

Understanding how customers engage with social tourism websites

Social tourism
websites

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to analyse the effect of technology acceptance variables on customer attitude and customer engagement behaviours (CEB) with social tourism websites (STWs).

Design/methodology/approach – An empirical study was carried out with 346 customers. A model was developed to analyse the relationships between CEB and their determinants. Partial least squares – structural equation modelling was used to test the model.

Findings – Customers' perceptions of enjoyment, ease of use, usefulness and trustworthiness positively influence their attitude towards STWs and their subsequent engagement behaviours [purchases, word of mouth (WOM) and referrals].

Originality/value – This study develops and empirically tests a model that analyses the impact of technology acceptance model variables on CEB, both transactional (customer purchases) and non-transactional (customer WOM, referrals and feedback), in the context of STWs.

Keywords Referrals, Tourism, WOM, Purchase, Customer engagement behaviours, Social tourism website

Paper type Research paper

摘要

研究目的 – 本论文分析研究科技tourism website behaviours pur

研究设计/方法/途径 – 研究样本为研究科技tourism website behaviours purchases LS-SEM分析验证假设模型。

研究结果 – 研究结果表明, 顾客愉快感知、易使用、有用性、以及可信度等变量对顾客社交旅游网站的态度及后续参与行为(购买、sOM、推荐)有着积极影响。

研究原创性/价值 – 本论文开发并验证分析了科技接受模型变量对顾客参与行为的影响, 包括交易性(顾客购买)以及非交易性(顾客(OM、推荐、反馈), 以社交旅游网站为背景)。

关键词 顾客参与行为、社交旅游网站、购买、WOM、推荐、旅游

文章类型: 研究型论文

1. Introduction

Social media, information sharing and user-generated content have significantly transformed the tourism and hospitality industry (Cai *et al.*, 2019; Oliveira and Casais, 2019). A consequence has been the development of *social tourism websites (STWs)*, tourism-specific social media sites that allow customers to share their travel experiences online

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(Zhang *et al.*, 2017). With dozens of STWs (Booking.com, TripAdvisor.com, etc.) competing in the market to attract users, questions are raised as to which specific features of the sites make them engaging for users and how this engagement provides value for the sites (Harrigan *et al.*, 2017). Thus, they have attracted the interest of academics as platforms on which to study customer engagement behaviours (CEB) (Diffley and McCole, 2019).

Prior research on STW-related CEB has focussed primarily on purchasing behaviour, through the analysis of online bookings (Sparks and Browning, 2011; Casaló *et al.*, 2015; Tsao *et al.*, 2015; Chan *et al.*, 2017). However, research on customer engagement (CE) has argued that focussing merely on purchasing behaviour underestimates customers (Kumar *et al.*, 2010). In addition to transactional behaviours, such as purchases, non-transactional behaviours are becoming more important (Verhoef *et al.*, 2010; Itani *et al.*, 2020). In particular, the theory of customer engagement value developed by Kumar *et al.* (2010) identified three types of non-transactional interactions through which customers indirectly add value to firms. These are customer influence, customer referrals and customer knowledge (Pansari and Kumar, 2017).

STWs provide platforms for customers to engage, for the most part, with hotels and restaurants. This is reflected in the amount of research focussed on customers' recommendations and word of mouth (WOM) about specific hotels and restaurants (Xie *et al.*, 2016; Zhang *et al.*, 2017), hotel referrals (Slivar and Bayer, 2017; Itani *et al.*, 2020) and customer feedback provided to hotels, mostly in the form of complaints (Hu *et al.*, 2019). However, few empirical studies have analysed CEB with the STWs themselves. In particular, few empirical studies have analysed customer influence, or WOM, transmitted about STWs, and to the best of our knowledge, no previous study has analysed customer referrals and customer knowledge, or feedback, about the websites. To address this gap, this study proposes and tests a model to explain CEB with STWs and their determinants.

2. Literature review

2.1 Customer engagement behaviours with social tourism websites

In the past years, STWs have become especially critical in the information search phase (Diffley and McCole, 2019), as before booking individuals can learn about previous customers' experiences shared through online reviews (Zhang *et al.*, 2017). Thus, many studies have addressed the role of online comments in customers' decision-making (Moro and Rita, 2018). Similarly, other works have focussed on those characteristics of STWs (aesthetics, website quality and ease of use) that might foster specific attitudes and behaviours, such as satisfaction and trust (Fileri *et al.*, 2015; Chen *et al.*, 2019). Previous research has also analysed the strategies adopted by companies in STWs, showing their impact on hotel ratings, eWOM and customer value (Xie *et al.*, 2016; Diffley and McCole, 2019).

Most of the studies in the tourism literature have analysed CEB towards hotel brands facilitated by social media platforms. However, comparatively few have analysed CEB with the STWs. Among these works, some have focussed on the development of scales to measure CEB in these websites (Harrigan *et al.*, 2017; Mkumbo *et al.*, 2020) and the different ways customers participate on the social platforms (bookings, content creation and search; Chan *et al.*, 2017; Lalicic and Weismayer, 2018), whereas others have examined intention to recommend these platforms or provide feedback (Fileri *et al.*, 2015; Godinho-Bilro *et al.*, 2018; Samala *et al.*, 2019). Table 1 provides an overview of these works.

Regarding the drivers of CEB, Casaló *et al.* (2010) showed that factors included in technology acceptance models (TAM), such as perceived ease of use and usefulness, improve customers' attitudes, which leads to higher intention to participate in STWs and higher purchase intentions towards their featured products and services. These authors also found that these

Article	CE variables	Findings
Casaló <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Participation, use, recommendation	Intention to participate in the travel community positively influences individuals' intention to purchase and recommend the firm's products
Sparks and Browning (2011)	Booking	Positively framed information together with numerical rating details increase booking intentions
Casaló <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Booking	Higher booking intentions emerge when the hotel appears in best hotels lists
Filieri <i>et al.</i> (2015)	WOM	Trust towards the website fosters positive WOM
Tsao <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Booking	Positive reviews are more effective than negative reviews in enhancing booking intentions
Chan <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Booking	Review valence affects hotel booking intentions; reader-reviewer demographic similarities moderate this effect
Harrigan <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Identification, absorption, interaction	CE determines the behavioural intention of loyalty
Godinho-Bilro <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Cognitive processing, affection, activation	Information/content and visual appeal explain CE; interactive features determine affection and activation, which predict brand advocacy
Lalicic and Weismayer (2018)	Use, recommendation	Intention to recommend and use a social platform depends on previous service quality evaluations and on having social and authentic experiences
Ruiz-Mafe <i>et al.</i> (2018)	WOM	Social presence predicts WOM; social identity moderates this effect
Correia-Loureiro <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Cognitive processing, affection, activation	Pleasure and arousal predict CE
Chen <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Booking	Impulse buying is explained by appealing websites, service quality and effective tourism websites that reduce customer time and effort in searching
Samala <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Enthusiasm, attention, interaction, absorption, identification	CE is positively related to participation in social sites (WOM and giving feedback) and to brand loyalty
Mkumbo <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Affection, absorption, interaction	CE explains participation continuance

Table 1.
CE with STWs

factors predict customer intention to recommend STWs to others by creating more positive attitudes towards the sites. Similarly, some works have shown that other website-related factors, such as information content and visual appeal and customers' perceptions of trust, are pivotal for predicting customers' intention to participate on, and recommend, the site (Ruiz-Mafe *et al.*, 2018; Godinho-Bilro *et al.*, 2018; Correia-Loureiro *et al.*, 2019).

2.2 Hypotheses development

The TAM, which has been widely used to analyse users' attitudes and behavioural intentions in tourism (Cai *et al.*, 2019; Pourfakhimi *et al.*, 2019), proposes that attitude towards new technologies is contingent on their perceived ease of use and usefulness (Davis, 1989). In particular, the TAM suggests that technologies that are easy to use are perceived as more useful (Davis, 1993; Venkatesh, 2000; Ayeh *et al.*, 2013), and both factors promote a more favourable attitude towards the use of technologies (Davis, 1993). Perceptions of ease of use and usefulness positively influence individuals' attitudes towards the use of tourism platforms for travel planning (Di Pietro *et al.*, 2012; Ayeh *et al.*, 2013) and towards participation in travel communities (Casaló *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, usefulness affects individuals' attitudes towards the advice provided by previous reviewers (Casaló *et al.*, 2011). Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1. Perceived ease of use has a positive effect on customer attitude.
- H2. Perceived usefulness has a positive effect on customer attitude.
- H3. Perceived ease of use has a positive effect on perceived usefulness.

Davis *et al.* (1992) found that enjoyment is also important in motivating the use of information technology. If the use of the technology provides enjoyable experiences, individuals will be more likely to develop favourable feelings towards the technology (Di Pietro *et al.*, 2012). Perceived enjoyment has been found to influence customer attitude towards social networks (Di Pietro *et al.*, 2012; Hussein and Hassan, 2017), blogging platforms (Hsu and Lin, 2008) and tourism social media (Ayeh *et al.*, 2013). In addition to its impact on customers' attitudes, perceived enjoyment positively influences perceptions of ease of use (Venkatesh, 2000); in other words, customers who enjoy STWs tend to find them easy to use (Ayeh *et al.*, 2013). Therefore:

- H4. Perceived enjoyment has a positive effect on customer attitude.
- H5. Perceived enjoyment has a positive effect on perceived ease of use.

The success of any social media may be highly dependent on the trustworthiness of the information contained on that media (Hussein and Hassan, 2017). In tourism, some studies have shown that users' comments influence other consumers' travel planning (Ayeh *et al.*, 2013; Kim *et al.*, 2018). Thus, users will assess STWs positively if the comments posted on them are reliable (Casaló *et al.*, 2011; Ayeh *et al.*, 2013). In addition, if customers perceive that the information provided in STWs is trustworthy, they will also perceive that they are useful for decision-making (Casaló *et al.*, 2011; Ayeh *et al.*, 2013). Thus:

- H6. Perceived trustworthiness has a positive effect on customer attitude.
- H7. Perceived trustworthiness has a positive effect on perceived usefulness.

CE has recently gained attention from academic researchers, especially in services (Kumar *et al.*, 2019) and social media settings (Carlson *et al.*, 2019; Hinson *et al.*, 2019). As the CE

literature is still in an emergent stage, the operationalisation of the construct is still evolving. Although researchers agree that CE is multidimensional (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Kumar and Pansari, 2016), its conceptualisation varies. In her seminal paper, Hollebeek (2011, p. 555) defined it as “*the level of a customer’s cognitive, emotional and behavioural investment in specific brand interactions*”. This conceptualisation of CE, which includes cognitive, emotional and behavioural components, is one of the most commonly accepted (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Hinson *et al.*, 2019). Subsequent conceptualisations of CE have suggested that its dimensions are: identification, interaction, absorption, enthusiasm, affection and attention (Harrigan *et al.*, 2017; Samala *et al.*, 2019; Mkumbo *et al.*, 2020). In an alternative approach, other researchers have posited that the CE concept should be limited to the customer’s behavioural manifestations (Pansari and Kumar, 2017), and that cognitive and emotional aspects are its drivers. In this line, Kumar *et al.* (2010) defined CE as *active interactions of a customer with a firm, with prospects and with other customers, whether they are transactional or non-transactional in nature* (p. 297). Transactional interactions include customer purchases, whereas non-transactional interactions include customer influence, customer referrals and customer knowledge (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). This perspective, which has received increased recognition in recent research (Pansari and Kumar, 2017; Carlson *et al.*, 2019; Itani *et al.*, 2020), is especially suitable for examining the CEB that create value for companies.

Customer purchases are transactional interactions that have a direct effect on firms (Kumar and Pansari, 2016). In STWs, each time a customer makes a reservation the site earns a commission from the hotel or restaurant. In addition to purchases, customers engage with firms through non-transactional interactions that indirectly contribute to their sales results, as in the case of customer influence behaviour (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Customer influence describes the impact customers make when they voluntarily generate WOM about firms (Kumar *et al.*, 2010). Customer influence exercised through WOM has been reported as a very effective persuasion channel that can contribute to companies’ reputations (Itani *et al.*, 2020) and as a cost-effective means to market tourism and hospitality products/services (Cai *et al.*, 2019). In addition to organic WOM, companies also benefit from customer referrals, firm-initiated, incentivised programmes that reward existing customers for bringing new customers (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Customer referrals indirectly contribute to company performance, as they attract new customers who would not be attracted through traditional marketing channels (Kumar *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, customer referrals are associated with higher margins and are more cost-effective than other marketing activities, such as advertising (Itani *et al.*, 2020). Finally, customer knowledge is feedback provided to firms by customers based on their personal knowledge and experiences with firms (Itani *et al.*, 2020). This feedback can help firms make their processes more efficient and their offerings more attractive to customers (Kumar *et al.*, 2010). It is also useful in the generation of ideas for innovations and new products (Pansari and Kumar, 2017).

Based on the theory of reasoned action and the hierarchy of effects (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), which provide support for the connection between customer attitude and behavioural intentions, it is expected that STW users who have positive attitudes towards them will engage with them. Hence:

H8. Customer attitude has a positive effect on customer engagement.

Figure 1 shows the proposed model.

3. Methodology

Data were gathered through a personal survey aimed at STW users. The fieldwork was carried out during May 2018 by a market research company. The data were collected

through non-probabilistic quota sampling with age quotas based on the respondents' year of birth (total range: 1965–2000). The necessary condition to participate in the study was to have booked a hotel through a social tourism website in the previous 12 months. The respondents were randomly approached offline, and they had to indicate which STW they had used most recently; this constituted the basis for responding to the rest of the questionnaire. The sample was of 350 individuals, with 346 valid responses. The final sample consisted of 212 women and 134 men. Regarding age, 115 individuals were born between 1965 and 1979, 117 between 1980 and 1995 and 144 between 1996 and 2000.

The questionnaire items were measured on 10-point Likert-type scales. The composition of the scales and the references to prior works are shown in Table 2. Information about means and standard deviations are also included. To avoid common method bias, two statistical procedures were used. A non-related question was included in the questionnaire, and it was verified that it was not correlated to the scales. Similarly, a full collinearity test based on variance inflation factors (VIFs) was implemented. As the estimations showed that the VIF values were lower than 3.3, there is no evidence to suggest the presence of common method bias (Kock, 2015).

4. Results

Partial least squares (PLS) with SmartPLS 3.0 (Ringle et al., 2015) was used to test the model. PLS is more suitable than other structural equation modelling methods when the study is focussed on prediction and theory development (Reinartz et al., 2009) and when the model includes second-order constructs (Hair et al., 2011).

The model was estimated in a two-stage approach (Ringle et al., 2015). First, the reliability and validity of the research constructs were assessed (Table 2). All standardised factor loadings are above 0.7 and statistically significant at 0.01, which indicates that individual item reliability is adequate. Moreover, all constructs were internally consistent as their composite reliabilities were greater than 0.7 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). The constructs also meet the convergent validity criteria, as the average variance extracted (AVE) values are above 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Finally, discriminant validity is also supported. In all cases, the square root of the AVE for any two constructs is greater than the inter-construct correlations (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) (Table 3).

After evaluating the measurement of the first-order constructs, we included the latent scores of the purchases, WOM, referrals and feedback as indicators of CEB and re-estimated the model. We evaluated the model by analysing the significance of the variables. Customer feedback was removed from the construct, as it showed a non-significant weight and a low loading, and the model was re-estimated (Table 4). Collinearity was assessed based on the VIF values. The VIF values range from 1.28 to 2.68, all lower than 5, which suggests that multicollinearity is not a threat in this study (Hair et al., 2011).

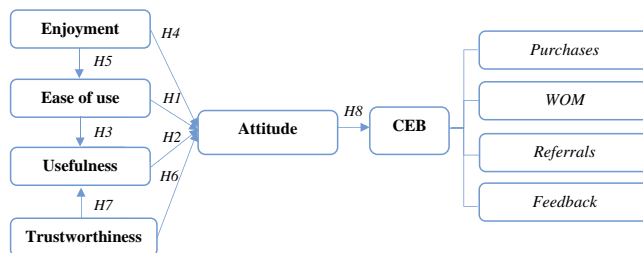


Figure 1. Proposed model

Social tourism websites

Constructs, items and sources	Mean	SD	Factor loading	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
<i>Ease of use (Ayehe et al., 2013)</i>					
Overall, I find it easy to use	7.90	1.59	0.895	0.923	0.751
Easy to use for finding the information needed	7.63	1.54	0.918	–	–
Easy to use for finding content to plan my trips	7.31	1.54	0.812	–	–
Easy to learn how to use	6.93	1.94	0.839	–	–
<i>Usefulness (Casaló et al., 2015)</i>					
It is useful for resolving doubts	6.45	1.79	0.768	0.859	0.671
It helps me to plan my trips in a more efficient way	7.06	1.78	0.869	–	–
It is useful for booking hotels	8.15	1.54	0.819	–	–
<i>Enjoyment (Hsu and Lin, 2008)</i>					
While using it, I experience pleasure	6.95	1.74	0.877	0.899	0.749
It is an entertaining website	6.21	1.79	0.877	–	–
I have fun using it	5.54	2.06	0.842	–	–
<i>Trustworthiness (Casaló et al., 2015)</i>					
I think that the information provided is sincere and honest	6.92	1.70	0.941	0.928	0.812
I think I can rely on the information provided in it	6.92	1.69	0.944	–	–
It does not include false information	6.40	2.00	0.813	–	–
<i>Attitude (Ferraro et al., 2013)</i>					
I like it	7.01	1.78	0.900	0.932	0.821
I have a favourable opinion towards it	7.27	1.66	0.938	–	–
It is a good tourism website	7.78	1.57	0.879	–	–
<i>CEB</i>					
<i>Purchases (Kim et al., 2009)</i>					
When I need to book a hotel, I will use this website as my first option	6.91	2.25	0.929	0.937	0.881
I am likely to book hotels through this tourism website	7.45	1.81	0.948	–	–
<i>WOM (Bravo et al., 2019)</i>					
I am likely to say good things about it	7.59	1.81	0.934	0.960	0.890
I would recommend this website to my family	7.56	1.92	0.958	–	–
If my friends were looking for a hotel, I would tell them to use this tourism website	7.48	1.93	0.937	–	–
<i>Referrals (Kumar and Pansari, 2016)</i>					
I would invite others to use this website if I receive referral benefits (points, money, discounts) for it	7.19	2.91	0.963	0.967	0.908
I would encourage other people to use this website not only for its value, but for the referral incentives	7.00	2.88	0.950	–	–
I would like to obtain referral incentives to invite friends and family to use this website	7.69	2.77	0.945	–	–
<i>Feedback (Kumar and Pansari, 2016)</i>					
I would provide feedback to the website about my experiences	4.32	3.05	0.904	0.938	0.836
I would provide suggestions to the website about their current services	4.49	2.87	0.926	–	–
I would provide suggestions to the website for developing new services	4.25	2.95	0.913	–	–

Table 2.
Scales, descriptive statistics and reflective measurement model results

The structural model was then tested. It includes the control variables: gender, age, self-efficacy in using the internet for booking and previous use of reward systems. The path significance levels were estimated using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resampling iterations. The model accounted for 66.4% of variation in attitude towards the social tourism website and 63.5% of variation in CEB. The predictive relevance of the model was assessed through the Stone–Geisser test. The results showed that the Q^2 values of this test for the dependent variables were positive. Finally, as the standardised root mean square residual showed a value of 0.06, lower than the threshold of 0.08 (Hu and Bentler, 1998), we can conclude that the model has good fit.

The results of the structural model are presented in Table 5. All the hypotheses are supported. As proposed in *H1*, the path coefficient is positive and significant, which leads us to accept the positive influence of perceived ease of use on customer attitude towards the STW ($\beta = 0.297$; $t = 5.852$). The results also indicate that the customer’s attitude towards the STW is determined by his/her perceptions of the usefulness of the site ($\beta = 0.143$; $t = 2.370$), supporting *H2*. Similarly, perceptions of ease of use positively determine perceptions of usefulness ($\beta = 0.577$; $t = 14.086$), which supports *H3*. Similarly, enjoyment was found to have a significant and positive influence on customer attitude ($\beta = 0.121$; $t = 2.605$) and perceived ease of use ($\beta = 0.567$; $t = 14.650$), supporting *H4* and *H5*. Moreover, the results showed that the perceived trustworthiness of the tourism website has a positive and significant influence on customer attitude towards it ($\beta = 0.383$; $t = 8.040$) and on perceptions of the usefulness of the website ($\beta = 0.277$; $t = 6.348$), which supports *H6* and *H7*. The results also showed that customer attitude towards the STW was positively related to CEB ($\beta = 0.583$; $t = 9.700$). Therefore, *H8* is supported. Finally, the mediation role of attitude was tested (Appendix).

5. Discussion

5.1 Conclusions

Recently, there has been increasing interest in STWs (Diffley and McCole, 2019), in parallel with a call for research to investigate CEB (Harrigan et al., 2017). In response to this call, this study demonstrates that TAM variables are key in explaining CEB. In line with previous research (Ayehe et al., 2013; Filieri et al., 2015), this study has demonstrated that feelings of trust towards STWs are key for developing positive attitudes and subsequent engagement. In addition, this study has shown that extrinsic motivators (ease of use and usefulness) are more important than intrinsic motivators (enjoyment) for developing positive attitudes

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Ease of use	0.867	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
2. Usefulness	0.756	0.819	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
3. Enjoyment	0.568	0.596	0.865	–	–	–	–	–	–
4. Trustworthiness	0.639	0.647	0.562	0.901	–	–	–	–	–
5. Attitude	0.718	0.688	0.591	0.733	0.906	–	–	–	–
6. Purchases	0.592	0.566	0.476	0.521	0.637	0.939	–	–	–
7. WOM	0.641	0.590	0.523	0.579	0.768	0.739	0.943	–	–
8. Referrals	0.336	0.331	0.257	0.252	0.376	0.219	0.441	0.953	–
9. Feedback	0.230	0.229	0.301	0.208	0.274	0.224	0.291	0.362	0.914

Table 3. Discriminant validity results

Note: Values on the diagonal are the square root of the AVE. Off-diagonal elements are the correlations among constructs

towards them. Although previous research has suggested that individuals may behave based on both factors (Davis *et al.*, 1992), intrinsic factors might better explain attitude towards websites with hedonic purposes than attitude towards websites with utilitarian purposes, such as STWs, where customers seek to achieve specific goals. In addition, the results revealed that the impact of customers' perceptions on CEB is mainly mediated by customer attitude towards the STW. Thus, for users to be engaged with a specific website, it is important that they are involved with it and develop a positive attitude towards it.

5.2 Theoretical implications

Firstly, this study contributes to the literature, as it is the first to apply the CE theory of Kumar *et al.* (2010) according to the authors' knowledge, in the context of STWs to simultaneously analyse customer purchases, customer WOM, customer referrals and customer feedback. Secondly, the previous literature has not fully identified which factors might influence these behaviours. Research analysing the antecedents of CEB with STWs has focussed mainly on the characteristics of reviews, such as review valence and quantity (Sparks and Browning, 2011; Tsao *et al.*, 2015; Chan *et al.*, 2017). The present study advances current knowledge by providing a new perspective from the TAM (Davis, 1989), focussing on platform characteristics (ease of use, usefulness, enjoyment and trustworthiness). Thirdly, most studies on CE in tourism have been undertaken from the perspective of hotels (Xie *et al.*, 2016; Slivar and Bayer, 2017). This study bridges this gap by developing and testing a model that analyses CEB with STWs. Finally, this study also contributes to the literature on CE, as it provides empirical support, in a new context, for the conceptualisation of CE proposed by Kumar *et al.* (2010).

5.3 Practical implications

The results of the study might help STWs in their resource allocation strategies by identifying which factors drive better customer attitude. Customer attitude may be dependent on the perceived trustworthiness of the information provided in the STW. If users

Variable	Items	Loadings	<i>t</i> -value	Weights	<i>t</i> -value	VIF
CEB	Purchases	0.84	24.02	0.28	3.84	2.27
	WOM	0.98	100.72	0.74	10.34	2.68
	Referrals	0.50	8.22	0.11	1.99	1.28

Table 4.
Formative measurement model results

Hypotheses	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i> -value
H1: Ease of use → Attitude	0.297	5.852***
H2: Usefulness → Attitude	0.143	2.370**
H3: Ease of use → Usefulness	0.577	14.086***
H4: Enjoyment → Attitude	0.121	2.605***
H5: Enjoyment → Ease of use	0.567	14.650***
H6: Trustworthiness → Attitude	0.383	8.040***
H7: Trustworthiness → Usefulness	0.277	6.348***
H8: Attitude → CEB	0.583	9.700***

Table 5.
Structural model results

Notes: ***p* < 0.05; ****p* < 0.01

detect fake comments or have suspicions about the services offered, their trust in the STW will diminish and their attitude towards it will become more negative. These results are in line with the work by [Fileri et al. \(2015\)](#), who emphasised the importance of customer trust as a key performance indicator and proposed the use of software to promptly detect promotional or fake reviews. For instance, Booking.com sends an email to customers who book a hotel through its website, asking for their opinions. Thus, only customers who have real experiences are allowed to create content. Besides trustworthiness, ease of use may be an important lever for improving CEB with STWs. These platforms offer a lot of information, which may be overwhelming for some users. It is very important to recognise that users positively value simplicity and that tools that make a platform easier to use will be likely to enhance CEB. They should also focus on providing enjoyable experiences to their users to improve perceptions of ease of use. For instance, TripAdvisor.com has introduced gamification elements, that is, points, levels and badges, to provide its users with more enjoyable experiences. Finally, the results should alert managers to the importance of improving the usability of their STWs to reduce the time and effort required to book trips.

5.4 Limitations and future research

The first limitation of this study is that it uses cross-sectional data; thus, we cannot analyse CEB in the long term. This is an interesting avenue for future research that could be addressed through longitudinal studies. Further research might also examine the proposed relationships in other customer segments, such as business travellers. Finally, future research should examine in depth the role of customer feedback in the context of STWs. Few customers were willing to give feedback to the platform; thus, this dimension cannot be a constituent part of the CEB construct. More research should be undertaken to identify the best approach to measure CEB.

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Relations	Direct effects		Indirect effects		Mediation
	β	<i>t</i> -value	β	<i>t</i> -value	
Ease of use → CEB	0.178	2.781**	0.173	5.075***	Partial
Usefulness → CEB	0.067	0.973	0.083	2.263**	Full
Enjoyment → CEB	0.075	1.598	0.071	2.498**	Full
Trustworthiness → CEB	-0.032	0.543	0.223	6.070***	Full
Note: ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$					

Table A1.
Mediation effects
through attitude

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