EFFECT OF EWOW AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE ON PRODUCT ADOPTION INTENTION

Tuan Minh Phung – Ly Thi Minh Pham – Nga Hong Do

Abstract

Since technological advancements have played an indispensable piece of the world economy lately, forecasting the acceptance of customers towards these innovations has turned into a noteworthy objective of not only numerous scientists in the scholarly community but also practitioners. Therefore, this study is to examine the effect of eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) and social influence on product adoption intention in the mobile phone context. A conceptual framework has been proposed, in which four parts of the extended version of Information Adoption Model (IAM) and social influence affect information adoption intention and the willingness of consumers to adoption a high tech device. The samples were gathered from mobile phone users in Vietnam and put into data analysis with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The results indicate that although eWOM which is the information sharing on online context does not have a direct impact on customer's intention to adopt new products, it still has an indirect effect on consumer behavioral intention through mediate variables namely information usefulness and information adoption in this context. Moreover, social influence has been confirmed for its strong effect on adoption intention of users. Finally, managerial implications are provided based on research findings.

Keywords: eWOM, social influence, product adoption intention

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Introduction

Word-of-mouth (WOM) has been considered as one of the most important drivers of new product diffusion. In the context without Internet, WOM has been widely examined as ways to promote new products. However, because of the technology development in recent years, Internet innovation has impressively modified individuals' way of life. As e-commerce has developed more and more rapidly, online shopping has turned into a popular way for Internet users (Yan et al., 2016). These days, numerous customers first aware of a product or service through others' comments about their feelings and experiences posted on several platforms for eWOM such as blogs, discussion forums, social network and so on (Cheung et al., 2008). There are several

researches which have confirmed the positive effect of eWOM on consumer behavioral intention including purchase intention or product adoption intention. For instance, Erkan and Evans (2016) supported the significant impact of eWOM's information characteristics on consumers' purchase intention. However, Kulviwat et al. (2009) argued that researchers have been put much emphasis on attitude towards adopting a new product, which drives the intention (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Sussman & Siegal, 2003).

Besides attitude, social influence is one of other factors that could affect consumer behavior as well (Kulviwat et al., 2009). This implies that adoption intention might be affected not only by individual's own attitude towards a product but also by reference group. Nevertheless, few studies have analyzed the part of social influence in consumer context. Kulviwat et al. (2009) indicate that both social influence and adoption attitude have positive effects on consumer intention to adopt high-tech innovations, especially when an innovation is publicly consumed rather than privately consumed. This study contains three objectives in which the first one is to discover the drivers of information usefulness and its effect on information adoption. Next, the impact of information adoption on customer behavioral intention, namely product adoption intention in this study is also put into examination. And finally, this research wants to determine whether social influence does have a significant effect on attitude towards information and product adoption intention of customers.

1 Literature review

1.1 Electronic word of mouth

With the development of the Internet, WOM could be intervened through electronic means. On the basic of the work of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004, p. 39), eWOM is defined as "any positive, neutral, or negative experiences made by potential, actual, or former consumers about a product, service, brand, or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" EWOM data in social media can emerge in many ways. Bloggers or forum members can intentionally comment or post about brands, products and services they may concern or have experienced about them. Besides, users can also show their interest and preferences to their forum network in an unintentional way, for example, being a loyal fan of brands, interacting with brands posts through sharing, liking and commenting. Finally, marketers can manage posts on their official fanpage or accounts. Customers progressively utilize remarks and comments posted on some typical forums such as Facebook, Twitter, and so forth to valuate products and services before purchasing; therefore, the contents on social media have turned into a vital data source influencing product choice and help shoppers make their shopping decision (Yan et al., 2016).

1.2 Information adoption model (IAM)

In the current information frameworks literature, dual procedure theories such as TRA (Theory of Reasoned Action) or TAM (Technology Acceptance Model), ELM (elaboration likelihood model) are often utilized to clarify how individuals are impacted in receiving and adopting thoughts, ideas, knowledge and information (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). These researchers took this knowledge further by incorporating them with dual process theories, which creates Information Adoption Model (IAM), which is the integrated model between TAM and ELM. The ELM model aims to explain different ways of processing stimuli, why they are used, and their outcomes on attitude change. The ELM proposes two major routes to persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route. The former refers to the nature of arguments in the message whereas the latter refers to issues or topics that are indirectly related to the topic of the message (Cheung et al., 2008).

Cheung et al. (2008) used IAM to examine the factors impacting information adoption of online seekers' opinion in online customer communities. This study concentrates on the relationship between eWOM on social media and product adoption intention; therefore, the application of IAM in the context is reasonably fit for this research. Four constructs of IAM which are applied into this situation are information quality, information credibility, information usefulness and information adoption.

Although IAM is a generally utilized model, Erkan and Evans (2016) argue that this model just focuses on some aspects of information, which are quality, credibility and usefulness. The impact of information, nevertheless, should not be restricted to only basic attributes of information; consumers' attitude towards information should be put into consideration. In addition, the elements relating to consumers' behavior towards eWOM information are adopted from TRA.

1.3 Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

The TRA proposes that behavioral intentions, which are the precursors of behavior, are decided by attitude and subjective norms (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). Behavior is said to be around equivalent to behavioral intention, which can be got from a combination of the buyer's attitude toward product and the subjective norms about the behavior. According to Ajzen & Fishbein (1977), subjective norms are considered as the force of other individuals in impacting behavior. Prendergast et al. (2010) research showed that both similarity between a user's interests and a forum's topic and user attitudes towards the forum strongly affect purchase intentions as well as have an indirect effect through helping determine the forum's persuasiveness. Thus, eWOM impacts readers' attitudes, intentions, and behavior. Nevertheless, in this research, we just adopt only three components of TRA named attitude towards the behavior, subjective norms and behavioral intention. With regard to

behavioral intention, it is chosen because the purpose of this study is to discover the effect of eWOM on product adoption intention.

Subjective norms are impacted by the expectations of important references and the desire of people to perform these expectations. Kulviwat et al. (2009) in their research suggested the term "social influence" to describe the phenomenon in which individuals may have a behavior regardless of the fact that they are not ideal towards it as long as it is positive and favorable to the reference forum. In addition, social influence of new product adoption behavior is a key aspect of the diffusion of innovations, their results showed that superordinate group influence has a direct effect on consumer's perceptions and normative outcomes from early adoption. Hence, just the previously stated three components which are attitude, subjective norms and behavioral intention are adopted. In addition, this research model adds needs of information as further construct, which is found as consumer behavior towards eWOM information from the previous literature (Wolny & Mueller, 2013; Erkan & Evans 2016).

2 Research model and hypotheses development

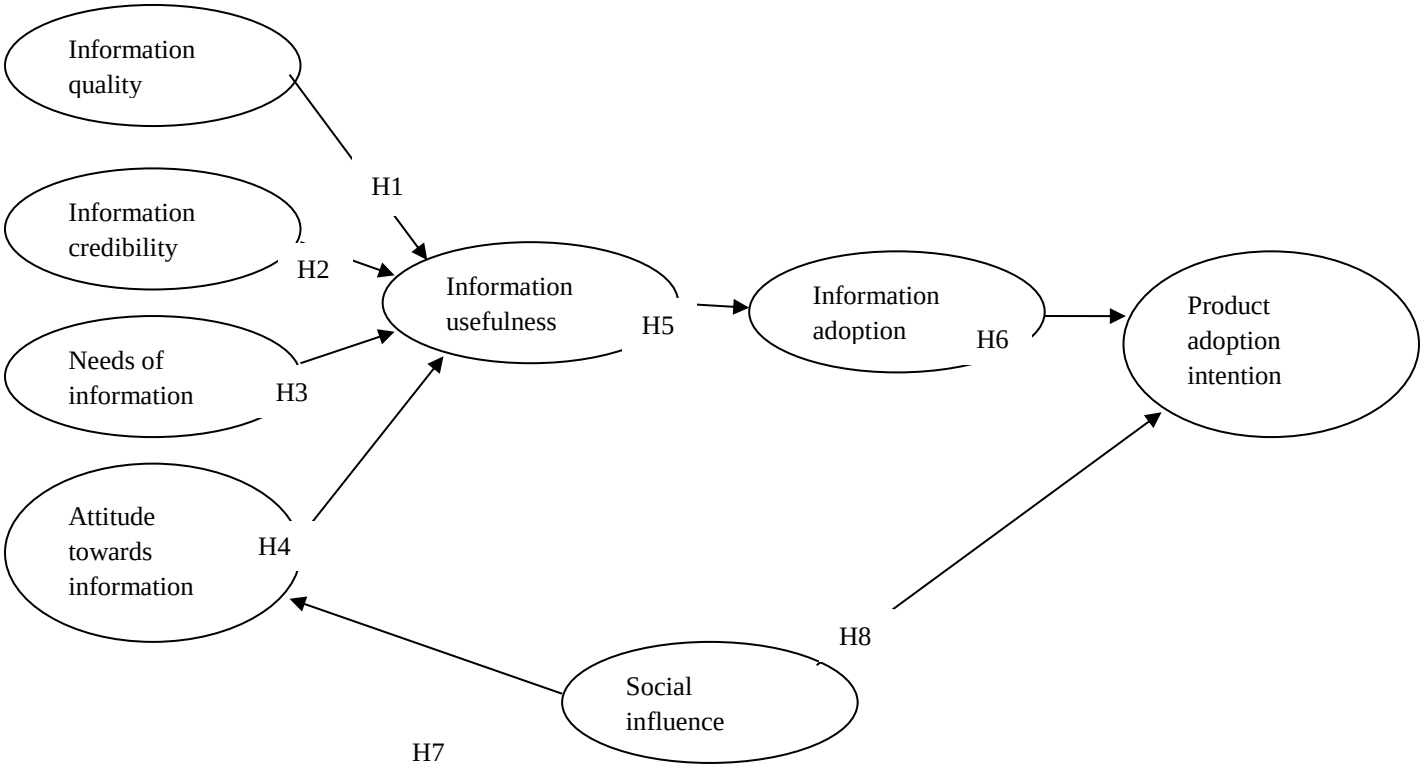
Figure 1 presents the model research which is adapted from the study of Erkan and Evans (2016) and Kulviwat et al. (2009). Both studies were conducted in social media context which examine users' adoption intention about technology innovations in the UK and the USA. The research model contains two main parts namely extended information adoption model (IAM) and social influence. As mentioned before, our model is the extended version of the IAM (Sussman & Siegal, 2003) through incorporating two parts of TRA (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977), which are attitude towards information and behavioral intention. The IAM clarifies the attributes of eWOM information, while the related parts of TRA describe the conduct of purchasers towards eWOM data. With this combination, the exploration model of this study offers to convey the IAM one step further. The original model of IAM just clarifies the adoption of data, while the extended research model examines how eWOM affect customers' behavioral intention. On the other hand, the impact of social influence on attitude towards information and product adoption intention is adopted from the research of Erkan and Evans (2016). Therefore, the proposed model is organized as follows:

With the development of electronic commerce, there are increasingly online consumer communities, encouraging shoppers to share their product reviews with others. These reviews and comments shared by online shoppers are known as electronic word-of-mouth (Cheung et al., 2008). Buyers approach products and services more energetically when the information meets their requirement. Actually, many studies confirmed the impact of online information quality on consumer's behavior. For instance, Park et al. (2007) analyzed the persuasive effect of online reviews on product sales, especially buying decision-making. Their paper produced an

important finding in which the quality of online comments has a significant impact on consumers' purchasing intention. Furthermore, Sussman and Siegal (2003) developed a model to assess the information usefulness as a mediator of the information adoption process. Findings support the model that information credibility is used to understand information adoption, and information usefulness serves a mediating role between information credibility and information adoption. Based on previous researches, the following hypotheses are developed:
H1: Information quality positively affects eWOM information usefulness.

H2: Information credibility positively affects eWOM information usefulness

Fig. 1: The proposed model



Source: Author own research model

Needs of information have been examined as a motivation for consumers engaging in both positive and negative word-of-mouth (WOM) communication. In the study of Erkan and Evans (2016), they added "need of information" as a predicting factor to their model and concluded that shoppers looking for information in an online community, are more likely to find usable ones and adopt them, and eventually needs of information positively affect their purchase intention. Therefore, the below hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Needs of information positively affect information usefulness.

Another dependent variable added through considering TRA to the proposed model is "attitude towards information". Many previous studies have been investigating the role of customers' attitudes towards eWOM information (Park et al., 2007; Prendergast et al., 2010; Erkan and Evans, 2016). Park et al. (2007) confirmed the positive effect of online reviews and recommendations on purchase intention; whereas Prendergast et al. (2010) argued that forum's topic and user attitudes towards the forum strongly predict purchase intentions. Furthermore, the findings of Erkan and Evans (2016) discussed about the positive effect of users' attitude towards information on information usefulness as well as its indirect impact on shoppers buying intention. From the above findings, the following hypothesis is created:

H4: Attitude towards information positively affects information usefulness.

Information usefulness refers to individual's perception that using the information on online forums will enhance or benefit for his/her transaction. Perceived information usefulness is an essential indicator of customer information adoption (Cheung et al., 2008). Sussman and Siegal (2003) highlights the assessment of information usefulness as a mediator of the information adoption process. Their results support the model, suggesting that information usefulness serves a mediating role between influence processes and information adoption. Therefore, customers might have greater intention to adopt information on social media when they find them useful.

H5: Information usefulness positively affects information adoption.

Online networking users, either deliberately or inadvertently, are exposed to a large amount of eWOM information and many previous studies have confirmed the influence of eWOM information on customer behavioral intention such as purchase intention or production adoption intention. For example, See-To & Ho (2014) noted that eWOM had a direct effect on purchase intention and indirect effect on product adoption through the moderate effect of customer trust. In this study, through connecting IAM and TRA, we anticipate that consumers who adopt eWOM information are more likely to adoption product.

H6: Information adoption positively affects product adoption intention.

In the study of Kulviwat et al. (2009), they stated that social influence or social norms play an essential role in consumer adoption, especially in technological innovations. The interpersonal impacts originate from many sources, for example, neighbors, relatives, family, friends, colleagues and also motivational figures in the social media like singers or movie stars. The outcomes of Kuviwat et al. (2009) illustrate that both social influence and customer's attitude affect user intention to adopt a technological innovation. In particular, the impact of

social influence on shopper adoption intentions is completely mediated by customer attitude. Hence, the following hypotheses are drawn:

H7: Social influence positively affects attitude towards information.

H8: Social influence positively affects product adoption intention.

3 Research method

This study applies two research methods which are qualitative research and quantitative research. First of all, qualitative research begins with group interview which aims to find out whether the translation from English to Vietnamese of all scales is suitable for context of mobile users in Vietnam or not. 10 interviewees are asked to provide ad hoc advice and revisions for scale items. After that, quantitative research was put into action. The survey was conducted for about one month in Vietnam. A convenience sampling method was used with self-administered questionnaires which were distributed online and through surveyors at schools and universities, officers. The questionnaire comprises two sections which are the assessment of interviewees about all items and the demographic information.

All variables used in this research are adapted from various previous studies and modified to fit in the online context in Vietnam from the original format. Specifically, 3 items of information quality are adopted from Park et al. (2007), 3 items of information credibility are withdrawn from the research of Prendergast et al. (2010), 2 items of needs of information are adapted from Chu & Kim (2011), 4 items of attitude towards information come from Wolny and Mueller (2013), 3 items of information usefulness are inherited from Bailey and Pearson (1983), 2 items of information adoption come from Cheung et al. (2008), and finally 3 items of social influence and 3 items of product adoption intention come from Hong and Tam (2006). All items in this study are rated based on 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). With regard to data analysis, construct reliability of all variables are assessed with Cronbach's alpha coefficient value. Next, explanatory factor analysis (EFA) is used with SPSS 16.0 before confirmed factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) are implemented through AMOS 18.0 to evaluate proposed research model and test hypotheses.

4 Results

After of month of survey period, 263 answer sheets are collected; however, there are only 231 questionnaires which are eligible for statistical analysis (accounting for 87.8%). The demographic of sample shows that 38.5%

of the interviewees are men whereas 61.5% of participants are women. The majority of respondents are 23 years old or above which accounts for 57.6%. and the remaining proportion is 22 years old or below. With regard to occupation, the data shows that 42.9% are students while 57.1% are people who have been already working. The percentage of people using Internet on a daily basis is by far the highest one, which represents slightly over 80%. In Vietnam, there are some popular mobile phone brands namely iPhone taking the first rank with 37.2%, followed by Samsung, other brands, Oppo, Sony which make up 26.4%, 23.4%, 7.8%, 5.3% respectively.

Later, table 1 illustrates the reliability through cronbach's alpha among all constructs. When Cronbach's alpha did not reach the cut-off of 0.7 and the corrected item-total correlations was below 0.3, the items lowering the construct reliability will be deleted to increase Cronbach's alpha. The results describes that all the construct reliabilities were above 0.7 and the corrected item-total correlations were above 0.3; therefore, no item was removed from the construct to raise the scale reliability. Then, all items are put into explanatory factor analysis. In this study, after EFA, the data will be put into CFA and SEM; therefore, it would be better if the method utilized is Principal Axis Factoring and Promax, according to Gerbing and Anderson (1988).

CFA and SEM were performed to assess the fit of measurement model with AMOS 18.0. As can be seen from figure 2, the measurement model fit was satisfactory: $\chi 2/df=3.075$; root mean square error of approximation (RSMEA) = 0.095; goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = 0.791; Tucker & Lewis index (TLI) = 0.821; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.841. In short, all of the indices demonstrated an acceptable fit for the measurement model. To assess the convergent validity, Gerbing & Anderson (1988) suggested that the standardized loading values must be over 0.5. As presented in table 1, all the standardized loading values are over 0.5; therefore, the convergent validity was established. After that, the internal consistency of each latent variable and discriminant validity of each construct are based on the composite construct reliability (CCR) values and the average variance extracted (AVE). Because all constructs displayed the value greater than 0.7, an acceptable level of composite reliability, it was concluded that each construct has internal consistency. In general, the average variance extracted (AVE) should be greater than 0.5 and the results were consistent with the conditions. All the results are presents in table 1.

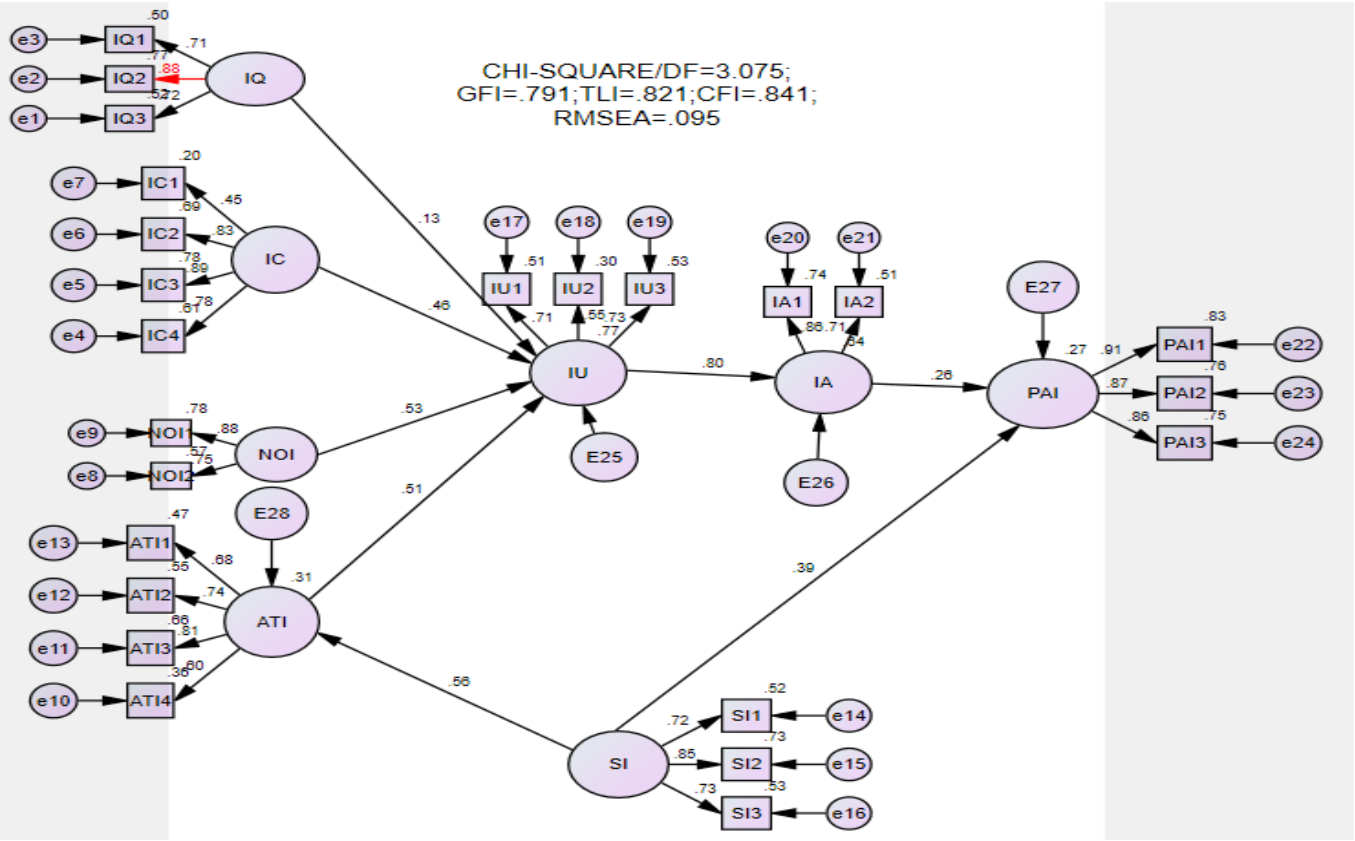
Tab. 1: Construct reliability and variance extracted values

Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Standardized loading value	CCR	AVE
The information about products which are shared by my friends in social media….			**0.813**	**0.594**
Information Quality (IQ)	**0.809**			
IQ1: I think they are understable.		0.789		
IQ2: I think they are clear.		0.789		
IQ3: In general, I think the quality of them is high.		0.605		
Information credibility (IC)	**0.820**		**0.839**	**0.575**
IC1: I think they are convincing		0.569		
IC2: I think thay are strong.		0.690		
IC3: I think they are credible.		0.894		
IC4: I think they are accurate.		0.714		
Needs of information (NOI)	**0.800**		**0.800**	**0.666**
NOI1: I like to apply them when I consider new products.		0.573		
NOI2: If I have little experience with a product, I often use them.		0.580		
Attitude towards information (ATI)	**0.801**		**0.806**	**0.512**
ATI1: Writing comments and posts is a nice thing.		0.578		
ATI2: Taking parts in online conversations is useful.		0.753		
ATI3: I feel that my life is enriched by online communication.		0.828		
ATI4: I don't want to miss out on what is happening.		0.509		
Information usefulness (IU)	**0.799**		**0.799**	**0.573**
IU1: I think they are generally valuable.		0.757		
IU2: I think they are generally informative.		0.677		
IU3: I think they are generally helpful.		0.836		
Information adoption (IA)	**0.826**		**0.835**	**0.719**
IA1: They make easier for me to make purchase intention.		0.838		
IA2: They enhance my effectiveness in making purchase decision.		0.838		
Social influence (SI)	**0.811**		**0.847**	**0.712**
SC1: People who are important to me would want me to use it.		0.738		
SC2: People who influence my behavior would think I should use it.		0.855		
SC3: People whose opinions I value would prefer me to use it.		0.713		
Product adoption intention (PAI)	**0.921**		**0.921**	**0.796**
PAI1: I intend to use it in the future.		0.915		
PAI2: I expect that I would use it in the future.		0.886		
PAI3: I expect to use it frequently in the future.		0.875		

Source: Author own calculations

SEM was used to test the proposed hypotheses which are presented in Table 2. From hypothesis 1 to hypothesis 4, the literature states that all dimensions including information quality, information credibility, needs of information and attitude towards information positively affect information usefulness and the results support the hypotheses. The research findings also indicate that information usefulness has a positive impact on information adoption of customers (t_5= 9.249, p<.01) and the intention of mobile users to adopt a new product (t_6 = 3.682, p<.01). Therefore, the hypothesis H5 and H6 are supported. With regard to social influence, the results show that social influence has a considerable effect on attitude of customers towards eWOM information (t_7= 5.899, p<.01) and product adoption intention (t_8= 5.202, p<.01).

Fig. 2: Structural Equation Model



Source: Author own calculations

Tab. 2: Standardized structural equation modeling of the proposed model

	t-value	p-value	Hypotheses
IQ→IU	2.317	0.020	Supported (H1)
IC→IU	6.846	***	Supported (H2)
NOI→IU	7.148	***	Supported (H3)
ATI→IU	6.313	***	Supported (H4)
IU→IA	9.249	***	Supported (H5)
IA→PAI	3.682	***	Supported (H6)
SI→ATI	5.899	***	Supported (H7)
SI→PAI	5.202	***	Supported (H8)

The significant level is p<.05 Source: Author own calculations

*** means that the p-value is significant at the level of 0.01

Conclusion

The impact of eWOM in social media context on customers' behavioral intention has widely been known by many previous researchers (Park et al., 2007; Erkan and Evans, 2016). The research findings relating to

characteristics of eWOM information in the context of mobile users in Vietnam are similar to previous research. Information quality, information credibility, needs of information and attitude towards information significantly affect information usefulness, and after that this element is considerably related with information adoption as can be found in the research of Sussman and Siegal (2003). Nevertheless, this study put one step further compared to the model of Sussman and Siegal (2003) when adding consumers' intention to adopt a new mobile phone as a dependent variable. Hence, after this research, we can confirm that the information adoption process definitely has an influence on consumers' behavioral intention, which is also claim in the finding of Erkan and Evans (2016).

On the other hand, one of the critical contributions of this study is that the results clarify and confirm the positive impact of social influence on customers' attitude towards eWOM information and product adoption intention. This relationship also has been reviewed in the research of Kulviwat et al. (2009); however, they argued that social influence only has an indirect impact on adoption intention, working through attitude. In our study, social influence from reference group has a direct effect on attitude and adoption intention. The reasonable explanation for this difference in results is that Kulviwat et al. (2009) conducted a research in the organizational context because it is less important to employees what other people think about use of an innovation when an authority figure tells them that they must accept a high tech innovation, while this study is applied in online context relating opinions and comments of users about a mobile phone which can bring some discrepancies about results.

The outcomes of this research present many theoretical and managerial implications. From a theoretical perspective, this study successfully develops a comprehensive conceptual model which analyses the determinants of eWOM information ad social influence on consumers' production adoption intention towards a new mobile phone product. The model was developed based on the integration of Information Acceptance Model (ICAM) of Erkan and Evans (2016) and social influence suggested by Kulviwat et al. (2009) which brings new insights to researchers studying about information on social media and consumer behavioral intentions. Moreover, this study also provides a deep understanding about the characteristics of eWOM data on social media together with the influence of social influence by reference group on user adoption intention towards a new product.

From a managerial perspective, our findings also provide implications for marketing managers to comprehend the impact of eWOM in online networking on shoppers' adoption intentions. Social media networking sites are essential for marketers have the huge quantities of consumers they have; and besides, these sites are viewed as extremely suitable platforms for eWOM). We expect the results of this research can give some advice to the organizers of online groups to help them better deal with their site with the end goal

of displaying useful information. This would help them to attract mobile users instead of paying in lot of money on advertisement. From our findings, we found that information quality and credibility are the most imperative components for affecting information usefulness and information adoption within an online purchaser group. Organizations and mobile brands should actively get involved in some online shopper communities and give all the pertinent and complete data about the organizations, brands and products. For instance, mobile brand owners can join some website of mobile retailers and present comprehensive data, such as pictures about products, colors, price, technical criteria and so on. This fulfillment of information definitely leads to greater information adoption, which implies more customers may have willingness to adoption a new mobile phone. All e-marketers should apply the above philosophy. Providing the most relevant and comprehensive information to where mobile users may have a tendency to see or approach it, it may bring higher information adoption. Practitioners should pay close attention to eWOM to maximize the influence of helpful or positive comments and minimize the negative ones because dealing well with both positive and negative consumer feedback plays an indispensable piece of purchaser administration and consumer service.

Another important managerial implication that is withdrawn from this research is that a vital way for marketers to shape customers' attitude is by using social influence. Consequently, there are two typical ways that organizations or brands can endeavor to influence people's attitude about adopting a new technological innovation like a brand new mobile phone. The first way is concentrate on product's attribute-based benefits while another solution, as recommended by this study, is to persuade potential adopters that reference group has already endorsed the product. This method is currently being encouraged by social media that have emerged lately. To be specific, previous research have proven that online interaction between current and potential users appears to influence customers attitudes by lessening instability about the organization, the brand and a new product and enhancing the quality of the customer–firm relationship (Kulviwat et al., 2009). Moreover, marketers ought to realize what opinions and affinities social networking users have towards their brand and products, which is regularly communicated through product ratings, reviews, blogs, forums, and sharing of remarks or pictures.

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