

Tourism 2.0: eWoM's Dimensions

How Costumers Consider eWOM to Book Hotels on Trip Advisor's websites?

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Abstract—This paper discusses the behaviour of consumers to seek and receive information in electronic form of Word of Mouth (eWOM). Today, more customers prefer to collect information about their destinations through social networks and search engines. Trip Advisor, as one of SNS with thematic category that is online social travel network, allows users to interact and perform reviews (eWOM), as well as plan their own trips. E-WoM has dimensions that are analyzed by importance. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine eWOM's dimensions influencing customers when choosing a hotel on Trip Advisor website. To do so, a descriptive qualitative research was conducted aiming to know and understand which and why certain eWOM's dimensions are able to influence customers decision making process. In order to obtain optimal results, the primary data used is the result of an interview completed with observation data. The result shows that there are several important dimensions of eWOM contribute in customers' decision-making process. First, recommendation rating attracts customers to obtain more information of a high-rated hotel. Second, concerning the quality of reviews, relevant and comprehensive reviews are valuable information to meet the needs of customers. Further, customers' trust emerged because the review is considered as accurate information since it contains honest story.

Keywords— *eWoM dimensions; decision making; hotel; foreign tourists*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the previous marketing world, we saw consumers always looking for more trusting opinions in the community about product or services, which further, this phenomenon in marketing terms is often called word-of-mouth (WOM). WOM plays a role in consumers' purchasing decisions and behaviour patterns [1]. Today, Internet gives consumers access to electronic form of Word of Mouth (eWOM) from other consumers. In particular, the web has created opportunities for communication (ie. eWOM) through electronic media, such as online discussion boards, electronic bulletin board systems, newsgroups, blogs, review sites, and social networking sites [2]. EWOM communication through electronic media allows consumers to not only obtain information related to the goods and services of some people they know, as well as from, a large geographical groups of people, who have experience with relevant products or services [3].

In the past few years, there is acceleration of popularity, and thus, a lot of research about consumers who share knowledge and concepts in the Internet environment related to goods and services [4]. The latest survey found that some consumers viewed online reviews as a trusted source of information, especially, online reviews from sales site. Further, According to [5], three quarters of travellers have considered online consumer reviews as an information source when planning their trips. In this case, eWoM shows the information is sharing shifting from a business-to-consumer to a peer-to-peer model. It creates a cultural change as the evolution of Web 3.0 in the tourism world, which then called Tourism 3.0 [6]. This led to the construction of business and destinations using the network effect to improve productivity, as more companies and individuals become active creators [7].

As one of tourist sites, Trip Advisor has been set as the largest tourist site in the world by comScore Media Metrix on July 2017 [8]. Trip advisor claims that they help travellers optimize the full potential of each trip by means providing over 570 million reviews and opinions on the world's top selection for travel lists around the world [8]. In this case, a study examines how hotels' information is displayed on a Web 2.0 platform and how the users that generate content are influencing tourism destinations [9]. It revealed that the information consists of three types: 1) rating/ranking, 2) destination product, and 3) forum analysis. However, this study does not explain clearly how eWOM influence tourism destinations. Another study shows that there are correlations between hotel performance and the number of reviews given as well as with the ratings of the reviews [10]. These two studies are some of abundant studies that focused on eWOM's content from the writers' perspective and eWOM influence on the object reviewed. However, how consumers use eWOM to choose certain accommodations have been ignored by researchers. Therefore, this study fills the gap by examining how consumers use eWOM.

In conclusion, this study is an early attempt to investigate how consumers use eWOM. This study aims to understand eWoM's dimensions on Trip Advisor website influencing consumers' decision-making process to book a hotel. The findings are expected to make a meaningful contribution to the development of knowledge to educate consumers, as well as help hospitality practitioners and researchers develop a more realistic evaluation of the WOM's influence online.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

According to Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, and Gremler [11], positive or negative statements made potential and actual by consumers who have used the products or services of a company and accessible to many people and institutions over the internet are called electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, and Chowdury [12] say that eWOM offers a variety of ways to exchange information, which can be done secretly or anonymously, as well as providing geographical and temporal freedom. eWOM also has uniqueness that is not owned by WOM, one of which is permanent [13].

1) *Dimension of eWOM*: According to various sources, eWOM can be analyzed using the following dimensions.

a) *Credibility of sources*: The source credibility is the recipient's perception of information about source expertise and trust in information [14]. Credibility is generally supported by three factors [15] mentioned in the following points.

- Expertise refers to the professional knowledge that communicators have about the product or service.
- Trustworthiness is the level of trust and acceptance that the message recipient develops to a source.
- Source's experience is the level where communicators feel familiar with the product or service based on actual experience viewed from the perspective of eWOM's recipient.

b) *Quality of arguments*: The quality of arguments refers to the persuasive power of arguments inherent in information messages [16]. Cheung and Thadani [17] argue that the quality of arguments can be evaluated from the following points.

- Relevance refers to the extent to which messages or information can be applied and useful in the decision-making process.
- Actuality (timeliness) relates to whether the message is new, timely, and current.
- Accuracy relates to the reliability of the message or argument. It also shows the user's perception that the information is true.
- Comprehensiveness refers to the ability of information to complement the needs of users, have the required values, and the information has a depth and sufficient breadth

c) *Type of review*: This type of review is concerned with the difference in the orientation of a review. Review can be categorized into two types [18].

- *Attribute-centric type*: The argument supporting the author's evaluation is based on technical attributes with the use of numbers that indicate the level of attributes.

- *Benefit-centric type*: The author subjectively interprets the benefits of each attribute in its own way to evaluate a product or service.

d) *Recommendation framing (valence)*: It is related to eWOM's valence, whether it is grouped positively (e.g. Praise) or negatively (e.g. complaint) [19].

e) *Recommendation sidedness*. It is related to the point of view, in which a one-sided message represents a positive or negative feature of a product or service but not both, while a two-sided message displays the positive and negative elements in it [19]

f) *Disconfirming information*: It refers to the information content in newly received messages that are inconsistent with previous understandings and beliefs [20].

g) *Power of argument*: It relates to the extent to which the argument or information makes sense as well as the extent to which the receiver perceived that an argument is valid and convincing [15].

h) *Consistency of recommendation*: It indicates the extent to which the current eWOM recommendations are similar and fits the experience of review's contributor regarding evaluation of the same product or service [19].

i) *Recommendation rating*: It indicates the ratings given by other readers on recommendations [19].

j) *Visual cue*: It can be defined as an image (as a form of communication) published by the review authors and addressed to other consumers to evaluate the characteristics of a particular product or service, providing an overview and enriching information [21].

B. Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

Elaboration Likelihood Model is a theory of persuasion because this theory tries to predict when and how individuals will be induced or not by messages [22]. This theory tries to explain how to evaluate the information received. The Elaboration Likelihood Model was developed by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo a persuasive communication expert from Ohio State University USA in 1980. The underlying assumption of this theory is that people can process persuasive messages in different ways.

Based on the theory of ELM, attitude changes can occur through two meaningful lines, central routes and peripheral routes [23]. There are two message processing routes in the Elaboration Likelihood Model that is the central route and peripheral routes. Two alternative routes differ at the level of information processing or elaboration. The higher the person's motivation and ability to process the message, the person will use the central persuasion route, and if the motivation and ability to process the message is low, then the route to be used is the peripheral route [22].

C. Decision Making Process in Normative or Rational Theory

In the decision, making process, decision and behavior may be the core characteristics [24]. Decision-making involves the process of human thought and reaction about the external

world, which include the past and possible future events and the psychological consequences, to the decision maker, of those events. The essence of decision-making seems to integrate both the beliefs about specific events and people's subjective reactions to those events.

Among many decision-making related theories, rational theory is used in this study. Rationality has been defined as the compatibility between choice and value [24]. Rational, or normative, theories of decision-making are based on fundamental axioms. Normative theories consist of rationalistic components that indicate how decision makers should decide. In rational decision-making models [24], decision makers analyze a number of possible alternatives from different scenarios before selecting a choice. These scenarios are weighed by probabilities, and decision makers can determine the expected scenario for each alternative. The final choice would be the one presenting the best-expected scenario and with the highest probability of outcome. Normative processes of decision explain how decision makers employ a particular set of alternatives to solve problems [25, 26].

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study examines consumers' behaviour to seek and receive information in term of electronic form of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM). Further, it aims to understand eWoM's dimensions influencing consumers' decision-making process, especially foreign tourist who read eWoM on Trip Advisor websites about hotels in Bali. To achieve the objective, it needs in-depth explanation in order to know the whole ideas. One explained that qualitative research aims to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by the subjects holistically by means of description in the form of words and language, in a specific context that is naturally and by utilizing a variety of natural methods [27]. Additionally, Nazir [28] stated that descriptive research type is a method in researching the status of human groups, an object, a set of conditions, a system of thought, or a class of events in the present. Therefore, a research method of qualitative-descriptive was conducted in this study.

Data gathering was conducted through interview on participants. It was conducted on December 2017 until February 2018. Participants were chosen purposively, which is defined as the presence of certain characteristics that should be owned by the subjects related to this study [29]. Those participants must be a foreign tourist who have had a holiday in Bali, read reviews of hotels on Trip Advisor website, and in the group age of 25-34 year old. Statistic shows, in 2017, the percentage of global internet users who post reviews online on Trip advisor by age group: 25-34 (52%), 16-24 (47%), and 35-44 (45%) [30].

Regarding the above explanation, research model is presented in the following figure.

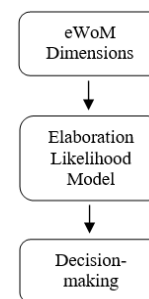


Fig. 1. Research Model

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The process to book any accommodation for travelling overseas makes customers consider many factors. Unfamiliar environment, type of payments, or particular services is some of conditions that need to be confirmed by reading relevant information. The access to get information in form of online reviews (eWoM) on Trip Advisor website offers intangible and specific information that are not provided by the accommodation providers. These personal experiences help customers to imagine and confirm the hotel situation. Therefore, the following paragraphs will discuss dimensions of eWoM based on the interview result. Moreover, in the discussion, trip advisor's features assist customer in some extents as well.

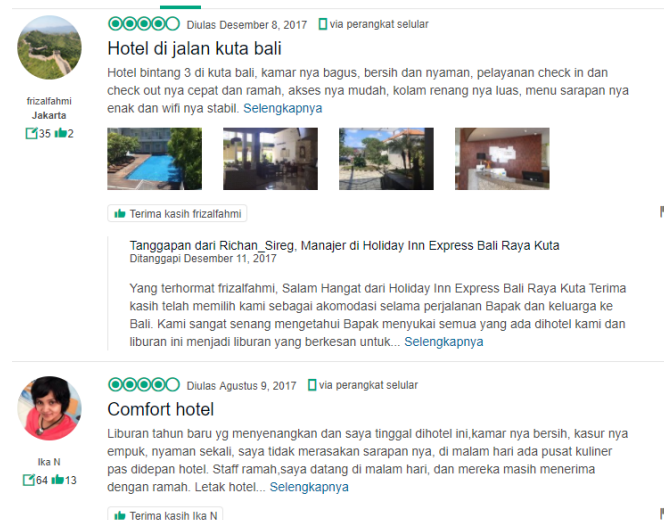


Fig. 2. Example of reviews about hotel [8].

First, the most important and easiest way to know the hotels' overall services is recommendation rating. Prior customer concludes their overall impression toward their experience staying in the hotel into a number of stars (rating). Trip advisor provides rating from 5 (five) to indicate the best rate and 1 (one) as the worst rate. According to Filieri and Mcleay [31], regardless that this study focuses on product, product rankings provide a shortcut in the elaboration process of information, as it displays consumer evaluations from the best to the worst. In other words, the use of product ranking

variables is a peripheral route to obtain more specific information about the hotels.

Second, the quality of reviews matters the most to customers. According to Cheung and Thadani [17], the quality of arguments can be evaluated from four aspects: relevancy, actuality, accuracy, and comprehensiveness. Majority participants agree that the content of online review must be relevant to their need and interest. Therefore, trip advisor's features to filter the online reviews are important for them to focus on the certain relevant reviews. The features can limit the reviews into specific groups: 1) according to the rating, 2) type of tourist, 3) timeframe, and 4) language. Thereby, customers expect to read the reviews suitable to their needs. They would like to read long-written reviews to find a specific value that prior customer have experienced. The information about specific values can be one of the customers' interests that are not provided by hotel providers or trip advisor features.

Further, customers want to guarantee that the reviews are accurate. The content of reviews, regardless contain different specific personal experiences, has one main idea to convey that a writer experience either good or bad moment when staying in a hotel. Participants agree that repetition of similar information in a number of different reviews indicates its accuracy. Moreover, pictures posted by a reviewer can strengthen the power of written reviews. It helps customers confirming their imagination and photos provided by the hotels. If needed, customers may check the writer's credibility, on Trip advisor, according to the number of contribution and readers' perceived of reviews' usefulness.

Regarding the writer's credibility, it may not a big concern for customers/readers since they are strangers to begin with. Customers cannot certify the writers' expertise solely based on the number of contribution and perceived of reviews' usefulness. However, writers' consistency in writing reviews describe that they are a frequent travellers and shows their sincerity to help future customers in describing what experience they may have in that hotel. Their consistency and sincerity grow trust in customers' mind. As a result, writers' credibility influences reviews' credibility.

Other reviews' dimensions are message's framing/valence and sidedness. Participants agree that review based on personal experience contains written emotional expression. These adjective words describe the writers' sidedness due to their good or bad experience. The reviews considered as an honest story if it contains written emotional expression, which shows human being reactions toward their prior experience. Again, honest story grows trust in customers.

Based on the above discussion, benefit-centric review considered as a type of review that has more influence to customers in their decision-making process. Park & Kim [18] stated that a review could be classified into benefit-centric type when the author subjectively interprets the benefits of each attribute in its own way to evaluate a product or service. Different choice of word to explain personal experience when staying in a hotel is perceived as a real and trustworthy message.

Participants agree that traveling abroad needs lots of considerations, especially to a new country. Different culture, custom, and habit will influence services provided in a hotel even though having international standard. It makes customers worry due to the uncertain conditions. To reduce uncertainty, customers involved intensely in reading online reviews to be well-informed before making a decision to stay in a certain hotel.

To be clear, customers seek a number of online reviews stated the services satisfaction, either in rating or words. In particular, reviews from customers telling about what they have satisfied or dissatisfied are also important. It helps customers to set expectation of their future staying experience. Therefore, they can reduce or avoid the loss they may experience.

Among many hotels, customers eliminate numerous hotels that cannot facilitate their needs based on the online reviews. They choose some alternatives of hotels having the most possibility to satisfy their needs and interest. At last, they decide to choose a hotel presenting the best-expected scenario and with the highest probability of outcome.

V. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, there are several important dimensions of eWOM contributes in customers' decision-making process. First, recommendation rating attracts customers to obtain more information of a high-rated hotel. Second, concerning the quality of reviews, relevant and comprehensive reviews are valuable information to meet the needs of customers. Further, customers' trust emerged because the review is considered as accurate information since it contains honest story.

Traveling abroad makes customers worry due to the uncertain conditions. To reduce uncertainty, customers are motivated to involved intensely in reading online reviews to be well-informed before making a decision to stay in a certain hotel. It helps customers to set expectation of their future staying experience. Therefore, they can reduce or avoid the loss they may experience. To sum up, customers perform central route when reading online reviews and consider to staying in certain hotels for traveling abroad.

Moreover, rational theory describe the most common way to decide a hotel. Customers choose some alternatives of hotels having the most possibility to satisfy their needs and interest. At last, they choose a hotel presenting the best-expected scenario and with the highest probability of outcome.

VI. IMPLICATION, LIMITATION, AND FUTURE DIRECTION

The current study have implications both in academic and practice. In academic, it enrich discussion about consumer behavior, especially the role ewom influencing customers' decision-making in hospitality industry. In practice, it help managers to evaluate their performance, and further, evaluate their identity and promise, "does customers' experience describe the identity and promise they want to convey?" It helps a hotel to understand their current identity and differentiation from competitors.

Regarding limitations, this study presents a discussion that only covers the role of ewom about hotel influencing customers' decision making in general. However, it cannot describe specific behavior pattern of foreign travellers with different economic status, for example. Therefore, future study should cover more specific characteristic of customers so that can be more beneficial for hospitality industry that have such niche market.

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