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The Relationship Between Electronic Word-of-Mouth, Travel Intention and Forwarding Information: A Study in Da Nang City

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KEYWORDS

Forwarding eWOM,
IACM,
Information need,
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Visual cues.

ABSTRACT

The aims of this study are to identify the relationship between concepts in eWOM, travel intention, and forwarding eWOM. In particular, we explore and test the new relationship between visual cues of eWOM and the useful information of eWOM. This study uses a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods. We use in-depth interviews with experts to build models and scales. Quantitative research is carried out using SmartPLS4 to test the structural equation modeling (SEM). The results of the study determined the existence of relationships in the model, especially the relationship between visual cues and useful information and the relationship between the need for information and information adoption, which are accepted in this research. This study has important implications in the context of eWOM. This study adds to the eWOM theory and reinforces the assertions of previous research on visual cues and forwarding eWOM. The practical meaning will help marketers and tourism managers apply to come up with solutions to attract more tourists to their destination.

1. Introduction

Social media is very important to managers and marketers in travel destinations. Nowadays, as technology and digital platforms develop, it is becoming more and more common for people to use social networks to exchange, share and find out information. People often share information through digital platforms with each other, which is known as electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Previous researchers have suggested that word-of-mouth information is more reliable than information provided by advertisers or promotions from companies that provide products and services. This is explained by the fact that word of mouth is information generated by users from their experiences and has no interest in providing information to other users. In the field of tourism, managers always want to understand the factors that affect the travel intention of tourists, from which they try to build solutions to attract a certain number of visitors to the destination they manage. This study attempts to explore and explain the issues related to the intention of tourists to travel in Da Nang in the context of electronic word-of-mouth. We believe that this study will help Da Nang City to have a perspective based on issues related to e-word of mouth to come up with good solutions to attract tourists.

Electronic word-of-mouth has been carried out by previous studies, and the research topics are also very broad and diverse. Concentrate the majority of authors

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on the components of eWOM (Sussman & Siegal, 2003); studies on the relationship between eWOM and purchase intent; studies related to the relationship between eWOM, brand, and purchase intent; studies related to the relationship between eWOM, brands, TPB components, and purchase intent (Abedi et al., 2019). In addition, there are many other studies in the field of eWOM. eWOM in the field of tourism has also been studied by many authors on the relationship between eWOM and travel intention (Silaban et al., 2023). Research by Silaban et al. (2023) has addressed the relationship between eWOM usefulness, eWOM acceptance, attitudes towards eWOM, and travel intent. However, according to the understanding of the authors from the literature review, we find that the association between eWOM and eWOM transition is still limited. In particular, the authors have not found any previous research discussing the relationship between eWOM market price signals that directly affect the usefulness of eWOM information. In addition, according to practical experience and research, we believe that visual cues have an effect on the eWOM usefulness. This relationship is fully explained by the peripheral ELM theory. From the above argument, we suggest that the relationship between visual cues and useful eWOM information is a "research gap". To conduct this study, we use three main underlying theories: IAM, IACM, and TPB. Previous studies that are closely related to our study and are inherited by us in this study include Cuong (2024), Erkan and Evans (2016), Silaban et al. (2023), Abedi et al. (2019).

2. Literature review

2.1. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is defined as non-commercial communication of opinions, evaluations, or comments between a sender and recipient regarding a brand, product, or service. As described by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), eWOM encompasses customer-generated claims based on personal experiences shared across digital platforms such as websites, social networks, instant messaging, forums, and blogs. Essentially, eWOM consists of consumer feedback disseminated widely via the internet and digital technologies. Currently, eWOM holds a critical role in social media, providing helpful details for potential consumers. Numerous studies indicate a significant relationship between eWOM and consumer behavioral intentions.

2.2. Electronic word-of-mouth visual cues (eWOM visual cues)

Visual cues are characterized as visuals shared by reviewers intended for other consumers to assess product or service features (Nguyen, 2024). In electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), visual cues include diverse elements—such as photographs, emojis, star ratings, review forms, profile pictures, and platform design—that influence users' perceptions and trust in online reviews and user-generated material. These graphic elements augment informational depth and facilitate customer decision-making. Akdim (2021) recognizes visual cues as essential to the representational attributes of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Moreover, visual cues are considered a type of electronic word-of-mouth (Le et al., 2022). Visual cues substantially affect information perception, trust assessment, usability, and, indirectly, behavioral intentions (Lin et al., 2012). Lin et al. (2012) asserts that visual information in electronic word-of-mouth influences customers' evaluation of its credibility. Previous studies on visual cues have predominantly concentrated on videos and images, considered the fundamental components of visual electronic word-of-mouth (Le et al., 2022).

2.3. Information Adoption Model (IAM)

Sussman and Siegal (2003) formulated the Information Acceptance Model (IAM) by synthesizing the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty et al., 1986). The Information Acceptance Model (IAM) proposes two main pathways for persuasive information processing: the central route, which focuses on the quality of arguments, and the peripheral route, which prioritizes the trustworthiness of the source. The concept posits that the adoption of information is affected by both the quality of the information and the reliability of the source, with perceived usefulness acting as a mediating variable. Perceived utility is fundamental to information adoption and is significantly influenced by information quality and source reliability (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Thus, IAM is particularly pertinent to electronic word-of-mouth on social networks, a significance corroborated by various empirical research (Abedi et al., 2019). This study utilizes IAM to clarify the links among essential constructs within the research model.

2.4. Theory of Information Acceptance Model (IACM)

The Information Acceptance Model (IACM) extends the TAM and IAM frameworks by integrating two supplementary elements: information demands and attitude toward information (Erkan & Evans, 2016). IACM asserts that the perceived utility of information is influenced by four factors: information quality, information credibility, information needs, and attitude toward information. When recipients acknowledge

the utility of the information, they are more inclined to embrace it, which in turn affects their purchasing intentions. Recent investigations by Cuong (2024) and Silaban et al. (2023) have utilized the IACM in empirical study.

2.5. Theory of planned behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), proposed by Ajzen (1991), extends the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by incorporating a cognitive control factor over behavior. TPB serves as a psychological framework to explain human behavior and decision-making, positing that behavioral intention is the primary predictor of actual behavior. Three key factors influence this intention: (1) attitude toward, (2) subjective norms, and (3) perceived behavioral control. Together, these factors shape an individual's intention, which in turn predicts behavior. TPB has been applied in studies examining electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) within the tourism sector (Abedi et al., 2019).

2.6. Traveling intention

Individuals are increasingly dependent on social media information to determine trip location selections. The tourism sector, especially destination marketing, relies significantly on social media channels (Silaban et al., 2023). A destination encompasses various attributes—such as service quality, infrastructure, and tourism resources—that necessitate comprehensive assessment by users utilizing social media. Promotion via user-generated social media material is particularly vital, as consumer-generated electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is regarded as more transparent and credible. As a result, tourists cultivate elevated expectations influenced by electronic word-of-mouth obtained from social media (Silaban et al., 2023). Visitors are more inclined to interact with electronic word-of-mouth when it is credible, pertinent, and satisfies their informational requirements, hence enhancing trip planning efficacy based on this data (Silaban et al., 2023).

3. Research hypothesis and model

3.1. Research hypothesis

3.1.1. The relationship between eWOM quality, eWOM source credibility and useful eWOM information

Electronic word-of-mouth quality (eWOM quality) refers to the recipient's perception of the validity and persuasiveness of eWOM messages. It reflects the persuasive power of comments derived from informational content and represents the value generated by the system based on user perception (Cheung et al., 2008). eWOM quality comprises several components, including relevance, timeliness, accuracy, comprehensiveness (Cheung et al., 2008), and information consistency (Lin et al., 2012). According to the Information Acceptance Model (IAM), eWOM quality is positively associated with the perceived usefulness of eWOM information, with the central route explaining information usefulness (Abedi et al., 2019; Cheung et al., 2008). Empirical studies further confirm that higher eWOM quality positively influences eWOM effectiveness (Abedi et al., 2019; Cheung et al., 2008).

Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed:

H1: The eWOM quality has a positive impact on the eWOM usefulness.

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) source credibility refers to the extent to which recipients trust the sender and the origin of the eWOM. This trust is shaped by attitudes toward the source (Cheung et al., 2008; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Teng et al. (2014) define source credibility as the source's cognitive ability and motivation to provide accurate and truthful information. Key components of source reliability include trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, familiarity, and source experience (Teng et al., 2014). Within the Information Acceptance Model (IAM), source credibility influences perceived information usefulness via the peripheral route (Cheung et al., 2008; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). The relationship between eWOM source credibility and information usefulness has been supported in prior research (Cheung et al., 2008; Erkan & Evans, 2016). Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed:

H2: The eWOM source credibility has a positive impact on the eWOM usefulness.

3.1.2. The relationship between needs of information and eWOM usefulness, eWOM adoption

According to the theory of information-seeking behaviour, when people have a need for information, they will tend to search for information, and then if they choose the right information, they will use that information (Wilson, 2006). Identifying information needs is understood as a driving force for eWOM participation, processing eWOM information to generate consumer behaviour (Erkan & Evans, 2016). The behaviour of seeking information is influenced by the perception of the need for information, to find the answer to a question, or to learn more about a particular topic. Individuals search social media for information they need, which then influences their behaviour (Silaban et al., 2023). From the need for information, searching for information through social networks has become more beneficial. IACM of (Erkan & Evans, 2016) has proposed that the need

for information positively affects the usefulness of eWOM information. The experimental study has also proposed this positive relationship (Silaban et al., 2023). Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed:

H3: The needs of information have a positive impact on the eWOM usefulness.

In addition, according to the theory of information-seeking behavior, there is a relationship between the need for information and the acceptance of information (Wilson, 2006). This means that when users need information, they will search and will accept or disaccept information when compared to the relevance of their needs. This suggests that a person's expectations can influence their behavior of accepting information, leading to them being more likely to accept information that matches their needs. Therefore, *the hypothesis is proposed:*

H4: The need for information has a positive impact on the eWOM adoption.

3.1.3. Relationship between visual cues and information usefulness

Visual cues in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) comprise elements such as images, emojis, star ratings, review formats, profile pictures, and platform, which influence user perception and trust in online reviews and user-generated content. Akdim (2021) identifies visual signals as key components of eWOM's representational characteristics, while Le et al. (2022) classify visual cues as a form of eWOM. Lin et al. (2012) emphasize that visual cues significantly affect information perception, trust evaluation, usability, and, indirectly, behavioral intentions, impacting consumers' assessment of eWOM reliability. Prior studies have predominantly focused on videos and images as core visual eWOM elements (Le et al., 2022). The relationship between visual cues and eWOM usefulness is supported by theories such as Social Information Processing Theory (SIPT), Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), and Cue Utilization Theory (CUT). According to ELM, persuasion occurs via central and peripheral routes, with visual cues serving as peripheral cues that shape attitudes and behaviors of recipients. Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed:

H5: The visual cues have a positive impact on eWOM usefulness.

3.1.4. The relationship between eWOM usefulness and attitude towards eWOM, eWOM adoption

eWOM usefulness is defined as content that consumers perceive to enhance their understanding, provide value, and inform their decision-making (Abedi et al., 2019; Cheung et al., 2008). According to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), perceived usefulness is positively associated with attitudes toward eWOM, as recognizing valuable information fosters a favorable attitude (Abedi et al., 2019). The Information Acceptance Model (IAM) further posits a positive relationship between eWOM usefulness and eWOM adoption (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). This relationship is supported by numerous empirical studies (Abedi et al., 2019; Silaban et al., 2023). Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed:

H6: eWOM usefulness has a positive impact on the attitude towards eWOM.

H7: eWOM usefulness has a positive impact on the eWOM adoption.

3.1.5. The relationship between attitude towards eWOM and eWOM adoption and traveling intention, forwarding eWOM.

Attitudes are defined as the extent to which an individual evaluates a behavior positively or negatively (Ajzen, 1991), while behavioral intention refers to the degree of an individual's willingness to perform or not perform a behavior (Ajzen, 1991). According to the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), attitudes toward behavior are a prerequisite for behavioral intention (Abedi et al., 2019). This relationship is also supported by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Abedi et al., 2019). TPB posits that individuals are more likely to intend to engage in a behavior if they hold a positive attitude toward it (Ajzen, 1991). Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that attitudes positively influence behavioral intention (Abedi et al., 2019; Erkan & Evans, 2016).

Attitudes have been examined in studies involving eWOM on online consumer review platforms (Cheung et al., 2008). Prior research conceptualizes attitudes as consumer beliefs regarding the trustworthiness of eWOM, with findings indicating a positive association between cognitive trust in eWOM and information adoption (Abedi et al., 2019). Attitudes also reflect consumers' perceptions of the usefulness of specific eWOM platforms (Abedi et al., 2019). Experimental evidence demonstrates that users' cognitive attitudes toward eWOM positively influence eWOM adoption (Abedi et al., 2019). Additionally, numerous empirical studies confirm that positive consumer attitudes toward eWOM enhance purchase intentions (Abedi et al., 2019; Erkan & Evans, 2016). Accordingly, this study hypothesizes that travelers' attitudes toward eWOM positively affect their travel intentions.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) is employed to explain the relationship between individual attitudes and behavioral intentions (Abedi et al., 2019). Abedi et al. (2019) posit that behavior is typically preceded by intention, which is influenced by two internal components within TRA: attitudes and behavioral intentions. This study focuses on the impact

of attitudes on behavioral intentions, specifically purchase intention and the intention to share eWOM. Empirical evidence supports a positive relationship between attitudes and both purchase intentions (Abedi et al., 2019) and travel intentions or destination choice. Accordingly, this research examines the influence of eWOM attitudes on destination selection intentions. Additionally, prior studies indicate that recipients' attitudes toward eWOM also affect their intention to forward eWOM content (Abedi et al., 2019). Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed:

H8: Attitudes toward eWOM have a positive impact on the eWOM adoption.

H9: Attitudes toward eWOM have a positive impact on the travel intention.

H10: Attitudes toward eWOM have a positive impact on the forwarding eWOM.

3.1.6. Relationship between eWOM adoption and travel intention and forwarding eWOM

Silaban et al. (2023) assert that information acceptance is the initial step in understanding intention formation. Information acceptance involves the deliberate engagement with and utilization of information (Cheung et al., 2008). Prior studies have examined the impact of eWOM information on purchase intention (Abedi et al., 2019; Erkan & Evans, 2016). In the tourism context, Silaban et al. (2023) demonstrated that eWOM acceptance positively influences travel intention. When eWOM presents destination information in a clear, compelling, and positive manner, it effectively attracts potential visitors. The use of eWOM enhances the likelihood that consumers will apply the information to form visit intentions, enabling them to select and recommend destinations based on previously acquired eWOM (Silaban et al., 2023). Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed:

H11: eWOM adoption has a positive impact on travel intention.

eWOM adoption refers to consumers' acceptance and utilization of eWOM information (Abedi et al., 2019; Cheung et al., 2008). Consumers typically assess the usefulness and credibility of eWOM before adoption. Once adopted, users apply the information in decision-making and often share it with others. Abedi et al. (2019) explore the relationship between eWOM adoption and the intention to forward eWOM, with Social Exchange Theory (SET) frequently employed to explain this linkage.

H12: eWOM adoption has a positive impact on forwarding eWOM.

3.2. Research Model

This study uses many different theories in the study and many different concepts used in the study. The theoretical framework shows the relationship between concepts in the IACM, TPB, and eWOM models in the field of tourism. Specifically, it is presented in the following conceptual framework (Figure 1).

4. Research methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research. The qualitative phase involved a comprehensive literature review and in-depth interviews with experts to refine the research model and measurement scales. A review of prior studies identified research gaps, and expert interviews—conducted with five academic lecturers experienced in research and marketing and two tourism industry directors knowledgeable in social

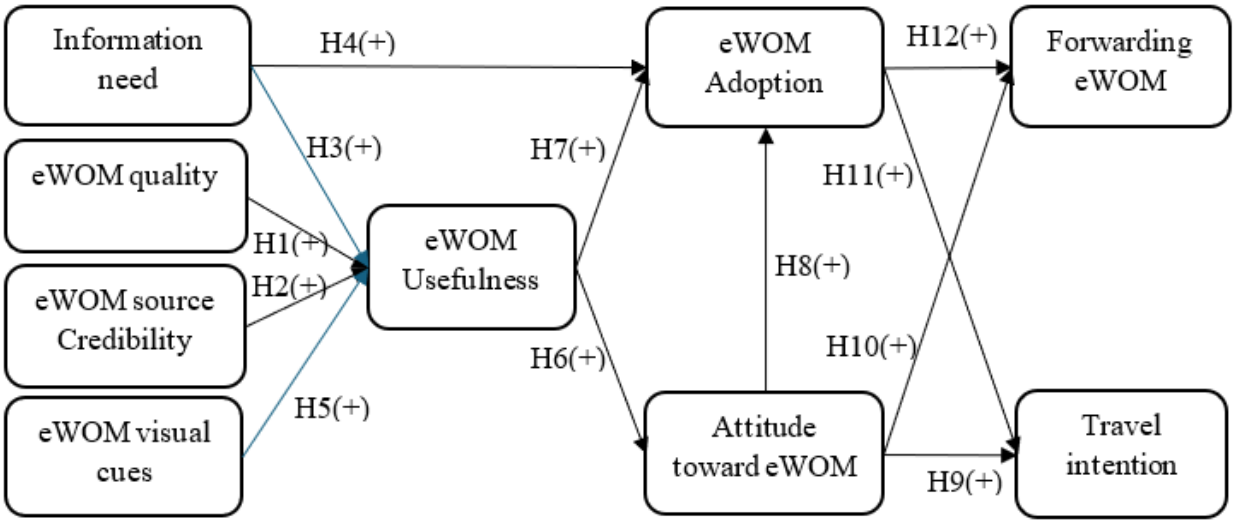

Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework

media—ensured the model's relevance and scale validity. A five-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The quantitative phase surveyed 433 travelers in Ho Chi Minh City intending to visit Da Nang, all of whom had utilized social media for destination information and shared experiences online. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 60 years. We employed convenience sampling, approaching respondents at tourist sites in Ho Chi Minh City. Survey data were cleaned and processed using SPSS 27, while SmartPLS4 was used for structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis. Quantitative analyses included Cronbach's alpha, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), scale validation, and SEM evaluation.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Preliminary quantitative study

The preliminary quantitative research was carried out in two steps, including Cronbach's Alpha and EFA analysis. The analysis results showed that Cronbach's alpha of factors: EQ (0.850), EC (0.891), IN (0.949), VC (0.940), EU (0.939), AT (0.890), EA (0.944), VI (0.948), FE (0.947), and the total variable correlation coefficient of all 36 observed variables of 9 factors is greater than 0.3. The results of the EFA analysis showed KMO = 0.881; Eigenvalues = 1.006 stop the ninth factor; the total deviation is 82.426%; the cross-loading values of the observed variables in these nine latent variables are all greater than 0.5 and converge correctly with the original proposed factors. Thus, the preliminary quantitative results show that the factors and observed variables of the factors are statistically reliable.

5.2. The major quantitative research

5.2.1. Scale evaluation results

The evaluation scales require the implementation of evaluation steps, including reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The quantitative results show that the Cronbach's Alpha on all scales is greater than 0.8, and the Composite reliability (rho_c) on all scales is greater than 0.8 (Table 1). This result confirms that the scales are intrinsically consistent. The results of the AVE mean deviation of the scales are all greater than 0.6 (Table 1). The results prove that the scale has converged. As a result, the HTMT coefficients of the scales are all less than 0.9, so the scales achieve a discriminant validity value (Table 2).

Table 1. Contruct reliability and validity - Overview

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
AT	0.891	0.910	0.925	0.756
EA	0.944	0.948	0.959	0.855
EC	0.891	0.894	0.924	0.754
EQ	0.853	0.870	0.899	0.692
EU	0.939	0.941	0.957	0.847
FE	0.947	0.950	0.962	0.862
IN	0.949	0.957	0.963	0.866
VC	0.941	0.950	0.957	0.849
VI	0.950	0.951	0.964	0.870

Table 2. Discriminant validity – Heterotrait – monotrait Ratio (HTMT) matrix

	AT	EA	EC	EQ	EU	FE	IN	VC	VI
AT									
EA	0.479								
EC	0.454	0.216							
EQ	0.240	0.344	0.175						
EU	0.713	0.440	0.439	0.361					
FE	0.518	0.455	0.350	0.287	0.506				
IN	0.312	0.397	0.327	0.174	0.399	0.339			
VC	0.257	0.278	0.294	0.197	0.402	0.309	0.624		
VI	0.580	0.544	0.432	0.359	0.540	0.688	0.428	0.348	

5.2.2. The structural equation model evaluation

We perform a collinear test of each variable before conducting a model conformance assessment. If the VIF coefficient is less than or equal to 3, no collinearity occurs between pairs of variables. The results showed that the pairs of variables all had a VIF coefficient of less than 3 (Table 3), which showed that there was no multicollinearity occurring between the pairs of variables in the study model.

The results of the path relationship test in the structure model, using the bootstrapping method with a sample size of 5,000 bootstrap templates. The results show that all P-values are less than 0.05, meaning that all impact relationships are acceptable and the impact level ranges from 0.140 to 0.659 (Table 4). The R^2 results in the study model show the degree of explanation of independent variables to dependent variables. The EU variable has R^2 (0.313), which means that EQ, EC, IN, and VC explain 31.3%; the AT variable has R^2 (0.435), which means that EU can explain 43.5%; the EA variable has R^2 (0.275), which means that IN, EU, and AT variables explain 27.5%; the VI variable has R^2 (0.389), which means that EA and AT explain 38.9%; the FE variable has R^2 (0.292), which means that EA and AT explain 29.2% (Figure 2). According to authors, $0.75 \geq R^2 \geq 0.25$ is considered acceptable. With the above result, R^2 of the dependent variables is accepted because it is greater than 0.25.

5.3. Discussion

This study confirmed the relationships between information demand and perceived usefulness of eWOM, consistent with previous findings (Cuong, 2024; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Silaban et al., 2023). Furthermore, we examined the associations between eWOM, consumer attitudes, travel intention, and eWOM forwarding behavior. The results indicate that these relationships are statistically significant, aligning with the findings of Abedi et al. (2019).

Unlike prior studies, our research uniquely establishes the link between the need for eWOM information and the acceptance of eWOM, suggesting

Table 3. Conllinearity statistics (VIF) – Inner - Model - matrix

	AT	EA	EC	EQ	EU	FE	IN	VC	VI
AT		1.776				1.243			1.243
EA						1.243			1.243
EC					1.132				
EQ					1.051				
EU	1.000	1.898							
FE									
IN		1.174			1.591				
VC					1.568				
VI									

Table 4. Results of evaluating the relationship between variables (paths)

Relationship (Hypothesis)	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values	Significant
EQ -> EU (H1)	0.233	0.234	0.042	5.604	0.000	Accept
EC -> EU (H2)	0.272	0.272	0.043	6.351	0.000	Accept
IN -> EU (H3)	0.157	0.158	0.050	3.128	0.002	Accept
IN -> EA (H4)	0.246	0.245	0.050	4.911	0.000	Accept
VC -> EU (H5)	0.173	0.171	0.053	3.247	0.001	Accept
EU -> AT (H6)	0.659	0.660	0.042	15.834	0.000	Accept
EU -> EA (H7)	0.140	0.139	0.059	2.366	0.018	Accept
AT -> EA (H8)	0.278	0.278	0.056	4.963	0.000	Accept
AT -> VI (H9)	0.388	0.388	0.049	7.998	0.000	Accept
EA -> FE (H10)	0.273	0.274	0.051	5.395	0.000	Accept
EA -> VI (H11)	0.346	0.346	0.045	7.637	0.000	Accept
AT -> FE (H12)	0.360	0.362	0.050	7.208	0.000	Accept

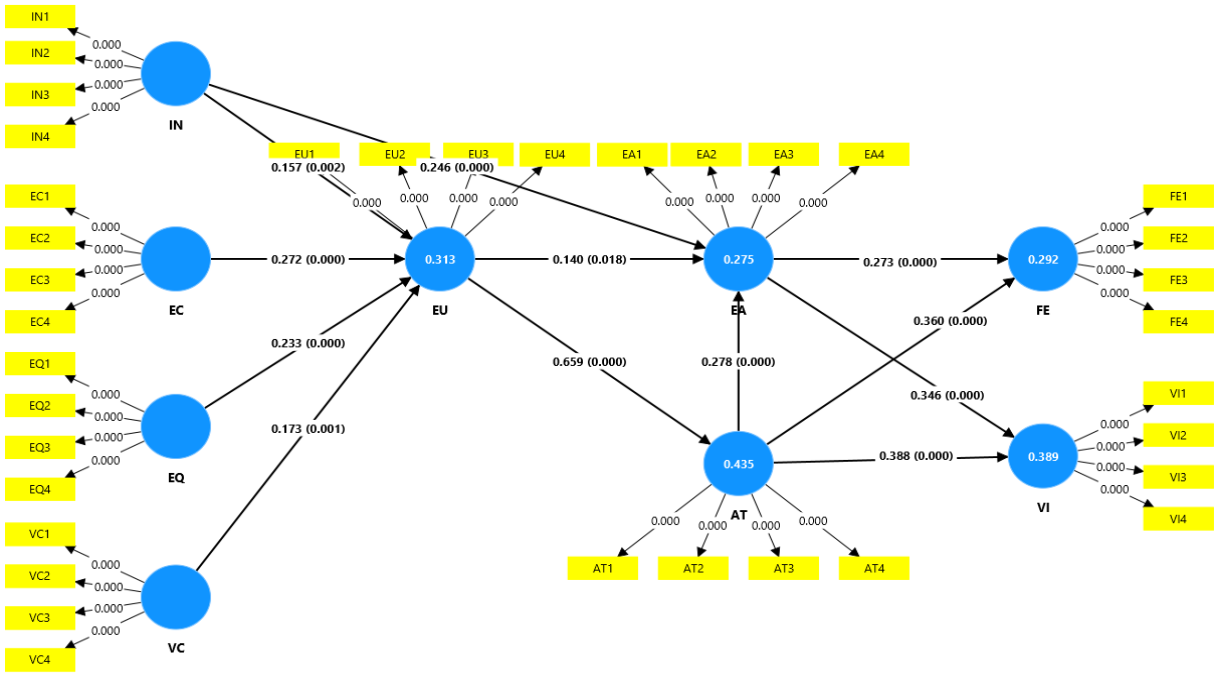

Figure 2. The Structure equation Model (SEM)

a distinct perspective compared to Cuong (2024), Erkan and Evans (2016), and Silaban et al. (2023). Additionally, our study addresses a research gap by highlighting the positive impact of visual cues on the perceived usefulness of eWOM information.

6. Conclusion

This study is grounded in the IAM, IACM, and TPB frameworks, as well as the experimental findings of Abedi et al. (2019), Cuong (2024), Erkan and Evans (2016), and Silaban et al. (2023). The results corroborate the validity of these prior studies. A key theoretical contribution of this research is the identification of a positive effect of visual information on the perceived usefulness of eWOM, a relationship not previously addressed. Additionally, the influence of information needs on eWOM adoption remains underexplored. While this study posits that information needs impact travel intentions, this relationship was not empirically examined and is recommended for future research.

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