dichter, 1966; Richins, 1984). While WOM offers a trustworthy message which prompts consumer decision making (Senecal & Nantel, 2004), negative WOM undermines the credibility of commercials (Smith & Vogt, 1995) and damages brand reputation (Laczniak, DeCarlo, & Ramaswami, 2001). Research suggests that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is more influential than traditional WOM for several reasons. First, with the development of the Internet and various electronic media, eWOM

messages can be quickly disseminated to reach a potentially large audience (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). Second, recipients of the messages actively seek a broader range of comments online and therefore do not rely only on the opinions of acquaintances (Senecal & Nantel, 2004). Third, eWOM can be accessed immediately or after a period of time; its digital footprint can remain online permanently (Sun, Youn, Wu, & Kuntaraporn, 2006). Fourth, anonymity encourages people to publish reviews online knowing they cannot be identified (Phelps, Lewis, Mobilio, Perry, & Raman, 2004). Finally, eWOM communication enables an individual to build up personal and social networks (J. Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007; Buffardi & Campbell, 2008). As opinions reach friends as well as strangers via the Internet, it is essential for managers to understand what motivates customers to produce eWOM in order to promote their products better and prevent negative publicity.

Travellers' WOM behaviour has evolved over recent years with the increasing use of online communication technologies (M. Lee & Youn, 2009). For travellers, eWOM is an important reference for related decision-making such as choosing tourism destinations and booking hotels and restaurants (Litvin et al., 2008; Simpson & Siguaw, 2008). Given that travel products are considered to be high-risk and high-involvement purchases, travellers tend to rely on the opinions of relatives, peers, and friends before making their decisions (Beldona, Morrison, & O'Leary, 2005). Recent research suggests that 60% of US travellers take eWOM recommendations into account when booking vacations (Travel Industry Wire, 2011). Furthermore, online travel companies such as TripAdvisor and TravBuddy offer what other travellers think about travel-related products (e.g. transportations, hotels, restaurants). Thus, travellers increasingly rely on peer-to-peer recommendations instead of information provided by hotel quality schemes or commercial sources (e.g. print media advertising) because they regard consumer advocacy as more objective and trustworthy (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Kozinets, 2002). While prospective travellers rely on eWOM to facilitate the decision-making process, practitioners treat eWOM as feedback to inform the improvement of their goods and services.

Existing research focuses on either the conceptualisation of eWOM communication (J. Brown et al., 2007; Litvin et al., 2008) or its influence on consumer behaviour (M. Lee & Youn, 2009; Riegner, 2007). However, understanding the key factors affecting the traveller's eWOM communication behaviour has received limited attention from academics (Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003; C. S. Lee, Ma, & Goh, 2011). This study aims to address that gap by investigating the antecedents of eWOM communication behaviour in the travel industry.

Our research makes three contributions to understanding of consumers' eWOM behaviour. First, although extant research in this area has primarily adopted a people-oriented approach by examining the effect of demographics (e.g. gender, age, income) and consumers' interpersonal characteristics (e.g. consumer motivations, innovativeness), it has seldom considered the effects of technology-related factors (e.g. adoption of electronic communication technology) and social processes (e.g. subjective norms) on travellers' attitude towards, and intention to use, eWOM communications (e.g. Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Sun et al., 2006; Zhou, 2011). Our study suggests that a traveller's intention to post an online comment depends not only on personal motives, but also on the extent of his or her adoption of electronic communication technology and perceptions of whether other people close to the individual think the behaviour

should be performed. This subjective norm is a form of social process (Ajzen, 1991) which influences overall attitude towards eWOM communication. As reported by Breazeale (2009), 'it would be a mistake to ignore the social component of eWOM' (p. 312). This is important because both adoption of electronic communication media and subjective norm factors could act as motivators, as well as barriers, towards eWOM behaviour. The second contribution builds on the research around the people-oriented approach, which posits that consumer motivations have a direct impact on consumers' intentions to engage with eWOM communication (e.g. Bronner & Hoog, 2011; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Our study suggests that an overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the effect of the traveller's adoption of electronic communication technology, social norm, and dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experience on the traveller's intention to use eWOM communication media. The third contribution is to introduce a parsimonious model to understand travellers' eWOM behaviour. The people-oriented approach (e.g. consumer motivation, consumer demographics) and the social processes (e.g. subjective norm, social identity) are used independently in different research contexts, such as participation behaviour in online travel communities (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004), online consumer-opinion platforms (Cheung & Lee, 2012), virtual worlds (Eisenbeiss, Blechschmidt, Backhaus, & Freund, 2012), writing online comments (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), writing online travel reviews (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008), and music-related communication (Sun et al., 2006). However, the application of these theories in understanding the traveller's eWOM communication behaviour is limited. Thus, using four underpinning theories, our study proposes a model to examine the applicability of these theories and to assess the relative importance of them in understanding the traveller's eWOM communication behaviour. Accordingly, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is employed to examine the traveller's adoption of the electronic communication media (Davis, 1989), and consumer attitude theory (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) is applied to examine the traveller's overall attitude towards eWOM communication. Furthermore, the consumer dis/satisfaction theory is considered essential in assessing the effect of the traveller's post-purchase motivations on eWOM communication behaviour (Anderson, 1998). Finally, the subjective norm is employed to understand social influences on the traveller's attitude towards eWOM communication and his/her intention to use eWOM communication media (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Conceptual framework

eWOM communication is defined as 'any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet' (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39). Few attempts have been made to explain the consumer's online WOM communication intentions in the travel industry from a motivational perspective. Members of the online travel community are motivated to participate by the social and hedonic benefits (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2003, 2004). Drawing on utility theory, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) identified 11 motives for predicting the frequency of visiting online platforms and intention to write online comments. Of these, five motives were found to have a statistically significant influence

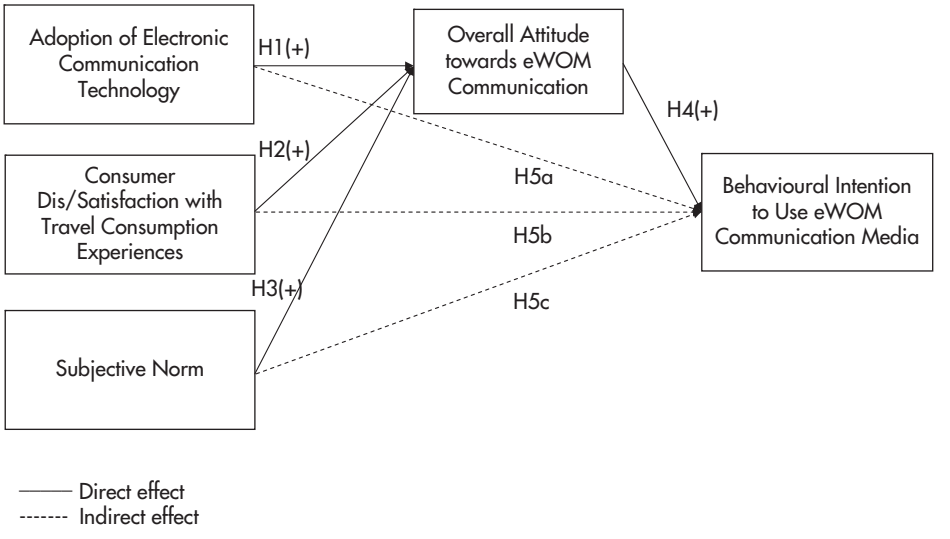
on the consumer's comment-writing behaviour: concern for other consumers, extraversion/post self-enhancement, social benefits, advice seeking, and economic incentives. Their study was replicated by Yoo and Gretzel (2008) in order to understand the traveller's motivations to write online travel reviews. The results showed that only three factors motivate travellers to publish online travel reviews: helping a travel-service provider, concerns for other consumers, and the desire for enjoyment/positive self-enhancement. On the contrary, economic incentives, advice seeking, and social benefits do not have a significant influence on the propensity to write online travel reviews. More recent research by Bronner and Hoog (2011) developed a classification of vacationers' motivations to participate in eWOM communication. They identified two typologies of motivations when vacationers post online opinions: self-directed motivation and other-directed motivation. Self-directed motivations are more negative and text-only, whereas other-directed motivations are more positive and combined with opinion ratings and text.

In addition to the motivation-based eWOM studies, existing work can be extended by adopting a diverse theoretical perspective to understand the traveller's attitude towards eWOM communication behaviour. 'An attitude is a relatively enduring organization of beliefs around an object or situation predisposing one to respond in some preferential manner' (Rokeach, 1968, p. 112). Rather than a momentary predisposition, attitude is more enduring and serves as a disposition towards a specific behaviour. The positive relationship between attitude, behavioural intention, and behaviour has been discussed for more than 70 years (see Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005; Campbell, 1950; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; LaPiere, 1934). Behavioural intentions, which are usually regarded as conative components of consumer attitude, are assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence behaviour. They are indications of how much of an effort individuals are planning to exert in order to perform the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). The stronger the intention to engage in a specific behaviour, the more likely it is that the behaviour will be performed. Following the concept of attitude–intention–behaviour, this study explores individuals' behavioural intentions to use eWOM communication media from an attitudinal perspective.

Accordingly, consumer attitude theory is integrated in order to develop a conceptual framework for understanding the traveller's eWOM communication behaviour. TAM is used for assessing the adoption of electronic communication technology based on the notion of perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEU). An individual's favourable attitude towards eWOM communication is motivated by reading other people's travel experiences, as well as posting his or her own travel consumption experiences (Bronner & Hoog, 2011). Consumer dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experience is used to investigate the traveller's motivations to engage with eWOM communication behaviour. This is because previous research suggests that post-purchasing comments are utilised to promote the travel company products or to warn of the risk of purchasing poor products (Litvin et al., 2008). In addition, subjective norm is employed for understanding social influences (e.g. peer pressure) on eWOM communication behaviour. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework, illustrating the key antecedents of the traveller's behavioural intention towards eWOM communication behaviour.

As can be seen from Figure 1, three hypotheses, all positive, are proposed to explain the effect of the adoption of the eWOM communication technology (H1), consumer dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experience (H2), and subjective

Figure 1 Antecedents of travellers' electronic word-of-mouth communication behaviour.



norm (H3) on overall attitude towards eWOM communication. The fourth research hypothesis suggests a positive relationship between overall attitude towards eWOM communication and intention to use eWOM communication media. The fifth hypothesis (H5a–c) proposes that overall attitude towards eWOM communication is a mediator between the three antecedents of eWOM communication behaviour and the traveller's intention to use eWOM communication media.

Hypotheses development

Effects of electronic communication technology adoption on overall attitude towards eWOM communication

The rise of electronic media, such as e-mail, instant messengers (e.g. Skype), social network communities (e.g. Facebook), weblogs, forums, and numerous websites, has changed consumers' communication behaviour dramatically in recent years. Online communications can be performed one to one, one to many, or many to many (Litvin et al., 2008). An online message can be disseminated immediately to the sender's friends, acquaintances, and even strangers. Although the benefits of communication via electronic media are recognised, there is limited research on individuals' adoption of electronic communication technology as a WOM communication channel.

This study employs TAM to examine the traveller's adoption of electronic media usage behaviour (Davis, 1989). TAM is an established model for explaining the user's adoption of information technology (IT) (Venkatesh & Morris, 2000), and is employed extensively to predict computer-usage behaviour in the workplace (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1989), online shopping behaviour (Vijayasarathy, 2004), and mobile commerce (Wu & Wang, 2005). PU and PEU are two main drivers that facilitate the individual's attitude towards IT and intention of using a specific IT system such as work computers (Hauser & Shugan, 1980).

PU is defined as 'the degree to which a person believes that using a particular IT system would enhance his or her job performance' (Davis, 1989, p. 320). PEU is defined as 'the degree to which a person believes that using a particular IT system would be free of effort' (Davis, 1989, p. 320). Adopting these definitions, in this research, PU refers to the degree to which a traveller believes that electronic communication technology would enhance the effectiveness (e.g. reaching a wider audience or expressing a complaint/praise to the service provider) and the efficiency (e.g. reaching a service provider or target audience quickly) of his or her travel-related eWOM communication. PEU refers to the degree to which a traveller believes that using a travel-related eWOM communication technology (e.g. e-mail, blog) would be free of effort.

In the motivation research, 'individuals are extrinsically motivated when they engage in the work in order to obtain some goals that are apart from work itself' (Amabile, 1993, p. 188). When people feel that a piece of technology can enhance their work performance, they are more willing to adopt it. More specifically, when people recognise that technology is a useful tool, they will have a more positive attitude towards it and consequently be more inclined to use it. Therefore, the frequency of its usage increases (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). Accordingly, PU is positively associated with an individual's intention to use the technology and usage frequency.

When more effort is required to accomplish a task, fewer individuals are willing to become involved, and show a preference to employ the easier way to accomplish the task (Venkatesh, 2000). PEU is 'tied to an individual's assessment of the effort involved in the process of using the system' (Venkatesh, 2000, p. 344). The degree of self-efficacy determines the amount of effort that may be required to use the technology (Bandura, 1982). In terms of computer acceptance, it facilitates individuals' adoption of the technology (M. Y. Yi & Hwang, 2003). When an individual perceives higher self-efficacy in computer use, their overall attitudes, behavioural intentions, and actual behaviours of computer use are positively influenced. Likewise, this study proposes that PU and PEU have a positive influence on the traveller's overall attitude towards eWOM communication channel. This is stated in hypothesis 1:

> *H1*: *Successful adoption of electronic communication technology as determined by PU and PEU will positively influence overall attitude towards eWOM communication.*

Effects of consumer dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experience on overall attitude towards eWOM communication

Consumer dis/satisfaction is defined as 'an outcome resulting from the consumption experience' (Y. Yi, 1990, p. 69). Consumers are motivated to express positive WOM such as 'intention to recommend' or 'intention to return' whenever they have a positive experience with the firm's products (Babin, Lee, Kim, & Griffin, 2005). Experiences that result in dissatisfaction prompt a variety of negative consumer responses, including complaining, switching, or deciding not to repurchase (Richins, 1983). Depending on their positive and negative consumption experiences, consumers express their emotions privately or publicly through different communications channels (e.g. face to face, mail). As electronic media is one of the

publicly available WOM communication channels, our justification for the positive relationship between consumer dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experience and an overall attitude towards eWOM communication is explained by two utility-based motivation theories: focus-related utility and homostase utility (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

The focus-related utility theory refers to the benefit consumers receive when adding value to the community through their positive contributions (Balasubramanian & Mahajan, 2001). In an Internet opinion platform context, a value is created based on the assumption that, having experienced a firm's products, consumers are motivated to post online opinions. The desires driving this motivation include to help (or warn) other people about travel products; to help a firm by recommending their services; to gain social benefits for better identification of themselves in public; to develop better social integration into online travel communities; and to shift the power to consumers from firms in the belief that online travel comments influence public perception of a firm's corporate image.

Homostase utility refers to the notion that people will strive to restore stability after unbalancing their originally balanced state of being (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In the context of a dissatisfying travel consumption experience, this balance may be restored by posting a comment on an online public opinion platform. Thus, sharing a negative consumption experience enables the traveller to reduce the unhappiness associated with his or her negative emotions. Similarly, in the context of a satisfying travel consumption experience, balance can be restored through communicating positive emotions (Sundaram, Mitra, & Webster, 1998). In this way, the traveller is able to reduce his/her psychological tension. People's desires for helping other people and the company, venting negative feelings, engaging in social interaction, and sharing positive consumption emotions are the primary factors that lead to online comment-writing behaviour (Bronner & Hoog, 2011; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). When travellers experience satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their travel consumption, the electronic communication medium provides them with a platform for expressing their feelings, as well as an opportunity to interact with other travellers (Delgadillo & Escalas, 2004). Because many people enjoy sharing their travel experiences and expertise with others, post-trip sharing is often one of the pleasures of travel (Litvin et al., 2008). Therefore, the second hypothesis proposes that:

> *H2*: *Consumer dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experience will positively influence overall attitude towards eWOM communication.*

Effects of subjective norm on overall attitude towards eWOM communication

Subjective norm, also known as the social norm, is defined as 'the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour' (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 302). The theoretical relationship between subjective norm and behavioural intention is explained by the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), and is supported by empirical studies (e.g. Borsari & Carey, 2003; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Gomberg, Schneider, & DeJong, 2001).

Research has shown that an individual's behaviour is influenced by two types of subjective norm: the injunctive norm and the descriptive norm (Borsari & Carey,

2001; Manning, 2009; Park & Smith, 2007). The injunctive norm suggests that individuals are pressurised by their peer group to perform a specific behaviour such as posting or reading online comments. On the other hand, the descriptive norm advocates that the individual's specific behaviour would be rewarded when his/her peer groups' acceptance or admiration is received (Borsari & Carey, 2003; Park & Smith, 2007). Subjective norm has an influence on eWOM communication behaviour through internalisation, compliance, and identification (Kelman, 1958). Internalisation refers to an individual's incorporation of peer groups' or a valued person's beliefs into his/her own belief structure and behaviour. The nature of this compliance suggests that the individual will adopt the group values in order to form an agreement with the group members. Identification requires individual members to maintain an active relationship with other liked and respected community members. Building on these principles of compliance and identification, travellers develop positive attitudes towards eWOM communication. This is because it enables them to participate actively in online communities, gain recognition from peer groups, expand social networks, and reinforce senses of attachment, belongingness, and membership to an online travel community (e.g. Wang & Fesenmaier, 2003, 2004). Hence, the third hypothesis proposes that:

H3: *Subjective norm will positively influence overall attitude towards eWOM communication*

Effects of overall attitude towards eWOM communication on behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media

The relationship between attitude, behavioural intention, and actual behaviour has been discussed for several decades (e.g. Campbell, 1950; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; LaPiere, 1934). An attitude is a set of interrelated predispositions that guide individuals' manners and behaviours (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). An attitude incorporates one or more beliefs presenting a favourable or unfavourable view of the object (Bagozzi, 1981). Consequently, an individual's preferential behavioural intention is based on positive or negative attitudes and initial evaluations from their beliefs. Individuals with stronger positive attitudes have a greater intention to perform a specific behaviour. Ekinci, Dawes, and Massey (2008) show that when consumers make judgements about their intentions to return, they take into account both the most recent satisfaction with service providers and overall attitude towards the firm providing the service. As a result, hypothesis 4 posits that overall attitude towards eWOM communication has a positive influence on the traveller's intention to use eWOM communication media:

H4: *Overall attitude towards eWOM communication will positively influence behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media.*

The mediator: Overall attitude towards eWOM communication

The direct influence of some antecedents of attitude such as subjective norm on the behavioural intention is debatable. Most researchers argue that overall attitude towards an object should be a mediator between subjective norm and behavioural

intention (e.g. Davis et al., 1989; Warshaw, 1980). Some studies assert a direct relationship between subjective norm and behavioural intention (e.g. Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). This suggests that subjective norm will influence the traveller's intention to use eWOM communication media, even when the traveller has not formed a positive attitude towards eWOM communication. Schepers and Wetzels' (2007) meta-analysis study suggests that both direct and indirect relationships exist between subjective norm and behavioural intention.

Our model posits that overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the direct influences of subjective norm, adoption of the electronic communication media technology, and customer dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experience. Travellers' eWOM behaviours are influenced by their overall attitude towards eWOM communication because eWOM media is one of the publicly available communication channels (Mattila & Wirtz, 2004). If travellers have positive feelings towards eWOM communication, they are likely to use the eWOM communication media for posting online comments about travel-related topics. Their attitude towards eWOM communication may be influenced by factors such as accessibility or ease of using electronic communication technology, subjective norm, being a member of an online travel community etc. Hypothesis 5a–c propose that:

H5: *Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of the traveller's adoption of electronic communication technology (H5a), consumer dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experience (H5b,) and subjective norm (H5c) on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media.*

Methodology

Research design

This research aims to understand the traveller's eWOM communication behaviour. By adapting theories from literature, a conceptual framework was introduced and tested in two phases using online focus groups and a web-based survey. First, three online focus groups were conducted to test the suitability of the constructs in the conceptual framework. Second, the feedback generated from online focus groups was incorporated into the revised conceptual framework and the web-based survey. Analysis of the data confirmed the face validity of the antecedent variables for travellers' eWOM communication behaviour. These variables are: adoption of electronic communication technology, consumer dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experience, subjective norm, and overall attitude towards eWOM communication. Minor changes were made to the statements in the web-based questionnaire.

The data were collected from international travellers via a web-based survey. PU and PEU were measured by the scales developed by Davis (1989). Consumers' overall dis/satisfaction with the travel experience was assessed by adopting the measures introduced by Spreng, MacKenzie, and Olshavsky (1996). Subjective norm was measured by adapting the scales of Manning (2011) and Park and Smith (2007). Overall attitude towards eWOM communication and behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media were assessed by adopting Ajzen (1991) measures (see

Appendix). The online survey was administered by using several electronic media (e.g. Facebook, blogs) and travel sites. An e-mail invitation to complete the survey was also sent to the researchers' online network.

Sample

After 12 weeks of data collection, 524 usable surveys were received. A reasonable attempt was made to randomise the recruitment of participants drawing from a wide range of socio-demographic background and selecting random days for data collection. The travellers in our sample have similar sociodemographic profiles to those reported in other studies (e.g. Cheung & Lee, 2012; Yoo & Gretzel, 2008). The majority of the respondents were female (69%). Forty per cent of them were between 16 and 25 years old, and up to 34% of respondents had a postgraduate degree. In terms of nationality, about 30% were Taiwanese, followed by 25% Chinese and 15% British. Twenty-six per cent of respondents lived in the UK, whereas 25% of them lived in the Taiwan. More than 70% of the participants indicated that they had uploaded their travel photos online; this was the most common type of eWOM communication. E-mail comments were shown to be the second most common way of engaging in eWOM communication. The majority of respondents (53%) were likely to use Facebook chat as a real-time channel for eWOM communication, and Facebook was the most popular channel (60%) as a non-real-time platform for sharing eWOM communication. About 32% of participants claimed their most frequently used channel for eWOM communication was Facebook.

Results

Validity and reliability of the measures

This study proposes a conceptual framework integrating five latent constructs with seven hypotheses. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was chosen, as it is suitable for testing the validity of latent variables and proposed theories by examining the interrelationship between constructs (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009; McQuitty, 2004). All the constructs in the model were underpinned by theories drawn from the academic literature. In addition, SEM was used to test the full and partial mediation effects in the model (Hair et al., 2009).

Normality, validity, and reliability of the measures were established before testing the structural model. The calculated z-values and graphical analysis of the variables suggested that distribution of the variables was normal (i.e. the absolute z-scores of the variables were <1.96). According to Malhotra (2010), scale validity should be tested by confirmatory factor analysis. Following the validity check, composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha statistics were used to assess the scale reliability. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the robust maximum likelihood estimator of LISREL 8.80 tested the scale's discriminant and convergent validity (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996). The scale's discriminant validity was assessed by Fornell and Larcker's (1981) formula. Discriminant validity is confirmed when the average variance extracted (AVE) from each scale is greater than the square of the intercorrelations. Results of the CFA suggested that adoption of the electronic communication technology scale was unidimensional. As the discriminate validity of

Table 1 Descriptive statistics, composite reliabilities, correlations, and average variances extracted.

Scale	Mean	SD	Composite reliability	1	2	3	4	5
1. Adoption of electronic communication media technology	5.55	.98	.86	**.51**	.28**	.38**	.53**	.40**
2. Consumer dis/satisfaction with travel experience	5.28	1.01	.88	.07	**.66**	.21**	.37**	.26**
3. Subjective norm	4.69	1.29	.82	.14	.04	**.61**	.45**	.42**
4. Overall attitude towards electronic word-of-mouth communication	5.67	.98	.92	.28	.13	.20	**.70**	.47**
5. Behavioural intention to use electronic word-of-mouth communication media	4.86	1.41	.84	.16	.06	.17	.22	**.64**

The diagonal figures in bold indicate the average variances extracted (AVE) for each construct. The scores in the upper diagonal are correlations. The scores in the lower diagonal are the squares of the correlations. *Correlation is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed). **Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

the PU and PEU was rejected from the CFA ($\chi^2_{(8df)} = 50.48$, $p > .01$) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA = .10), the two dimensions were merged to measure the traveller's adoption of the electronic communication technology. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics, bivariate correlations, composite reliabilities, and AVEs for the research model's variables.

Table 1 confirms that the five measurement scales – adoption of electronic communication technology (.51), consumer dis/satisfaction (.66), subjective norm (.61), overall attitude towards eWOM communication (.70), and intention to use eWOM communication media (.64) – meet the discriminant validity criterion. The five measurement scales indicate that the factor loadings are high and statistically significant ($p < .05$), satisfying criteria for convergent validity. In addition, the Cronbach's alpha reliabilities of the measurement scales ($\alpha_{\text{adoption of electronic communication technology}} = .86$, $\alpha_{\text{consumer dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experience}} = .89$, $\alpha_{\text{subjective norm}} = .85$, $\alpha_{\text{overall attitude towards eWOM communication}} = .92$, $\alpha_{\text{behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media}} = .84$) meet Nunnally and Bernstein's (1994) recommendation for good reliability. As can be seen from Table 1, composite reliability scores also support these findings.

SEM using LISREL 8.80 was the primary testing method. As the data did not follow a multivariate normal distribution, the robust maximum likelihood estimation method was used (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). This testing confirms a model's 'goodness of fit' and the hypothesised paths. PRELIS generated the asymptotic covariance matrix as the input. The structural model's overall fit was determined initially by examining the chi-square statistic. The chi-square statistic ($\chi^2_{(182df)} = 520.55$) and the associated probability value were statistically significant ($p < .001$). This finding suggests the potential for an inadequate fit. However, sample size and model complexity can influence the chi-square statistic and is an insufficient basis

on which to reject a model (Bollen, 1989; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996). Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), goodness of fit index (GFI), norm fit index (NFI), and critical fit index (CFI) help in assessing goodness of fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). RMSEA values between .08 and .10 indicate mediocre fit, while those below .08 indicate a good model fit. GFI, NFI, and CFI values greater than .90 are normally considered to be an acceptable model fit (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996). Accordingly, Table 2 shows the structural equation model results and the fit indices.

As can be seen from the model fit indices in Table 2, the results support the validity of the full mediation model. The RMSEA (.06) is less than .08, and the other goodness of fit indices (GFI = .91, NFI = .97, CFI = .98) suggest that the model's fit ability is acceptable (Hair et al., 2009). The four antecedents of eWOM communication behaviour explain 48% and 29% of the variance in travellers' overall attitude towards eWOM communication and intention to use eWOM communication media respectively. Testing of the structural model between male ($\chi^2_{(182df)} = 334.66$, $p < .01$, RMSEA = .07, GFI = .84, NFI = .95, CFI = .98) and female travellers ($\chi^2_{(182df)} = 423.74$, $p < .01$, RMSEA = .06, GFI = .90, NFI = .95, CFI = .97) also confirmed the validity of the full mediation model.

Hypothesis testing

As predicted in H1, adoption of electronic communication technology should have a positive relationship with overall attitude towards eWOM communication. The results of the study support this proposition (SPC = .39, $t = 8.06$, $p < .01$). The findings indicate that communication technology adoption behaviour strongly influences the traveller's overall attitude towards eWOM communication – a finding that is consistent with the literature. The results also support H2 (SPC = .19, $t = 4.81$, $p < .01$), suggesting that consumer dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experience relates positively to the traveller's overall attitude towards eWOM communication.

H3 posits that subjective norm positively associates with an overall attitude towards eWOM communication. The study supports H3 (SPC = .32, $t = 6.92$, $p < .01$). Similarly, these results support H4, which states that an overall attitude towards eWOM communication positively relates to the traveller's intention to use eWOM communication media (SPC = .54, $t = 10.66$, $p < .01$). The SPCs suggest that overall attitude towards eWOM communication (SPC = .54) is the most important factor for explaining the traveller's eWOM communication usage behaviour. The predictive ability of the traveller's attitude towards eWOM communication is ordered as follows: adoption of electronic communication technology (SPC = .39), subjective norm (SPC = .32), and consumer dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experience (SPC = .19).

As can be seen in Table 2, the partial mediation model also shows good overall model fit results ($\chi^2_{(179df)} = 477.68$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .05, GFI = .92, NFI = .97, CFI = .98). Because the first model is nested within the second model, a chi-square difference test was performed to determine whether an overall attitude towards eWOM communication fully or partially mediates the effect of the electronic communication technology adoption, consumer dis/satisfaction with the travel consumption experience, and subjective norm on the traveller's intention to use eWOM communication media (T. J. Brown, Mowen, Donavan, & Licata, 2002). Accordingly, the partial mediation model fits the data better ($\Delta\chi^2_{(3)} = 42.87$,

Table 2 Results of structural models.

		Full mediation model		Partial mediation model	
Hypothesis number	**Relationship**	**Standardised path coefficient**	***t*-value**	**Standardised path coefficient**	***t*-value**
H1	Adoption of electronic communication technology → Overall attitude towards eWOM communication	.39	8.06***	.38	7.88***
H2	Consumer dis/satisfaction → Overall attitude towards eWOM communication	.19	4.81***	.19	4.74***
H3	Subjective norm → Overall attitude towards eWOM communication	.32	6.92***	.31	6.71***
H4	Overall attitude towards eWOM communication → Behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media	.54	10.66***	.27	4.27***
H5a	Adoption of electronic communication media technology → Behavioural intention to ise eWOM communication media			.19	3.22**
H5b	Consumer dis/satisfaction → Behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media			.06	1.38
H5c	Subjective norm → Behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media			.23	4.04***
Model fit statistics					
χ^2		520.55		477.68	
df		182		179	
RMSEA		.06		.05	
GFI		.91		.92	
NFI		.97		.97	
CFI		.98		.98	
Variance explained (R^2)					
Overall attitude towards eWOM communication		.48		.47	
Behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media		.29		.35	

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$. RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; GFI, goodness of fit index; NFI, norm fit index; CFI, critical fit index.

$p < .01$). Following the results of the partial mediation model, the direct effects of the three eWOM communication antecedents on the traveller's intention to use eWOM communication media were examined.

H_{5a} and H_{5c} suggest that the traveller's overall attitude mediates the effect of the electronic communication technology adoption and subjective norm on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media. Table 2 shows statistically significant results of the partial mediation model by supporting the influence of the electronic communication technology adoption (SPC = .19, $t = 3.22$, $p < .001$), and subjective norm (SPC = .23, $t = 4.04$, $p < .001$) on intention to use eWOM communication media. The influence of consumers' dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experiences on their intention to use eWOM communication media was not statistically significant (SPC = .06, $t = 1.38$, $p > .05$). Therefore, as proposed by H_{5b}, the premise that the traveller's overall attitude towards eWOM communication fully mediates consumer dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experiences on intention to use eWOM communication media was supported. This finding indicates that consumer dis/satisfaction with their travel experiences is not sufficient to influence their intention to use eWOM communication media unless travellers believe that eWOM communication is a useful communication channel to express their feelings.

Conclusions

This study contributes to better understanding of the antecedents of travellers' eWOM communication behaviours. A conceptual framework is introduced and tested by integrating the three key antecedents that inform travellers' attitude towards eWOM communication: adoption of electronic communication technology, consumer dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experience, and subjective norm. Extant research has largely focussed on exploring consumer motivations for eWOM. Furthermore, it has assumed that consumer motivations will have a direct effect on eWOM behaviour. Our study suggests that overall attitude towards eWOM communication is a mediator between the three antecedents and the traveller's intention to use eWOM communication media. Also, to the best of our knowledge, previous studies have not yet examined the simultaneous effect of the three antecedents on travellers' eWOM communication behaviour. Empirical testing of the conceptual model shows that all the antecedents have positive influences on travellers' overall attitude towards eWOM communication. In turn, travellers' willingness to use eWOM communication media is influenced by overall attitude towards eWOM communication. The key results of this study, with reference to each of the three antecedents, are summarised below.

First, PU and PEU, adapted from TAM, are widely employed to predict computer-usage behaviour in the workplace (e.g. Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1992; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). This study extends the research context of TAM to a non-work-oriented environment in order to predict the traveller's eWOM communication behaviour. While previous research posits PU and PEU as two separate constructs, this study found they are unidimensional. Furthermore, the study's findings show that the adoption of electronic communication technology has positive influences not only on the traveller's attitude towards eWOM communication, but also on intention to use eWOM communication media. Therefore, if online communication media is

perceived to be useful and effortless, travellers will develop positive attitudes and are likely to use eWOM communication media for posting their comments. Moreover, previous studies debate whether overall attitude towards eWOM communication plays a mediator role between the adoption of electronic communication technology and behavioural intention (e.g. Davis et al., 1992; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). Findings from this study demonstrate that overall attitude plays a partial mediating role between adoption of electronic communication technology and behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media.

Second, this study suggests that travellers who are satisfied or dissatisfied with travel consumption experiences embrace a positive attitude towards eWOM communication because eWOM communication is seen as a facilitator and a channel to pursue their individual objectives such as venting their feelings and helping others. However, previous studies (e.g. Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) have proposed a direct relationship between consumer motivation and behavioural intention to eWOM communication, but have not considered overall attitude towards eWOM communication as a potential mediator. This study fills that gap, and suggests that overall attitude towards eWOM communication fully mediates the effect of consumer dis/satisfaction with their travel consumption experience on the traveller's intention to use eWOM communication media. This research highlights the importance of attitude as a mediator in an online communication environment when discussing the relationship between consumer dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experience and communicating it via electronic media technology. This finding suggests that travellers perceive eWOM communication as a useful, enjoyable, and appropriate channel for posting their post-travel consumption experience before actually posting messages. If they believe that it is not a useful or appropriate communication channel (e.g. perceived to be too public), they are unlikely to engage with eWOM communication media. They may decide to use more traditional (e.g. communicating by writing letters or face to face with a member of the travel service provider or other travellers) and more appropriate (e.g. private or officially authorised) WOM communication channels, for instance, when the travellers expect to receive compensation for their unsatisfactory travel experiences.

Third, this research points out that subjective norm has a strong impact on travellers' attitude towards eWOM communication. In addition, the empirical data show that attitude towards eWOM communication serves as a partial mediator between subjective norm and behavioural intention of using eWOM media as a communication channel. These findings suggest that if travellers believe that eWOM communication is a useful and desirable communication channel, they are likely to use it for posting travel-related opinions because their peer group exhibit similar beliefs and behaviour. In the online focus groups' discussions, several participants pointed out that they engage in a specific electronic medium because all their friends are using that particular medium. They see it as the easiest way to maintain their social networks. This corroborates previous research that suggests that enhancing personal social networking is one of the specific features of eWOM communication behaviour (J. Brown et al., 2007; Buffardi & Campbell, 2008). Also, this result contributes to the debate about the role of subjective norm in the attitude and behavioural intention formation as proposed by the TRA and TPB models (Schepers & Wetzels, 2007). The findings suggest that subjective norm not only affects travellers' overall attitude towards eWOM communication but also their intention to use eWOM communication media.

The present study has several managerial implications because the identification of reasons behind travellers' eWOM communication behaviour can enhance the effective use of eWOM as a marketing tool. Reading eWOM comments is increasingly popular among travellers and clearly has an impact on the traveller's decision-making process when planning trips. Travel service providers can stimulate more eWOM publications by understanding what motivates travellers to form an attitude or engage in eWOM communication. Encouraging or stimulating positive eWOM can help to promote their businesses. Analysis of eWOM opinions can further help to enhance the quality of their offering.

Results from this research show that a user-friendly environment is a key driver for the adoption of online communication technology, as this positively affects the traveller's willingness to share their opinions in a virtual environment. With the development of the Internet and electronic media, an increasing number of businesses provide different electronic communication channels for their customers. However, providing communication channels is not enough to increase the number of eWOM postings. Travellers are looking for a user-friendly and effective communication platform. The adoption of one communication channel over another is determined by the electronic medium's user-friendliness, effectiveness (e.g. speed), and efficiency. For example, travellers do not want to spend much effort learning how to use an electronic communication channel, or going through a complicated, time-consuming registration process. At the same time, travel providers should monitor their customers' opinions and provide an appropriate response to create an effective communication system for building better relationships with their customers.

Analysis of eWOM comments present an opportunity for businesses to evaluate and improve their performances, as online comments are related to travellers' dis/satisfaction with travel consumption experiences. Travel manufacturers or service providers can benefit from the feedback received by not only addressing critical service failures identified by eWOM comments, but also directly replying to travellers' comments, engaging in and stimulating dialogue. In addition to that, positive responses to negative eWOM comments (e.g. offering compensations, apology) can help to improve service recovery.

As eWOM comments are reviews of goods or services, they could be seen as a signal that determines the success or failure of these travel products. Companies in other sectors (e.g. Amazon, Dell, etc.) have decided to foster the use of online communication by creating an official online platform for consumers to generate comments (Zhang, Craciun, & Shin, 2010). A travel service–related channel could also potentially be dedicated to ease the process of posting and finding other travellers' experiences regarding a specific travel brand or service.

The findings of this study highlight the role of subjective norm in travellers' attitude and behavioural intention towards eWOM communication. It could be argued that eWOM has the potential to generate a 'ripple effect' as travellers are more willing to express their eWOM when they find their friends doing the same. In the online communication environment, subjective norm is related to reference groups but not limited by them. Travellers may participate in eWOM communication because it is 'trendy' among peers. It is possible for travel businesses to set up processes aimed at targeting, and inviting, specific segments of travellers (e.g. popular bloggers and opinion leaders) to post online comments. This may ultimately stimulate the use of eWOM communication media.

Limitations and future research

Although the present study contributes to better understanding of travellers' eWOM communication behaviour, there are limitations, some of which can be addressed by further research. First, the conceptual framework has been tested and validated in the travel industry. Generalisation to other industries cannot therefore be argued, and future research could focus on applying this model to other industries in order to test its validity further. Second, customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction with travel consumption experience should be measured separately to understand their valence and influence on eWOM communication behaviour. Third, the inclusion of the other variables such as perceived behavioural control, trust, and consumer emotions into the model could potentially increase the model's predictive validity. Fourth, future research should examine the cultural differences in understanding eWOM communication behaviour. Finally, using focus groups, future research should develop a much deeper understanding of consumer attitude towards eWOM communication.

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Appendix. Measurement properties

Statements									Item loading
Adoption of electronic communication technology (Davis, 1989). *(1) S. disagree, (7) S. agree*									
Using electronic media improves my ability to communicate									.58
Using electronic media enables my communication more effectively									.74
Using electronic media makes my communication with others easier									.77
Using electronic media to communicate is convenient									.74
Learning to use electronic media to communicate is easy									.75
It is easy for me to become proficient at using electronic media to communicate									.71
Consumer Dis/Satisfaction with Travel Consumption Experience (Spreng et al., 1996) *The overall quality of travel and tourism experience in my most recent eWOM communication was:*									
Very dissatisfactory–very satisfactory									.73
Terrible–Delightful									.82
Worse than my expectation–Better than my expectation									.81
Very poor quality–Very good quality									.90
Subjective Norm (Manning, 2011; Park & Smith, 2007). *(1) S. disagree, (7) S. agree*									
Most people who are important to me have participated in eWOM communication before									.86
Most people in my social network have participated in eWOM communication before									.83
Most people whose opinion I value have eWOM communication experience before									.65
Overall Attitude towards eWOM communication (Ajzen, 1991). *My attitude towards eWOM communication is:*									
Very Negative	−3	−2	−1	0	1	2	3	Very Positive	.77
Very Worthless	−3	−2	−1	0	1	2	3	Very Valuable	.89
Very Undesirable	−3	−2	−1	0	1	2	3	Very Desirable	.89
Very Unpleasant	−3	−2	−1	0	1	2	3	Very Pleasant	.83
Very Useless	−3	−2	−1	0	1	2	3	Very Useful	.81
Behavioural Intention to Use eWOM Comm Media (Ajzen, 1991). *(1) V. unlikely, (7) V. likely*									
I will use eWOM to communicate travel and tourism related opinions in the next 12 months									.81
I will spend more time on eWOM to communicate travel and tourism related opinions in the next 12 months									.85
I will recommend others to communicate their travel and tourism related opinions via eWOM									.76

[a] All factor loadings are statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level.