

# **Factors to Enhance Tourists' Ecotourism Loyalty, Moderation Effect of Prosocial Behaviour and Social Media Influence**

Sinh Duc Hoang, Ph.D.

Doctoral Thesis Summary

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**Factors to Enhance Tourists' Ecotourism Loyalty,  
Moderation Effect of Prosocial Behaviour and Social  
Media Influence**

**Faktory, které zvyšují loajalitu turistů k ekoturistice, mírný  
účinek prosociálního chování a vliv sociálních médií**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Ecotourism loyalty management is a function that leveraged desirable outcomes for tourists through satisfactory experiences and to the community through sustainable development. This management includes environmental conservation and tourism earnings to enable the destinations to cater to their future needs through the revenue. Ecotourist loyalty is a composite variable that depends on behaviours and attitudes after consuming a tourism product. Sustainable approaches reduce marketing costs through satisfactory services that leverage recommendations and word of mouth marketing. Expectation confirmation theory and theory of planned behaviour provide critical insight on how destination managers may shape the quality of services and tourist activities. The primary objective of this study is to determine ways that enhance tourist's ecotourism loyalty. Moreover, this study's central research question is how prosocial behaviour and social media influence moderate the relationship between e-WOM consumption and ecotourism loyalty. The research show that e-WOM consumption before the trip affects destination image and this effect is stronger when visitors have a favourable impression of the residents' altruistic manner or positive social media influence. In addition, tourist satisfaction is related to ecotourism loyalty and this relationship is stronger when tourists perceive positive social behaviour or tourists receive more interactions from social networks (after the trip).

## **ABSTRAKT**

Ekoturismus řízení loajality je funkce, která využívá žádoucí výsledky pro turisty prostřednictvím uspokojivých zkušeností a pro komunitu prostřednictvím udržitelného rozvoje. Toto řízení zahrnuje ochranu životního prostředí a příjmy z cestovního ruchu, aby mohly destinace uspokojit své budoucí potřeby prostřednictvím výnosů. Ekoturistická loajalita je složená proměnná, která závisí na chování a postojích po konzumaci produktu cestovního ruchu. Udržitelné přístupy snižují marketingové náklady prostřednictvím uspokojivých služeb, které využívají doporučení a ústní marketing. Teorie potvrzení očekávání a teorie plánovaného chování poskytují kritický pohled na to, jak mohou destinační manažeři utvářet kvalitu služeb a turistických aktivit. Primárním cílem této studie je určit způsoby, které posílí loajalitu turistů k ekoturistice. Kromě toho je ústřední výzkumnou otázkou této studie, jak prosociální chování a sociální média ovlivňují mírnění vztahu mezi spotřebou e-WOM a loajalitou k ekoturistice. Výzkum ukazuje, že spotřeba e-WOM před cestou ovlivňuje image destinace a tento efekt je silnější, když mají návštěvníci příznivý dojem z altruistického chování obyvatel nebo pozitivního vlivu sociálních médií. Spokojenost turistů navíc souvisí s loajalitou k ekoturistice a tento vztah je silnější, když turisté vnímají pozitivní sociální chování nebo turisté získávají více interakcí ze sociálních sítí (po cestě).

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## **ABBREVIATIONS OF KEY TERMS**

DI: Destination Image

ECT: Expectation Confirmation Theory

EE: Ecotourist Experience

ES: Ecotourism Satisfaction

e-WOM: Electronic Word-of-mouth

ECOSERV: Ecotourists’ Quality Expectations

LOYL: Ecotourism Loyalty

MOT: Motivation

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

PS: Prosocial Behaviour

SMIA: Social Media Influence after the trip

SMIB: Social Media Influence before the trip

TPB: Theory of Planned Behavior

SEM: Structural Equation Modelling

SERVQUAL: Service Quality



# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Motivation and need for study

Eco-tourism destinations are a unique segment of tourism since they focus on environmental and landscape factors. Despite the high volume of eco-tourism and destination management studies, little literature has captured eco-tourist loyalty (Rivera & Croes, 2010). In most prior investigations, the connection between expectation and destination image has been examined independently. Several investigated at expectation-satisfaction-loyalty connections (e.g., Lee et al., 2011; Serenko & Stach, 2009; Vinh & Long, 2013), while others focused on destination image, satisfaction, loyalty relationships (e.g., Kanwel et al., 2019; Ramseook-Munhurrun et al., 2015; Som & Badarneh, 2011). However, the papers published to date have left the following research gaps:

First, a strong and good image of the place has always been an essential component of effective marketing tactics for the destination (Echtner et al., 2003). A favorable image of the place may be created by marketers by means of effective marketing communications and good word of mouth, which will attract visitors to the destination in question (Govers et al., 2007). On the other hand, the image of the place is dynamic and may be altered throughout the several stages of the tourist experience (namely, before, during, and after the trip) (G. M. S. Dann, 1996; S. Lee et al., 2014). There is conceivable that the image of a location will change after people have visited it and had a tourism experience there (Chon, 1987; Pearce, 1982; Phelps, 1986). A favorable place image could turn negative owing to certain poor vacation experiences (Smith et al., 2015). In other instances, a pre-trip destination image that was either positive or neutral might be improved once the traveler had the opportunity to experience the place (Chon, 1987; B. K. Lee et al., 2014). Therefore, the operators of the location need to decide what kinds of experiences should be provided in order to cultivate a favorable image (Smith et al., 2015). If a good image of the destination is not formed, then visitors may be unhappy and spread unfavorable word of mouth, which in turn has a negative effect on the picture that prospective visitors have of the location (Tseng et al., 2015).

Previous study has focused on pre-trip image and its effect on travel choices (for example, Assaker et al., 2011; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Destination image has been the subject of a significant amount of research over the years. However, post-trip destination image and how it is influenced by tourist experiences is less investigated (J. H. Kim, 2018). Furthermore, post-trip destination image has not been addressed in an ecotourism context, despite the relevance of this topic to the sector. As a consequence of this, the study contributes to the conversation on the significance of post-trip destination image and makes up for the dearth of research that focuses on the influence that ecotourism experiences have on visitors.

Second, (A. K. Kim & Brown, 2012) and (Oppermann, 2000) argue that enhancing destination loyalty is challenging. Moreover, the effect of destination loyalty has been raised doubt (Buhalis et al., 2020; A. K. Kim & Brown, 2012; Parra-Lopez et al., 2018), because tourists are always looking for something new when choosing a destination (G. M. Dann, 1981) . Tourists go on vacation to get away from the ordinary and explore new experience (Albaity & Melhem, 2017) . Most tourists, even those who are really delighted, only visit a place one time (Dolnicar et al., 2015). This also applies to ecotourism situation (Rivera & Croes, 2010). Regarding tourism studies, it has been suggested that they should employ distinct measures for measuring loyalty to different forms of touristy (Cheng et al., 2014). Based on definition of loyalty (Oliver, 1999), I define ecotourism loyalty as visitors' inclinations to explore other ecotourism locations. Ecotourism places may be considered as a product category. When people have a great experience when traveling to an ecotourism location, such as enjoying good sights, a favorable destination image, and high levels of satisfaction, they are more likely to desire to visit more ecotourism destinations and become a fan of this genre of travel.

Third, in addition to having a significant effect on public health, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the tourist sector all over the globe (Samdin et al., 2022). Because of the limits placed on travel to stop the epidemic from spreading further, the travel and tourist sector is expected to see a major drop beginning in early 2020. Because of this, the income generated by the tourist industry throughout the globe has significantly decreased, and this trend is expected to continue until 2020 (Stronza et al., 2019). The decisions that visitors make in response to these never-before-seen situations are heavily influenced by the online evaluations of their fellow travelers that are posted on social media websites. 62% of online consumers in the United States read e-WOM before selecting a specific service, and 38% of those same customers reported that online reviews are important to them in the decision-making process (Yang, 2019). TripAdvisor is a well-known website that gives users the opportunity to share their opinions and other information on travel destinations located all over the globe (Nilashi et al., 2021). Taking into consideration the platform that is Tripadvisor, the total number of comments has been continuously increasing since 2014, and is expected to reach roughly 884 million comments in the year 2020 (Statista, 2021).

As a consequence of this, at the stage of assessment, travelers demand extra information from third parties to aid them in making judgments on their purchases. Regarding this matter, travelers are becoming more reliant on e-WOM in order to lower their perceived risk, which in turn influences their behavioral intention and booking choices. During the COVID-19 epidemic, a substantial number of travel e-WOMs have been uploaded on various social media platforms. These e-WOMs might be useful for making decisions about trip destination

selection (Martínez et al., 2020). Although there have been a number of research conducted on e-WOM and the influence it has on the decision-making and purchasing behavior of customers, the connection between pre-trip e-WOM and ecotourism loyalty has not yet been examined.

Fourth, many researchers have suggested to study ecotourism from a social perspective because it is very complicated, including many different fields from economics to sociology (Buckley, 2020). According to (Morrison et al., 1998), tourism is primarily a social psychological phenomenon. Some psychological theories are founded on tourism. However, due to testing and validation issues, a lot of these theories are inapplicable outside of their own contexts, indicating that there are still research gaps that need to be filled (Pearce & Packer, 2013). Therefore, this research uses new moderate variables that has not been employed with previous research (prosocial behaviour, social influence).

Last, ecotourism has become a way for tourists to learn about Vietnam's rich natural resources and gain knowledge deeper about the country's cultural relics while having fun (Thuy et al., 2020). Even though domestic and international tourists bring a lot of money into Vietnam's economy, misapplying the nation's natural assets to lure them, like building hotels, resorts, and other high-end facilities on the spot, could harm the nation's economy. With so many visitors, it will be hard for the boards in charge of ecotourism areas to do their jobs. So, the government should come up with the right plans and strategies to keep the nation and the tourism industry in balance. Vietnam's ecotourism, on the other hand, is still in its beginning stages. Also, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has made it hard for individuals in the nation to find a good balance between safeguarding the natural environment and using it in a way that will help enhance ecotourism in the nation. In their research, Pham & Khanh (2020) say that the ecotourism procedures in the country will be hurt if short-term economic and cultural benefits are given more importance than protecting natural and biological resources. For the people of Vietnam and the government to strengthen the visitor satisfaction, it is important to make a plan and set standards for developing ecotourism, which is the fastest-growing part of the tourism business.

## **1.2 Research problem**

The research problem explores the factors that enhance tourists' ecotourism loyalty in the context of Vietnam. Understanding factors for ecotourism loyalty in the country helps develop ecotourism in ways that increase tourist visits and referrals by promoting loyalty (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2018). Developing ecotourism guided by customer identification, brand personality, and satisfaction drives consumer behavior. Destination personality enhances the satisfaction and ability of tourists to identify destinations and engage in word-of-mouth referrals and intentional revisits (Harahap & Dwita, 2020). Ecotourism loyalty builds on alternative tourism founded on community-based tourism ideals

giving local and disadvantaged persons control and a source of income, a goal for Vietnam (Giampiccoli et al., 2021). Understanding ecotourism loyalty means understanding what aspects of the ecotourism industry in Vietnam promote tourist revisits and thus promote investments in them. The ecotourism sector will be able to structure the ecotourism environment and assess value for the sector to achieve its full potential (Pham & Khanh, 2020). It is established that the Vietnam ecotourism industry has the resources but still underperforms and thus fails to meet its potential. Understanding ecotourism loyalty helps achieve that full potential by leveraging existing tourists and tourists that are passionate about ecotourism (Bashir, Khwaja, & Mahmood, 2021). The factors associated with consumer loyalty are some of these limiting community-based tourism in Vietnam. The factors include infrastructure, environmental protection, and safety and security levels (Phuong et al., 2020).

Promoting ecotourism is critical to sustainable development, which benefits Vietnam and the world. Customer loyalty in ecotourism is unique because it has to meet eco-tourists needs without compromising the social, environmental, and cultural aspects of the destination and at the same time offering economic benefits and promoting sustainability (Hermawan & Wijayanti, 2019). The research is also crucial because exploration of destination image, travel motivation, familiarity, and destination image as influencers of Eco tourists' destination loyalty influencers help projects behavior in ecotourism and tap into them to boost revenues (Liu et al., 2016). Also, establishing ecotourism loyalty allows; leveraging for marketing, cutting out on marketing strategies and costs. With nature destinations, referrals and recommendations are significant influencers for the growth of the consumer base and widening the reach, especially in the international market (T. T. Li et al., 2021) . Improving the state of factors influencing loyalty can cut out marketing costs and grow the Vietnam ecotourism industry towards realizing its potential. The context of Vietnam is crucial to establishing consumer loyalty for the ecotourism industry due to the challenges of financial resources to sell the drive to the global market better. The exploration of factors that enhance ecotourism loyalty in Vietnam will enable the assessment of the state of the factors to inform their development or maintenance to continue advancing the ecotourism sector in the country. The research findings will be integrated into ecotourism education for local communities to enhance their skills in promoting tourism in their communities

### **1.3 Research questions and research objectives**

According to the explanation above, the fundamental purpose of the research is to create a complete model for analyzing the influence of e-WOM consumption on ecotourism loyalty. To achieve the aim of the research, the three main questions are:

***RQ1: How and why does e-WOM consumption affect the ecotourism loyalty?***

***RQ2: Do prosocial behaviour moderate the relationship between e-WOM consumption and ecotourism loyalty?***

***RQ3: Do social media influence moderate the relationship between e-WOM consumption and ecotourism loyalty?***

Research objectives are proposed in line with the primary goal of the study:

***RO1: To explore the effects of e-WOM consumption on ecotourism loyalty.***

***RO2: To explore the role of prosocial behavior in moderating the relationship between e-WOM consumption and ecotourism loyalty.***

***RO3: To explore the role of social media influence in moderating the relationship between e-WOM consumption and ecotourism loyalty.***

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Theoretical lenses of the research**

This thesis uses a combination of two background theories, namely ECT and TPB.

#### **2.1.1 Expectation confirmation theory**

The marketing industry has made great use of the Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT), which seeks to fully comprehend and explain the consuming process by analyzing consumers' post-purchase behavior and levels of satisfaction with a product or service after it has been purchased (Oliver, 1977). According to Oliver (1980), Oliver, 1999), and Bhattacharjee (2001), the primary mechanism that underlies ECT is accomplished by the execution of a process sequence. To begin, before customers actually make a purchase, they form an initial expectation of a particular service or product. This expectation could be understood as the extent to which customers have beliefs about the capability of the service provider, as well as the extent to which customers have expectations regarding the target (Coye, 2004). The consumer's impressions of the product's overall performance evolve progressively throughout the course of the usage term. The next step in the process is for consumers to evaluate the perceived performance in relation to their previous expectations about the service in order to determine the degree to which these expectations are verified. The next stage involves determining the level of customer satisfaction with the service by analyzing the customers' pre-purchase expectations, as well as confirming that there is a gap between the customers' pre-purchase expectations and their post-purchase assessments of the service (J. Lee & Kim, 2020).

The ECT helps us understand the link between passenger expectations, experience, and expectation confirmation. See Fig. 2.1:

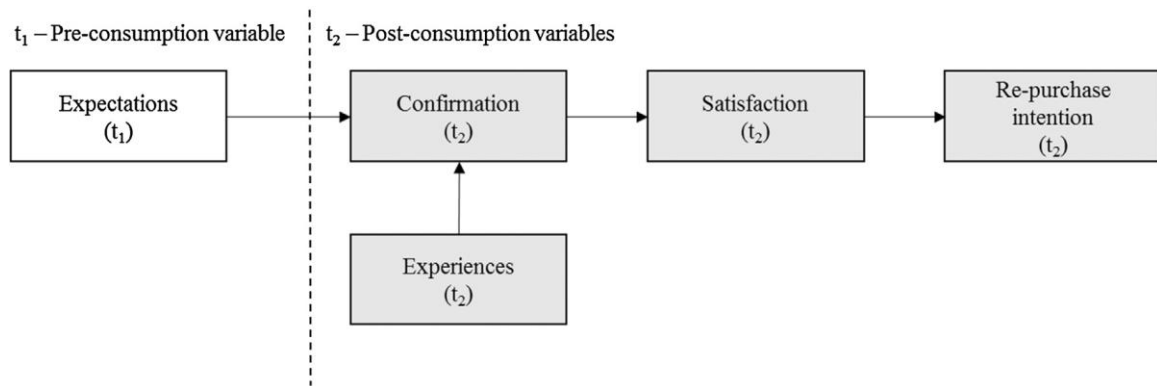


Figure 1: Expectation confirmation theory

Source: Oliver (1977)

### 2.1.2 Theory of planned behavior

Researchers in the domains of marketing and tourism, as well as industry experts and destination managers, have shown an increasing interest in consumer psychology and behavior in recent years, making it one of the most interesting study topics (Armitage & Conner, 2001). This theory is important for all parties involved in the tourism industry because having an understanding of how consumers think, feel, and act is the central focus of this growing interest. This is because having this knowledge makes it possible to describe, analyze, predict, and control or influence consumers as well as consumer systems and the consumption environment (Han & Kim, 2010).

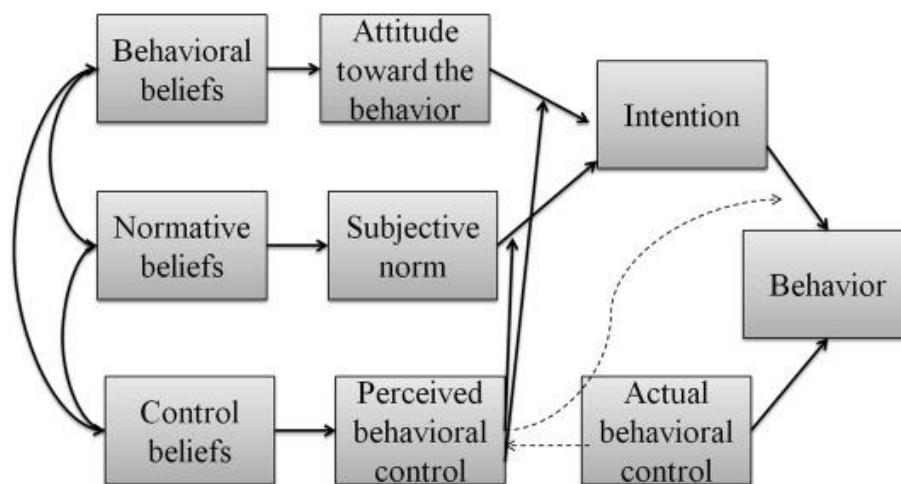


Figure 2: The TPB is presented to explain actual behavior

Source: Ajzen (1991)

According to this theory, attitude, subjective norms, and behavioral control form behavior intention.

## **2.3 Hypotheses Development**

### **2.3.1 The Relationship between Word-of-Mouth, Destination Image and Ecotourism Experiences**

According to Lawson & Baud-Bovy (1977), the term "destination image" refers to a compilation of individual or collective impressions that are associated with a particular location (e.g., a country or a resort). Within the realm of ecotourism, the concept of a destination's image also includes visitors' opinions of whether or not traveling to a certain location was seen as being ecologically sustainable (Kim & Chen, 2016). According to the findings of Kock et al. (2016), the picture of a location is shaped by both a priori and actual impressions of the surrounding area. However, the authors (Kim & Chen, 2016) did not relate their results to the field of ecotourism in any way. As a result, it is not known how precisely ecotourists conceptualize the destinations they visited after returning from their trips. Indeed, past research has a tendency to concentrate on the image of the destination before the trip rather than the image of the destination after the journey (Chi & Qu, 2008). Because of this, we rely on ECT to imply that the image of a site functions as "confirmation," which is concurrently impacted by word-of-mouth marketing and the experiences of ecotourists. However, there are no current studies on the topic of ecotourism that would put e-WOM, destination image, and ecotourism experiences in a model that is comparable to the ECT. This is the case since no such model exists (Kanwel et al., 2019).

The travel and tourism industry is one that benefits tremendously from the use of e-WOM (Park & Kim, 2008). Because they can't be assessed in advance, intangibles like tourist services come with a large measure of risk attached to them. As a consequence of this, tourists usually depend on the indirect feedback and experiences of other visitors, as well as the recommendations that these visitors provide, in order to reduce the likelihood of experiencing any adverse outcomes (Amblee, 2016). According to Huete-Alcocer (2017), e-WOM is crucial in that it captures how customers utilize digital platforms to discuss their feelings both before and after they travel. According to the findings of this research project, e-WOM refers to the process through which knowledge about a location spreads rapidly across many platforms.

The ECT (Oliver, 1997) allows us to get a better understanding of the interaction between previous expectations, experience, and confirmation of expectations, as well as how these factors contribute to traveler satisfaction. Additionally, the ECT enables us to get a better understanding of how these factors contribute to traveler satisfaction (Oliver, 1980). The next section provides a description of the journey taken by a traveler who makes use of the ECT. According to this theory, a traveler's expectations of a certain service are developed at the beginning (in this case about their forthcoming travel). The formation of expectations takes place before the culmination of the service or its reception (i.e., prior to travelling). The

tourist will then be offered services that will allow them to make the most of their vacation. The word "experience" refers to an individual's private impression, which might be very different for different people who have walked the same path. After returning home from their trip, the tourist evaluates how well the experience lived up to their anticipations. This is a comparison to determine the degree to which the event lived up to the anticipation that had been built up. The traveler is said to be in the state of confirmation when the experience of the trip lives up to or even surpasses the expectations that the traveler had for the trip.

According to Lai & Li (2016), the concept of destination image stands for the confirmation of beliefs. The degree to which actual performance conforms to expectations and perceived performance is evaluated using this concept. The results of this evaluation are used to develop impressions of various locations for ecotourism. In accordance with ECT, we postulate that e-WOM and ecotourism experiences influence destination image via cognitive and affective processes that are comparable to the interactions between expectations, perceived performance, and confirmation, respectively. People will often look up information on a place on the internet before going there, for instance. They will acquire a good impression of the site if they are presented with a significant quantity of positive information on the destination, such as the high quality of the services offered, the diverse and appealing natural scenery, and the pleasant people who live there. After then, the picture of the place changes gradually during the course of the tourist's time there (Chon, 1987). An image of a region that was formerly seen favorably may become less desirable as a consequence of certain unsatisfactory travel experiences (Smith et al., 2015). In other cases, a negative or neutral pre-trip opinion of the place may be increased upon arrival, as stated by Chon (1987). Therefore, the hypotheses are proposed as follows:

*H1: e-WOM positively affects destination image.*

*H2: Ecotourism experiences positively affects destination image.*

### **2.3.2 The Links Between Destination Image, Ecotourism Satisfaction and Ecotourism Loyalty**

It is a fact that tourists' subjective perception, subsequent behavior, and destination choice are all influenced by a destination's image (Castro et al., 2007). This fact has been acknowledged by a large number of researchers. It is reasonable to anticipate that tourists' actions will be influenced, at least in part, by the mental picture they have of their locations. Image will impact visitors in the process of selecting a place, the following appraisal of the trip, and in their future plans. Image is important.

According to ECT, a customer is said to be in a state of confirmation when the experience that they have had is greater than the expectations that they had. When an event or experience lives up to or even beyond one's anticipations, contentment might result (or dissatisfaction, if the experience is less than what was expected).



Finally, the customer will produce a behavioral intention, which will vary according on the level of pleasure they have experienced (Oliver, 1977). In line with ECT, we propose that travelers who have a favorable picture of their location after their journey (their tourist experience exceeded their tourist expectation) are happy and subsequently have the desire to either return or promote the place. However, even very satisfied tourists often only visit a location once (Dolnicar et al., 2015), since the primary reasons people travel are to break away from their normal lives and experience new things (Dann, 1981). This is also the case in environments associated with ecotourism (Rivera & Croes, 2010). In light of this, the research puts out the following hypothesis as a means of determining whether or not the ECT is still relevant to ecotourism, and the hypotheses are proposed as follows:

***H3: Destination image positively affects ecotourism satisfaction.***

***H4: Ecotourism satisfaction positively influence ecotourism loyalty.***

### **2.3.3 The Moderating Effects of Prosocial Behaviours**

Prosocial behaviors are often characterized as actions that are carried out with the intention of expressly assisting other people (Goh et al., 2021). If we apply this idea to ecotourism, then it's possible that locals may spend their own time or money to assist visitors who get disoriented in the wild (Seo et al., 2021). Despite the fact that some authors, such as Kim & Qu (2020), have suggested that prosocial behaviors have an effect on tourists' levels of satisfaction, there is a lack of information regarding how exactly prosocial behaviors could be incorporated into the ECT or how this concept relates to e-WOM intentions (Seo et al., 2021).

According to the ECT, expectations are pre-trial views about a product (or service) that serve as standards or reference points for assessing the performance of the product. These beliefs are formed before the actual testing of the product (Oliver, 1977). In addition, the expectations of visitors are the things that they feel "should" or "ought to" take place (Bigne, 2001). According to Zeithaml and colleagues, this constitutes the perfect state of service. (1993). According to Li et al. (2011), the expectations of tourists are often considered to be of a normative character. According to what is suggested by the theory (Oliver, 1977), anticipation serves as a point of reference against which actual experience is evaluated. In light of this, any shift in one's expectations, whether they lower or higher, will result in a different confirmation. When a traveler is connected to social media (such as Facebook, a blog, or a forum), they are able to gain additional input and/or insights from their network of friends (Fotis et al., 2012), which changes the expectations that they have for their trip. To be more specific, if a tourist receives a number of positive comments about the considerate actions of a local resident, this helps to cultivate "affection" for the region and increases the visitor's interest in and engagement with e-WOM about the destination on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. This is quite important in order

to promote a favorable picture of the place. In contrast, if a visitor has a poor opinion of remarks connected to residents' prosocial conduct, they are less sensitive to e-WOM on social networks, which leads to less influence on destination image. E-WOM is a kind of word-of-mouth communication. As one of novelty issues of my thesis, the hypothesis below is proposed to assess the moderating role of Prosocial behaviors of local resident in the relationship between e-WOM and destination image before the ecotourism trip(s).

***H5: Prosocial behaviours of local residents moderate the relationship between e-WOM consumed by ecotourists and destination image.***

As was said earlier, one of the most important factors that travelers consider when selecting a place is the quality of the experience they expect to have there (Quynh et al., 2021). Tourists often depend on the experiences of other tourists to construct a picture of the place, or they may even rely on their own recollections or experiences to form an image of the destination and make decisions about whether or not to visit the destination (Chiu et al., 2014). In order to shape a favorable picture of a place, prosocial activities are very necessary. The link between a destination's image and the ecotourist experience is, however, moderated by the prosocial actions of visitors (Fu et al., 2016). If participating in charitable activities may improve one's ecotourism experience, this suggests that these activities have the potential to dramatically influence the correlation between a destination's image and one's ecotourism encounters (Li et al., 2021). It is crucial for the locals who are acting as hosts to demonstrate prosocial behaviors in order to provide visitors with the greatest possible experience while they are there (Pfattheicher et al., 2022). Imagine for a minute that the locals are eager to engage in conversation with the visitors and share their way of life and experiences. In such instance, they will construct a wonderful representation of the place, which they can then convey to other tourists who may be interested in traveling there.

The image of the location, and the level of happiness it provides to ecotourists, are directly influenced by prosocial activities such as locals offering assistance to visitors who get lost (Goh et al., 2021). Therefore, prosocial activities are very necessary because of the considerable moderating role that they play in the link between ecotourist happiness and the image of the destination. The desire of the people to engage in the community needs in their immediate area is a significant factor that contributes to the enhancement of both the prosocial behaviors and the image of the destination. Therefore, the expectations and beliefs of the visitors are satisfied, which results in the loyalty of the tourists. Similarly, the hypothesis below is proposed to assess the moderating role of Prosocial behaviors of local resident in the relationship between ecotourism satisfaction and ecotourism loyalty after the ecotourism trip(s).

***H6: Prosocial behaviours of local residents moderate the relationship between ecotourism satisfaction and ecotourism loyalty.***

#### **2.3.4 The Moderating Effects of Social Media Influence**

Previous research indicates that the word of mouth has an effect on the image of the place (Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). In this day and age, word-of-mouth is commonly disseminated via social media networks, which have not only become key tools for discovering information about locations, but also big platforms where travelers can discuss their experiences from trips and intents to visit other places (Bizirgianni & Dionysopoulou, 2013; Pantano & Pietro, 2013). Because visitors are able to obtain comments on social media, this input has the potential to interfere with their initial motives to travel as well as their initial expectations about the location, both of which are reflected in the image of the place (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

According to Pan et al. (2021), the picture that visitors have of a site does not remain unchanged over time; rather, it is significantly impacted by the influences of peer pressure and social media. They point out that even if visitors do not have a distinct picture of their trip, this image will be developing and converging with the image of the place that is sent through social media. On the other hand, (Chandrasekara et al., 2021) claim that social media makes it possible to gather various responses to a certain location from a variety of sources. On the basis of this information, a hypothesis can be formulated which states that the association between e-WOM consumption and destination image will be stronger and more positive when there is a high level of social media use before the trip; however, the link between e-WOM consumption and destination image will be more obscure for tourists who have a low level of social media use because there are fewer information sources used in the formation of the destination image. Therefore, the following is how the next hypothesis should be formulated:

***H7: Social media influence moderates the relationship between e-WOM and destination image.***

According to (Al-Adamat et al., 2020), the image of a place also has a role in determining future visit intentions, which may be seen as a sign of loyalty. In addition to this, the impact of social media may also have an effect on the desire to return. This provides evidence that there may be the existence of moderating factors, which, if identified and accounted for, may make it possible to extend the applicability of the ECT to the setting of ecotourism.

According to findings from recent studies in marketing, the proliferation of social media has considerably lowered the barriers for consumers in terms of recommending the goods or services they have tried (Garay, 2019). People would have to spend more time and effort on face-to-face discussion about their experience with a vacation trip with their friends, families, and acquaintances

before they could make recommendations using the conventional method of word of mouth. At high levels of social media usage, on the other hand, all that is required to make a travel suggestion is to click on a "share" button, drastically reducing the amount of time and effort required. Because of this decrease in the psychological obstacles that visitors must overcome in order to promote a location, travelers will be able to click the like and share buttons frequently without giving any thought to how satisfied they were with their own personal experience during their trip. As a consequence of this, one may anticipate a lower correlation between visitor pleasure and the amount of loyalty they exhibit at increasing levels of social media usage. The conclusion that may be drawn from this is as follows:

**H8: Social media influence moderates the relationship between ecotourist satisfaction and ecotourism loyalty.**

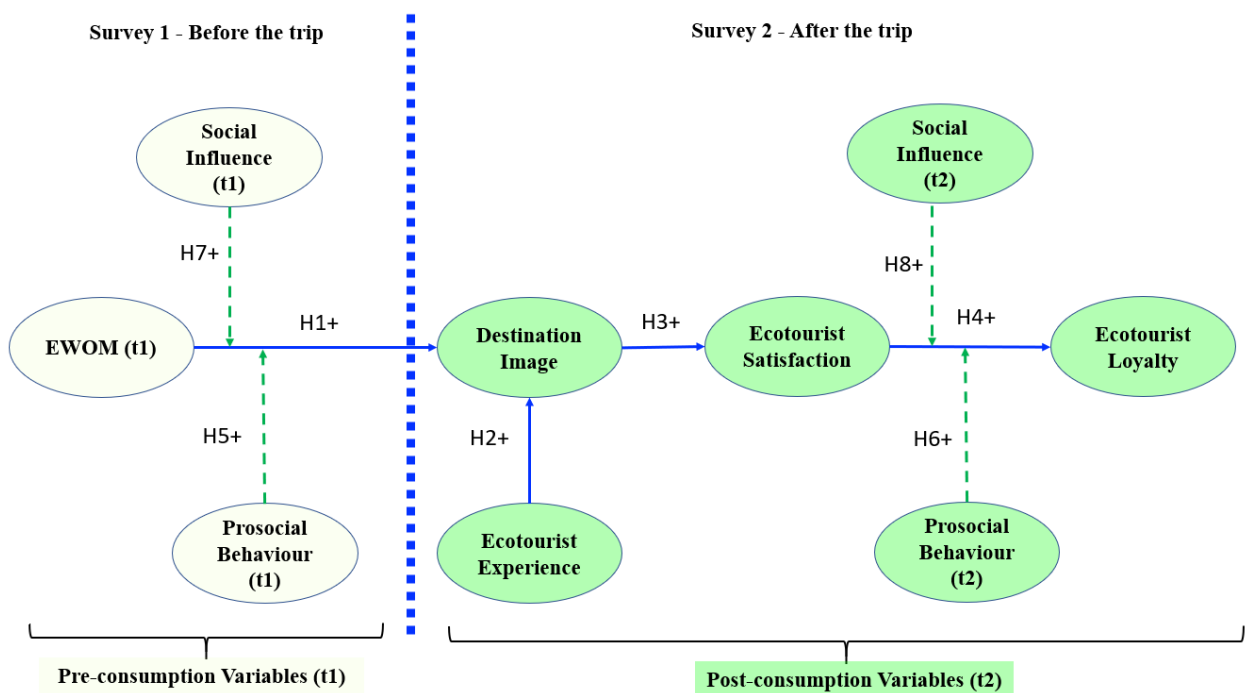


Figure 3: The Conceptual Framework.

Source: The author's works

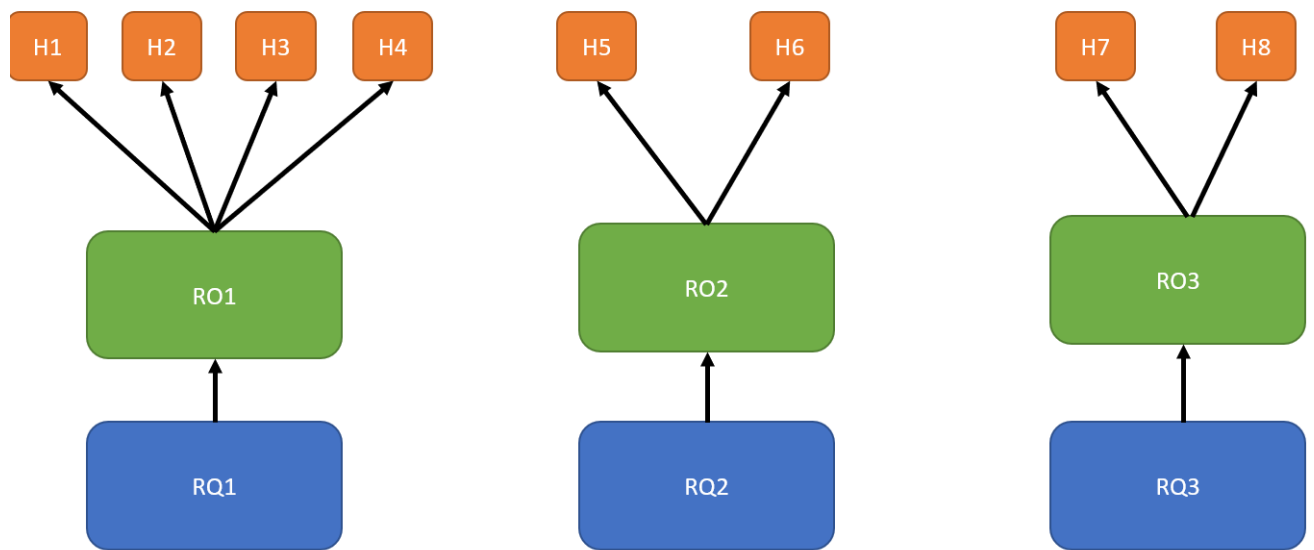


Figure 4: Research question – research objective - hypotheses

Source: The author's works

### 3. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The interviewees, consisting of two academic scholars, three experts in the field of tourism industry, five tour managers, and ten tour guides in ecotourism (detailed as Table 1), contributed many consultation opinions and fruitful ideas with deeply and clearly explanation to develop the questionnaire for survey. In general, the discussions were positive because all of interviewees admitted that the reciprocal correlations among the proposed constructs were existing and they had strongly effects on the target construct Ecotourism loyalty. The qualitative result is not only the foundation for questionnaire design, but also is one of the prerequisites to answer the two research questions of the thesis when all proposed constructs and relevant indicators have been verified with the agreeing rate from 80% to 100%.

Table 1: Interview results - Agreeing responses of qualitative study

Constructs and Indicators		Agreeing responses				Total %
		Scholars (2)	Experts (3)	Managers (5)	Tour guides (10)	
Destination image (DI)	DI1	2	2	5	10	95
	DI2	2	3	5	9	95
	DI3	2	3	5	10	100
	DI4	2	2	5	8	85
	DI5	2	3	5	10	100
	EE1	1	3	5	8	85

Constructs and Indicators		Agreeing responses				Total %
		Scholars (2)	Experts (3)	Managers (5)	Tour guides (10)	
Ecotourism experience (EE)	EE2	2	3	5	10	100
	EE3	2	3	4	10	95
	EE4	1	3	5	7	80
Ecotourism satisfaction (ES)	ES1	2	3	5	9	95
	ES2	2	2	4	10	90
	ES3	2	3	4	9	90
Electronic-Word-of-mouth (EWOM)	EWOM1	2	2	5	10	95
	EWOM2	2	3	5	10	100
	EWOM3	2	3	5	8	90
	EWOM4	2	3	5	10	100
	EWOM5	2	3	4	8	85
	EWOM6	2	3	5	10	100
Ecotourism loyalty	LOYL1	2	2	5	10	95
	LOYL2	2	3	5	10	100
	LOYL3	2	3	5	10	100
Prosocial behaviour after the trip (PSA)	PSA1	2	3	4	10	95
	PSA2	2	3	4	9	90
	PSA3	2	2	5	10	95
Prosocial behaviour before the trip (PSB)	PSB1	2	3	5	10	100
	PSB2	2	2	4	9	85
	PSB3	2	3	5	10	100
Social media influence after the trip (SMIA)	SMIA1	2	3	5	10	100
	SMIA2	1	3	4	9	85
	SMIA3	2	3	5	10	100
Social media influence before the trip (SMIB)	SMIB1	2	3	5	10	100
	SMIB2	2	2	4	8	80
	SMIB3	2	3	5	10	100

Source: The author's works

In general, qualitative research yields impressive results. Taken together, these findings give important insights into ecotourism and forecast visitor attitudes and behavior before and after the ecotourtrip from the perspectives of researchers and practitioners (experts, managers, and tourguides) in Vietnam setting.

## 4. QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

### 4.1 Results of Questionnaire survey

In order to explore the relationship between pre-trip e-WOM and ecotourism loyalty, a longitudinal survey was carried out over the course of two different times in Vietnam. The study was carried out in the national park known as Cat Tien, which is located near Ho Chi Minh city. This location was selected because it is protected and expansive, and it provides opportunities for activities such as hiking, canoeing, cycling, sightseeing, and bird watching. These activities emphasize the preservation of natural resources and sustainable practices.

The primary data were collected via the administration of two structured online questionnaires, the first of which was completed before the trip and the second of which was completed after it. Both Vietnamese and English were used in the writing of the questionnaires. The questionnaire was first translated into Vietnamese by two language professionals, who then returned it to its original form in English. Ecotourists who traveled in groups and used the services of tour operators as intermediaries were sought in order to get a bigger sample size. In the first study, a questionnaire was given to 1000 visitors before they went on their vacation and they were asked to fill it out. The total number of legitimate replies received from travelers was 723. A week after returning from the trip, the second survey was carried out. A week's worth of separation was employed in order to reduce the likelihood of previous replies having an impact on subsequent assessments of the destination picture. A total of 521 replies were received in response to the questionnaire that was given to those visitors before and after their trip. It was determined that these 521 replies could be included in the analysis.

Table 2: Background of Respondents

Categories		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	301	57.8%
	Male	220	42.2%
Age	18-29	128	24.6%
	30-39	154	29.6%
	40-49	106	20.3%
	50-59	92	17.7%
	60+	41	7.8%
Times Visited	Once	346	66.4%
	Twice	128	24.6%
	Three and over	47	9%
Frequency checking social	0-1	55	10.6%
	2-4	102	19.6%
	5-10	230	44.1%

media	10 and over	134	25.7%
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Source: The Author's works

Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Model	chi-sq	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
EE, ES, DI, PSB, SMIB, LOYL, PSA, SMIA, EWOM, CMV	976.696	377	0.902	0.887	0.055	0.039
EE, ES, DI, PSB, SMIB, LOYL, PSA, SMIA, EWOM	863.422	304	0.907	0.892	0.061	0.041
EE+ES, DI+PSB+SMIB, LOYL+PSA+SMIA, EWOM	1858.119	318	0.732	0.705	0.096	0.078
EE, ES+DI, PSB+SMIB+LOYL, PSA+SMIA+EWOM	2272.725	318	0.660	0.625	0.109	0.114
EE+ES+DI, PSB+SMIB+LOYL+PSA+SMIA, EWOM	2346.738	321	0.648	0.615	0.110	0.096
EE, ES+DI+PSB+SMIB, LOYL+PSA+SMIA+EWOM	2514.031	321	0.619	0.583	0.115	0.103
EE+ES+DI+PSB+SMIB, LOYL+PSA+SMIA+EWOM	2856.912	323	0.560	0.522	0.123	0.108
EE+ES+DI, PSB+SMIB+LOYL+PSA+SMIA+EWOM	2756.341	323	0.577	0.541	0.120	0.105
EE+ES+DI+PSB+SMIB+ LOYL+PSA+SMIA+EWOM	3219.347	324	0.515	0.474	0.131	0.110

Source: The author's works

The best fit is demonstrated by the original model with all factors (chi-sq = 863.422, df = 304, CFI = .907, TLI = .892, RMSEA = .061, SRMR = .041). This implies that the variables used in the research are distinguishable. The results also show that CMV was not a significant issue in measuring the variables. This conclusion is also supported by simulations ran by (Fuller et al., 2016), who showed that CMV should be substantially high in order to threaten the validity of results in SEM, where observed variables are measured on the Likert scale. Thus, even if some CMV is present, it can be tolerated.

## 4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

A full correlation matrix with descriptive statistics that can be used by future researchers to replicate the results are reported in table 4. The table provides the mean, the standard deviation (SD) and correlation coefficients between the observed variables and control variables, which represent the background information on ecotourists such as their age, gender (0 = female; 1 = male), at the number of times they visited the same destination, and frequency of checking SM daily ranging from never (0) to 10 times and more.



Table 4: Descriptive statistics and correlations

	$\alpha$	Mean	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
<b>Age (1)</b>		40.082	14.006		-.036	-.030	-.484**	-.007	.044	-.007	.019	-.018	-.012	-.004	-.007	-.013
<b>Gender (2)</b>		.422	.494	-.0360		.028	.112*	-.013	.003	.005	-.086*	-.054	.008	-.015	-.016	-.089
<b>Times Visited (3)</b>		1.614	1.252	-.0300	.0280		.072	-.013	-.028	.008	-.085	-.004	-.026	-.060	-.087	-.02
<b>Frequency (4)</b>		6.840	6.024	-.484**	.112*	.072		-.029	-.044	-.049	-.043	.017	-.017	.038	0.21	0.23
<b>EE (5)</b>	.793	3.351	.914	-.007	-.0130	-.013	-.029		.383**	.376**	.263**	.258**	.300**	.303**	.247**	.302**
<b>ES (6)</b>	.725	3.330	.798	.0440	.003	-.028	-.044	.383**		.307**	.270**	.307**	.625**	.341**	.521**	.309**
<b>DI (7)</b>	.812	3.491	.85	-.007	.005	.008	-.049	.376**	.307**		.465**	.326**	.268**	.377**	.389**	.514**
<b>PSB (8)</b>	.799	3.720	.834	.0190	-.086*	-.085	-.043	.263**	.270**	.465**		.286**	.286**	.587**	.589*	.413
<b>SMIB (9)</b>	.756	3.354	.841	0.108	-.075*	-.091	-.038	.276**	.298**	.423**	.312**		.211**	.041	.588	.311**
<b>EINT (10)</b>	.823	3.490	.934	-.0180	-.054	-.004	.017	.258**	.307**	.326**	.286**	.388**		.413**	.328**	.567*
<b>PSA (11)</b>	.824	3.447	.915	-.0120	.008	-.026	-.017	.300**	.625**	.268**	.286**	.413**	.294**		.279*	.489**
<b>SMIA (12)</b>	.821	3.512	.834	-.0131	.009	-.0256	-.021	.315*	.711**	.195*	.469**	.319*	.612**	.366*		.451**
<b>EWOM (13)</b>	.855	3.400	.788	-.004	-.015	-.060	.038	.303**	.341**	.377**	.587**	.328**	.294**	.217**	.341**	

Notes: N = 521; \*\* significant at 1%; \* significant at 5%; † significant at 10%. Bootstrap samples: 50000; CI: 95% Confidence Interval. EE: Ecotourism Experience; EWOM: EWOM consumption; DI: Destination Image; ES: Ecotourism Satisfaction; EINT: EWOM Intention; PSB: Prosocial Behavior before the trip; PSA: Prosocial Behavior after the trip, SMIB: social media influence before the trip, SMIA: social influence after the trip.

### 4.3 Evaluating measurement models

Based all the figures in Table 5, internal loadings for all indicators vary from 0.705 to 0.868, which is considerably higher than the criterion of 0.70, and average variance extracted (AVE) values for the constructs range from 0.570 to 0.744, which is substantially higher than the threshold of 0.5. (Hair et al., 2017; 2019). Furthermore, the findings show that the model's internal consistency is reliable when the Composite reliability values, Cronbach's alpha, and rho-A are within the stated criteria of 0.845 to 0.897, 0.725 to 0.855, and 0.725 to 0.862, respectively (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 5: Consistency reliability and Convergent validity

Constructs and Relevant Indicators		Convergent validity		Internal consistency reliability		
		Loadings ≥0.70	AVE >0.50	Composite Reliability 0.60 - 0.95	Cronbach's Alpha 0.60-0.95	Rho_A 0.70- 0.95
Destination image (DI)	DI1	0.764	0.570	0.869	0.812	0.818
	DI2	0.769				
	DI3	0.741				
	DI4	0.720				
	DI5	0.781				
Ecotourism Experience (EE)	EE1	0.832	0.614	0.864	0.793	0.810
	EE2	0.705				
	EE3	0.809				
	EE4	0.784				
Ecotourism Satisfaction (ES)	ES1	0.800	0.645	0.845	0.725	0.725
	ES2	0.822				
	ES3	0.788				
Electronic-Word-of-mouth (EWOM)	EWOM1	0.734	0.579	0.892	0.855	0.862
	EWOM2	0.754				
	EWOM3	0.730				
	EWOM4	0.844				
	EWOM5	0.745				
	EWOM6	0.753				
Ecotourism loyalty	LOYL1	0.849	0.738	0.894	0.823	0.826
	LOYL2	0.860				
	LOYL3	0.868				
Prosocial Behaviour	PSA1	0.855	0.742	0.896	0.826	0.827
	PSA2	0.865				
	PSA3	0.864				

Constructs and Relevant Indicators		Convergent validity		Internal consistency reliability		
		Loadings ≥0.70	AVE >0.50	Composite Reliability 0.60 - 0.95	Cronbach's Alpha 0.60-0.95	Rho_A 0.70- 0.95
After the Trip (PSA)						
Prosocial Behaviour Before the Trip (PSB)	PSB1	0.841	0.718	0.884	0.804	0.805
	PSB2	0.854				
	PSB3	0.847				
Social media influence after the trip (SMIA)	SMIA1	0.855	0.744	0.897	0.828	0.828
	SMIA2	0.867				
	SMIA3	0.866				
Social media influence before the trip (SMIB)	SMIB1	0.841	0.714	0.882	0.800	0.801
	SMIB2	0.849				
	SMIB3	0.845				

Source: The author's works (computed by SmartPLS)

Furthermore, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) is utilized to assess the model's discriminant validity. All of the figures in Table 6 are less than 0.9, indicating that the discriminant validity of the measurement models has been double validated (Hair et al., 2017). As a result, the measurement models may be considered verified.

Table 6: Discriminant validity (HTMT)

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>(1)</b>	<b>(2)</b>	<b>(3)</b>	<b>(4)</b>	<b>(5)</b>	<b>(6)</b>	<b>(7)</b>	<b>(8)</b>	<b>(9)</b>	<b>(10)</b>	<b>(11)</b>	<b>(12)</b>	<b>(13)</b>
<b>DI (1)</b>													
<b>EE (2)</b>	0.468												
<b>ES (3)</b>	0.399	0.505											
<b>EWOM (4)</b>	0.451	0.367	0.434										
<b>LOYL (5)</b>	0.399	0.321	0.399	0.392									
<b>PSA (6)</b>	0.321	0.357	0.800	0.347	0.485								
<b>PSB (7)</b>	0.562	0.328	0.341	0.694	0.359	0.348							
<b>SMIA (8)</b>	0.324	0.364	0.801	0.354	0.497	0.885	0.348						
<b>SMIB (9)</b>	0.585	0.323	0.356	0.711	0.350	0.358	0.819	0.350					
<b>SMIA*ES (10)</b>	0.019	0.051	0.040	0.061	0.168	0.045	0.051	0.039	0.048				
<b>SMIB*EWOM (11)</b>	0.039	0.066	0.056	0.295	0.107	0.131	0.305	0.123	0.325	0.022			
<b>PSB*EWOM (12)</b>	0.046	0.069	0.059	0.276	0.094	0.136	0.319	0.117	0.302	0.045	0.855		
<b>PSA*ES (13)</b>	0.016	0.051	0.038	0.049	0.174	0.046	0.052	0.043	0.059	0.890	0.036	0.033	

Source: The author's works (computed by SmartPLS)

#### 4.4 Evaluation of Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The process of evaluating the structural model and testing the research hypotheses is based on the figures presented in Table 7&8.

Table 7: Suitability and predictive relevance of the model

Metrics		Estimated Model	Remarks
<b>Root mean square residual covariance (RMS<sub>theta</sub>)</b>		0.111	A well-fitting model
<b>Path coefficients (β)</b>	eWOM → DI	0.130	Positive
	EE → DI	0.255	Positive
	DI → ES	0.310	Positive
	ES → LOYL	0.095	Positive
	PSB*eWOM → DI	0.174	Positive
	PSA*ES → LOYL	0.262	Positive
	SMIB*eWOM → DI	0.045	Positive
	SMIA*ES → LOYL	0.112	Positive
<b>Coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>)</b>	DI	0.42	Moderate
	ES	0.45	Moderate
	LOYL	0.46	Moderate
<b>f<sup>2</sup> effect size</b>	eWOM → DI	0.026	Small effect
	EE → DI	0.086	Small effect
	DI → ES	0.106	Small effect
	ES → LOYL	0.070	Small effect
	PSB*eWOM → DI	0.033	Small effect
	PSA*ES → LOYL	0.021	Small effect
	SMIB*eWOM → DI	0.024	Small effect
	SMIA*ES → LOYL	0.031	Small effect
<b>Predictive relevance (Q<sup>2</sup>)</b>	DI	0.288	Medium
	ES	0.111	Small
	LOYL	0.161	Small
<b>q<sup>2</sup> effect size</b>	DI → ES	0.077	Small
	DI → LOYL	0.024	Small
	ES → LOYL	0.058	Small

Source: The author's works

Therefore, the estimated model based on the thesis results is depicted as Figure 4.1

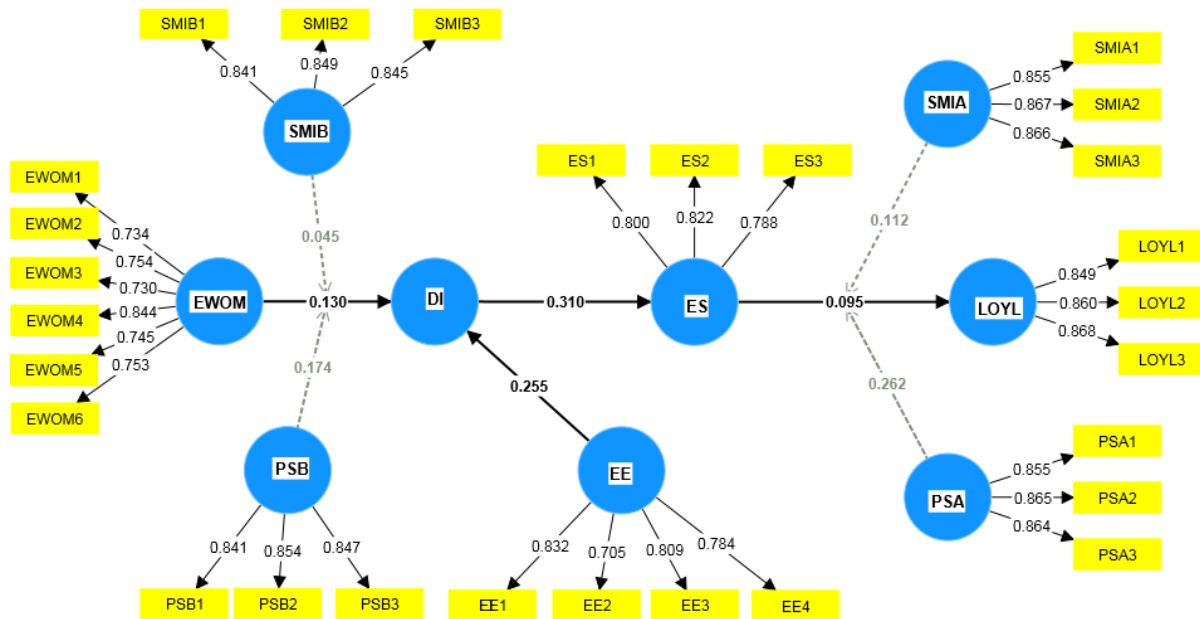


Figure 5: The estimated model with moderator PSB, PSA, SMIB, SMIA

Source: The author's works

The bootstrapping approach will be used as the foundation for significance testing to determine if predictors substantially impact target constructs in conceptual models (Hair et al., 2017). In this study, the bootstrapping approach is used using 5,000 samples at a significance level of 5%, as advised by Hair et al. (2017), with SmartPLS assistance. The results are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8: Summary of Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis		f <sup>2</sup>	Original sample	Sample mean	p-value	Remarks
H1	eWOM → DI	0.026	0.130	0.132	0.003	Support
H2	EE → DI	0.086	0.255	0.257	0.000	Support
H3	DI → ES	0.106	0.310	0.312	0.000	Support
H4	ES → LOYL	0.070	0.095	0.097	0.000	Support
H5	PSB*eWOM → DI	0.033	0.174	0.109	0.002	Support
H6	PSA*ES → LOYL	0.021	0.262	0.211	0.000	Support
H7	SMIB*eWOM → DI	0.024	0.045	0.109	0.000	Support
H8	SMIA*ES → LOYL	0.031	0.112	0.106	0.002	Support

Source: The author's works

## **5. DISCUSSIONS**

This research aims to investigate the relationship between e-WOM consumption and ecotourism loyalty with the moderation effect of prosocial behaviour and social media influence. These findings are highlighted and discussed with respect to the three research questions as follows:

RQ1: How and why does e-WOM consumption affect the ecotourism loyalty?

RQ2: Do prosocial behaviour moderate the relationship between e-WOM consumption and ecotourism loyalty?

RQ3: Do social media influence moderate the relationship between e-WOM consumption and ecotourism loyalty?

### **5.1 The role of e-WOM in shaping ecotourism loyalty (RQ1)**

Hypothesis 1 positing that there is a direct effect of e-WOM on destination image, and the results support this hypothesis. This result is consistent with previous studies (Abubakar et al., 2017). Building confidence in the image of the destination is possible via the use of a positive e-wom statement. A traveler who has already visited the location and had personal experience there might serve as a reference when providing details about it to other people who are considering going there. Because it is likely to assist destination managers in developing a good image of the location and, more importantly, because it will enhance visitors' intents to travel, the influence of e-WOM on the choice of a tourism destination is substantial.

Hypothesis 2 indicated that destination image is impacted by tourist experience, which is similar with the findings of earlier research (Smith et al., 2015). In addition, in the context of present-day ecotourism, acting, enjoyable education, and emotional experience were significant factors in shaping both the essential element and the holistic aspects of destination image. The picture of the place was affected in a variety of ways by the three aspects of the encounter. The amount of effect that acting and having fun while learning had on both dimensions of destination image was substantially more than that of emotional experience. The theory of destination image construction might provide an explanation for these findings. According to this theory, information sources are essential components in the process of creating a picture of a destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Conditions that are put up by various types of information at various stages of an event, such as secondary research just before vacation and fundamental sources of info after a journey, impact the picture that people have of a location. Through acting (such as guided walks through into the rock formations) and fun acquiring knowledge (such as an interpretation of the natural surroundings), vacationers received considerable information about the natural environment (such as rock formation) and the destination (such as its history).

This allowed for the development of a feasible and complex destination image that was distinct from the prior trip image (Phelps, 1986).

Hypothesis 3 indicated that destination image positively effect ecotourist satisfaction. According to a number of studies, a positive image is directly correlated to increased levels of visitor (Adam, 2021; Boo & Busser, 2018; Cong, 2021). In turn, the appraisal of the experience provided by the destination has an effect on the perception that visitors have of the location According to the findings of PH et al. (2011)the relationship between image and satisfaction should go as follows: image > quality > satisfaction. In other words, tourists' perceptions of a destination's quality are influenced by its image, with a more favorable image equating to greater levels of perceived quality. The satisfaction level of the tourist is directly proportional to their perception of the destination's quality. In today's highly competitive travel industry, it is more challenging for marketers to entice tourists. Tourists have several choices for fulfilling their travel demands; thus, it is crucial that locations evaluate tourists' satisfaction. Managers and marketers must also grasp how to boost the destination image over time.

According to hypothesis 4, visitors were more inclined to stick to the ecotourism tourism category as opposed to a particular ecotourism location. This may be due to the fact that many tourists are interested in experiencing new things throughout their travels. Previous research (Rivera & Croes, 2010) that questioned the usefulness of the concept of destination loyalty and suggested loyalty to a travel form as an alternative to destination loyalty was confirmed by these results. The results also suggested that destination loyalty could be replaced with loyalty to a travel form. Again, the findings of Kim's (2018) study provide credence to the hypothesis that tourism experience has an indirect influence on customer loyalty through the destination's image and level of satisfaction. Previous research that examined the influence that experience and image had on tourist behavior through the experience-satisfaction-loyalty chain (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2013)and through the image-satisfaction-loyalty chain (Gallarza & Saura, 2006).

## **5.2 The moderating role of prosocial behaviour (RQ2)**

According to Hypothesis 5, finding the information of prosocial behaviour of local residents before the trip moderates the relationship between e-WOM and destination image. This hypothesis was tested by creating an interaction term between EWOM and PSB and regressing DI on this interaction and the rest of the control and independent variables as shown in Table 8. The results support Hypothesis 5, with the interaction term revealing a statistically significant positive association with destination image in Vietnam. The detected moderating effect implies that the relationship between e-WOM and destination image becomes stronger when tourists look for information on prosocial behaviour of residents.



Hypothesis 6 suggests that when tourists have experienced prosocial behaviour of locals, this behaviour will moderate the relationship between the tourist satisfaction and the tourist intention to spread e-WOM about the trip. This hypothesis was tested by regressing EINT on the interaction between PSA and ES along with the rest of the independent and control variables reported in Table 8. The coefficient for the interaction term was positive and statistically significant at the 5% level. This can be explained by the assumption that international tourists might perceive local people in Vietnam friendly, and even though the facilities and infrastructure could be less attractive in Vietnam, the attitude of the locals attracts more tourists and makes them more willing to spread e-WOM. Both results support Hypothesis 6. This finding means that tourist satisfaction will result in a stronger intention to spread e-WOM about the destination if the tourist experienced positive prosocial behaviour of the locals who offered help or aided with information than if the satisfaction derived solely from experience without prosocial behaviour of the residents.

### **5.3 The moderating role of social media influence (RQ3)**

The research validated hypotheses 7 and 8 on the moderating effects of social media impact on the links between e-WOM and destination image, as well as between visitor satisfaction and ecotourism loyalty. There is a considerable positive relationship between motivation and destination image at high levels of social media impact. There is no substantial association between e-WOM and destination image at low levels of social media impact, indicating that social media plays a major role in forming the destination image in the minds of visitors before they go. Similarly, at high levels of social media impact, there is a considerable positive relationship between visitor pleasure and ecotourism loyalty. The association between visitor happiness and loyalty is insignificant at low levels of social media impact. This phenomena may be explained by travelers' usage of social media to suggest locations, as well as the significant influence that likes and comments on social media have in tourist choices to return to a location. This implies that visitors in Vietnam are more influenced by social media, and their destination image is primarily molded by the social media they consult before to their journey. Furthermore, ecotourists in Vietnam grow devoted to the place when they are both happy and get great comments on social media. The key conclusion is that social media influence is more essential as a source of information to pick an ecotourism location in Vietnam, and social media influence is more important as a tool for value expressions rather than a source of information.

## **6. CONTRIBUTION**

### **6.1 Theoretical contributions**

This research, which was based on ECT, investigated the association between e-WOM before and after the trip, as well as the moderating influence of prosocial conduct via the lens of a case study centered on Vietnam. In particular, the findings confirmed that actual experience does not directly influence tourist satisfaction; rather, it is the disparity between expectations and actual experience that determines satisfaction and ultimate e-WOM intentions in Vietnam. These expectations are evidenced in the destination image. This conclusion lends credence to some of the earlier assertions made by ( Lee & Kim, 2020), but it also casts doubt on the idea that visitor happiness is entirely dependent on the quality of their experiences, an idea that has been supported by a number of research in the past (Petrick et al., 2001).

Additionally, ECT was extended in a different direction. This research related visitor happiness to a concept of loyalty that was represented by the e-WOM intents of visitors. Rather than taking visitor satisfaction as the ultimate endogenous variable, this study used a different approach. As a consequence of this finding, the final theoretical framework establishes a connection between the consumption of e-WOM before to the trip and the post-trip intentions towards e-WOM. Some of the earlier research made an effort to investigate either the impacts of satisfied tourists on the spread of word of mouth (Wang et al., 2017) or the contribution of e-WOM consumption to the development of the destination (Jalilvand & Heidari, 2017). The fact that no research were able to properly merge these two concepts into a single holistic framework is something that may be explained by the challenges associated with organising panel polls with the same sample of vacationers. This research was able to accomplish such a combination thanks to the assistance of tour operators, and the expansion of ECT led to the creation of a comprehensive framework for e-WOM that was applied to the context of ecotourism, which led to an addition to the existing body of literature.

### **6.2 Practical contribution**

In addition to the contributions to theory that this work has produced, there are also implications for practice that can be drawn from it. Positive e-WOM that is distributed by travelers is essential for the success of tour operators, hotels, and other local businesses since it will encourage more people to go to the region. In addition to this, consumers who want to spread good word-of-mouth through e-WOM are also more likely to return to the location on many occasions. Reviews, comments, and suggestions that are positive help to increase interest in ecotourism locations, which in turn may have an effect on the income of the companies that are affiliated with such locations. According to the findings of this research, the image of a place and the level of satisfaction experienced by visitors are key factors that influence e-WOM intentions. Therefore, in order to

allow a broader spread of good word-of-mouth from ecotourists who visit the region, tour operators should strive toward developing a favorable image of the place. The findings of the research also shown that one of the significant contributing elements is the altruistic behavior of the local people, which helps to mediate the link between satisfied tourists and their intents to spread positive word of mouth online. It is advised that local companies in the hospitality and tourism industries work to improve their customer service and provide more assistance to visitors who are in the area in order to facilitate the spread of e-WOM. This will not only have benefits in the short term but also long-term implications, which can be seen in the continued rise of the number of visitors visiting the place in the future.

interactions.

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## Research activities at Tomas Bata University in Zlin

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