FACTORS AFFECTING ECOTOURISM LOYALTY WITH THE MODERATING ROLE OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE - EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE IN VIETNAM

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Abstract: Today, ecotourism has become more common and attractive for tourists who love to explore nature and experience the cultural heritage. In the 4.0 age of technology, social networking not only helps visitors find suitable destinations to visit easily but also provides visitors with a place to leave comments or reviews after the trips. This study aims to qualify the relationships between electronic-worth-of-mouth (eWOM), social influence (SI), destination image (DI), tourist satisfaction (SAT), and ecotourism loyalty (EL). The study applied the PLS-SEM model to estimate 499 observations at ecotourism sites in Vietnam as empirical evidence. The research results show that all the factors in the research model have positive and significant effects on EL. In particular, DI and SAT, directly and indirectly, affect EL; while eWOM and SI only have direct effects on EL. Additionally, it was found that the effect of eWOM on EL increased with the moderating role of SI.

Key words: electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM), ecotourism loyalty, destination image, tourist satisfaction, social influence

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INTRODUCTION

As a new trend in modern life, ecotourism has become more attractive and interesting activity for people who want to escape the crowds. Factors that influence ecotourism have been explored in several studies. Mainly, tourism loyalty involves psychological attachment between the tourists and their preferred destination (Oppermann, 2000). This psychological commitment is usually developed when tourists leave the destination with a positive experience. In addition, existing research recognizes that the tourist experience is a broad field that ranges from the behaviour of their host and other interactive features of their destination. According to Kim and Brown (2012), most tourists' experience is determined by four aspects: entertainment, education, escapism, and aesthetics. These authors also explain that entertainment is mainly the ability of destinations to entertain tourists. It involves how hosts treat tourists and how the destination features fulfilled tourists' emotional appeal. In the field of tourism, the concept of loyalty is mentioned in many scientific studies and is often affected by factors such as destination image, tourist satisfaction, and word of mouth (Li et al., 2021a; Li et al., 2021b; Ramseook-Munhurruna et al., 2015; Jalilvand et al., 2012; Chi and Qu, 2008; Prayag and Ryan, 2012). For Vietnamese tourism, almost all studies discuss tourism in general or focus on tourists' intention to return and loyalty (Vinh and Long, 2013; Cong, 2021).

Practically, few studies discuss the loyalty factors in ecotourism in Vietnam. Furthermore, tourists who visit a particular destination get the experience as expected to develop the destination image of that specific destination (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). Several factors influence the image of the destination of a tourist. For Beerli and Martin (2004), most of these factors depend on the experience tourists develop from their visited destinations. A good experience is obtained by fulfilling the expectations of the tourist. When expectations are met, satisfaction is obtained, which leads the tourist to develop a positive destination image of the place they visited. Most tourists tend to do pre-visit research about their destinations to create expectations of their particular destinations (Chon, 1990). However, the first-hand information that tourists usually give their hosts tends to change their views and perceptions about that destination. This kind of information builds their expectations that later translate to experience (Bosque and SanMartín, 2008). When this information generates a good experience, tourists will be satisfied and loyal to that destination. Furthermore, there are still gaps in research on the relationship between eWOM factors with destination image, tourist satisfaction, and tourist loyalty in Vietnam.

Therefore, conducting this research is essential to supplement the academic knowledge of existing studies in tourism. At the same time, the research findings are expected to provide several novelty values of ecotourism when the first time SI is studied as a construct moderating the effect of eWOM and EL in the 4.0 technology era.

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Theoretical Framework

1. Ecotourism characteristics

Theoretically, the definitions of ecotourism are still debated (Blamey, 2001) although Ceballos-Lascurain (1987, p.14) suggests that ecotourism means "travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with a specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas". While Fibrianto (2021) claims that ecotourism is related to the conservation of ecosystems and nature and maintains the cultural integrity of the local community. Nowadays, ecotourism, as a kind of enjoyment in the natural environment or ethnic communities, is one of the common trends to allow tourists to experience ecology and biodiversity (Ulfy et al., 2021) and enrich knowledge of wildlife, nature and cultural inheritance (Nguyen, 2020).

2. Destination image

However, a destination image is defined as the composition of people's beliefs and impressions of a tourist destination (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). Besides, it is the overall perception of an individual's impression of a place (Phelps, 1986). It is also considered a mental portrait of a destination (Alhemoud and Armstrong, 1996). Destination images are diverse and different based on tourists' experiences (Dann, 1996; Lee et al., 2014). Milman and Pizam (1995) describe the destination image as consisting of three components: (i) the product, (ii) the behaviour and attitudes of people at the destination, and (iii) the environment: weather, landscape, and facilities. The image of the destination in the minds of tourists plays an essential role in their tour purchase decision and subsequently in stimulating their intention to visit (Oppermann, 2000; Pike, 2004). Many previous studies have also shown that destination image is one of the most critical factors for eliciting the intention to revisit a place they have been (Bigné et al., 2001; Alcaniz et al., 2005). Ecotourism is defined as going to relatively undisturbed or unpolluted natural areas to study, contemplate, and enjoy flora and fauna landscapes and cultural experiences (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987; Ryan et al., 2000). Therefore, the image of an ecotourism destination is reflected in many aspects of the landscape, people, culture, and local economic activities.

3. Loyalty of customers in the tourism industry

Customer loyalty is generally defined as a deep psychological commitment to continuously repurchase or reuse a preferred product or service in the future, and only to purchase or use repeatedly products or services of the same brand despite various marketing efforts or effects to switch shopping behavior (Oliver, 1997). According to Dick and Basu (1994), customer loyalty is formed through a process involving a variety of evaluation and psychological processes and derived from the assessment of these services. Additionally, customers' loyalty should be considered in terms of both behaviour and attitude (Gremler and Brown, 1998a, 1998b). Tourism loyalty is often studied as loyalty to the destination, since tourists enjoy a destination as a product or brand; thus, they are likely to return to these destinations in the future (Yoon and Uysal, 2005). Loyalty can be measured in different approaches, with most destination loyalty measured as a repeated visit or the intention to return (Cong, 2021).

4. Tourist satisfaction

The most commonly accepted theory to explain the customer satisfaction mechanism is the expectation-confirmation theory, developed by Lewin (1938). Customers can compare the perceived performance of a product or service with their expectations. Positive attitudes or satisfaction arise if perceived performance exceeds expectations. Then researchers consider customer satisfaction to be the overall evaluation of a product or service provider (Johnson and Fornell, 1991), consumer feedback on product or service features; or whether the product or service itself satisfies consumers or not (Oliver, 1997). Satisfaction is an indicator of matching what customers expect (Reichheld, 1996) or exceeding their expectations (Grisaffe, 2001). These definitions provide the implications for customer satisfaction in tourism and dimensions of tourist satisfaction in particular (Pizam et al., 1978).

5. Electronic word of mouth

Word of mouth (WOM) is an informal form of communication that allows consumers to share information regarding products and services (Hawkins et al., 2010). With the vigorous development of the Internet, a new WOM method appears, which is eWOM. The traditional form of WOM has evolved into a new form of information sharing on various online platforms. eWOM is a written memo on the Web, usually posted by experienced or former consumers (Abubakar and Ilkan, 2013; 2014). Memory makes it easy to diffuse information because it can be accessed anytime, anywhere and relayed to other computers (Abubakar and Ilkan, 2013; 2014).

6. Social influence

Social influence is a significant idea that can impact all of our decisions. It is described as "actors" playing a direct role in moulding an individual's views and conduct (Crano, 2000). Nowadays, there is confirmation of increased engagement in and effect of essential communities, which positively impacts communal influence (Bagozzi et al., 2002). According to a study, virtual communities have the power to alter people's perceptions and actions (Chen and Tsai, 2007). The rise and expansion of the social network, particularly Facebook, is perceived as an influential phenomenon that boosts users' social impact (Hvass and Munar, 2012). According to US Department of Commerce research, social media motivated 31% of the 25.4 million holiday travelers in 2015. Similarly, research from Liu et al. (2021) shows that tourists commonly use social media to confirm post-activity approvals from friends and family. According to reports, 52% of tourists altered their original travel plans due to social media remarks (Yüksel and Yüksel, 2007).

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS AND MODEL
1. Research hypothesis
1.1. Destination image and tourist satisfaction
The relationship between destination image and tourist satisfaction has been mentioned in many scientific studies, and most of them agree that the destination image has a positive impact on satisfaction. Li, Liu and Soutar (2021a; 2021b) suggest that travel experience, destination image, and satisfaction positively influence tourist loyalty to the ecotourism sector in Western Australia. Ramseook-Munhurrun et al. (2015) show a positive relationship between destination image and perceived value with tourist satisfaction, affecting their loyalty to destination visited. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:
H1: Destination image (DI) positively influences tourist satisfaction (SAT).

1.2 Destination image, tourist satisfaction, and eWOM
Some argue that customers will feel satisfied with a service, are more likely to buy or use it again, and recommend it to others through eWOM (Lam et al., 2004; Kanwel et al., 2019). Alhidari et al. (2015) also believe that tourist satisfaction with the overall image of the destination will create positive eWOM (Jeong and Jang, 2011; Pantelidis, 2010). In addition, some other studies show that destination image is quite important and has a substantial impact on tourists' intention to return and positive eWOM (Fakeye and Cromton, 1991; Lee et al., 2014). From there, the authors propose the hypotheses as follows:
H2: Destination image (DI) positively affects eWOM.
H3: Tourist satisfaction (SAT) positively affects eWOM.

1.3. Ecotourism loyalty
Destination image and ecotourism loyalty
The relationship between destination and tourist loyalty has been mentioned in many studies, but the results are not always consistent. Some previous studies support the view that destination image is an essential factor and has a significant positive impact on the intention to return to the destination of tourists (Bigné et al., 2014; Alhidari et al., 2015; Fakeye and Cromton, 1991; Lee et al., 2014; Li et al., 2021a; Li et al., 2021b). However, the study of Ramseook-Munhurruna et al. (2015) did not support this positive relationship. Therefore, the authors propose the hypothesis that:
H4: Destination image (DI) positively affects ecotourism loyalty (EL).

Tourist satisfaction and ecotourism loyalty
Satisfaction is one of the driving forces that leads to referrals and repurchase intentions. Customer satisfaction leads to greater customer loyalty (Bolton and Drew, 1991). Similarly, Ganesan (1994), Mittal et al. (1998), and Mittal and Kamakura (2001) indicate that consumer satisfaction is a significant factor influencing customer loyalty. Many studies in tourism have also found that satisfaction influences the future intention behavior of tourists (Chi and Qu, 2008; Prayag and Ryan, 2012). And positive experiences in terms of services, products, and other resources are the factors that lead to positive eWOM, i.e., recommending positive things about the destination to others or returning by themselves (Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Chi and Qu, 2008). According to Li et al. (2021a) and Li et al. (2021b), loyalty to ecotourism is influenced by the travel experience of the tourists, the satisfaction of the general image of the destination. This concept is consistent with the consumption theory that consumers who have a positive evaluation of a brand are more likely to repurchase the brand's products (Libai et al., 2009).
H5: Tourist satisfaction (SAT) positively affects ecotourism loyalty (EL)

eWOM and ecotourism loyalty
The topic of eWOM has attracted the attention of many industries such as marketing, consumer behavior, tourism, hospitality, etc. eWOM has been shown to influence prepurchase intention strongly and is considered an essential factor in predicting company service (Keiningham et al., 2007; Morgan and Rego, 2006; Reichheld, 2003). Tourism products and services are often not properly known until the point of experience, that is, the risks and uncertainties associated with it are increased, so potential visitors will access and refer to online reviews. Potential tourists use the service through recommendations from friends, family members, or social networks (Casaló et al., 2015). According to Bickart and Schindler (2001), eWOM has the potential to help tourists reduce the risk, uncertainty, and ambiguity associated with a product or service. Many studies demonstrate that eWOM has a significant influence on tourists' decisions, in which eWOM has a considerable impact on the destination image, attitude, and intention to return to tourists (Abubakar et al., 2014; Jalilvand et al., 2012). Therefore, the hypothesis put forward is:
H6: eWOM positively affects ecotourism loyalty (EL).

Social influence, eWOM, and ecotourism loyalty
Social influence initiates when others impact an individual's attitudes and behavior. Previously, social influence was studied in three distinct approaches: judgment (Asch, 1951; 1956), small group interaction (Hopkins, 1964), and persuasive communication (Hovland and Weiss, 1953; Hovland et al., 1953). Early studies looked at these directions together to assess the far-reaching effects of social influence (Kelman, 1968). Social influences include normative and informational influences (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955). Normative influence refers to how individuals are influenced by their desires to conform to the expectations of others. In informational influence, individuals are influenced by the desire to act according to the appropriate view of reality (Turner, 1991). Liu et al. (2021) found that virtual communities or social networks positively influence eWOM. Therefore, the hypothesis put forward is that eWOM and social networks are believed to

significantly influence consumer engagement (Dholakia et al., 2004; Liu et al., 2021). Evaluation of a new product on social networks has a positive effect on customer attitudes and encourages them to actively spread eWOM. It also means that positive impact on the intention of users to accept the product (Phung et al., 2020). In addition, through the Internet and social networks, a positive image of a destination significantly impacts tourist satisfaction and their intention to revisit the destination (Alhidari et al., 2015). Most studies support the view that social influence positively impacts eWOM and consumers' intention to experience services. Therefore, the author put forward the following hypotheses:

H7: Social influence (SI) positively affects ecotourism loyalty (EL).

H8: A combination of Social influence (SI) and eWOM positively affects ecotourism loyalty (EL).

2. Research model formulation

The research model is formulated based on the expectation-confirmation theory, developed by Lewin (1938) and the literature review with the relevant hypotheses. The model presents the directly and indirectly causal effects of DI, SAT, and eWOM on EL with the moderating effect of SI on the relationship between eWOM and EL.

RESEARCH METHODS
1. Methodology

From the summaries of the theoretical overview, the study analyses the impact of DI, SAT, and eWOM on EL. Furthermore, the influence of these variables under the moderating role of SI variable on the loyalty of ecotourism has also been investigated.

Figure 1. Proposed research model (Source: The authors' works)

The PLS-SEM model has been considered one of the effective models applied in many studies in marketing management (Hair et al., 2017a). Previous studies on tourism also often use the PLS-SEM model to test the relationship between the variables related to SAT, DI, eWOM, and EL. Therefore, the PLS-SEM model will also be utilized in this study.

2. Research sample and implementation process

The study applies a convenient sampling method through a questionnaire survey conducted in two groups of subjects, including international tourists and domestic tourists. The questionnaire is designed in Google Doc form which can be answered on PC or smartphone. The target group of the respondents is visitors to ecotourism sites, who are mainly guests of Vietnamese tourism companies and who have just experienced ecotourism services. Especially, tourists participating in the survey should usually use social networks (e.g., Facebook or Twitter) or over-the-top applications for communication transfer (e.g., Viber, Whatsapp, Zalo) for information of destinations in Vietnam before traveling and to provide suggestions or comments after the trip. The total number of observations was 499 visitors; the sample number of observations was suitable for analysis using the PLS-SEM model (Hair et al., 2017a; Hair et al., 2017b; Goodhue et al., 2012a, Goodhue et al., 2012b). The authors used Smart PLS software version 3.0 to analyze the data and estimate the results in this study.

3. Scale and measurement

With the survey questions, visitors are asked about the ways and sources of eWOM references before deciding to go to the tourist destination, the criteria for assessing the destination image such as environment, beautiful scenery, cultural events, infrastructure, activities, perceived tourist satisfaction, and loyalty through intention to return, willingness to recommend and return to a destination, desire and plan to discover other ecotourism sites. Observed variables are measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH RESULTS
1. Relevant tests
1.1. Multicollinearity, convergent and discriminant values of the variables test

Table 1 shows that the scale loading factor ranges from 0.718 to 0.837, higher than the threshold of 0.7. In addition, all factors have the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient above 0.7 and range from 0.772 to 0.820. The analysis results show that the factors' composite reliability (CR) is also over 0.7 and ranges from 0.853 to 0.881, which means that the scales have good internal consistency reliability. The coefficient of average variance extracted (AVE) results ranging from 0.564 to 0.649 satisfy the threshold of 0.5 (Wong, 2013; Hair et al., 2017a; Hair et al., 2017b). So, it proves that each scale shows a good convergence value. Variance inflation factors (VIF) are all within the acceptable range and range from 1 to 3 and below 5 (Lowry and Gaskin, 2014). Therefore, there is no multicollinearity in the research model.

1.2. The model's discriminant validity test

We used the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio to test the model's discriminant validity. Table 2 results show that all HTMT indices of each structure are less than 0.9 (Henseler et al., 2015). Therefore, the scales used in the model are valid in terms of construct validity.

1.3. Model fit

According to Henseler et al. (2016), the SRMR index as a very suitable measure for the PLS-SEM model is used to avoid
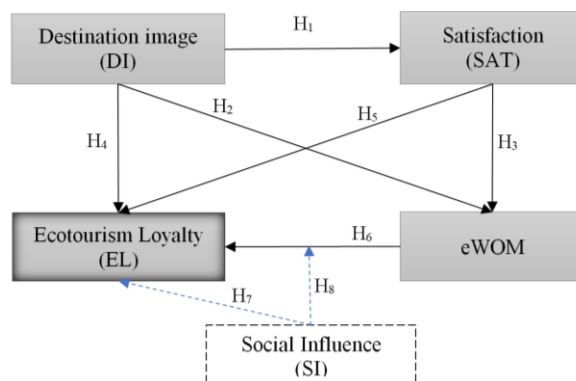
skewing the parameters in the model. From Table 3, it is easy to see that Chi-square = 922.505 and SRMR = 0.068 < 0.1 (Bentler and Bonett, 1980) and NFI = 0.798. Therefore, it proves that the model is completely consistent with the research data.

Table 1. Summary results of load factors in the PLS-SEM model (Source: The authors' works)

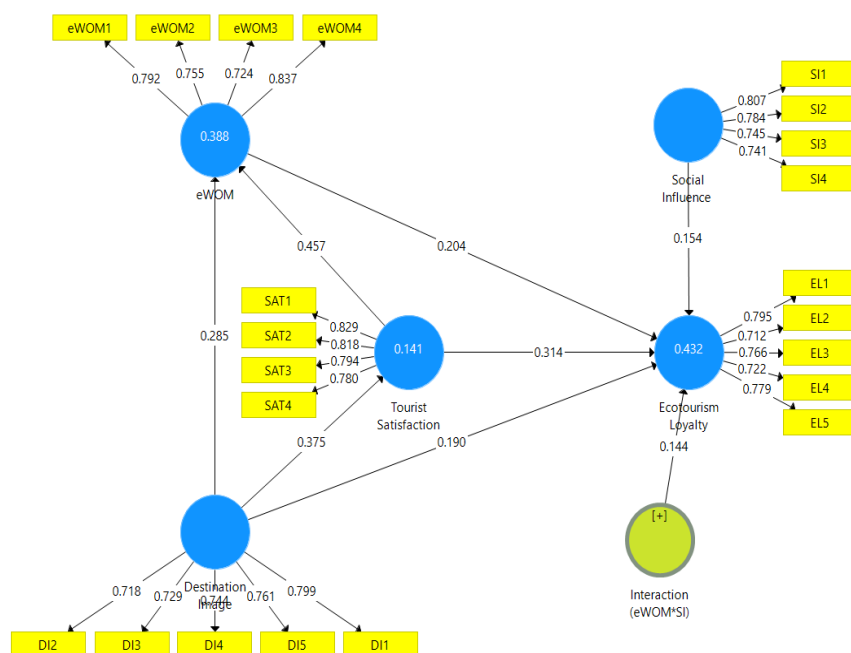| Construct & Measurement items		Factor loading	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE	VIF
Electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM)			0.782	0.859	0.605	
eWOM1	To make sure I choose the right place. I often read other ecotourism tourists' online travel reviews	0.792				1.591
eWOM2	I often consult other ecotourism tourists' online travel reviews to help me choose a good ecotourism destination.	0.755				1.639
eWOM3	I frequently gather information from tourists' online travel reviews before traveling to a specific ecotourism destination.	0.724				1.425
eWOM4	When I travel to an ecotourism destination, tourists' online travel reviews make me confident in traveling to the destination.	0.837				1.893
Destination image (DI)			0.809	0.866	0.564	
DI1	Travel environment (safe. clean environment; friendly and peaceful)	0.799				1.733
DI2	Attraction (Scenic Mountain, spectacular scenery, natural attraction)	0.718				1.551
DI3	Event (History and heritage, variety of entertainment. exciting cultural events and festivals. colorful nightlife. special cuisines)	0.729				1.677
DI4	Infrastructure (wide selection of accommodation. cuisine. Shopping, etc.)	0.744				1.438
DI5	Sport (exciting sports activities, an excellent place for walking, picnics, outdoor recreation, etc.)	0.761				1.600
Tourist Satisfaction (SAT)			0.820	0.881	0.649	
SAT1	This trip is worthwhile	0.829				1.765
SAT2	I am satisfied with this trip	0.818				1.884
SAT3	This trip is meaningful	0.794				1.796
SAT4	I feel favourable about this trip	0.780				1.598
Ecotourism Loyalty (EL)			0.814	0.869	0.571	
EL1	I intend to revisit this place soon.	0.795				1.712
EL2	I will recommend this destination to others	0.712				1.631
EL3	I am willing to spend time and money to revisit this place	0.766				1.669
EL4	I want to visit other ecotourism sites in Vietnam	0.722				1.668
EL5	I plan to visit other ecotourism sites in Vietnam	0.779				1.554
Social influence (SI)			0.772	0.853	0.593	
SI1	How many friends do you have on your social network (Facebook, Zalo, etc.)	0.807				1.605
SI2	The social network has become part of your daily routine	0.784				1.533
SI3	You regularly update your status on social networks, i.e., Facebook. Zalo.	0.745				1.559
SI4	You regularly update photos and reviews after each trip on social networks	0.741				1.360

Figure 2. Result of the Research model (Source: The authors' works)

Table 2. Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) (Source: The authors' works)

	DI	EL	SAT	SI	eWOM
DI					
EL	0.535				
SAT	0.434	0.656			
SI	0.525	0.597	0.827		
eWOM	0.561	0.583	0.699	0.675	

Table 3. The model fit (Source: The authors' works)

	Saturated Model
SRMR	0.068
d_ULS	1.176
d_G	0.314
Chi-Square	922.505
NFI	0.798

2. Estimation results of the PLS-SEM model

The evaluation of the statistical significance of the effect of independent variables on dependent variables in the

structural model is examined by the bootstrapping method (Hair et al., 2017a). According to Hair et al. (2017a), bootstrapping is an iterative sampling technique to estimate standard error without forwarding distributional assumptions. It is used to calculate the significance of the t-statistic related to the path coefficients (Wong, 2013). However, according to Erceg-Hurn and Mirosevich (2008), when analyzing the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable, we should consider the relationship and the meaning of the relationship and consider the weak and robust effects to build the benchmark for assessment. After the bootstrapping analysis, the results of the PLS-SEM estimation model are shown in Figure 2 and Table 4.

Table 4. Results of the relationship between the structures in the research model
(Source: The authors' works) Note: significance of 10%; (**): significance of 5%; (***): significance of 1%

Relationship between variables	Original weight	t-value	Significance level (P-value)	Degree of influence
H1: DI → SAT	0.375***	8.535	0.000	Medium impact
H2: DI → eWOM	0.285***	5.407	0.000	Medium impact
H3: SAT → eWOM	0.457***	9.498	0.000	Great impact
H4: DI → EL	0.190***	3.160	0.002	Small impact
H5: SAT → EL	0.314***	4.336	0.000	Medium impact
H6: eWOM → EL	0.204***	3.045	0.002	Medium impact
H7: SI → EL	0.154**	2.269	0.023	Small impact
H8: Interaction variable (eWOM*SI) → EL	0.144***	2.837	0.005	Small impact
	R^2	Adjusted R^2		
EL	0.432	0.426		
SAT	0.141	0.139		
eWOM	0.388	0.385		

The structural model was tested by non-parametric bootstrapping with 5,000 replicates. The results in Table 4 and Figure 2 show that the predictors are confirmed to have a positive and direct impact on EL and are statistically significant, specifically destination image ($\beta = 0.190$, $p < 0.01$), satisfaction ($\beta = 0.314$, $p < 0.001$), eWOM ($\beta = 0.204$, $p < 0.01$), social influence ($\beta = 0.154$, $p < 0.05$). Besides, the combination of eWOM with SI has a statistically significant positive impact on EL ($\beta = 0.144$, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, hypotheses H4, H5, H6, H7, and H8 are accepted with different influence levels (Table 4). In addition, predictive factors that were confirmed to have a positive and direct impact on eWOM include DI ($\beta = 0.285$, $p < 0.001$), SAT ($\beta = 0.457$, p). < 0.001). Therefore, hypotheses H2 H3 are accepted. Finally, DI has a statistically significant positive effect on SAT ($\beta = 0.375$, $p < 0.001$), so hypothesis H1 is also accepted. The combined results in Table 5 show that DI has the most significant total impact on EL through both direct and indirect influence. Similarly, SAT is the second most influential factor. The remaining factors, including eWOM and SI, only directly impact EL. The study proves the SI modifier's positive and relatively strong effect on the relationship between eWOM and EL (Table 6).

DISCUSSIONS

The research results clearly show that DI has the greatest influence on EL, with $\beta = 0.455$ (Table 5). It proves that the better domestic and foreign tourists have discovered and experienced an ecotourism area, the greater the intention to return and introduce others to the good things about ecotourism. This conclusion is consistent with the findings of Artuğer et al. (2013), Dewi and Abidin (2021), and Prayag and Ryan (2012). Furthermore, intermediate variables, including SAT and eWOM, significantly increase the impact of destination image on the loyalty to ecotourism. The finding demonstrates that SAT and eWOM fully mediate the effect of DI on EL. However, the direct impact of DI ($\beta = 0.455$) is still greater than its indirect effect ($\beta = 0.32$). Additionally, the study also reinforces empirical evidence on the direct and indirect effect of SAT on EL. The level of direct impact

Table 5. Summary of the impact of variables on loyalty to ecotourism (EL) (Source: The authors' works)

Item	Factor	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect
1	DI	0.190	0.211	0.401
1.1	DI->EL	0.190		
1.2	DI → SAT → EL		0.118	
1.3	DI → eWOM → EL		0.058	
1.4	DI → SAT → eWOM → EL		0.035	
2	SAT	0.314	0.093	0.407
2.1	SAT → EL	0.314		
2.2	SAT → eWOM → EL		0.093	
3	SI	0.154		0.154
4	eWOM	0.204		0.204

Table 6. Moderating effect of the moderating variable (SI) on the relationship between eWOM and EL (Source: The authors' works)

Item	Variables and effects	Total effect
1	Independent variable (eWOM → EL)	0.204
2	Moderator variable (SI → EL)	0.154
3	Interaction variable (eWOM*SI)	0.144
4	Independent variable with moderating effect	0.399

of SAT on EL is $\beta = 0.293$ (Table 5), similar to the studies of Chi and Qu (2008); Coban (2012); Prayag (2009); Prayag and Ryan (2012); Lemy et al. (2020); Williams and Soutar (2009) on SAT has a positive effect on tourist loyalty to the destination. The results also show an indirect positive influence of SAT on EL through the mediating variable eWOM. When tourists feel satisfied with the tourist destination, they will recommend it to relatives and friends and intend to return (Bayih and Singh, 2020a; 2020b; Kozak and Rimmington, 2000; Rivera and Croes, 2010). Thus, the satisfaction of domestic and foreign tourists combined with positive eWOM about ecotourism in Vietnam will increase their loyalty or return. The results of the research indicate a direct positive impact on EL, including eWOM, SI. In which, eWOM has a moderate impact with $\beta = 0.2696$ (Table 5), while SI has a rather small effect with $\beta = 0.146$ (Table 5). However, the intervention of the moderator variable SI on the relationship between eWOM and EL will increase the degree of dynamics very high in EL with the addition of $\beta = 0.130$. These positive findings enrich the existing literature on factors influencing ecotourism loyalty. Recorded by AsiaPac Net

Media (2020), Vietnam is the 18th country in the world regarding the percentage of people using the internet, up to 68.17 million people (accounting for 70% of the population), and the number of social network users is 65 million (accounting for 67% of the population). Vietnam is one of the ten countries with the highest number of Facebook and YouTube users globally, with young people accounting for a large proportion (AsiaPac Net Media, 2020). Therefore, taking advantage of SI, especially social networks such as Facebook and Zalo, to discuss or spread information and images about tourist destinations has become popular, easy, quick, and valuable to stimulate visitors to come or return to ecotourism sites.

CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the influence of factors on EL in a Vietnam context as empirical evidence. The results confirmed that the factors that have a statistically significant positive impact on ecotourism loyalty (EL) according to the level of influence are the following (i) image of the destination (DI), (ii) tourist satisfaction (SAT), (iii) eWOM, and (iv) social influence (SI). Additionally, the findings illustrate the significant mediating roles of SAT in the relationships between DI and EL and between DI and eWOM. Similarly, eWOM also mediates the relationships between DI, SAT, and EL. Intersetingly, the study also discovers the strong effect of the SI regulatory variable to increase the relationship between eWOM and EL. Theoretically, the study has demonstrated that the image of the destination, tourist satisfaction, eWOM have strong links between pairs of them and, together, support tourists' loyalty to ecostourism. The findings also support and expand the expectation-confirmation theory (Lewin, 1938) with supplementation of SI as a moderator to the effect of eWOM on EL. For practice, the research results allow suggestions that business organizations, maketers and policy makers in tourism should strenghten the destination image through communication campaigns to enhance eWOM and social influence in ecotourism in digital era. It is one of the key effective approaches to motivate tourists to visit or revisit the ecotourism destinations because more and more people use social network (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) and "Over-the-top" application for information transfer (e.g., Zalo, Viber, Telegram, etc.) for pre- and post-visiting. However, this study still has certain limitations when only evaluating the field of ecotourism, not a general survey of all tourism. In addition, many other factors affecting tourist loyalty are neglected. Therefore, future studies may consider investigating other factors related to the quality of tourism services, the relevance of people with social influence and the differential influence between social backgrounds to gain a deeper understanding of these relationships with the loyalty to ecotourism in future research directions.

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