

# The Role by Electronic Word-of-Mouth (EWOM) Influencing Trust and Brand Image in Online Hotel Booking Among Thai Generation Z

บทบาทของการสื่อสารแบบปากต่อปากบนอินเทอร์เน็ตที่มีอิทธิพลต่อความไว้วางใจและภาพลักษณ์ของตราสินค้าในการจองโรงแรมของกลุ่มคนไทยเจเนอเรชั่น Z

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## Abstract

This research paper examines the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) influencing trust and brand image in online hotel booking among Thai generation Z in Thailand. Data were collected by using questionnaire-based surveys. The participants in this study were 420 respondents, who had experiences in online hotel reservations within one year. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was applied to propose the conceptual model by considering the effect of eWOM on trust and brand image among Generation Z. The research finding revealed that eWOM has a significant positive effect on trust and brand image in online hotel booking among Thai generation Z. Specifically, this could be due to the fact that Thai generation Z as consumers are likely to trust online reviews and choose the hotel with a positive brand image.

**Keywords:** *Electronic-Word-of-Mouth, Trust, Brand Image, Hotel Reservation, Thai Generation-Z*

## บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ศึกษาเกี่ยวกับอิทธิพลของการสื่อสารแบบปากต่อปากบนอินเทอร์เน็ตที่มีต่อความไว้วางใจ และภาพลักษณ์ของตราสินค้าในการจองโรงแรมของกลุ่มคนไทยเจเนอเรชั่น Z ในประเทศไทย เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลโดยใช้

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แบบสอบถามกับผู้ตอบแบบสอบถาม 420 คน ที่มีประสบการณ์ในการจองโรงแรมช่องทางแบบออนไลน์ภายในระยะเวลาไม่เกิน 1 ปี วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยใช้โมเดลสมการโครงสร้างเพื่อคำนวณแนวคิดอิทธิพลของ การสื่อสารแบบปากต่อปากบนอินเทอร์เน็ตที่มีต่อความไว้วางใจ และภาพลักษณ์ของตราสินค้าในการจอง โรงแรมของกลุ่มคนไทยเจเนอเรชั่น Z ผลการศึกษาพบว่า การสื่อสารแบบปากต่อปากบนอินเทอร์เน็ต มีผลต่อความไว้วางใจ และภาพลักษณ์ของตราสินค้าในการจองโรงแรมของกลุ่มคนไทยเจเนอเรชั่น Z โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งกับผู้บริโภคกลุ่มคนไทยเจเนอเรชั่น Z มีแนวโน้มที่จะไว้วางใจต่อรีวิวออนไลน์ และเลือก โรงแรมที่มีภาพลักษณ์ที่ดี

**คำสำคัญ:** การสื่อสารแบบปากต่อปากบนอินเทอร์เน็ต ความไว้วางใจ ภาพลักษณ์ของตราสินค้า การจอง โรงแรม กลุ่มคนไทยเจเนอเรชั่น Z

## Introduction

The Internet became important in our daily life, as did online. In 2018, Thai users spent time on the Internet at an average of 10 hours and 5 minutes per day, which increased from the previous year of 3 hours 41 minutes (Electronic Transactions Development Agency (ETDA), 2018). With the increase in Internet usage of Thai people, they have expanded to use various networking platforms (Hu, Ha, Mo, & Xu, 2014). They can get to connect with each other around the world through the Internet channels, which are websites, social networks, or online communities (Hussain, Ahmed, Jafar, Rabnawaz, & Jianzhou, 2017). Nonetheless, there are several online channels created by many consumers, who give information about products or services. Those channels allow people to communicate and get information, such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and mobile applications (Rui, Liu, & Whinston, 2013).

The content that is shared or generated by customers to others on the Internet is defined as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), or a statement that can be both negative and positive reviews created by customers who used a product or service, which included online reviews

via cyberspace. (Ayeh, Au, & Law, 2013; Burgess, Sellitto, Cox, & Buultjens, 2011). Therefore, consumers normally need to evaluate products or services before creating a decision by gathering information from others; they rely on the Internet such as comments or recommendation from other users (Gottschalk & Mafael, 2017; Grönroos, 1990; Ladhari & Michaud, 2015; Park & Lee, 2009). In addition, it is important to understand the eWOM because it is useful as an Internet marketing tool. It may help E-commerce to develop their online services and prevent any risk that may harm the businesses (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008).

The tourism industry is a very important factor for Thailand because, according to the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Thailand has received more than a thousand million baht per year in the tourism industry (Chulaphan & Barahona, 2018). However, in 2019, Association of Thai Travel Agents reported the decreasing number of inbound tourists from several major countries including China, Japan, the UK, and France (Worrachaddejchai, 2019).

There are potential risks in tourism businesses such as emotional risk and tourist risk perception on hospitality choices, which affected consumer's

purchase intentions (Wong & Yeh, 2009). Those risks involved the inability to empirically measure hospitality services due to their nature as intangible goods (Lewis & Chamber, 2000). Besides, hospitality industry is highly competitive. Especially when online technology came in place (Litvin et al., 2008). Since the electronic commerce is considered a powerful tool in tourism business this paper needs to explore an electronic commerce in the tourist sector in Thailand.

There is a massive group of Internet users called Generation Z. The people of this generation are younger travelers, who are seeking for authentic travel experience and shareable adventures (Skinner, Sarpong, & White, 2018). Thus, they are important in the current tourism market in terms of their behavior and attitudes toward the Internet (Issa & Isaias, 2016). Also, this generation is the members of various networks, which differ from other generations (i.e., Generation X, Generation Y) in their expectations as consumers (Priporas, Stylos, & Fotiadis, 2017).

The generation Z's concept was initiated by Ozkan and Solmaz (2015), who studied the social life of generation Z to observe what impacts their social and individual life. Furthermore, several marketers realized the importance of Generation Z as they were estimated to soon become the largest consumer population (Business Insider, 2019).

Most previous research papers have attempted to study the factors that can influence eWOM adoption through popular theory models such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Acceptant model (IACM), and Technology acceptant model (TAM). However, the context of social marketing needs to be developed

(Prasad, Gupta, & Totala, 2017). The theory of social sensitivity stated that people can be sensitized by social media and eWOM. The model has been shown in previous studies that were developed to test social media, eWOM, trust, and purchasing decision involvement (Prasad et al., 2017). Beyond the previous studies on social sensitivity, this study is extending the sensitivity in the context of online hotel booking by adding a new dimension of brand image to the theory.

To consider the above, the purpose of this paper is to solve and create a model of the eWOM roles in influencing trust and brand image in online hotel booking among Thai generation Z. Accordingly, the first research question is: What are the roles of eWOM in influencing trust and brand image? Several previous studies suggested that generation Z has high purchasing power (Priporas et al., 2017). This led to the second research question: How is an acceptance of electronic word-of-mount among Thai generation Z in the online hotel booking?

## Literature Review

### 1. Generation Z

Generation Z is defined as people who were born during 1995 - 2010 (Goh & Lee, 2018). Some paper explored that generation Z is familiar with technology as they have been using the Internet since their birth (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015). They are the first generation who is able to use the World Wide Web. Also, they were born in a digital world that they live in online environments, are members of various online communities, and actively access to their favorite brands in an electronic environment (Bernstein, 2015; Priporas et al., 2017).

The past studied asserted that Generation Z is also called 'Internet generation' of which people are more competent in using Internet via electronic devices such as computers and mobile phones (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015). Hence, they spend their time at an average of 9 hours per day on their smartphones (Shatto & Erwin, 2016). Relevant paper reported that generation Z characteristic is likely to take fewer risks, be cautious, and be suspicious (Twenge, 2017). Moreover, Generation Z is a young people, who are seeking technology experiences, as they spend their time on smartphones every single day and other technologies for online shopping (Bernstein, 2015; Latina & Docherty, 2014).

In the area of tourism, most of Generation Z use online channels to find information needed to make a reservation and make a buying decision. Also, they are becoming important challenges in the tourist sector as they considered online reviews more reliable than information provided by operators or product/service providers (Monaco, 2018). For these reasons, it is important for marketers to understand Generation Z so that they will be able to position their products or services to targeted individuals (Priporas et al., 2017).

## 2. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)

Several studies found that word-of-mouth is relevant to market actions as customers to customer communication is highly credible and persuasive (Reimer & Benkenstein, 2016; Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009). Some papers show that word-of-mouth has become very important in terms of online communication.

With today's world, the Internet is getting prominent as a new marketing channel over traditional channels, and it has become wide open for everyone to get access to comments,

posts, or shares existing on Internet (Angulo, Ripple, & Halko, 2016). Some papers found that Internet is available for long periods with unlimited access (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004).

The past research defined eWOM as the pros or cons of online content about products or brands, which is created by customers and made it for other customers using the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Several researchers agreed that consumers engage in eWOM in order to share their self-image, to help other people, and to seek benefits through online channels (Cheung & Lee, 2012).

Thus, studying eWOM might lead to many benefits as marketers can prepare to prevent negative eWOM before it gets worse. Also, it can guide marketers to focus on valuable tools in order to lead customers to start positive eWOM (Erkan, 2015).

## 3. Trust

The previous research defined trust as a psychological propensity to have confidence in someone or something, which affected the individual's decision-making styles (Glanville & Paxton, 2007; Kenning, 2008). An earlier study showed that trust is influenced by factors such as experience, information, and other people (Hallikainen & Laukkana, 2018). See-To and Ho (2014) showed that potential consumers normally trust in eWOM in order to make a decision. Furthermore, trust in eWOM has increased consumer confidence and reduced the fear toward the online environment (Awad & Ragowsky, 2008). In addition, consumers have trusted in eWOM source rather than the information created by marketers (Yoo & Gretzel, 2009).

Moreover, there are several papers confirming that trust in eWOM gives advice and useful information, which impacts consumers to follow online advice (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalíu, 2011). Some researchers, such as McKnight and Choudhury (2006) supported that trusting beliefs can lead to consumers' willingness to buy a product or service. Previous research papers also found that eWOM influences online market places (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub 2003; See-To et al., 2014).

#### 4. Brand image

Brand image is defined as the mental picture in consumers' minds, which included symbolic meaning and attributes of the product and service (Bibby, 2011; Chinomona, 2016; Salinas & Pérez, 2009). In the same way, brand image is represented by consumers' perceptions about the brand associations (Cretu & Brodie, 2007).

Some research study revealed that brand image is a brand characteristic, or what consumers think about the brand (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Keller, 1998). The previous papers about brand image defined that brand image is a perception, which reflected a brand on consumers or customers' memory (Lee & Tan, 2003). Furthermore, brand image consisted of the attributes and benefits' features combined with a brand (Webster & Keller, 2004).

Thus, brand image links to consumer perceptions, which make brand image become an important role for marketers to understand

(Mudambi, Doyle, & Wong, 1997; Shankar, Azar, & Fuller, 2008). The brand image also plays an important role in the evaluation of product/service and a greater brand image refers to a higher perceived price (Grewal, Krishnan, Baker, & Borin, 1998). Therefore, brand image refers to consumers' views from their self-image, which reflected a product or service's attributes. The study of Aghekyan-Simonian (2012)'s showed that brand image helps the consumers to make a decision to purchase a product/service.

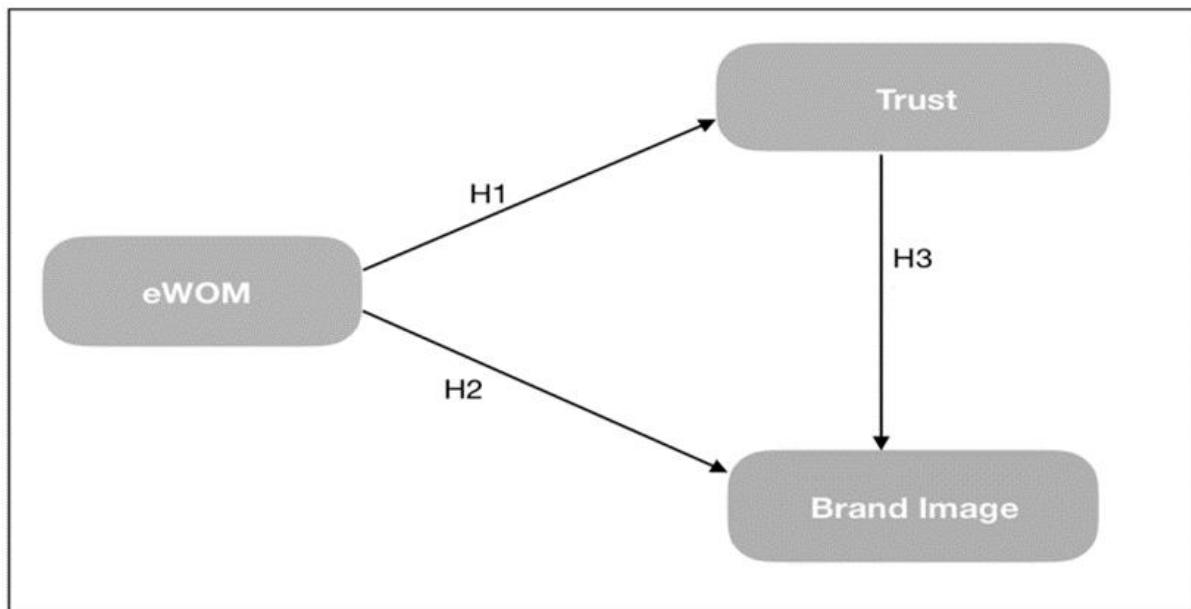
Hence, brand image is an important factor in the hospitality industry that influences the elements in services (Lahap, Ramli, Said, Radzi, & Zain, 2016). A good brand image will make consumers have a greater intention to do online hotel reservation (Lien, Wen, Huang, & Wu, 2015). For these reasons, the researchers decided to examine the roles of eWOM influencing trust and brand image in Thai culture.

#### Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

H1: Perceived electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has a significant direct influence on trust in online hotel reservation.

H2: Perceived electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has a significant direct influence on brand image in the online hotel reservation.

H3: Trust in eWOM has a direct influence on brand image in online hotel reservation.



**Figure 1** Conceptual model

## Research Methodology

### 1. Population and sample

The participants in this study consisted of Bangkok residents in Thailand, who are university students. The researchers applied two key criteria of Thai Generation Z (age and online hotel booking experience) as adopted from the paper of Priporas et al. (2017)'s to choose the sample. Firstly, the subjects whose birth year was between 1995 and 2003, or who are 16-25 years old, were selected. Secondly, initial screening questions were asked to filter out disqualified persons. Those questions are "have you had experiences in hotel online booking?" and "In the past year, have you booked hotel via online channels?". The sample was selected using a convenience sampling method.

The researchers distributed 550 questionnaires to the selected sample of Thai generation Z. After excluding the incomplete responses, 420 completed questionnaires were achieved for further analysis, with the response rate of 76.36 percent from those who agreed to participate.

As a general rule, the overall sample size is more than the suggested sample size of 100-200 while the desired ratio is 5-10 times the number of items for reliable results in structural equation modeling (SEM) (Hair, Anderson, Babin, & Black, 2010; Kline, 2011).

### 2. Instrument development and pre-test

The measurement used a five-point Likert scale format and the respondents rated them from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items on the questionnaire were adapted from previous studies (see Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4).

**Table 1** The related research questions and dimensionality of eWOM

Dimension	No	Symbol	Measurement	Source
Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)	E1	eWOM1	I often read other tourists' online travel reviews to know what hotels' advantages.	Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012
	E2	eWOM2	To make sure I choose the right hotel, I often read other tourists' online travel reviews.	
	E3	eWOM3	I often consult other tourists' online travel reviews to help choose an attractive hotel.	
	E4	eWOM4	I frequently gather information from tourists' online travel reviews before I travel to a certain hotel.	
	E5	eWOM5	When I choose a hotel, tourists' online travel reviews make me confident in booking the hotel.	

**Table 2** The related research questions and dimensionality of trust

Dimension	No	Symbol	Measurement	Source
Trust (TRU)	E6	TRU1	Using the Internet has been a good experience for me personally.	Connolly and Bannister, 2007; Harris and Goode, 2004; Chinomona, 2016
	E7	TRU2	I get useful information through online channels.	
	E8	TRU3	Online review is secure and reliable.	
	E9	TRU4	It is easy for me to trust a person/thing online.	
	E10	TRU5	Online review is honest and true.	

**Table 3** The related research questions and dimensionality of brand image

Dimension	No	Symbol	Measurement	Source
Brand image (BI)	E11	BI1	The hotel brand is reliable.	Lien, Wen, Huang, and Wu, 2015; Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012
	E12	BI2	The hotel brand is attractive.	
	E13	BI3	The hotel brand is pleasing.	
	E14	BI4	The hotel brand is a social status symbol.	
	E15	BI5	The hotel brand has a good reputation.	

The questionnaires were pre-tested with 30 sets of data (reliability test) by using the Cronbach's alpha analysis. The measurement yielded the Cronbach's alpha coefficients ( $\alpha$ ) between 0.868-0.928 (Table 4), which were over the acceptable level of 0.70-0.79 (Cronbach & Shavelson, 2004), and hence the questionnaire was considered to have good reliability. Moreover, the questionnaire was checked for the precise content validity by experts to assure the measurement items encompassed the research

objectives posted in this paper. The questions passed the validity criteria stated by Rovinelli and Hambleton (1977) that the index of item-objective congruence should be higher than 0.5 in each section. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and path analysis were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) by using AMOS in order to investigate the causal relationship, and presented a significant level and goodness of fit.

## 2.1 Coefficient alpha and reliability

**Table 4** Cronbach's alpha reliability for individual constructs

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	No. of items
Electronic word-of-mouth	0.928	5
Trust	0.868	5
Brand image	0.884	5
Total/Over-all reliability	0.893	15

## 2.2 Convergent validity

Convergent validity is the indicator of a specific construct as average variance extracted (AVE), which is tested by standardize factor loading values. The recommended value for each construct is greater than or equal to 0.50

(Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & William, 1995). The individual construct value was analyzed by using a validity toolkit developed by Gakingston (see Table 5). The recommended value for Average Variance Extracted (AVE)  $\geq 0.50$ , Construct reliability  $\geq 0.70$  (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

**Table 5** Validity for individual constructs

Construct	Standardized Factor Loading	AVE	CR
eWOM			
eWOM1	0.823	0.600	0.882
eWOM2	0.817		
eWOM3	0.711		
eWOM4	0.709		
eWOM5	0.804		

**Table 5** Validity for individual constructs (continue)

Construct	Standardized Factor Loading	AVE	CR
Trust			
TRU1	0.666	0.550	0.859
TRU2	0.671		
TRU3	0.758		
TRU4	0.780		
TRU5	0.821		
Brand image			
BI1	0.863	0.564	0.865
BI2	0.782		
BI3	0.742		
BI4	0.641		
BI5	0.707		

As can be clearly seen (Table 5), all constructs have factor loading higher than 0.6, which indicated at least 60 percent reflecting the latent construct they are designed to measure (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The lowest value of the average variance extracted (AVE) of the three constructs is 0.550, which exceeded the recommended 0.50 value (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The instrument's

reliability (CR) of all latent variables were greater than 0.7 that indicating good reliability (Hair et al., 2010). Hence, these results of all constructs were confirmed as acceptable of the pre-requisites of convergent validity in this study.

### 2.3 Confirmatory factor analysis and dimensionality

**Table 6** Confirmatory factor analysis and dimensionality

Model fit indices	Recommended value	Source	Results
$\chi^2$ /Degree of freedom	< = 5	Bagozzi and Yi (2012)	2.301
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	> = 0.90	Hair et al (1998)	0.948
Adjust Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	> = 0.90	Kline and Santor (1999)	0.917
Normalized Fit Index (NFI)	> = 0.90	Hu and Bentler (1999)	0.951
Relative Fit Index (RFI)	> = 0.90	Hu and Bentler (1999)	0.931
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	> = 0.90	Hu and Bentler (1999)	0.971
Tucker Lewis Index (TLI)	> = 0.92	Bagozzi and Yi (2012)	0.960
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	> = 0.90	Hu and Bentler (1999)	0.971
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	< = 0.08	Hair et al (1998)	0.056

Source: AMOS output

The data from AMOS output showed the result of this measurement model, which accounted for the common variance of a set of variables. The recommended indicator values are considered to have a good fit to the data with great reasonability (see Table 6). The CFA results indicated favorable goodness of fit ( $\chi^2/df = 2.301$ , GFI = 0.948, AGFI = 0.917, NFI = 0.951, RFI = 0.931, IFI = 0.971, TLI = 0.960, CFI = 0.971, RMSEA = 0.056) were all in the acceptable level (Hair et al., 2010).

### Research Finding

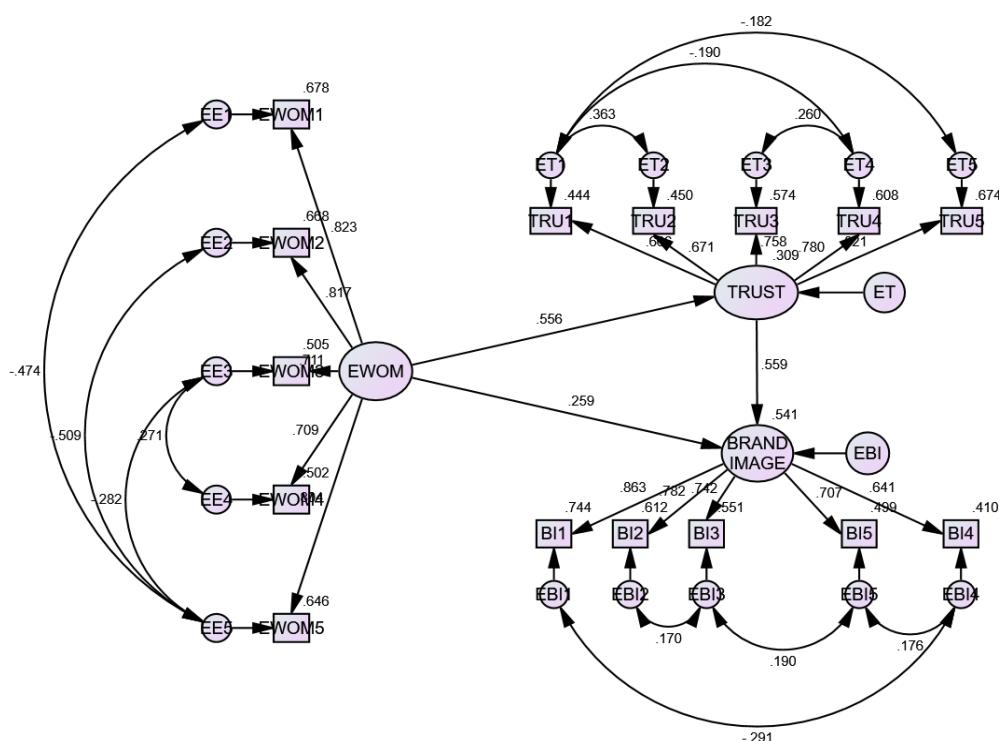
With regard to the 420 respondents' gender, age, marriage status, education, and monthly income, 66.2% of them were females, and 33.8% were males. All of them were not married and were undergraduate students. Most of them (88.1%) were aged between 18-25 years old, with 53.6% having monthly income less than or equal 10,000 Baht.

As referred to the output generated by AMOS, a path structural equation program for the causal relationships based on the objectives and hypotheses (Table 7) was presented as follows.

Hypothesis 1: Perceived electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has a significant direct influence on trust in online hotel reservations. The result showed that electronic word-of-mouth can influence trust ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Hypothesis 2: Perceived electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has a significant direct influence on brand image in the online hotel reservations. The result showed that electronic word-of-mouth can influence brand image among Thai Generation Z ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Hypothesis 3: Trust in eWOM has a direct influence on brand image in the online hotel reservations. According to the result of this research paper, the result showed that the trust of people can influence consumer's brand image toward a hotel ( $p < 0.001$ ).



**Figure 2** Standardized path coefficients proposed model

Source: AMOS output

Figure 2 showed the overall standardized path coefficients as follows. First is that eWOM influences Trust ( $\beta = 0.556$ ). Second is the significant link between eWOM and Brand image

( $\beta = 0.259$ ). The last link is that Trust influences Brand image ( $\beta = 0.559$ ). Hence, Trust played a significantly partial mediating role between eWOM and brand image ( $\beta = 0.259$ ) (Table 8).

**Table 7** Summary of path analysis

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Path coefficients	p-value	Results
Electronic word-of-mouth	Trust	0.556	0.000***	Supported
Electronic word-of-mouth	Brand image	0.259	0.000***	Supported
Trust	Brand image	0.559	0.000***	Supported

**Notes:** \*\*\* Significance at the  $p < 0.001$  level

The output generated by structural equation modeling is presented in Figure 2 and Table 7 with the significant values of all paths at p-value less than 0.001.

**Table 8** Decomposition of total effects for research model

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Total effect	Direct effect	Indirect effect
Electronic word-of-mouth	Trust	0.556	0.556	0.000
Electronic word-of-mouth	Brand image	0.570	0.259	0.311
Trust	Brand image	0.559	0.559	0.000

The findings revealed three direct effect paths as following: Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) had a direct effect on trust ( $\beta = 0.556$ ), and on brand image ( $\beta = 0.259$ ), while trust had a direct effect on brand image ( $\beta = 0.559$ ). Moreover, there is an indirect effect of Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on brand image ( $\beta = 0.311$ ), which was higher than that of the direct link ( $\beta = 0.259$ ). It is clearly seen that there is a significant effect of eWOM on brand image through trust as trust played a partial mediating role.

### Discussions and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the eWOM influencing trust and brand image in

online hotel booking among Thai generation Z in Thailand. In particular, three hypotheses were postulated. The empirical outcomes of this study were supported by previous research studies in all postured hypotheses.

The results of this study showed that electronic word-of-mouth can influence trust, which are market actions as a customer to customer communication that is highly credible and persuasive (Reimer & Benkenstein, 2016; Trusov et al., 2009). Also, there is a previous study stating that using social media and eWOM has a positive impact on purchase decision and online trust (Prasad et al., 2017). The study of McKnight and Choudhury (2006)'s found that trusting belief can lead to consumers' willingness to buy a

product or service as the consumer often read the online review from other people, gather information from online in order to choose the right hotel, and make them feel confident when doing online hotel reservation.

Furthermore, the electronic word-of-mouth can influence brand image, which could make a positive effect or negative on brand image in Thai Generation Z. It is supported by the research of Farzin and Fattahi (2018)'s that found eWOM has a significant effect on brand image in the mind of consumers and their purchasing intention. Furthermore, previous research also revealed that credible online review has an impact on brand image of electronic product in India.

In addition, consumer trust of Thai generation Z can influence hotel brand image toward contents in consumer reviews (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018). It is related to the study of Chu and Kim (2011)'s, which confirmed that positive electronic word-of-mouth about online hotel bookings stems from good experiences, useful information, security and reliability, honest and accurate information, and consequently online review can be trusted. The result additionally showed that the trust of people can influence consumer's brand image toward the hotel.

Last but not least, trust has a significant influence on brand image in the online hotel reservation, which supported the following results: Firstly, the study of Chinomona (2016)'s found that brand communication can have a strong influence on brand trust and brand loyalty via brand image. Secondly, the study of Lien, Wen, Huang, and Wu (2015)'s found that Taiwanese people believe the hotel is trustworthy with regards to their online hotel booking. As a final point, the results showed that Thai generation Z think the brand image is highly reliable, attractive,

and pleasing when doing online reservation. This notion was supported by the previous study of eTrust on online hotel reservation (Wang, Law, Guillet, Hung, & Fong, 2015).

### Implications

Given the current study findings, several implications are presented. Firstly, since online reviews become more powerful and important, this research paper needs to contribute to the marketing body of knowledge in the context of online reviews. Hence, the outcomes of this study may provide a useful strategy for marketers to encourage user-generated positive online reviews via cyberspace. For example, marketers may give a gift to their customers, who publish positive reviews about the product or service on Internet.

Secondly, the present research found that electronic word-of-mouth has a positive effect on trust. Marketers should concentrate on online content, which included online reviews, comments, and social media content. Also, the current consumers give an importance to believable information on the Internet, which influences brand image of product/service. Marketers can monitor and help them reach useful information sent by a credible source. Further, marketers may be able to connect with their customers to improve consumer trust, which will later influence the brand image of product/service.

Thirdly, the current study found that electronic word-of-mouth has a significant effect on brand image. Hence, we recommend the marketers to make hotels look reliable, attractive, pleasing, representing social status, and holding a good reputation as it can affect the hotel brand image. Also, marketers can persuade their customers to give only positive online reviews

and feedbacks, where the customers share their experience on the Internet. This may be a useful strategy to increase positive electronic word-of-mouth about the product/service via online space.

Overall, the conceptual model, comprising eWOM, trust, and brand image was developed. To test the hypotheses, a survey was used with university students who are Thai generation Z. The model confirmed the strategy for electronic word-of-mouth will be effective to build people's trust that can make them greatly improve their perceived brand image towards hotels or products/services. Therefore, the conceptualization of this research model proposed the theory of social sensitivity, which was highlighted in the contexts of eWOM to focus on Thai generation Z involvement with trust and brand image.

### Limitations and Future Research Directions

The results of this research paper should be considered with some restrictions, which could be explored by future research. Firstly, this study considered only the consumers in the hospitality service category. Therefore, further studies are needed to explore other categories of product/service, which could provide a new insight into the consumer's perception and hence better relevant strategies may be implemented. Secondly, the study was limited to Thailand context only. Therefore, for comparative findings, subsequent studies should consider to study in other developing countries. Thirdly, by examining the influence of electronic word-of-mouth on trust and brand image, adding purchasing action on the consumers would be an interesting future direction. Finally, methodologically, the authors used only a quantitative approach to analyze the

data. With this reason, using of mixed-method approach may generate a more comprehensive understanding in the hospitality area.

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