

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TIKTOK EWOM AND HO CHI MINH CITY STUDENTS' STUDY-ABROAD INTENTION

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ABSTRACT

Background: TikTok has developed as a valuable eWOM source for study abroad information. However, research looking specifically at the relationship between eWOM on TikTok and study abroad intentions is still lacking in Vietnam, particularly when it comes to the distinctive context of Ho Chi Minh city students. Purpose: This research focuses on defining the correlation between Ho Chi Minh city students' study abroad intentions, and online word-of-mouth about study abroad content on TikTok platform. Method: This research uses a descriptive quantitative method of analysis. 384 students in Ho Chi Minh City universities and colleges constitute the data set of a structured questionnaire survey. Features of eWOM such as information quality, credibility, needs, usefulness, adoption level and attitudes towards information are evaluated by statistical analysis, including mean, standard deviation and Pearson correlation coefficient. Result: eWOM content regarding study abroad on TikTok had a favorable response by students. Information's usefulness received the highest rating among the analyzed variables, and students' attitudes towards along with the acceptance of study abroad eWOM content on TikTok tended to be positive. However, information credibility scored the lowest on average, showing the fact that students' suspicion about the reliability and completeness of these content. Conclusion: TikTok functions mostly as an additional source, even if it is growing progressively more crucial in informing students about study abroad options and influencing their opinions. Implications: This research demonstrates that authentic and trustworthy content is more important and successful than traditional advertising approaches in influencing student choices.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of the Internet and social media has significantly changed how individuals search for, evaluate, and exchange information in their daily lives. In this setting, traditional word-of-mouth has shifted to the digital realm, giving rise to the concept of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Hennig-

Thurau et al. (2004) and Ismagilova et al. (2017) define eWOM as the continuous exchange of information about products, services, brands, or businesses among users, customers, or potential customers via the Internet. Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) can spread more widely, be preserved for a longer period of time, be easily seen, be highly interactive, and be heavily influenced by the online community (Ismagilova et al., 2017). In the context of digital media, these characteristics make eWOM a crucial information source for influencing users' attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral intentions.

Previous studies have shown that eWOM significantly influences consumer behavior, particularly in terms of information quantity, quality, reliability, opinion value, and sender experience (Y. K. Dwivedi et al., 2021; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Ismagilova et al., 2017). Likes, shares, experience videos, user-generated content, reviews, comments, and interactions between online communities are all examples of eWOM in the context of social media (Chu & Kim, 2011; Erkan & Evans, 2016). Consequently, social media creates an atmosphere that is favorable to the spread of eWOM and encourages social influence on users' choices.

TikTok is gradually becoming an eWOM platform because of its short video mechanism, customized algorithms, and ability for quick content distribution. Recent research indicates that eWOM on TikTok can positively impact purchase intentions, particularly through information quality, information reliability, interaction intensity, and video content (Angelina & Widaningsih, 2025; Nguyen et al., 2024; Putra & Bangsawan, 2022; Veronital et al. 2025). However, most research on eWOM in TikTok still focuses on consumer businesses including e-commerce, travel services, cosmetics, and personal care. Examples of high-risk, high-cost businesses that require complex decision-making processes but have not yet received enough attention are international education and studying abroad.

TikTok content that talks about study abroad experiences, provides advice on selecting a school, evaluates study abroad locations, scholarships, visas, living expenses, part-time jobs, and student life abroad can become an important source eWOM during this process. This content may influence viewers' attitudes, levels of trust, and intentions to study abroad, especially among young people and students in big cities. However, compared to studies on eWOM in consumption, shopping, or university choices, there is still a dearth of research on eWOM related to study abroad content on TikTok, particularly in the Vietnamese context. The literature evaluation highlights a significant research gap linking eWOM on TikTok to the education and study abroad sectors, despite the fact that this is a highly participatory decision-making process that is heavily influenced by online information.

eWOM has been studied in a number of Vietnamese industries, including online commerce, aviation, cosmetics, tourism, sustainable finance, and university selection. These studies generally verify that eWOM has a favorable impact on the attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral intentions of consumers or learners. However, little research has been done on how eWOM for study abroad content is actually received on TikTok in a major educational center like Ho Chi Minh City. There is a significant discrepancy because Ho Chi Minh City is home to a large concentration of students, international education consulting organizations, producers of educational materials, and young people who are highly interested in learning about studying abroad.

The team investigated the relationship between Ho Chi Minh City students' plans to study abroad and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on TikTok based on the research context. The study illustrated how eWOM influences study abroad intentions by typing academic theory to empirical data. According to the study's findings, TikTok reviews and shares had a much more favorable effect than traditional channels, directly strengthening Ho Chi Minh City students' convictions and feeling of purpose. This is unmistakable proof of the change from only obtaining information to using social media to create useful projects.

eWOM is considered a transformation of traditional word-of-mouth into a digital environment in light of the Internet's and social media's rapid development (Ismagilova et al., 2017). Traditional definitions of eWOM, according to Hennigh-Thurau et al. (2004) and Kietzmann & Canhoto (2013), emphasize the role of statements, reviews, or shared experiences made by users, potential customers, current customers, or former customers and distributed to numerous people and organizations via the

Internet in a variety of forms, including neutral, positive, or negative (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013). Building on this approach, Ismagilova et al. (2017) view eWOM as a dynamic and continuous process of sharing information on products, services, businesses, or brands. This understanding shows that eWOM is a communication stream that may spread, be tracked, saved, and utilized in an online environment.

Studies on eWOM often concentrate on three main areas: eWOM persuasiveness, eWOM participation behavior, and eWOM influence on user decisions (Ismagilova et al., 2017). Some notable characteristics of eWOM include large amounts of information, wide dispersion, permanence and observability, anonymity paired with the potential for dishonesty, the emotional nuances of information, and community involvement (Ismagilova et al., 2017). eWOM has been shown to significantly influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Park et al., 2011). eWOM provides consumers with pleasure and personal fulfillment while increasing product knowledge through group discussions (P. A. Dwivedi & Singh, 2017; Shukla et al., 2015). This is now more powerful due to the expansion of social media and the Internet.

Recent data continues to support the two-way influence of eWOM. Positive eWOM can improve trust, perceptions of expertise, and business outcomes, while negative eWOM can damage an organization's reputation, erode trust, and raise concerns about service quality (Ekta & Yadav, 2025). Patel (2024) claims that a variety of criteria, such as brand image, information quality, and confidence in reviews, affect consumers' consideration of eWOM.

A summary of the research reveals three key gaps in eWOM understanding. First, in terms of long-term consequences, previous studies have overlooked negative impacts on a company's reputation and have not clarified how eWOM influences customer lifetime value, loyalty, and long-term brand trust (P. A. Dwivedi & Singh, 2017; Ekta & Yadav, 2025). Second, artificial intelligence (AI) and big data have not been utilized to assess sentiment and address information overload, and eWOM mediating variables like brand engagement and demographics are still not related in methodology and technology (Ekta & Yadav, 2025; Patel, 2024). Last but not least, studies lack cross-platform and sector specificity, especially the differentiation between specialized areas like taxes, auditing, and consulting, rather than merely evaluating the accounting industry as a whole (P. A. Dwivedi & Singh, 2017; Patel, 2024).

Social media is considered an especially appropriate space for eWOM due to its high degree of interactivity, reliance on pre-existing social networks, and ability to facilitate the exchange, sharing, and dissemination in multiple directions (Canhoto & Clark, 2013; Chu & Kim, 2011; Erkan & Evans, 2016). Unlike eWOM independent review sites, eWOM on social media occurs in a setting where users engage with friends, acquaintances, and online communities, enabling knowledge sharing, exchange, and multidirectional dissemination (Chu & Kim, 2011).

Social media also expands the forms of expression eWOM, making information more dynamic, compelling, and easily disseminated through a range of context formats, such as text, photos, videos, and integrated apps (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Examples of actions that can purposefully or unintentionally generate eWOM include posting, following, liking, commenting, and sharing content (Alboqami et al., 2015). As a result, people are increasingly viewing social media as a useful information source when doing research, evaluating brands, and making judgments. However, because of the amount and variety of eWOM generated and consumed on different platforms, users must also carefully assess the reliability and quality of information (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Kusawat & Teerakapibal, 2022).

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in Viet Nam has been studied in a variety of fields and has shown a positive and statistically significant impact on consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral intentions in the context of rapidly changing digital media and social networks (Thao et al., 2023).

Through cognitive mediating factors, research on consumption and shopping validates the importance of online information and engagement in modern purchasing behavior (Thao et al., 2023). Consumer interest, information quality, reliability, and experience knowledge are the primary drivers of eWOM adoption, and it has been shown to have a positive and statistically significant impact on online purchase intentions for Generation Z in Da Nang (Le et al., 2019). This implies that eWOM affects young consumers directly as well as through psychological processes.

Do & Nguyen (2021) claim that eWOM positively influences both brand image and passenger purchase intentions in the aviation industry, with brand image acting as a mediator in this relationship. Additionally, a lot of study focuses on analyzing the impact of eWOM on certain social media platforms. Information's reach, quality, and credibility all have a significant role in shaping consumer behavior. Credibility, quantity, quality, and above all the senders's experiences are all aspects that contribute to this influence. Students' intentions to choose an institution in the field of higher education have been shown to be positively and statistically significantly impacted by eWOM; the largest influencing element is eWOM quality, which is followed by eWOM quantity and sender expertise. The tourism sector has also conducted a great deal of studies on eWOM.

With relation to TikTok in particular, eWOM is becoming increasingly significant in shaping user attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral intentions. TikTok is a helpful tool for spreading eWOM as its algorithm, which is based on user preferences and makes content more engaging, made the app the best in 2022 (Efendi & Cahyaningratri, 2023). According to Hidayah et al. (2024), it's crucial to closely monitor changes in consumer attitudes toward products purchased through eWOM. Three components of eWOM on TikTok - quality, dependability, and quantity - all had a significant and positive impact on customers' intention to make purchases. According to Hidayah et al. (2024). When combined, these three factors explained 71.4% of the variation in Originote product purchase intention. The study also pointed out that it has been challenging to determine the exact impact of TikTok eWOM because of conflicting results from previous studies. Future studies on this need to be more in-depth and comprehensive.

According to Veronita et al. (2025), the most significant and advantageous aspects impacting purchasing intention are believability and information quality. However, the research shows that the quantity of information has little effect on purchase intention (Vernonita et al., 2025). This study also emphasizes the need for a more in-depth analysis of the part content creators play in marketing strategies for eWOM.

It's clear that eWOM in TikTok has begun to influence users' and viewers' choices in a favorable way. Although eWOM is currently rare on the TikTok platform and has not received much attention when it comes to school or studying abroad, it has a big influence on purchasing decisions in several industries, including skincare and beauty. Further research is required to investigate eWOM's key features on TikTok in order to show its impact on one of the most popular social media platforms worldwide. More importantly, the relationship between eWOM on TikTok and consumer or viewer intent needs to be made more explicit and apparent in order to demonstrate the reciprocal influence between these two factors.

Without particularly addressing study abroad aspirations, numerous studies on eWOM on TikTok have described how eWOM influences high-risk, experience behavioral intents. Wulandari et al. (2025) claim that eWOM through travel vlogs on TikTok significantly affects users' intents to travel by evoking emotions, beliefs, and visions of future experiences.

From the perspective of information perception, studies such as Ngo et al. (2024) and Thao et al. (2023) demonstrate how eWOM influences behavioral intentions through information quality, reliability, and acceptability. These results demonstrate the role of eWOM as a risk-reduction mechanism, particularly in the context of study abroad, where students must process a great deal of complex information on living conditions, career opportunities, training quality, and tuition expenses.

In order to directly address behavioral intentions and eWOM on TikTok, a number of recent studies have employed integrated theoretical frameworks. Nguyen et al. (2024) assert that eWOM on TikTok influences behavioral intentions through attitudes and social norms in addition to information perception, based on the Information Acceptance Model (IAM) and the Theory of Rational Action (TRA). However, this study is limited to the consumer environment and has not expanded to long-term and high-risk choices like studying abroad.

The impact of eWOM on learning choices and school choice intentions has been demonstrated by numerous studies in the field of education. Le et al. (2019), Nguyen (2023) and several more studies show that eWOM is an important educational choice. However, most of these studies focus on social

media in general in sites like Facebook and YouTube, and they largely consider the domestic setting of school selection, without a detailed analysis of TikTok's specifics.

Despite the fact that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has been extensively studied, researchers have mostly ignored high-stakes, long-term decisions like education and studying abroad in favor of common consumer industries like e-commerce and tourism. Additionally, there is still little research on eWOM through TikTok in Viet Nam; studies frequently focus on amusement rather than thoroughly examining life-oriented issues, and there is especially little empirical data pertaining to university students in Ho Chi Minh City. Furthermore, prior research has tended to focus more on assessing information features and processing methods than thoroughly examining distinctions resulting from the characteristics of the recipients.

By explicitly connecting the influence of eWOM on TikTok to students' intents to study abroad – a choice that necessitates serious consideration and has significant ramifications for their individual futures – this study fills in these gaps and presents a fresh viewpoint. To close the gap in local empirical data, the study concentrates on the unique setting of Ho Chi Minh City rather than reproducing traditional consumer research methodologies. In addition to enhancing the theoretical framework underlying eWOM, shifting the research focus to the education sector within the short-form video landscape offers useful insights into how Vietnamese students acquire and process information when making crucial life decisions.

In conclusion, research from both domestic and international sources shows that eWOM is an information source that significantly influences users' attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral intentions. Currently, however, most research on eWOM on TikTok focuses on consumerism, shopping, cosmetics, vacation, or college preferences. In the costly, high-risk field that calls for long-term career and educational choices. Therefore, to complete the existing theoretical gap and elucidate the tight relationship between eWOM and study abroad intentions, research on eWOM connected to study abroad material on TikTok for students in Ho Chi Minh City is required. The study's findings demonstrate that eWOM on short-video platforms is an important motivator that positively and significantly influences young people in Ho Chi Minh City's desire to pursue overseas education.

2. METHOD

This study adopted a convergent mixed methods, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed independently, and integrated at the interpretation stage to provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of eWOM on study-abroad intention. The integration of these methods enables triangulation across findings while also offering deeper explanatory insights into the quantitative relationships, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the research.

The quantitative component employed a cross-sectional design using a structured questionnaire to measure factors including information quality, source credibility, information needs, attitudes toward information, perceived usefulness, and eWOM adoption. The target population comprised students at universities and colleges in Ho Chi Minh City and was selected using non-probability sampling due to the absence of a complete sampling frame. The minimum sample size was determined at a 95% confidence level ($Z = 1.96$), margin of error of 0.05, and $p = 0.5$, resulting in 384 respondents.

The qualitative component was conducted through group interviews with students who had previously participated in the quantitative survey. Participants were purposively selected based on the relevance of their responses and their ability to provide in-depth insights, allowing for a deeper exploration of experiences and perceptions related to study-abroad content on TikTok. Each group consisted of five participants to ensure rich interaction and manageable discussion dynamics. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically and integrated with the quantitative findings at the interpretation stage to further explain and contextualize the results.

To provide a more detailed account of the quantitative sampling procedure, a two-stage sampling approach was employed. During the first stage, simple random sampling was used to select educational institutions. The sampling frame comprised 66 universities and colleges located in Ho Chi Minh City according to the administrative boundaries prior to recent mergers. Using the RANDOM.ORG platform, 10 institutions were randomly selected, namely Ho Chi Minh City University of Foreign Languages - Information Technology (HUFLIT), Saigon Technology University (STU), Ho Chi Minh University of Natural Resources and Environment (HCMUNRE), Hoa Sen University (HSU), Ho Chi Minh University of Technology (HUTECH), University of Medicine and Pharmacy at Ho Chi Minh City (UMP), Nguyen Tat Thanh University (NTTU), Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Education (HCMUTE), University of Economics and Law (UEL), and Ho Chi Minh City University of Physical Education and Sports (UPES).

In the second stage, convenience sampling was applied within each selected institution to recruit participants. Students who met the study requirements and voluntarily agreed to participate were included in the survey. Approximately 39 questionnaires were collected from each institution, resulting in a total of 390 valid responses. To be eligible for participation, respondents were required to possess a TikTok account, have viewed or interacted with study-abroad-related content on the platform, be considering, preparing for, or planning to pursue studies abroad and be willing to share their experiences through the survey.

Data collection was conducted through a structured questionnaire consisting of two sections. The first section obtained demographic and background information, including respondents' gender, age, academic status, financial capacity for study-abroad plans, level of social media use and degree of exposure to study-abroad content on TikTok. These variables were used to describe the sample characteristics and provide contextual information regarding students' access to study-abroad-related content.

The second section assessed multiple dimensions of electronic word-of-mouth associated with study-abroad content on TikTok. Measurement items were adapted from established studies and covered the constructs of information quality, information credibility, information needs, attitude toward information, information usefulness and information adoption. More specifically, the information quality scale was adapted from Cheung et al. (2008), Park et al. (2007) and Filieri (2015). The information credibility scale was derived from Erkan and Evans (2018), Filieri (2015) and Weizl (2014). Information needs were measured using items adapted from Chu and Kim (2011), while attitude toward information was adapted from Park et al. (2007). Information usefulness was measured based on Hussain et al. (2020) and information adoption was adapted from Shen et al. (2014).

Table 1.
Proposed group of variables (Authors team)

No	Variables	Measurement Items
1	Information Quality (Cheung et al., 2008) (Filiere 2015, Park et al 2007)	1. I can understand the information regarding studying abroad on TikTok 2. The information regarding studying abroad on TikTok is relevant to my needs 3. I believe that the information regarding studying abroad on TikTok is fact-based 4. The information regarding studying abroad on TikTok explain the attributes of studying abroad 5. I Find the information regarding studying abroad on TikTok to be clear 6. I find the information regarding studying abroad on TikTok to be detailed 7. I find the information regarding studying abroad on TikTok to be complete 8. In summary, I consider the information regarding studying abroad on TikTok to be of high quality
2	Information Credibility (Erkan & Evans, 2018) (Filiere 2015, Weizl 2014)	1. The information regarding studying abroad on TikTok is persuasive 2. I believe that the information regarding the studying abroad on Tik Rok is reliable 3. I believe that the information regarding studying abroad on TikTik is believable 4. I believe that the information regarding studying abroad on TikTok is factual 4. The information regarding studying abroad on TikTok trustworthy

3	Needs of Information (Chu & Kim, 2011)	1. In frequently search and apply eWM information on TikTok when I am interested in studying abroad 2. When I lack experience regarding studying abroad, often seek eWOM information on TikTok 3. Before making a decision to study-abroad, I usually gather relevant information from TikTok
4	Attitude towards information (Park et al 2007)	1. I always consider eWOM information on social media when research study-abroad option 2. I believe that eWOM information on social media is useful for making decision about studying abroad 3. eWOM information social media help me feel more confident when make studying-abroad decision
5	Information Usefulness (Mehyar et al., 2020)	1. I find the information on studying abroad on TikTok to be useful 2. I believe that the information on studying abroad on TikTok provides much necessary information 3. Information on studying abroad on TikTok helps me evaluate studying abroad options 4. Information on studying abroad on TikTok helps me better understand the process of studying abroad
6	Information Adoption (Shen at al 2014)	1. I have learned many things about studying abroad through eWOM information on TikTok 2. I adopt the eWOM information regarding studying abroad on TikTok 3. I accept the study abroad recommendations shared via eWOM on TikTok

All questionnaire items (Table 1) were adapted to reflect the context of study-abroad information on TikTok and were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The adaptation of measurement items from prior studies was undertaken to preserve the theoretical rigor of the constructs while ensuring their suitability for the research setting in Ho Chi Minh City.

The reliability of the measurement scales was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. Following the criteria adopted in this study, observed variables with corrected item-total correlation values below 0.30 were removed, whereas scales with Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.70 or above were considered sufficiently reliable. The reliability analysis demonstrated that all constructs satisfied the required threshold, with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.810 to 0.940. Specifically, the information quality scale achieved an alpha value of 0.902, information credibility reached 0.820, information usefulness recorded 0.842 and information adoption obtained the highest reliability coefficient at 0.940. Furthermore, all observed variables exhibited corrected item-total correlation values exceeding 0.30 and were therefore retained for subsequent descriptive analyses.

After data collection was completed, the dataset was examined, cleaned and screened for potential outliers following the procedure proposed by Hoaglin and Iglewicz (1987). All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26.0. Given that the primary objective of this article was to describe the current state of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) concerning study-abroad content on TikTok, the analysis mainly relied on descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. These statistical indicators were employed to illustrate the characteristics of the research sample, students' levels of exposure to study-abroad content on TikTok and their evaluations of different eWOM dimensions, namely information quality, information credibility, information needs, attitudes toward information, information usefulness and information adoption.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and regression analysis were not employed in this article for the purpose of testing causal relationships or influence models. Instead, the study focused exclusively on describing and interpreting the existing situation based on survey findings. Such an approach allowed the research to maintain its emphasis on portraying the current landscape of study-abroad-related eWOM on TikTok among students in Ho Chi Minh City.

In addition to the questionnaire survey, a qualitative study was conducted through focus group interviews to provide deeper insights into the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on TikTok on students' study-abroad intentions. A total of 15 students participated in the qualitative phase, divided into three focus groups consisting of five participants each. The participants were selected from among students who met the study criteria, including having a TikTok account, having viewed or interacted with study-abroad-related content, and being interested in or considering studying abroad. The focus group discussions explored students' experiences in accessing study-abroad information on TikTok, their perceptions of information quality and credibility, and the extent to which such information influenced their attitudes and intentions toward studying abroad. The qualitative findings were used to complement and contextualize the quantitative results, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Factors are included in the model test after evaluating the accuracy and validity of the scale. The values of these verified factors are the averages of the observed variables within that factor's component. Before proceeding the model testing, a correlation coefficient test is performed to examine the linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The absolute value of 'r' implies the degree of strength in the linear relationship between two quantitative variables. If the absolute value of 'r' approaches 1, it means that the two variables have a strong linear correlation. Conversely, a value of 'r' = 0 indicates that there is no relationship between the two variables (Hoang Trong & Chu Nguyen Mong Ngoc, 2008).

Table 2.

Correlation analysis results among the constructs of the research model (Authors team)

		IQ	IC	NI	AI	IU	IA	SAI
Information Quality (IQ)	Correlation coefficient	1	0.252**	0.246**	0.263**	0.547**	0.340**	0.261**
	Significance level		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Information Credibility (IC)	Correlation coefficient	0.252**	1	0.219**	0.283**	0.506**	0.453**	0.357**
	Significance level	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Needs of Information (NI)	Correlation coefficient	0.246**	0.219**	1	0.270**	0.462**	0.553**	0.317**
	Significance level	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Attitude towards Information (AI)	Correlation coefficient	0.263**	0.283**	0.270**	1	0.454**	0.425**	0.365**
	Significance level	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000
Information Usefulness (IU)	Correlation coefficient	0.547**	0.506**	0.462**	0.454**	1	0.540**	0.469**
	Significance level	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000
Information Adoption (IA)	Correlation coefficient	0.340**	0.453**	0.553**	0.425**	0.540**	1	0.537**
	Significance level	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000
Study abroad intention (SAI)	Correlation coefficient	0.261**	0.357**	0.317**	0.365**	0.469**	0.537**	1
	Significance level	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.537**

Based on the results from the Pearson correlation analysis presented in the Table 2, it is found that the dependent variable, Information Usefulness (IU), has a linear correlation with all independent variables in the study, including Information Quality (IQ), Information Reliability (IR), Needs of Information (NI), and Attitudes Towards Information (AI). All these correlations are statistically significant at the 5% level ($Sif. < 0.05$), indicating a notable association between the independent and dependent variables.

Specifically, IQ and IR are strongly correlated with IU. IQ has the strongest correlation with IU, with a correlation coefficient of 0.547. This indicates that when users perceive content on TikTok as clear and reliable, they tend to consider that information useful. This is consistent with the Information Adoption Model (IAM) proposed by Sussman and Siegal (2003), which posits that IQ is a key antecedent of perceived usefulness, which in turn drives information adoption. Moreover, these two factors also have a positive correlation with Information Adoption (IA), but only to a moderate degree, suggesting that evaluating quality and reliability alone is insufficient to guarantee user acceptance of information. Furthermore, NI has the strongest correlation with IA, with $r = 0.553$. This indicates that personal motivation is crucial in the adoption of eWOM. In other words, students with a need to learn about studying abroad are more likely to accept and trust the information than those without such a need. This

aligns with the IAM's argument that argument quality and source credibility influence adoption only when mediated by the individual's cognitive processing, which is itself shaped by the relevance and urgency of the needs of information (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). In addition, AI also has a positive correlation with IA, with $r = 0.425$. This result suggests that positive perceptions of the content also contribute to information adoption.

When considering the dependent variable, Study Abroad Intention (SAI), the results show that IA has the strongest association with $r = 0.537$, followed by IU with $r = 0.469$. Meanwhile, factors such as attitude, reliability, needs, and especially information quality only show moderate or lower relevance, with IQ having the lowest index ($r = 0.261$). These results suggest that users actually adopting the information is a more important factor than simply evaluating whether the information is of high quality or reliable.

Correlation analysis results show that all factors in the model are closely related to each other, in which the Information Adoption factor (IA) has the strongest relationship with Study Abroad Intention (SAI) ($r = 0.537$), followed by Information Usefulness (IU) ($r = 0.469$). These findings are consistent with the theoretical framework of the IAM, which proposes that information usefulness and information adoption function as sequential mediators between information characteristics and behavioral outcomes (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). In the context of eWOM, Erkan and Evans (2016) similarly confirmed that perceived usefulness and adoption of social media information are the most proximate predictors of purchase intention, a pattern that the present study replicates in the study-abroad domain. This shows that students actually receiving, believing, and actively consuming information are more important than simply evaluating the information as quality or trustworthy. Therefore, many interview participants said that TikTok was the first platform they looked for when they became interested in studying abroad because of its ease of understanding, brevity, and ability to provide information quickly through videos.

Specifically, in group 1, student 2 stated: "If I were to study abroad, I would choose TikTok first, because videos help me visualize things more easily. Facebook isn't as useful as TikTok for searching for information." Student 2 added: "I see the classroom environment and costs very clearly." Similarly, student 3 expressed: "If you only look at images on Google or Facebook, you can't visualize things clearly. On TikTok, people share general videos, usually from real people experiencing things, so it's more authentic." In group 3, student 11 shared: "I choose TikTok because the videos are short, unlike YouTube, so I can quickly and easily access information about studying abroad." Student 13 also said: "I use TikTok because it's easy and the algorithm suggests content that I like." This suggests that TikTok plays a crucial role in the initial awareness and learning phase, and is consistent with the correlation where NI are strongly related to IA ($r = 0.553$). Many studies also indicate that IU and IA play a very important role in shaping behavioral intentions.

Particularly, Cheung et al. (2012) argued that the influence of eWOM on consumer behavior occurs through the process of information reception and processing, where users only select information they find useful to make decisions. Information usefulness positively influences information adoption, and this acceptance further influences consumer behavioral intentions, according to Erkan et al. (2016).

Additionally, quantitative findings reveal that Information Quality (IQ) and Information Usefulness (IU) have the strongest link ($r = 0.547$), revealing that students mostly view information as more advantageous when it is practical, clear, and specific. A great deal of students highly appreciate content containing real-life experiences, such as daily vlogs, expenses for living, typical educational settings, and real-world challenges encountered while studying abroad, according to focus group interview data.

Specifically, in group 3, students 12 and 13 stated: "I find it helpful when videos provide specific information about tuition fees, financial aid, and how international students balance studying and working." In the same way, in group 2, students 6 and 10 both emphasized that the real-life experience of the person sharing is the most valuable factor in providing valuable information. Students 6 and 10 shared the same opinion, saying: "I find information useful when the person sharing has real-life experience, especially in daily or real life vlog videos from their personal view." In group 1, student 1 said: "Useful information normally comes from international students, since they are people who are currently living their life there, so their experiences feel more realistic than others." Student 5 in group 1 also stated: "I once watched a video tutorial on how to write an email requesting a deadline extension at a university in France; I found it very specific and highly applicable, so I rate that information useful." This is in line with the findings of the current study, which show that Information Quality (IQ) and Information Reliability (IR) have a reasonably high correlation with Information Usefulness (IU) (0.547 and 0.506, respectively), but a lower correlation with the intention to study abroad, suggesting the indirect influence of these features. This pattern supports the IAM's proposition that IQ and IR do not directly determine behavioral intention but exert their influence indirectly through IU and IA (Sussman & Siegal, 2003), a finding also echoed by Cheung et al. (2012) in the context of online consumer reviews.

Another important aspect is that students become more proactive and critical in their information seeking activity when they really need to gain knowledge about studying abroad. The vast majority of students in group 1 said that they would search for more videos on the same subject from multiple sources, read comments, store videos, or even cross reference material with Google to confirm it. This suggests how deeper information adoption processing occurs when there is an increasing demand for information, which raises the possibility that the information will be accepted. This final outcome is in line with the current examination, which revealed a comparatively high connection between Needs of Information (NI) and Information Adoption (IA) ($r = 0.553$) and Information Usefulness (IU) ($r = 0.462$). From the perspective of the IAM, this behavior reflects the model's underlying assumption that individuals engage in systematic information processing when the information is personally relevant - a condition clearly met when students are actively considering studying abroad (Sussman & Siegal, 2003).

Furthermore, evidence from interviews showed that students selectively verify content on TikTok rather than fully trusting it. In contrast to information from counseling services or advertising materials, the majority of participants said they prefer to believe information from real-life overseas students' experiences or individuals who are currently living there. Students 4 and 5 in group 1 added: "I usually do not believe overly promotional content, especially videos that only show the positive aspects and lacking the difficulties. Such content seems to be unreliable to me." The level of trust in study abroad information on TikTok only varied between 40 and 60 percent in both groups of students 2 and 3. Students 11 and 13 in group 3 specifically stated that: "I rate the trustworthiness at about 50-60%. I normally doubt and have double checked with other sources and only have a small amount of faith in it. Whenever someone shares information and has lots of others attesting to its authenticity or has firsthand knowledge, I am more likely to believe them". Moreover, group 2 indicated a broad pattern in which each member read comments and verified the information on the school's website before adopting it. This demonstrates that information's dependability is mainly dependent on its sources as much as its content.

The direct correlation between information characteristic variables, including Information Quality (IQ), Information Reliability (IR), and Study Abroad Intention (SAI) in the TikTok context, however, is not as strong as it is in some e-commerce research. For example, Hajli (2015) shown that in

a social commerce setting, purchase intention can be greatly affected by the reliability and precision of information. This divergence may be attributed to the nature of the study-abroad decision, which is a high-involvement, long-term commitment rather than a transactional purchase. In such contexts, the IAM suggests that behavioral intention is more heavily mediated by internal cognitive processes - specifically IU and IA - rather than being directly triggered by information characteristics alone (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). This implies that rather than being exclusively established by the objective qualities of the content, user behavior on TikTok may be more influenced by personal sentiments and the process of receiving information.

According to the data, TikTok strongly influences students' perceptions of the potential of studying abroad, even though it does not directly influence their decision to do so. Particularly, the majority of participants in group 1 of students stated that they felt inspired, motivated, and able to better imagine their own chances of studying abroad after seeing multiple videos about the subject. Student 2: "I feel like if others can do it, so can I. Even people from very ordinary backgrounds can still study abroad." This shows how students have been influenced to believe they can study abroad when they witness others in comparable situations doing so. Additionally, student 1 stated: "I can believe more in its practicality since, through comparing my profile with others' online profiles, I realize that I can do it too." As a result, they feel that the path to studying abroad becomes possible when they compare their own profiles with those posted on TikTok. In a comparable way, most participants in group 2 think that TikTok gives them the impression that studying overseas is possible, even though the final decision still depends on personal circumstances. Student 7 and student 8 both highlighted: "Contents on TikTok make me believe that studying abroad is possible for me." This supports the survey results that show the strongest correlation between Information Adoption (IA) and Study Abroad Intention (SAI), suggesting that behavioral intentions will only be created when students completely accept and believe the information, further validating the IAM's core proposition that the adoption of information - not merely its evaluation - is the critical mechanism through which eWOM translates into behavioral intention (Sussman & Siegal, 2003; Erkan & Evans, 2016).

In general, the study's findings indicate that eWOM on TikTok has an indirect influence on students' intention to pursue higher education overseas through a series of stages, starting with the need to search up for information, assessing its value, accepting the information, and eventually developing the urge to study abroad. However, qualitative research also shows that the "authenticity" of content is an important factor contributing to the consideration of viewers in the TikTok environment, since students choose less commercialized and real-time, diverse real experiences over promotional content. This is a crucial recommendation for future studies on short-video platforms that include a component of content quality into the eWOM study approach.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined how Ho Chi Minh City students' plans to study abroad were influenced by electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on TikTok. According to the findings, eWOM influences students' intents to study abroad by evaluating and accepting information, acting as a persuasive mechanism in addition to being a source of knowledge. Instead of directly influencing intention formation, eWOM promotes information acceptance and increases perceived information usefulness. These results demonstrate the increasing significance of TikTok in students' information seeking and decision making processes and expand the application of eWOM research to the setting of international education. The study recommends that the creation of truth, open and genuine material for TikTok be given top priority by educational institutions, study abroad organizations and content producers. Study abroad vlogs, personal narratives and everyday life sharing are examples of experience based formats that may improve students' comprehension of international educational options and lessen the ambiguity around

study abroad choices. The results also highlight the significance of content producers as trust building middlemen whose legitimacy and sincerity can increase eWOM's efficacy. Future research should examine these relationships using broader and more diverse samples, compare the influence of different social media platforms and investigate causal mechanisms underlying the effects of eWOM on study abroad intentions. Such initiatives would offer a more thorough knowledge of how young people's educational decision making is influenced by social media communication.

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