

Exploring the Effects of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) Marketing of Travel Agencies to the Buying Behavior of Leisure Travelers in Laguna

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Dumas, Jamela Cindy E., Gella, Kate C., Vicente Orilyn Jane C.,
Gamoso, Ryan A. PhD, CHIA, LET

Lyceum of the Philippines University-Laguna

jcdumas@lpulaguna.edu.ph, kcgella@lpulaguna.edu.ph,

ojcvicente@lpulaguna.edu.ph, ryan.gamoso@lpulaguna.edu.ph

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Abstract – The advancement and popularity of the internet have resulted in a rapid shift from traditional word of mouth to electronic word-of-mouth, particularly in the tourism industry. The current paper attempted to explore the effects of e-WOM marketing of travel agencies on the buying behavior of leisure travelers. Similarly, determine the psychographic profile, the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings, and their buying behavior. Finally, this aimed to determine the significant relationship between travelers' purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings to their buying behavior when grouped according to psychographic profile. The researchers used a descriptive-correlational method with a sample of 134 respondents coming from cities and municipalities within Laguna. The findings indicate that social benefits, self-enhancement, concern for others, and economic incentives positively affect the consumers' buying behavior. Significant relationships were also found between the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings and leisure travelers' buying behavior. Posting reviews and ratings has a direct impact on the buying behavior of leisure travelers. Generally, the proposed primary eWOM framework may be used by the travel agencies and tourism marketers to curate the needs and wants of the leisure travelers to improve their services; thus creating a positive eWOM..

Keywords: Consumer behavior, Electronic word of mouth, Tourism marketing.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the internet revolution plays a dominant role in changing people's way of living. Since then, the internet has refined the way information is shared and delivered to its receiver through electronic word-of-mouth or eWOM. eWOM may consist of statements that are considered positive and negative made by consumers about a certain product and service that they purchased or acquired.

Based on the data reported, the number of internet users gradually increased to 45.36 billion users in the said year. Most of the internet users came from Asian countries, which allotted 50.7% of the global population [1]. Business sectors recognized the effectiveness of using the Internet as strengthening the relationship with their consumers since more than 51% of firms use digital information servers as a tool in attaining business goals [2].

Given the tourism industry as a complex and dynamic sector for consumers because of the different interests, lifestyle choices, and personalities that they have when it comes to determining the type of product or service to provide is a challenge for marketers. Brought by technological advancements and the

internet revolution, it revamps the way travel-related information, experiences, as well as travel itineraries, are disseminated with the use of eWOM. Mainly, the internet has altered the way tourism is being promoted because searching for travel information can be done with just a click.

In line with this, the majority of travelers use internet websites to get all the information they needed about the place they intend to visit [3]. Correspondingly, eWOM works in the travel agency sector by providing ratings, feedbacks, comments about the service they fulfil to the consumers in line with the advantages they may obtain such as economic incentives in the forms of monetary payments, products free of charge, social benefits, concern for the consumers, and self-enhancement [4].

As many tourism firms invest heavily in marketing tools to uphold their position in the competitive market, the researchers aim to propel the need to measure the effectiveness of their marketing performance. For some reasons, leisure travelers become conscious as they can search for ratings and comments to prove the legitimacy of a specific product, brand, or service that they are going to purchase. This study aims to conduct

an in-depth analysis of the effect of electronic word-of-mouth marketing of the different travel agencies in the Philippines concerning the decision-making and buying behavior of leisure travelers in Laguna by their psychographic profile. Lastly, the researchers aim to contribute to the enrichment and stimulation of the travel industry in the country; more specifically, to create awareness on how viable eWOM is.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to explore the effects of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) marketing of travel agencies on the buying behavior of leisure travelers in Laguna. Specifically, to determine the psychographic profile of leisure travelers in terms of Interests, Lifestyle choices, and Personality; determine the purpose of the conduct of consumer reviews and ratings in terms of social benefits, economic incentives, concern for others, and self-enhancement. Also, analyze the leisure travelers' behavior in terms of complexity, dissonance reducing, habitual buying, and variety-seeking behavior; correlate the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings to leisure traveler's behavior; determine the significant relationship between travelers' purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings and their behavior when grouped according to (psychographic profile). Lastly, develop an Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) framework out of gathered data.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The researchers used a descriptive-correlational method of research in gathering the needed information, which focuses on the role of eWOM marketing of travel agencies and its influence on the buying behavior of leisure travelers in Laguna. The respondents for this study are 134 leisure travelers located in, who have experienced booking on a travel agency. This was determined by using G-Power version 3.1.9.2. The researchers used a purposive sampling technique. The main instrument that was utilized in this study was an adapted questionnaire. The value of Cronbach's alpha is 0.965, which signifies that there is an excellent internal consistency of the items. For the research protocol, the researchers made a letter that served as a consent or data privacy act and waited for the respondent's approval. After retrieving the consent from the respondents and they are willing to answer then that is the time that the researchers disseminated the online survey questionnaire through the utilization of Microsoft Forms. All the data that

were gathered throughout the study remained confidential and ensured that the procedures happened fairly and were not biased to all the involved participants. The statistical tools used in the study were Weighted Mean, Frequency and Ranking Tool, and Spearman's Rank Correlation for the significant relationship.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Summary table on the psychographic profile of leisure travelers in Laguna

Indicators	WM	VI	Rank
Interests	3.47	A	1
Lifestyle Choices	2.78	A	3
Personality	3.17	A	2
Composite Mean	3.14	A	

Legend: 3.50-4.00= Strongly Agree (SA); 2.50-3.49= Agree (A); 1.50-2.49= Disagree (D); 1.00-1.49=Strongly Disagree (SD)

From the table, other indicators such as personality have a weighted mean of 3.17 and a verbal interpretation agreed. It can be gleaned from the same table that lifestyle choices (2.78) procured the lowest ranking among the given indicators and with a verbal interpretation of agree. This means that when it comes to traveling, they do not give much value to their lifestyle choices, and these are the factors to consider including the weather conditions and the season of the place that they want to visit.

It can be deduced from Table 1 that the respondents strongly agreed that the purpose of the conduct of consumer reviews and ratings of leisure travelers in Laguna are based on social benefits (3.57). Hence, it can be observed through the communal benefits consumers might obtain such as being the point of reference of other consumers to avoid false belief and at the same time allows the consumer to establish a sense of belonging with the virtual community. time allows the consumer to establish a sense of belonging with the virtual community. This can be supported by Yen and Tang [5] that most consumers play a significant role in society because they post their experiences regarding a particular service to create awareness for other consumers.

From the same summary table, other indicators for purpose of the conduct of consumer reviews and ratings such as concern for others (3.53), ranked second from the given indicators in which the verbal interpretation strongly agrees. Also, self-enhancement ranked third with a weighted mean of 3.52 and a verbal interpretation strongly agrees.

Table 2. Summary table on the purpose of the conduct of consumer reviews and ratings of leisure travelers in Laguna

Indicators	WM	VI	Rank
Social Benefits	3.57	SA	1
Economic Incentives	3.41	A	4
Concern for Others	3.53	SA	2
Self-Enhancement	3.52	SA	3
Composite Mean	3.51	SA	

Legend: 3.50-4.00= Strongly Agree (SA); 2.50-3.49= Agree (A); 1.50-2.49= Disagree (D); 1.00- 1.49=Strongly Disagree (SD)

Henceforth, from the same table, it can be gleaned that the lowest in ranking when it comes to conducting reviews and ratings is economic incentives with the weighted mean of 3.41 and a verbal interpretation agree. This shows that the least motivation of consumers to post ratings is the monetary benefits they might acquire. Consumers faced social pressure when thinking of economic incentives because they are forced to accept them even though they just want to share their post-purchase experience [6].

Table 3. Summary table on the different buying behavior of leisure travelers in Laguna

Indicators	WM	VI	Rank
Complex Buying Behavior	3.47	A	1
Dissonance-Reducing Behavior	3.20	A	4
Habitual Buying Behavior	3.33	A	3
Variety-Seeking Behavior	3.46	A	2
Composite Mean	3.37	A	

Legend: 3.50-4.00= Strongly Agree (SA); 2.50-3.49= Agree (A); 1.50-2.49= Disagree (D); 1.00- 1.49=Strongly Disagree (SD)

From the following indicators in the summary table, variety-seeking behavior ranked second (3.46) and has a verbal interpretation agreed. On the other hand, the indicator habitual buying behavior (3.33) ranked third with a verbal interpretation agree as well. It is shown that the dissonance reducing behavior got the lowest rank (3.20) and a verbal interpretation agrees. This signifies that most consumers tend to conduct reviews and ratings because they did not want to feel any dissonance after the post-purchase experience.

In the same case, after the buying decision, the consumer may experience "dissonance" or be unsatisfied as they will act and seek information that will substantiate their choice of purchase [7].

Table 4. Correlation of the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings to leisure traveler's behavior in terms of social benefits

Social Benefits vs	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation
Complexity	.359	.000	Significant
Dissonance reducing	.243	.005	Significant
Habitual buying	.275	.001	Significant
Variety seeking	.325	.000	Significant

Legend: If the p-value is <.05, Significant. If the p-value is >.05, Not Significant.

Table 4 presents the correlation of the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings to leisure travelers' behavior in terms of social benefits. It was gleaned that there is a significant relationship when grouped according to complexity (r=.359, p=.000), dissonance reducing (r=.243, p=.005), habitual buying (r=.275, p=.001), and variety seeking (r=.325, p=.000) since it acquired p-values less than .05 alpha level. This means that the respondents' answers are paralleled on each other and were based on the posthoc test conducted. The following types of buying behavior are all essential to associate the leisure traveler's behavior.

In addition, consumer reviews and ratings are vital as other consumers will be aware of the travel products and services of a travel agency. Since many consumers are always active to read feedbacks whether positive or negative, it will help them to distinguish if the packages that they are going to purchase are worth their money. Moreover, the majority of marketers use eWOM as a means of marketing strategy where consumers have the liberty to share their experiences [8] as well as recommendations on purchasing tour packages that eventually will help them acquire new friends.

Table 5. Correlation of the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings to leisure traveler's behavior in terms of economic incentives

Economic Incentives vs	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation
Complexity	.306	.000	Significant
Dissonance reducing	.295	.001	Significant
Habitual buying	.289	.001	Significant
Variety seeking	.299	.000	Significant

Legend: If the p-value is <.05, Significant. If the p-value is >.05, Not Significant.

Table 5 shows the correlation of the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings to leisure travelers' behavior in terms of economic incentives. It was observed that there is a significant relationship

when grouped according to complexity ($r=.306$, $p=.000$), dissonance reducing ($r=.295$, $p=.001$), habitual buying ($r=.289$, $p=.001$), and variety seeking ($r=.299$, $p=.000$) wherein it obtained p-values less than 0.05. The result shows that the responses have a connection wherein the economic incentives are linked with the types of buying behavior of consumers.

Consumers are familiar with the packages that are available in the travel agency whether it is advertised on social media or any promotional tools but they have adversity in resolving the differences between the features of the tour packages that they purchase. Thus, they are more inclined in searching for low-cost travel products due to the rewards and incentives they might gain in return for their purchase. The reward is given for employees to be more motivated to market the products and services of a travel agency to maintain good performance in selling [9].

Table 6. Correlation of the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings to leisure traveler’s behavior in terms of concern for oth

Concern for Others vs	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation
Complexity	.438	.000	Significant
Dissonance reducing	.351	.000	Significant
Habitual buying	.251	.003	Significant
Variety seeking	.459	.000	Significant

Legend: If the p-value is <.05, Significant. If the p-value is >.05, Not Significant.

Table 6 propounds the correlation of the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings to leisure travelers' behavior in terms of concern for others. It was observed that there was a significant relationship in terms of complexity ($r=.438$, $p=.000$), dissonance reducing ($r=.351$, $p=.000$), habitual buying ($r=.251$, $p=.003$), and variety-seeking ($r=.459$, $p=.000$) since the acquired p-values were less than 0.05. This signifies that the responses are linked, and it was gleaned that the type of buying behavior corresponds to the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings.

This symbolizes that leisure travelers tend to do thorough research to find a credible travel agency and have a lot of choices when it comes to the suitable packages and services offered. Similarly, they want to purchase products and services that they are already familiar with because they could use the experience they have to share and post it to review sites regarding the post-purchase experience. Book, Tanford, Montgomery & Love [10] specified that consumers find it difficult to buy a package without prior

knowledge about the credibility of the travel agency and its services.

Table 7. Correlation of the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings to leisure traveler’s behavior in terms of self-enhancement

Self-Enhancement vs	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation
Complexity	.351	.000	Significant
Dissonance reducing	.277	.001	Significant
Habitual buying	.366	.000	Significant
Variety seeking	.364	.000	Significant

Legend: If the p-value is <.05, Significant. If the p-value is >.05, Not Significant.

Table 7 shows that there is a correlation between the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings to leisure travelers' behavior in terms of self-enhancement. It was distinguished that there was a significant relationship in terms of complexity ($r=.351$, $p=.000$), dissonance-reducing ($r=.277$, $p=.001$), habitual buying ($r=.366$, $p=.000$), and lastly, variety seeking ($r=.364$, $p=.000$). This was derived since the values are less than 0.05 alpha level which denotes that the responses correspond significantly. It was found out that conducting reviews and ratings increases the consumer's self-esteem and how they perceive themselves.

Consumers feel satisfied within themselves after posting reviews and ratings because they felt like they are a credible source of information. There is fulfillment on the consumer’s perspective as if he or she became the point of reference of others. Hence, it can boost their self-esteem and adds up confidence. According to Johnson, Liljenberg, and Dahlgren [11], consumers post reviews and ratings because it helps them to express contentment about a good purchase.

Table 8. Correlation of the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings when grouped according to interest

Interest vs	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation
Social Benefits	.401	.000	Significant
Economic Incentives	.475	.000	Significant
Concern for Others	.486	.000	Significant
Self-Enhancement	.401	.000	Significant

Legend: If the p-value is <.05, Significant. If the p-value is >.05, Not Significant.

Table 8 presents the correlation of the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings when grouped according to interest. It was gleaned that there was a significant relationship in social benefits ($r=.401$, $p=.000$), economic incentives ($r=.475$, $p=.000$), concern for others ($r=.485$, $p=.000$), and self-enhancement ($r=.401$, $p=.000$) given that the indicators

procured p-values less than 0.05. This means that the responses have a connection based on the posthoc test conducted. It was determined that the consumers visit destinations inclined with their preferred activities because of the reviews and ratings they saw on review sites and other social media platforms.

Hence, this signifies that the consumer's motive for purchasing tour packages in a travel agency is their promotional materials in terms of brochures, flyers, and advertisements that attract consumers with a wide array of activities to choose from. The post-purchase experience allows the consumers to share their experiences in exchange for promo discounts, meeting other people, and strengthening his/her reputation by being a good source of information. As stated by Chang and wang [12], eWOM can be used as online advertising for most travel agencies that bring a tantamount effect due to the nature of persuasion it may convey.

Table 9. Correlation of the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings when grouped according to lifestyle choices

Lifestyle Choices vs	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation
Social Benefits	.104	.234	Not Significant
Economic Incentives	.182	.035	Significant
Concern for Others	.270	.002	Significant
Self-Enhancement	.149	.086	Not Significant

Legend: If the p-value is <.05, Significant. If the p-value is >.05, Not Significant.

Table 9 manifests the correlation of the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings when grouped according to lifestyle choices. It was remarked that there is a significant relationship in terms of economic incentives (r=.182, p=.035) and concern for others (r=.270, p=.002) because it acquired p-values less than 0.05 alpha level. The result appears that it corresponds significantly based on the posthoc test conducted.

The same table demonstrates that the respondents are more likely influenced to travel from time to time because of the other travelers' feedback and recommendations about the tour packages they purchased. In consonance with Ettemaet, al. [13] other factors why travelers are influenced to travel from time to time is because of the season and weather of the destinations that they want to visit. As they are influenced by these factors, they are motivated to share their travel experience through eWOM to raise awareness and to inform consumers about a good purchase, which makes them a good source of information.

Table 10. Correlation of the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings when grouped according to personality

Personality vs	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation
Social Benefits	.114	.191	Not Significant
Economic Incentives	.220	.011	Significant
Concern for Others	.230	.008	Significant
Self-Enhancement	.216	.012	Significant

Legend: If the p-value is <.05, Significant. If the p-value is >.05, Not Significant.

Table 10 suggests that there is a correlation between the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings when grouped according to personality. It was gleaned that there was a significant relationship in terms of economic incentives (r=.220, p=.011), concern for others (r=.230, p=.008), and self-enhancement (r=.216, p=.012). This is because the values are less than the 0.05 alpha level which signifies those responses are paralleled. It was observed that the purpose of conducting consumers reviews and ratings affects the personality of the traveler particularly their main motive to do reviews is to gain respect and confidence from other consumers.

This propounds that leisure travelers browse online for reviews in ratings to quickly find personal choices when purchasing a product or service online. While other types of tourists seek new experiences and adventure in a wide range of activities. Hence, in doing so, receiving rewards such as discounts or travel points can also be their motivator to conduct reviews and ratings over the internet that will lead them to seek new experiences. Consumers who express their joy in giving recommendations help their fellow consumers particularly those who are seeking a new kind of adventure. Some travelers said that they give comments and reviews because they want to give awareness to those leisure travelers who are scared of being adventurous but at the same time willing to try something new [14].

Table 11. Correlation of leisure travelers' buying behavior when grouped according to interest

Interest vs	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation
Complexity	.331	.000	Significant
Dissonance Reducing	.370	.000	Significant
Habitual Buying	.352	.000	Significant
Variety Seeking	.425	.000	Significant

Legend: If the p-value is <.05, Significant. If the p-value is >.05, Not Significant.

Table 11 presents the correlation of leisure travelers' buying behavior when grouped according to interest. From the table, it can be observed that there is a significant relationship when grouped according to complexity (r=.331, p=.000), dissonance reducing

($r=.370$, $p=.000$), habitual buying ($r=.352$, $p=.000$), and variety seeking ($r=.425$, $p=.000$) since it acquired p-values less than .05 alpha level. This means that the respondents' answers are interdependent and were based on the post hoc test conducted. It was determined that the consumers visit destinations inclined with their preferred activities because of the reviews and ratings they saw on review sites and other social media platforms.

Hence, this signifies that the consumer's motive for purchasing tour packages in a travel agency is their promotional materials in terms of brochures, flyers, and advertisements that attract consumers with a wide array of activities to choose from. The post-purchase experience allows the consumers to share their experiences in exchange for promo discounts, meeting other people, and strengthening his/her reputation by being a good source of information. The determinants for posting consumer reviews and ratings take part in having customer retention [15] and can help improve the services of a travel agency as well.

Table 12. Correlation of leisure travelers' buying behavior when grouped according to lifestyle choices

Lifestyle Choices vs	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation
Complexity	.288	.001	Significant
Dissonance Reducing	.342	.000	Significant
Habitual Buying	.343	.000	Significant
Variety Seeking	.237	.006	Significant

Legend: If the p-value is <.05, Significant. If the p-value is >.05, Not Significant.

Table 12 shows the correlation of leisure travelers' buying behavior when grouped according to lifestyle choices. It was driven from the table that there was a significant relationship in terms of complexity ($r=.288$, $p=.001$), dissonance-reducing ($r=.342$, $p=.000$), habitual buying ($r=.343$, $p=.000$), and lastly, variety seeking ($r=.237$, $p=.006$). This was derived since the obtained p-values were less than 0.05 alpha level to denote that the responses correspond significantly.

This means that leisure travelers do thorough research with a specific travel agency to recommend a particular destination where they could seek great pleasure, most importantly goals from rural areas. Thus, making a thorough background check from various sites is a more significant action for those backpackers or traveling alone [16]. Hence, others visit a destination three times a year, so they always make sure to make the most out of it.

Table 13 summarizes the correlation of leisure travelers' buying behavior when grouped based on their personality. It was found that there was a significant relationship in complexity ($r=.244$, $p=.005$),

dissonance reducing ($r=.248$, $p=.004$), habitual buying ($r=.389$, $p=.000$), and variety seeking ($r=.193$, $p=.025$). This was derived since the obtained p-values were less than 0.05 alpha level. This promotes that the responses are signed by the respondents' buying behavior when grouped according to their personality.

Table 13. Correlation of leisure travelers' buying behavior when grouped according to personality

Personality vs	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation
Complexity	.244	.005	Significant
Dissonance Reducing	.248	.004	Significant
Habitual Buying	.389	.000	Significant
Variety Seeking	.193	.025	Significant

Legend: If the p-value is <.05, Significant. If the p-value is >.05, Not Significant.

This indicates that the respondents' buying behavior depends on visiting areas or destinations online based on their familiarity. Nonetheless, many travelers often rely on others' opinions particularly those who have past experiences with the place [17]. Leisure travelers could get information and recommendations from the people they know through visiting websites or social media platforms over the internet.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Most of the respondents agreed that their interests affect their decisions to purchase tour packages depending on the online advertisements and promo deals they saw on social media platforms. When it comes to lifestyle choices, it was found out that the respondents do not agree with traveling alone. In terms of personality, the common ground for respondents is that they are the type of leisure travelers who seek new experiences and adventure in a wide range of activities. Most of the respondents have a very high level of agreement that the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings is essential for leisure travelers in the province of Laguna. Moreover, this only affirmed that the social benefits, concern for others, and self-enhancement are the common factors that motivate them to post reviews and ratings on review sites and other social media platforms. Hence, the respondents agreed that their buying behavior such as complexity, dissonance-reducing, habitual buying, and variety-seeking has a positive impact on their purchasing decisions. There is a positive correlation between the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings in terms of social benefits, economic incentives, concern for others, and self-enhancement with the leisure traveler's behavior. When grouped according to psychographic profile, there is a significant relationship between interest and the purpose of conducting consumer reviews and ratings. In terms of buying behavior, there is a significant relationship when it comes to complexity, dissonance

reduction, habitual buying behavior, and variety-seeking behavior. An initial framework was created from the results of the significant predictors that may contribute to eWOM Marketing.

This is a call for travel agencies to innovate their travel packages and ensure that the marketing promotional tools are appropriate to the activities and interests of leisure travelers. Consumers must consider the responsibility of posting reviews and ratings as a contribution to other consumers and not for their gain. All domestic travel agencies and tourism marketers may pivot their marketing strategies to cater to the perspective of different leisure travelers. They may encourage their consumers to post feedback to gain an honest review and for them to improve the quality and services they are giving to their consumers. The proposed primary eWOM framework may be used by the travel agencies and other tourism marketers, and stakeholders to curate the needs and wants of the leisure travelers and for them to improve their services in the long run. In connection with this, the EWOM framework can help travelers to make a positive eWOM because they are satisfied with the products and services, they have received from the travel agency.

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