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Empirical Research Article

Domestic Tourists' Perception of Hotel Websites in Thailand

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Abstract

With the growing trend of online global market, customers have further technological capabilities in searching for information and online shopping on the Internet. In addition, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is a significant factor that influences customer purchase intention. However, the perspective of online users on hotel websites is still in its infancy, especially in various cultural contexts. The current study examined a theoretical framework of hotel websites to understand how online users perceive the importance of hotel websites with regard to influencing purchase intention, within the content of Thai online users through an online questionnaire survey. Findings show that usability positively influences online Thai users' satisfaction. Moreover, eWOM has a significant positive influence on satisfaction, but eWOM has an indirect effect on the intention to purchase. Practical implications are further discussed.

1. Introduction

The tourism industry has become increasingly important among Asian countries (Statista, 2023). Thailand, which is one of the popular destinations for visitors worldwide, is known for its impressive historical attractions, rich culture, beautiful nature, warm and friendly people, attractive hotels and resorts, a variety of nightlife, and unique souvenirs and local gifts (Asia Highlights, 2023). One important factor to drive tourists to visit Thailand is the accommodation and lodging, encompassing not only international hotel brands but also local Thai hotel brands (CN Traveller, 2023). To meet the increasing tourist demand, the developers included Anantara Hotels, Resorts & Spas, Dusit Hotels & Resorts, and Centara Hotels & Resorts, had increased their inbound and outbound investment. Therefore, considering the popularity of Thailand and its promising prospect of the global tourism market, this study selected Thailand as the research site.

Since four decades ago, information and communication technologies have played important roles in changing management strategies and implementation in hospitality and tourism (Ip et al., 2011; Law, 2019). At present, Internet usage is rapidly developing and expanding in Thailand, with e-Marketplace such as Shopee, Lazada and Kaidee, followed by Facebook, Website, LINE application, Instagram, and Twitter, at 75.99%, 61.51%, 39.7%, 31.4%, 12.95%, and 3.81% of users, respectively (ETDA, 2022). The Internet creates a facilitating distribution channel between suppliers and consumers. Hence, the Internet offers advantages to hotel businesses (Kim & Hyun, 2021), allowing hotels to sell their packages through websites (Amin et al., 2021). Hotels can also understand what customers need by receiving

their online feedback, which might help companies to develop their packages afterward (Xia et al., 2022). Additionally, hotels seek opportunities to find new marketing channels to promote their packages, such as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication through social media (e.g., blogs), which could be an appropriate way to reach customers (Seo et al., 2020).

Recently, online travel agencies combine information from many suppliers on various special deals systematically and provide a comparable price, simplify the search process between buyers and sellers (Wong et al., 2020). This case brings pressure to the performance of the official websites of hotels. Prior studies highlighted the importance of research on website quality in several contexts (Li et al., 2017). However, online users' perspective on hotel websites is lacking in hospitality and tourism, and studies focusing on Thai residents are rare. Online users in Thailand have cultural backgrounds and geographic differences with diverse requirements and perspectives on website attributes (Goodrich & De Mooij, 2011; Wattana & Phattarawan, 2019). Hence, to fill the above gaps, the current study endeavored to explore the perception of Thai online domestic users regarding hotel websites. Objectives of the present study are (i) to examine the perception of hotel website functionality with regard to Thai online users' satisfaction, (ii) to investigate the perception of hotel website usability with regard to Thai online users' satisfaction with hotel websites, (iii) to explore the effects of eWOM on satisfaction and purchase intention from Thai online users' perspectives, and (iv) to analyze the effects of online users' satisfaction on their purchase intention in Thailand. This study contributes to the hospitality and tourism literature by revealing the influence of hotel website performance in terms of

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functionality and usability on customers' satisfaction and booking intention. In addition, e-WOM was identified as an external influencing factors of customers' purchasing intention. Moreover, this study fills the void of online booking behavior of local Thai residents.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Website Quality

Since the late 1990s, in the hotel sector, websites have become a major tool and a powerful operational and marketing channel to maintain contact with customers (Law, 2019). Hotels utilize websites as electronic media not only to market their service packages, but also to offer customers a convenient platform for searching information and comparing prices prior to making a purchase (Wong et al., 2020). Hence, providing a quality website is the key determinant of a successful e-business. In addition, a website is a main channel of information that must contain comprehensive packages information and allow customers to quickly retrieve information through search engines to help customers in the evaluation of alternatives (Sun et al., 2017). Many tourism and hospitality companies continue to invest in their website owing to online customer behavior affecting their overall experience.

Examining the significance of hotel website attributes in cultural backgrounds influencing customer attitude is considered a focal point of website quality. For example, Díaz and Koutra (2013) assessed the differentiated subgroup of persuasive hotel websites by using latent class cluster analysis. Usability, credibility, informativeness, inspiration, involvement, and reciprocity of hotel websites are different concerning the scale of hotel chains.

2.2 Evaluation Criteria for Hotel Website Functionality and Usability

Previous research applied functionality features to evaluate the quality of websites in hotels and tourism, which is expected to directly affect travelers' perception of products and services (Wang et al., 2015). In particular, hotel booking information is the most crucial attribute for e-buyers (Le et al., 2020). For example, Wong and Law (2005) investigated the perceptions of travelers with nine different attributes concerning why they reserve rooms through hotel websites. Over 90% of the respondents prefer to book hotel rooms through websites if its price is cheaper than offline. Price is a strategy that companies use to attract potential purchasers by providing discounted pricing.

A reservation system and communication channel with advanced functionality can maintain contact directly with customers (Sun et al., 2020). For example, Kim and Kim (2004) examined the dimensions that influence hotel reservation intention and ease of information search. They considered the transaction method a significant factor for online users when using online reservation sites. Customers can find sufficient information with ease to make reservations. Furthermore, perceived transaction security and privacy of information along with specific privacy policies can stimulate customers' intention to purchase online. Guaranteed security in payment systems can also attract users to feel confident when booking (Wong & Law, 2020). Regarding the attributes of facilities' information, the information of hotel facilities is considered as a crucial factor from hotel managers' perspective, and guest room facilities are found to be vital attributes (Leung et al., 2016).

The dimension of contact information is for accommodating convenient communication between customers and a hotel. Tang et al. (2012) examined dual-route communication on destination websites, which includes central and peripheral routes. The results indicated that the level of consumer involvement affects information elaboration and customer intention. People with high involvement tend to follow the central route that provides elaborate information, whereas low-involvement people tend to use the peripheral route in that they make judgments based on simple cues. Interactive communication should be added to hotel websites to save the cost of contacting customers. Thus, when customers have any problems or inquiries, the problems can be solved immediately (Ting et al., 2013). As such, functional quality, including delivery, communication, and administrative activities, has a direct effect on relationship satisfaction (Wong & Law, 2020).

Website usability is a significant factor in the existing hospitality studies. Usability is a dimensional property of a user interface, which involves the user's ease of learning to manage the system and ease of remembering, with a low degree of error, the satisfaction of the user. The definition is similar to perceived ease of use that involves two different features: ease of understanding and ease of operation and navigation (Loiacono et al., 2002). An effective website design facilitates users to easily find the necessary information and assist hoteliers to increase sales volume (Lohse & Spiller, 1998). Web design is important in presenting an integral front-end feature to appeal to customers. The layout and pictures, language, information architecture, user interface and navigation, and general information are attributes in the usability of website design proposed by prior researchers for customer satisfaction and behavior (Bufquin et al., 2020).

For instance, Kim and Mattila (2011) evaluated video clips of hotel websites based on six distinct dimensions, such as user interface, aesthetics, customization, assurance, flexibility, and virtual human interaction. These dimensions provide evidence of service quality in products and services offered to online customers. In addition, Bai et al. (2008) proposed a framework of the inter-relationship among website quality, online satisfaction, and purchase intentions of Mainland Chinese travelers online. Usability has a direct effect on satisfaction and language, and layout and graphics are key attributes that are inclined to have a great impact on customer perception. Although large-scale and mid-scale hotel chains have good website design and layout and adequate visual characteristics, hotel chains with low-persuasive web designs still have an impact on customer purchase decisions (Díaz & Koutra, 2013). Hence, hypotheses 1 and 2 are proposed.

H1: *Website functionality has a positive effect on customer satisfaction.*
H2: *Website usability has a positive effect on customer satisfaction.*

2.3 EWOM on Customer Satisfaction and Purchase Intention

EWOM plays an increasingly significant role in consumers' attitudes and decision-making because of the growth of the Internet and widely use of web-based platforms (Yang, 2022). Cheung and Thadani (2012) proposed the model for the influence of eWOM communication adopted from previous individual-level eWOM studies. eWOM has four major elements: (1) information-sharing customers (communicators), (2) a form of social communication content (stimuli), (3) information-seeking customers (receivers), and (4) outcomes of eWOM (responses). In addition, positive reviews and comments on customer satisfaction can enhance a hotel's reputation and consumers' confidence in the hotel (Akbari et al., 2022). For example, Gavilan, Avello, and Martinez-Navarro (2018) revealed that the more number of positive reviews, the more confidence the customers will trust on the hotel.

Moreover, cleanliness, hotel room size, bed comfort, quality of food and beverages, staff performance, helpful staff, and location and accessibility are the sources of customer satisfaction (Gu & Ryan, 2008). Meanwhile, slow Wi-Fi and additional charges, noise, smoking issues, old facilities, dirty rooms, and unhelpful and

unfriendly staff are reasons for generating customer dissatisfaction when staying in hotels (Xu & Li, 2016). Furthermore, Li et al. (2013) examined the determinants of customer satisfaction in the hotel industry by analyzing the online reviews of 774 star-rated hotels in China. Results indicated that factors such as transportation convenience, food and beverage management, are considered the key factors that influence customer satisfaction with regard to budget and luxury hotels. Furthermore, location, room quality, and staff performance are included in the dimensions of customer satisfaction for all hotel services (Xu & Li, 2016).

Meanwhile, Yoo et al. (2009) argued that a source of valid assertion, such as an official tourism bureau website, creates confidence for readers in the source. Hence, they trust the comments and materials, which has an influence on honesty and intention behavior. In particular, the hotel and tourism business provide intangible products with limited physical cues, which are difficult to evaluate. Therefore, source credibility is important for planning a trip, including the economic and psychological risks, which affect decision-making (Alsheikh et al., 2021). EWOM is employed to find information from previous customers who explain their experience and assist other customers to evaluate products and services that they are willing to buy. If the information from eWOM fits customers' needs, including its value, usefulness, and credibility, then customers will believe in the recommendation provided by eWOM and result in a purchasing intention. After consumers are no longer passive recipients of information, interpersonal communication influences the receiver's attitude regarding their purchase decision. For example, Farida (2016) examined the influences of consumer inertia and satisfaction on repeat-purchase intention. They found that online stores are used for shopping owing to customer inertia. Thus, a positive eWOM is significant between satisfaction and repurchase intentions (Izogo et al., 2022). Hence, hypotheses 3 and 4 are proposed.

H3: eWOM has a positive effect on customer satisfaction.
H4: eWOM has a direct positive effect on purchase intention.

2.4 Customer Satisfaction and Purchase Intention

During the last decade, satisfaction has been studied as an important theoretical and practical issue for marketing scholars (Dash et al., 2021). Therefore, customer satisfaction is an effective condition that results from evaluating a product or service between what customers expected (Mafael et al., 2022).

Satisfaction is indeed a component of the customer decision-making process that influences consumers' buying behavior (Goel et al., 2022). According to Madden et al. (1992) and Ajzen and Fishbein (1975), the theory of reasoned action (TRA) model has been broadly utilized to predict and explain behavioral intentions and/or behavior based on customers' attitudes and norms. The model has been developed to explain a person's specific behavior under a high degree of volitional control. Behavioral intentions are a function of a person's attitude toward performing the behavior and a person's subjective norm (SN). Either customers' attitude and/or SN affect their intentions to perform a behavior. The individual's attitude toward a specific behavior relates to personal outcome evaluation being in favor of or against performing the behavior. By contrast, the SN involves an individual perceiving others' opinions as important concerning behavior. Thus, attitudes are derived from beliefs, and norms are derived from normative beliefs and motivation in compliance (Ajzen, 1985). Later, Ajzen (1985) modified the TRA model to the theory of

planned behavior (TPB), which extended the boundary conditions of volitional control. Perceived behavioral control is added as an exogenous determinant. Moreover, customers' attitude is a key driver of behavioral intention. For instance, Han et al. (2010) indicated that the TPB model is better in predicting hotel consumers' intention in visiting green hotels than the TRA model because of situational constraint factors in a green hotel. In addition, attitude toward a behavior is found to affect tourists' intention to visit a green hotel; consequently, creating positive customers' attitudes may enhance their intention to stay in such hotels. George (2004) also applied the TPB to examine the relationships among beliefs of trustworthiness and privacy, beliefs of important others' judgments, beliefs of perceived behavioral control, and purchasing behavior online. The results present that the beliefs regarding trustworthiness directly impact attitude, which in turn directly affects online purchasing behavior.

Kim and Kim (2004) found that the main reason for online hotel reservation intention is the concern with ease of information searching and transactions. Moreover, Kim et al. (2006) found different motives for online purchase intention where customers pay attention to service performance and reputation and price. By contrast, convenience, safety, and technological inclination are important for satisfaction and purchase intention on hotel websites. Lien et al. (2015) examined consumers' online hotel booking in Taiwan and found that consumers are price sensitive, and hotel brand image and perceived value influence booking intentions.

From another aspect, Cronin et al. (2000) mentioned that service quality and service value have an indirect effect on consumers' behavioral intention because of the hospitality industry providing intangible products, leading to a complex and comprehensive decision-making process of buying. Hence, customers' satisfaction can be a mediator between service quality and behavioral intentions to complete evaluations of service performance. Liusear et al. (2001) also found that customer satisfaction is presented as a mediator of the relationship between perceived quality and customer purchase intention. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H5: Customer satisfaction has a positive effect on purchase intention.

2.5 Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework was presented in Figure 1. Considering functionality and usability have incorporated most of website performance criteria, these two dimensions are adopted in this study as the independent variables. This study modifies the hotel website quality model of Bai et al. (2008) to evaluate the functionality and usability of hotel websites. According to the existing research, the model includes five constructs, namely, functionality, usability, eWOM, customer satisfaction, and purchase intention. The constructs of functionality, usability, and eWOM are designated as independent variables, with satisfaction and purchase intention as dependent variables. Moreover, observable variables cannot be directly measured but can be measured indirectly through observable variables to understand the characteristics of all the research constructs. All the constructs are integrated into the model to investigate the perception of customers regarding hotel websites. This model posits that independent variables affect their outcome with regard to which customer satisfaction is presented as a mediating variable. However, only eWOM is expected to have a direct path to purchase intention.
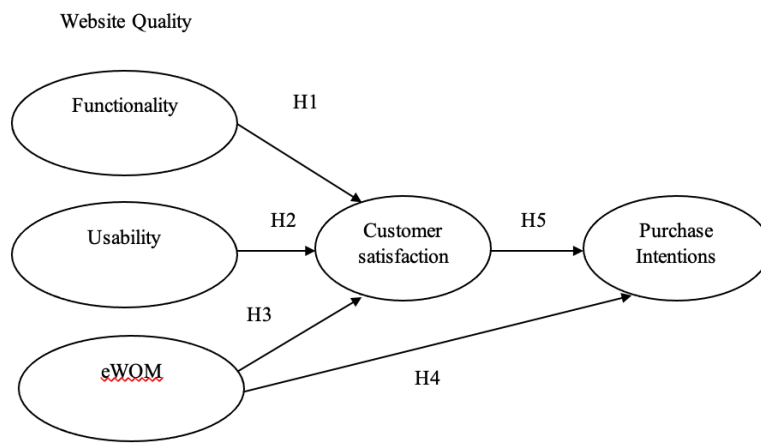
Fig. 1. A theoretical framework for the study

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A quantitative approach was adopted to examine the research questions in the current study. A deductive approach was employed to create all items in the measure. The approach started with a literature review of previous studies and pre-existing theories related to a certain topic, followed by the development of specific hypotheses that can be tested using the research sample (Kamil, 2004). In addition, survey was an appropriate method for collecting data from several respondents (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, survey was utilized as the main method to collect the data for testing the hypotheses and the model.

3.2 Measurements of the Dimensions

The five main constructs are proposed in the conceptual framework, which consists of hotel website functionality, hotel website usability, eWOM, customer satisfaction, and purchase intention. Multi-measurement of each construct was developed from the previously identified empirical research studies. The construct of the hotel website functionality was designed as seven items (Table 1).

Table 1. Measurement of functionality

1. Hotel reservation information
2. Facilities information
3. Contact information
4. Website management
5. Surrounding area information
6. Accessibility
7. Peripheral information

Source: Leung et al. (2016) and Qi et al. (2009).

Hotel website usability comprises five items (Table 2), all of which were adapted from Au Yeung and Law (2004). The items consist of language, layout and graphics, information architecture, user interface, and navigation and general usability. Website usability relates to ease of use or design (Law et al., 2008). Bai et al. (2008) found that language, layout, and graphics are important attributes of website usability in creating customer satisfaction. Pictures and visual reality on hotel websites also help customers who are not familiar with an unknown place to easily make a purchase decision (Lee & Oh, 2007). Hotel websites with a friendly layout, well-organized information, ease of operation, and simple navigation tend to increase sales volume (Wang et al., 2015). The website's quality with ease of use allows customers to memorize the business and creates a positive image of products on the

website (Law, 2019). Service failure is still observed on hotel-relevant websites and makes customers abandon them and visit other sites (Chen & Tussyadiah, 2021). Au Yeung and Law (2004) developed website usability indicators using a heuristic evaluation technique. The entire checklist is applied in this study to evaluate hotel website performance from the customers' perspective.

Table 2. Measurement of usability

1. Language
2. Layout and graphics
3. Information architecture
4. User interface and navigation
5. General usability

Source: Au Yeung and Law (2004).

EWOM has eight items (Table 3) of which six items were obtained from Cheung et al. (2008), namely, relevance, timeliness, accuracy, comprehensiveness, source expertise, and source trustworthiness. Then, the other two items, that is, rating and number of reviews, were derived from Cheung and Thadani (2012). Before making the decision to book a hotel, eWOM on social media sites or online travel reviews is a good way to find out information (Litvin et al., 2008). Reading online reviews can provide additional up-to-date information about products. In addition, positive hotel reviews can create positive customer attitudes toward hotels (Li et al., 2023). Recommendations from reliable sources are important to help eliminate risky buying on websites (Xie et al., 2011) because the hotel industry provides intangible products that are difficult to be evaluated by experienced customers. Furthermore, source credibility can enable readers to have additional confidence and trust in products (Kang & Namkung, 2019).

Table 3. Measurement of eWOM

1. Relevance
2. Timeliness
3. Accuracy
4. Comprehensiveness
5. Source expertise
6. Source trustworthiness

Source: Cheung et al. (2008).

7. Rating
8. Number of reviews

Source: Cheung and Thadani (2012).

Based on previous studies, satisfaction is related to post-consumption evaluation where customers judge a product or service by considering the levels of under or over-fulfillment (Oliver, 1970). The outcome of customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction depends on their expectation and experience of products and services (Chen & Peng, 2014). If a customer enjoys a

product, then a company could be successful in meeting customer expectations. Conversely, if a customer encounters an unpleasant experience with a product, then anger and negative feelings will arise (Szymanski & Henard, 2001). Satisfaction is also appropriate for monitoring the performance of the company and predicting customers' intentions and behavior (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Therefore, understanding how customers perceive hotel websites is important to improve them to attract additional customers and increase profitability.

In this study, customer satisfaction with online hotel booking was measured by six questions adapted from Bai et al. (2008) and Law and Bai (2006) (Table 4). Bai et al. (2008) investigated the influence of website quality on customer satisfaction in Mainland China. Website functionality and usability positively affect customer satisfaction. In addition, Vladimirov (2012) evaluated customer satisfaction with 10 attributed indicators of Bulgarian tour agencies and tour operators' websites. Moreover, playfulness, navigation, trust, variety of destinations, information quality, and online transactions are the dimensions that affect website quality and customer satisfaction.

Table 4. Measurement of customer satisfaction

1. I am satisfied with my decision to visit hotel websites.
2. If I had to visit again, I would feel differently about visiting hotel websites.
3. My choice to visit hotel websites was a wise one.
4. I think I did the right thing by visiting hotel websites.
Source: Bai et al. (2008)
5. I am happy that I visited hotel websites.
6. Overall, I feel happy with my decision to visit hotel websites.
Source: Law and Bai (2006).

Internet usage has increased rapidly, and thus, understanding customer satisfaction among these factors will help hotel marketers to predict purchase behavior and the intention to make a booking on hotel websites. In addition, this case may assist hotel marketers to create a successful webpage. Ladeira et al. (2016) found that purchase intention has the strongest relationship with satisfaction in the context of hospitality and tourism. This research draws from the studies of Bai et al. (2008), Law and Bai (2006), and Wang et al. (2015) to examine purchase intention. The variable of purchase intention is examined with a seven-point Likert-type scale (Table 5).

Table 5. Measurement of purchase intention

1. It is likely that I will book hotel rooms via hotel websites within the next six months.
2. It is likely that I will book hotel rooms via hotel websites within the next two years.
Source: Bai et al. (2008) and Law and Bai (2006).
3. I am willing to book hotel rooms via hotel websites.
4. I plan to book hotel rooms via hotel websites.
Source: Wang et al. (2015).

3.3 Questionnaire design

In this study, the questionnaire consists of two sections. The first part involves the respondents' perception of hotel website functionality and usability, eWOM, satisfaction, and purchase intention. The participants were invited to evaluate their perceived importance of website functionality and usability performance items and eWOM items. All variable attributes were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 7 = "strongly agree" to 1 = "strongly disagree" (Bai et al., 2008).

The second section is related to respondents' demographics, including gender, age, marital status, education level, occupation, and income, to collect private and personal information at the end of the questionnaire. In addition, the translation from English to Thai version, pilot test, population, and sampling method of the questionnaire design are included and described as follows.

3.4 Data collection and data analysis

The developed questionnaire from the previous literature was distributed to a small number of participants for pilot testing to refine and purify the questionnaire design. Any mistakes and errors were corrected and adjusted through the feedback or suggestions of the participants. In addition, a pilot test assists in measuring the validity and reliability of an initial instrument and reducing the failure of the main survey to confirm the feasibility of the research (Maxwell, 2005). A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed through multiple methods (i.e., online and onsite) based on convenience sampling, and the respondents were all Thai residents. The respondents evaluated the clarity of their experiential satisfaction and their online purchase intention with hotel websites. Data were uploaded to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to test the reliability by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient. After that, the researchers made minor revisions in terms of rewording and rephrasing the items to obtain great reliability and validity before the formal data collection. The researcher screened out the unqualified respondents automatically. Eight questionnaires had missing values because the respondents misunderstood hotel and OTA websites, resulting in a total of 92 valid pilot-test samples.

The main survey was distributed onsite and online to a sample of 450 respondents residing in Bangkok, Thailand, recently. After questionnaire collection, the data were entered into Excel and then transferred and analyzed using SPSS software. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) confirms the previously identified constructs to test the goodness of fit of each measurement model. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was also applied to test the hypothesized relationships among the latent variables in the research model, which is supported by AMOS 24.0 software. SEM is a popular data analysis method often applied across disciplines, particularly in social sciences, including hotel and tourism industries (MacCallum & Austin, 2000), which is utilized to estimate the relationships among the constructs.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Profile

The characteristics of the 450 respondents were analyzed using SPSS. The following paragraphs briefly explain each variable, which is summarized in Table 6.

A total of 450 respondents participated in the survey, with 69.3% (N = 312) being female and 30.7% (N = 138) being male. Participants under 26 years old account for 55.1% (N = 248) of the participants. The majority of the respondents (N = 331, 73.6%) completed an undergraduate education level. A total of 242 respondents (53.8%) are students, representing the majority group. A large proportion of the respondents are single (N = 355, 78.9%), whereas 91 respondents (20.2%) are married. The majority of the respondents live with their families of approximately three to five people (N = 360, 80%). Almost half of the participants (N = 212, 47.1%) have no income.

Over 60% of the respondents (N = 279, 62%) browsed websites between 3–4 star hotels in the last 12 months. Nealy 70% of the respondents (N = 310, 68.9%) have never experienced purchasing on hotel websites. In addition, most participants have experienced online booking hotel websites two to three times (N = 70) in the last 12 months.

Table 6. Demographic profile of the respondents (N = 450)

Variable (N = 450)	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	138	30.7
Female	312	69.3
		100.0
Age		
Less than 26	248	55.1
26–35	103	22.9
36–45	88	19.6
46–55	7	1.6
56–65	4	0.9
		100.0
Education		
Secondary/high school	6	1.3
Diploma/higher diploma	8	1.8
Bachelor's degree	331	73.6
Completed postgraduate degree or above	105	23.3
		100.0
Occupation		
Retire	3	0.7
Management/executive	22	4.9
Government employee/state enterprise office	97	21.6
Self-employed/owner	69	15.3
Student	242	53.8
Others	17	3.8
		100.0
Marital status		
Single	355	78.9
Married/partnered	91	20.2
Separated/divorced	3	0.7
widowed	1	0.2
		100.0
Family members		
1 person	2	0.4
2 persons	30	6.7
3 persons	96	21.3
4 persons	171	38.0
5 persons	93	20.7
6 persons	27	6.0
7 persons	20	4.4
8 persons	6	1.3
9 persons	2	0.4
10 persons	1	0.2
11 persons	1	0.2
13 persons	1	0.2
		100.0
Salary		
Less than THB 15,000	12	2.7
THB 15,000–THB 24,999	44	9.8
THB 25,000–THB 34,999	59	13.1
THB 35,000–THB 44,999	34	7.6
THB 45,000–THB 54,999	12	2.7
Above THB 54,999	49	10.9
Unstable	28	6.2
No income	212	47.1
		100.0
Visits on hotel websites within the past 12 months		
2-star hotels	44	9.8
3-star hotels	155	34.4
4-star hotels	124	27.6
5-star hotels	127	28.2
		100.0
Purchases on hotel websites within the past 12 months		
Yes	140	31.1
No	310	68.9
		100.0
Frequency of online booking on hotel websites		
Never	310	68.9
1 time	43	9.6
2–3 times	70	15.6
4–5 times	13	2.9
More than 5 times	14	3.1
		100.0

4.2 CFA

The five constructs are functionality, usability, eWOM, customer satisfaction, and purchase intention form the overall measurement model. Latent variables are assumed to be freely correlated with each other in the model (Jöreskog & Goldberger, 1975). In addition, the model analyzes the relationships between all the constructs through a CFA with the sample (N = 450) to ensure its reliability and validity.

The result of the preliminary analysis includes 30 measurement items, which show an unacceptable model fit. The goodness-of-fit indices were CMIN = 1794.350, CMIM/df = 4.543, CFI = 0.823, TLI = 0.805, and RMSEA = 0.089. The model indicates a poor fit of the data. In addition, an item having a loading value of 0.7 means that a particular item would be explaining 50% variance of the latent variable.

The examination reveals that six items with an inappropriate factor loading were dropped to improve the fitness and robustness of the model. Then, the model was rectified to improve fitness again, and the model fit indices are CMIN = 1077.690, CMIM/df = 4.453, CFI = 0.873, TLI = 0.855, and RMSEA = 0.088. However, these values still illustrate a poor fit of the model to the sample data in which an acceptable model should have standardized residuals close to one. Therefore, re-specification using the modification indices (MI) is considered to improve the model fit by freeing the pairs of the error covariance with the highest MI value. MI provides evidence of misfit, which relates to a chi-square statistic with one degree of freedom. When the parameter was to be freely estimated in subsequent tests, the overall chi-square (χ^2) value is expected to reduce. If any pair of items has MI greater than 4.0, the fit could be done by freeing the corresponding path.

In terms of the reliability and validity tests on the measurement model, MI is acceptable. The overall composite reliability of the multi-item scales range from 0.76 to 0.89, which is greater than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010). This result indicates a high consistency in the measurement model. In addition, the internal reliability is satisfactory: functionality (0.76), usability (0.84), eWOM (0.89), customer satisfaction (0.89), and purchase intention (0.89).

In addition, the standardized factor loadings and t-values in the CFA models are examined on convergent validity (Table 7). As a rule of thumb from Hair et al (2010), standardized factor loadings should be $\geq$ 0.5. All items obtain factors loading, which are greater than the threshold and range from 0.62 to 0.93. In addition, C.R. (t-value) is greater than 1.96, which ranges from 11.437 to 20.657. Moreover, all indicators are statistically significant at p < 0.001. The next parameter to consider for convergent validity and discriminant validity is AVE (Table 8). The AVE values are in a range of 0.51 to 0.67, which exceeds the acceptance value of 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Hence, the convergent validity is satisfactory. Regarding discriminant validity, the comparison between the AVE value of each construct and the squared correlation coefficients for the corresponding inter-constructs is verified. The AVE value of each pair is higher than the squared correlations, which meets the criteria for discriminant validity. Therefore, the model successfully confirms satisfactory discriminant validity. The proposed model has sufficient reliability and validity and is the structural model to be tested.

Table 7. Results of CFA: factor loading estimates and t-value

Factors	Factor loading	t-Value
Functionality		
Hotel reservation information	0.77	11.53
Facilities information	0.66	NA
Contact information	0.73	11.44
Usability		
Language	0.78	NA

Layout and graphics	0.89	16.95
Information architecture	0.72	14.94
eWOM		
Relevance	0.62	12.74
Timeliness	0.69	14.27
Accuracy	0.72	14.86
Comprehensiveness	0.74	15.43
Source expertise	0.73	15.27
Source trustworthiness	0.71	14.79
Rating	0.74	15.49
Number of reviews	0.76	NA
Customer satisfaction		
I am satisfied with my decision to visit hotel websites.	0.67	NA
If I had to visit again, I would feel differently.	0.64	12.37
About visiting hotel websites	0.73	13.84
My choice to visit hotel websites was a wise one.	0.87	15.99
I think I did the right thing by visiting hotel websites.	0.82	15.23
I am happy that I visited hotel websites.	0.83	15.28
Overall, I feel happy with my decision to visit hotel websites.	0.86	15.52
Purchase intention		
It is likely that I will book hotel rooms via hotel websites within the next six months	0.66	NA
It is likely that I will book hotel rooms via hotel websites within the next two years.	0.73	20.66
I am willing to book hotel rooms via hotel websites.	0.93	16.48
I plan to book hotel rooms via hotel websites.	0.92	16.39

Note: All factor loadings are significant at p < 0.000. The parameter is fixed at 1.0 for the maximum-likelihood estimation. Therefore, t-values were not obtained (NA) for those fixed to 1 for identification purposes.

Table 8. Correlation (squared correlation), reliability, AVE, and mean

	Functional ity	Usabilit y	eWOM	CS	PI
Functional ity	1.00				
Usability	0.30(0.09)	1.00			
eWOM	0.36(0.13)	0.43(0.1 9)	1.00		
CS	0.29(0.08)	0.38(0.1 4)	0.47(0.2 2)	1.00	
PI	0.14(0.02)	0.32(0.1 0)	0.33(0.1 1)	0.63(0.4 0)	1.00
Reliability	0.76	0.84	0.89	0.89	0.89
AVE	0.52	0.63	0.51	0.59	0.67
Mean	6.32	5.74	5.83	5.44	4.98
Std. Dev.	0.70	0.84	0.77	0.79	1.02

Note: CS = customer satisfaction, PI = purchase intention, AVE = average variance extracted. Mean values are based on seven-point scales. All correlations are significant at p < 0.01.

4.3 SEM

4.3.1 Overall Fitness

The overall fit for the structural model is similar to the procedure and indicators applied to the measurement model. Four indicators comprise of normed Chi-square (X^2/df), CFI, TLI, and RMSEA are used for reporting. Hair et al. (2010) stated that the degrees of freedom ratio with a range between 2 and 5 are at an acceptable level for sample sizes of more than 200. In addition, a value for CFI and TLI is recommended nearly or fit to 1, and the cut-off point is 0.9 to indicate a good model fit (Kline, 2011). The model fit indices are CMIN = 698.534, CMIM/df = 2.923, CFI = 0.919, TLI = 0.930, and RMSEA = 0.065. The overall indices show a good model fit, which satisfies the minimum requirement of the fit indexes.
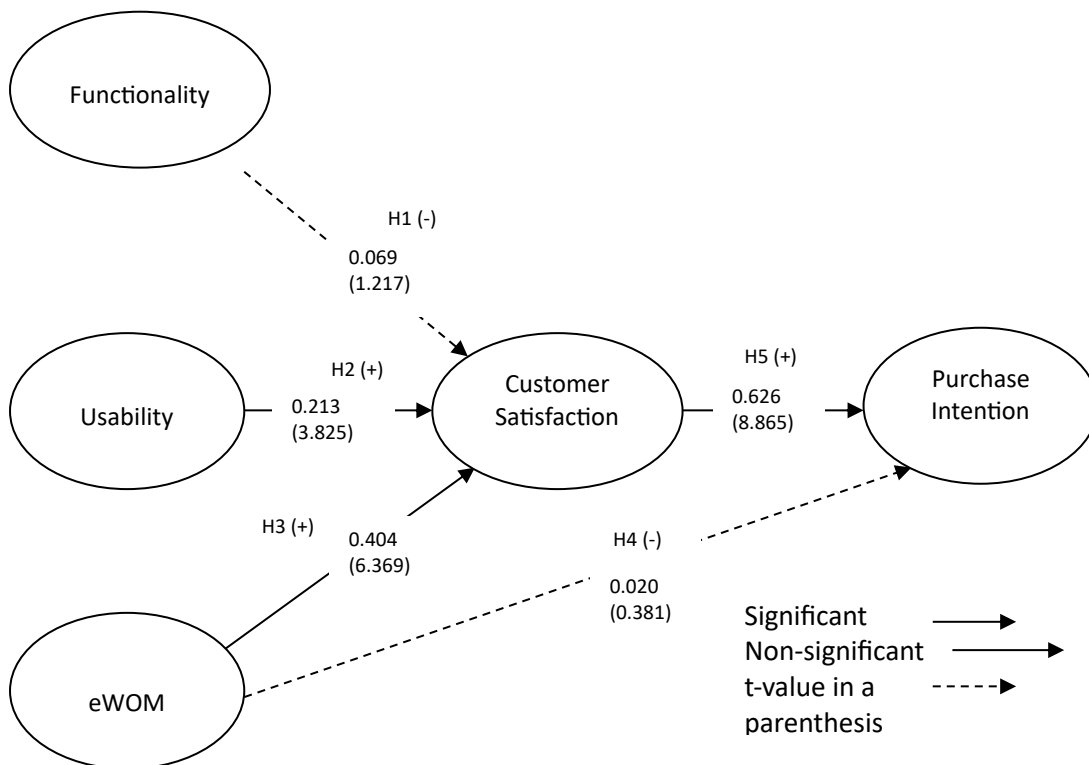
4.3.2 Hypotheses testing

Fig. 2. The structural model with estimated path coefficients
Note: χ^2 = 698.534, df = 2.923, CFI = 0.919, TLI = 0.930, RMSEA = 0.065

- **Hypothesis 1**: Website functionality has a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

In Figure 2, the path coefficient between "website functionality" "customer satisfaction" is examined. The path coefficient from website functionality to customer satisfaction is found to be non-significant with a t-value lower than 1.96 and a significant level at $p > 0.05$. The coefficient of the pair was 0.069. Therefore, H1 is rejected.

- **Hypothesis 2**: Website usability has a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

The path coefficient from website usability to customer satisfaction is positive with a t-value of >1.96 and a significant level of $p < 0.05$. The coefficient of the pair was 0.213. Therefore, H2 is supported.

- **Hypothesis 3**: eWOM has a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

The path coefficient from eWOM to customer satisfaction is found to be positive with a t-value of >1.96 and a significant level of $p < 0.05$. The coefficient of the pair was 0.404. Therefore, H3 is supported.

- **Hypothesis 4**: eWOM has a directly positive effect on purchase intention.

eWOM is not significantly related to purchase intention. The coefficient of the pair is 0.020, the t-value is extremely lower than 1.96, and the p-value was greater than 0.05. Therefore, eWOM has an indirect effect on purchase intention, and H4 was rejected.

- **Hypothesis 5**: Customer satisfaction has a positive effect on purchase intention

Customer satisfaction is hypothesized to have an influence on their purchase intention. The path coefficient from customer satisfaction to purchase intention has a strongly positive correlation. The coefficient of the pair is 0.626, and the t-value is 8.865, which is higher than 1.96, indicating significance at $p < 0.05$. Therefore, H5 is statistically supported (Table 9).

Table 9. Path results for the structural equation model (N = 450)

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient	C.R. (t-value)	Results
H1	Functionality → Satisfaction	0.069	1.217	Rejected
H2	Usability→ Satisfaction	0.213	3.825***	Supported
H3	eWOM → Satisfaction	0.404	6.369***	Supported
H4	eWOM → Intention	0.020	0.381	Rejected
H5	Satisfaction→ Intention	0.626	8.865***	Supported

***Parameter estimates are significant at $p < 0.05$, C.R. > 1.96.

5. Implications

This study provides theoretical contribution to the literature on website quality, especially in developing online technology in hospitality and tourism area. First, although several empirical studies attempted to develop hotel websites evaluation models, the current study indicated that the evaluation models should be periodically improved owing to the discrepancies found in prior studies. In particular, customers have different standards of satisfaction/dissatisfaction perceptions and purchasing behavior in products and services. Thus, the theoretical contribution of this research fills the research gap by expanding the website quality framework from Bai et al. (2008). One additional concept of eWOM was introduced in the model which has not been adequately suggested in the previous hotel website concept. The results of this study demystified that eWOM is a key feature in the evaluation of consumers' attitudes and decision-making process.

Second, the current study contributes to the existing research by proposing key items in satisfaction and purchase intention on hotel websites from the perspective of customers. There are 30 items from five constructs, namely, functionality, usability, eWOM, satisfaction, and purchase intention. The results show the perceptual constraining factors and the unique features of hotel websites that should be considered by developers.

Finally, numerous research studies examined functionality and usability features to evaluate the hotel and tourism website quality, which is expected to have effects on customer behavior. However, the perception of hotel websites has been rarely investigated, particularly from the customers' perspective (Ting et al., 2013). In particular, the perception of local Thai residents is limited. However, it is necessary to explore the requirements and perspectives on websites features of customers who have cultural and geographical differences.

Managerially, the results achieved from this study contribute to hotel practitioners to understand the perception of online visitors on hotel websites, by highlighting six key contributions. First, the key link of this study is to investigate the development of hotel websites relating to customers' perceptions and their purchase intention. The findings could be valuable in assisting hotel professionals to understand how to continuously refine and improve their hotel websites and to create a marketing strategic plan for achieving a large market share.

Second, the results suggest that the resources that hotel managers and hotel marketers have invested to improve their hotel websites would be useful and valuable to make customers stay and attract newcomers to purchase online. When browsing on hotel websites, online users' key information need is functionality. Providing useful and updated information on websites for reservation, contact, facilities, website management, surrounding area, accessibility, and peripheral information, is important in publicizing hotels' offerings, generating business leads, and influencing customers' intention to book hotel rooms online.

Third, this study not only emphasizes providing useful information on hotel websites but also focuses on their easy-to-use and design aspects. Tourism and hospitality suppliers should routinely scrutinize and update their websites to make sure that they are eye-catching, rich-text description, and easy to use. The use of color combinations, including the website design and structures, should be well organized and simple and easy for the customers to understand. Navigational functions should accommodate advanced website information by providing website visitors the ability to easily move around and link to other pages.

6. Conclusions and Future Research

In conclusion, as the development of the Internet has been increasing dramatically, the hotel and tourism sector utilizes websites as a direct marketing tool to sell products. Many hotels attempt to develop their website to meet customers' needs and motivate them to directly book through the websites. Although hotel websites focus on domestic and international users, differences exist in terms of practice and usage patterns for customers. This study attempts to investigate the perception of websites by functionality, usability, and eWOM from customers' perspective to evaluate website performance using the hotel business in Thailand as the context. The results indicate that usability and eWOM are important features for achieving customer satisfaction. The finding is in contradiction to previous studies with regard to the negative correlation between functionality and satisfaction. In addition, eWOM negatively influences purchase intention, but satisfaction is a mediator between eWOM and purchase intention. These conclusions are based on the SEM analysis with acceptable model fit indices.

Moreover, this study provides contributions to academics on how to encourage online users' intention to purchase directly via hotel websites. In addition, the study provides recommendations for hotel practitioners.

This study has some limitations that must be considered. The first limitation is the survey distribution. The data were collected in Bangkok, Thailand, which focused only on Thai online users using convenience sampling. Thus, the results might only cover a partial section of the demographic features. Second, the survey was collected from online users who have experience visiting hotel websites within the past 12 months. The majority of respondents were university students who are relatively young and well educated. Although young customers are major online shoppers, they were over-represented in this research; they do not have experience in actual purchase behavior owing to their low purchasing power and real intention to purchase products (Chung & Hoffman, 1998). Third, regarding data collection, some respondents cannot differentiate between hotel and OTA websites. OTA websites, such as Agoda and Booking.com, were mentioned while filling out the questionnaires. Therefore, many responses could not be used for this study because their data could not be computed for future analysis. Finally, another area for future study can be extended to investigate how other factors such as how website persuasiveness (Pektas & Hassan, 2020) influences customer behavior in different hotel types according to the level of service and hotel stars. Third, future research can consider extending previous qualitative and quantitative studies from the suppliers' perspective, including the opinions of web designers, hoteliers, and marketing personnel.

Declaration of competing interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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