

ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF  
BUSINESS, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SMES  
(AIJBES)[www.aijbess.com](http://www.aijbess.com)**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ACTIVITY  
(SMMA) ON CUSTOMERS' HOTEL BOOKING INTENTION IN  
MALAYSIA: THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF BRAND IMAGE**Muhammad Syazani Ghazali<sup>1</sup>, Aslinda Mohd Shahril<sup>2\*</sup>, Azdel Abdul Aziz<sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup> Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi Mara, Puncak Alam Campus, Selangor, Malaysia  
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**Article Info:****Article history:**

Received date: 23.09.2025

Revised date: 15.10.2025

Accepted date: 06.11.2025

Published date: 08.12.2025

**To cite this document:**

Ghazali, M. S., Shahril, A. M., Aziz, A. A. (2025). The Influence of Social Media Marketing Activity (SMMA) on Customers' Hotel Booking Intention In Malaysia: The Mediating Effect of Brand Image. *International Journal of Business Entrepreneurship and SMEs*, 7 (26), 106-119.

DOI: 10.35631/AIJBES.726008

This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)**Abstract:**

Social media significantly impacts tourism and hospitality by changing how travelers search for and engage with travel information, especially for hotel bookings. Despite these changes in consumer behavior, the effect of social media on hotel decision-making still need to be explored. This study examines how social media marketing activities (SMMAs) affect customers' hotel booking intentions, focusing on factors like electronic word of mouth, entertainment, interaction, and trendiness. The study also looks at the role of brand image in this process. Guided by the Theory of Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR), the study collects data through a survey questionnaire from 390 social media users in Malaysia and applies quantitative analysis with SPSS and SmartPLS 4. Findings indicate that trendiness in social media marketing has a significant influence on booking intentions, whereas factors such as word of mouth, entertainment, and interaction show no significant effect. Brand image also plays a key mediating role. These insights benefit hoteliers by highlighting effective areas for social media investment, offering guidance for more targeted and innovative marketing. Future research may further explore factors like interactivity, informativeness, and personalization to enhance social media marketing strategies.

**Keywords:**

Brand Image, Customer Booking Intention, Social Media, Hotel And Tourism

## Introduction

The evolution of the internet as a platform for sharing and communication has significantly increased its popularity over the years, with social media emerging as the most prominent development, engaging 90 per cent of internet users (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2021). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok have transformed and created new networks for social relationships (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). Additionally, the internet through its social media platforms, encourages active consumer discussions and promotes content sharing, which, in turn, influences consumers' booking intention and purchase behaviours (Duffett, 2017).

Social media, individual experiences, memories from previous purchases, and marketing tactics influence how consumers make decisions (Kübler et al., 2020). Research has found that the most popular platforms in the hotel and tourism sector, include WordPress, FourSquare, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, TripAdvisor, Booking.com, YouTube, Twitter, Pinterest, and Snapchat (Shaed & Azazi, 2020). In addition, social media plays can influence the pre-travel stage, which involves planning, data search and decision-making (Verma et al., 2018).

Social media is a powerful instrument that enables customers to discover and connect with hospitality and tourism brands. It is perceived as a trustworthy platform for gathering brand information and learning about other people's experiences. Customers' online reviews and recommendations regarding hospitality businesses are critical to establishing and maintaining potential customers (Priskila, 2023). Hotels, resorts, and restaurants utilise platforms like Instagram, TripAdvisor, and Facebook to showcase their services and amenities to international travellers. This allows potential guests from around the world to explore and book accommodations or dining experiences remotely. George and Sarkar (2018), show that travellers use social media platforms to choose their destinations, plan their trips, and gather sufficient information about destinations. Moreover, social media platforms provide a means for international tourists to share their travel experiences, reviews, and recommendations, thereby influencing and inspiring others to explore new destinations and hospitality establishments across borders. In this way, social media has revolutionised how the hospitality industry engages with a global clientele, facilitating international marketing and guest engagement on a once unimaginable scale (Yadav, 2018).

social media enables hotel managers to get feedback from their customers to understand their demands, needs and wants. Hotel managers will conduct testing, analyse, and implement ideal marketing strategies using social media to seize opportunities for new market segments (Sanchez et al., 2020).

Thus, this study aims to investigate and provide information and knowledge on the influence of SMMA on customer booking intentions. Additionally, the study seeks to gather knowledge from customer perspectives and understand their booking intention after they experience SMMA. The information will be beneficial and will expand the knowledge, particularly in a local hotel setting. As a result, the findings of this study will contribute to the literature by offering a theoretical insight into how SMMA influences customer booking intentions.

## Literature Review

Due to the intangible characteristics of products and services in the hotel industry, understanding consumer behaviour can be complicated and therefore, reliance on eWOM becomes apparent. eWOM is accessible to tourists via various networks such as social media (Mariani & Borghi, 2021; Kim et al., 2022). Online reviews have become an important and powerful element in the search processes on social media (Zhang et al., 2021). Recent studies on eWOM regarding booking intentions have witnessed a notable surge in attention due to their critical significance, as evidenced by studies conducted by Shevira et al. (2023), Shabnam et al. (2016), Aprilia and Kusumati (2021), Ilham et al. (2021), Ezzat and Ebraheem (2022), and Yohanna (2021). eWOM from peers is progressively gaining importance for travel destinations and hospitality organisations, as highlighted by Farhangi (2022). Noraihan et al. (2022) and Pourfakhimi et al. (2020) mentioned that online comments and reviews about travel experiences are preferred because they assist other travellers. Hoteliers and service providers can also refer to the reviews to help them improve operations. The online comments and reviews are true expressions from the customers to express their satisfaction and service feedback towards a company. visitors must be encouraged to provide online evaluations as this can improve visibility on tourist sites. Businesses can request their guests to share their reviews on the products or service experience (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Good reviews can help potential visitors identify good places to visit. Moreover, destination marketers and managers must take into consideration that reviews will be accessible from various platforms and they need to monitor related websites too (Lujun et al, 2022). Therefore, the first hypothesis is stated as follows:

H1. Electronic word of mouth positively affects customer booking intention.

Brand image is a set of beliefs and ideas that people have about a particular brand. It can also be defined as a set of brand associations that consumers link with a brand (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In other words, brand image means the perception of consumers about a particular brand or how consumers feel or think about a particular brand. This perception may change in different buying situations and eventually impacts the purchase intention (Gupta et al., 2021). According to Ezzat and Elsalam (2022), the brand image element in marketing is important in helping consumers identify the products and services, as well as differentiate them from other brands. Kotler (2009) considers the name, term, logo, or symbol, or all of the elements will represent the brand image. The product's attributes, value, and culture, as well as the association of the brand characteristics as consumers remember them, will form consumers' perceptions of the brand. Therefore, the second hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H2. The brand image positively mediates the relationship between electronic word of mouth and customer booking intention

Brand image is also shaped by experiences. For example, good experiences will influence a positive brand image, while bad experiences lead to a negative brand image. Brand image can also be formulated based on recommendations, viewpoints, and suggestions offered by celebrity endorsers, social media influencers, family, and friends. Businesses cannot neglect online customer reviews (Gupta & Valecha, 2016) as brand image is a significant influence on purchase intention. If a consumer has a positive image of a brand, then the consumer will purchase regularly from that brand without switching to any other brands. Consumer's characteristics are reflected by brand image, as they stick to the brand to express themselves.

Today, many customers do not purchase products simply because they have the finest product, but because of what the brand represents. According to Faisal and Ekawanto (2021), brand image perception can be reflected by brand associations that consumers remember. They emphasise the importance of businesses embedding a positive image into their brands, as it fosters a positive attitude towards the brand's existence. (Faisal & Ekawanto, 2021). A strong brand image will influence product purchases (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Brand image is very critical to ensure market success (ÇELİKKOL & Şimal 2020; Sürücü et al., 2020; Şaylan & Tokgöz, 2020). The proposed hypotheses are as follows:

H3. The brand image positively affects customer booking intention.

### Methodology

This study examines the influences of SMMA toward customer booking intention using the causal relationship between construct and variables, guided by the positivist approach. The study data were collected cross-sectionally. The unit of analysis of this study is social media user in Malaysia.

The survey items of this study were adapted from previous studies (Cheung et al., 2021; Saleem et al., 2021; Yoong and Lian, 2019; Alalwan, 2018) with minor modifications in terms and content following the research objectives. The researcher modified several items to suit the study settings without changing the statement's original inkling. The five-point Likert scale was used. The questionnaires were designed in English and Malay language. A pilot study was conducted in February 2024 to enhance the reliability and validity of the questionnaire.

Based on the SPSS minimum sample size, 35 respondents were selected for a pilot study, which was conducted to ensure the reliability and clarity of the questionnaire items. The results confirmed that the questionnaires were suitable for measuring the variables used in the study. Two main platforms used in disseminating the survey link were Facebook and WhatsApp. All respondents were presented with a consent form at the beginning of the survey and then screened based on a few questions to ensure they fit the inclusion criteria.

The participants were Malaysian who have any social media, must be above 18 years old and proficient in both English and Malay. For actual data collection, the data was collected for three months. The online survey was conducted between 1st March and 1st December 2024 using the Google online survey platform. This study yielded a substantial data set of 390 respondents for the analysis. The descriptive analysis was analysed using SPSS version 24. Next, this study used the structural equation model (SEM) for this research setting. The SmartPLS software to validate the measurement and structural models.

### Results

Respondent profiles or personal characteristics have a significant role, especially in social science research. It ensures that the information gathered is obtained from the right targeted respondent and provides valid, meaningful, unbiased information. It has been mentioned in Chapter 3, that the demographic profile of the respondent's section (Section A) was placed at the first of the questionnaire to positively affect their motivation to complete the survey. In this chapter, however, the demographic profiles of the respondents lead the discussion with a simple frequency analysis on all variables included in the survey questionnaire. The frequency analysis of respondents' demographic profiles is probed in the next section.

**Table 4.1**  
**Demographic Profiles of Respondents**

Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	139	35.6
Female	251	64.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age</b>		
18-21	47	12.1
22-25	55	14.1
26-29	109	27.9
30 years and above	179	45.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	197	50.5
Married	188	48.2
Widowed	3	0.8
Divorced	2	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Education Level</b>		
Primary	0	0
Secondary	59	15.1
Tertiary	331	84.9
Other	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Occupation</b>		
Private sector	211	54.1
Government sector	64	16.4
Unemployed	12	3.1
Self employed	37	9.5
Student	66	16.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>100</b>

Descriptive Analysis: Each item in every dimension of social media marketing activity (Electronic word of mouth), brand image and purchase intention were measured using descriptive analysis, which consists of mean score and standard deviation based on a five-point Likert scale with the Note: Likert Scale (1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neutral, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree).

**Table 2: Descriptive Analysis**  
**Results of Analysis on Electronic Word of Mouth**

No.	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I would like to pass information on brands, and services from the hotel's social media to my friends.	3.93	1.015
2	I would like to upload content from the hotel's social media on my social media page.	3.59	1.143
3	I would like to share opinions on brands, items, or services acquired from the hotel's social media with my friends.	3.88	1.017
4	I would likely spread positive word of mouth about the hotel on social media.	4.03	0.930
5	I would share with my friends the best hotel's social media if they were looking for a hotel to book.	4.20	0.954

From the Table 2, it can be suggested that most of the answers lean towards the fifth point in the scale (strongly agreed), with the highest score shown by the fifth item, where respondents willing to share with their friend the best hotel's social media if their friend were looking for a hotel to book ( $M = 4.20$ ;  $S.D = 0.954$ ). It is then followed closely by the score shown by item number four ( $M = 4.03$ ;  $S.D = 0.930$ ) with a margin of only 0.17, expressing their willing to spread positive word of mouth about the hotel on social media. Not only that, there were also an opinion and willing to pass information on brand, and services from the hotel's social media to their friends on their magnitude of agreement on the scale ( $M = 3.93$ ;  $S.D = 1.015$ ). Followed by third items, they would like to share opinions on brands, items, or services acquired from the hotel's social media with their friends ( $M = 3.88$ ;  $S.D = 1.017$ ). The lowest score was identified on the items 'I would like to upload content from the hotel's social media on my social media page' ( $M = 3.59$ ;  $S.D = 1.143$ ). All these figures generally tell the study that most respondents strongly agreed that electronic word of mouth one of the activities can influence customer to book the hotel.

**Table 3**  
**Results of Analysis on Brand Image**

No.	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I agree that, in comparison to other brands, the products of this hotel are of high quality.	3.93	0.908
2	I consider this hotel has a rich history.	3.81	0.915
3	I can reliably predict this hotel will perform.	3.88	0.915
4	I believe this hotel was a leading company.	3.86	0.941
5	I reckon this hotel is a good representative of the industry.	3.93	0.921

Table 3 report the mean scores rated by the respondents on five items dealing with the mediating role of brand image on the customer booking intention on the dependent variable. Looking at the table, most of the respondents agreed with all items in this section, with the

total mean of this factor is 3.88. This is evident through the magnitude of the mean score ranging from 3.81 to 3.93 out five points on the Likert scale.

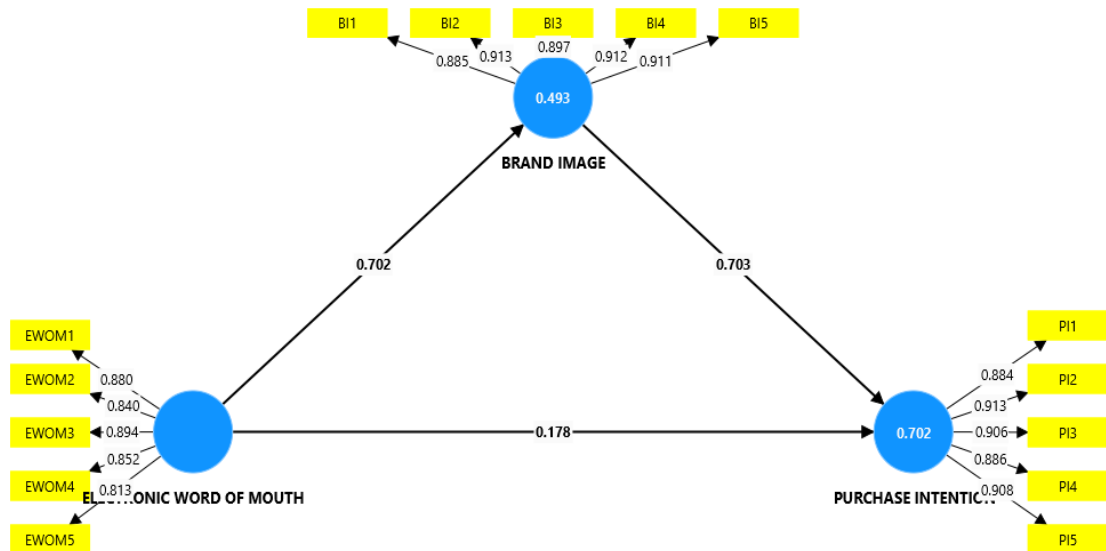
Respondents rate the highest mean score for item number one and five on whether they agreed that, in comparison to other brands, the products of this hotel are of high quality and reckon this hotel is a good representative of the industry ( $M= 3.93$ ). The lowest score rate by respondents is for item number two on the question “I consider this hotel has a rich history” ( $M= 3.81$ ) and item number four on the question “I believe this hotel was a leading company” ( $M= 3.86$ ). Followed by item number three on the question “I can reliably predict this hotel will perform” ( $M= 3.88$ ). However, both scores are still high and show respondents agreement on the brand image.

**Table 4**  
**Results of Analysis on Customer Booking Intention**

No.	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I will book rooms that are advertised on hotel's social media.	3.94	0.960
2	I desire to book rooms that are promoted in advertisement on hotel's social media.	4.01	0.913
3	I have positive purchase intention on the hotel services.	3.98	0.900
4	I am very likely to purchase the hotel services recommended by my friends on hotel's social media.	4.05	0.954
5	I intend to purchase the hotel services as marketed on hotel's social media.	4.0	0.915

Table 4 reports the mean scores rated by the respondents on five items dealing with the customer booking intention as the dependent variable. Looking at the table, most of the respondents agreed with all items in this section, with the total mean of this factor being 4.0. This evident through the mean score's magnitude ranging from 3.98 to 4.05 out of five points on the Likert scale.

Respondent rate the highest mean score for item number four on the statement of whether they like to purchase the hotel services recommended by their friends on hotel's social media ( $M= 4.05$ ). This is line with the literature suggesting that satisfaction on the experience will lead to further positive action such as recommendation. The lowest score rated by respondents was on item number one on the statement “I will book room that are advertised on hotel's social media” ( $M= 3.94$ ).

**Figure 1: The Reflective Measurement Model Assessment  
Measurement Model Evaluation****Table 5**  
**Path Coefficients, T-statistics and Significance Levels**

H	Path Analysis	Path Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	T- Statistics	P- Values	Hypotheses
H1	EWOM $\rightarrow$ PI	0.178	1.596	0.055	Rejected
H3	BI $\rightarrow$ PI	0.703	5.700	0.000	Accepted

Referring to Table 5, the result of the electronic word of mouth, brand image and customer booking intention path analysis shows significant and insignificant outcomes. The result shows that electronic word of mouth ( $\beta=0.178$  and  $t=1.596$ ) insignificantly affects to customer booking intention. The results of the path coefficients with respect to brand image and customer booking intention indicate significant and positively relationship ( $\beta=0.703$  and  $t=5.700$ ).

**Table 6**  
**Coefficients of Determination –  $R^2$** 

Constructs	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Brand Image	0.757	0.755
Purchase Intention	0.731	0.728

The results showed a substantial amount of variance ( $R^2$  values ranged from 0.731 to 0.757) that the proposed predictors can explain. Referring table above, the determinants of social media marketing activities was able to explain 75.7% ( $R^2 = 0.757$ ) of the variance in brand image. Meanwhile, the result shows that brand image was able to explain 73.1% ( $R^2 =$

0.731) of the variance in customer booking intention. Based on the criteria put forth by Chin (1998b), both models were considered moderately fit.

**Table 7**  
 **$f^2$  – Factor if the Research Model**

	<b>EWOM</b>	<b>BI</b>	<b>PI</b>
<b>EWOM</b>		0.021	0.010
<b>BI</b>			0.049
<b>PI</b>			0.187

The result from Table 7 above suggest that the inclusion of an additional path(s) or independent variable(s) has no observable effect on a dependent variable's shared variance. Specifically, in terms of the substantive effects for the significant paths towards brand image,  $f^2$  for electronic word of mouth is greater than 0.02. This result suggests that the path coefficient ( $\beta$ ) of electronic word of mouth posit weak effects on brand image. On another hand, brand image path towards customer booking intention with the value of 0.187 was found to be moderate ( $>0.15$ ).

**Table 8**  
**Test of Predictive Relevance ( $Q^2$ )**

	<b><math>Q^2</math></b>
Brand Image	0.749
Purchase Intention	0.670

The results showed a substantial amount of prediction power ( $Q^2$  values ranged from 0.670 to 0.749). Referring to table above, the study depicts the prediction power of brand image ( $Q^2=0.749$ ) and purchase intention (0.670), which are pass the requirement, so it is relevant to be predicted.

**Table 9**  
**Mediating Effect of Brand Image**

	<b>Sample Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>T Statistic</b>	<b>P Values</b>	<b>Result</b>
EWOM → BI → PI	0.051	0.022	2.281	0.011	Significant

Based on Table 9, the result confirmed that brand image significantly mediates the relationship electronic word of mouth ( $\beta=0.051$ ). From the result, it can be concluded that brand image has a significant mediator impact towards the relationship between electronic word of mouth. A positive beta reflects the mediator (brand image) positively influences the relationship between independent variable (electronic word of mouth) and dependent variable (customer booking intention). As conclusion from the mediation analyses, the hypotheses H3 is accepted as brand image shows significant mediating impact.

## Discussion

The activities of eWOM, as one of the determinants of SMMA, were tested through hypothesis H1. This finding contradicts previous research, where eWOM was found to have a significant and positive impact on customer booking intention. Hypothesis 1, therefore, was not supported. This unexpected finding provides interesting evidence for the literature on social media marketing activities. As mentioned in the literature review, Yorganci (2020) and De Pelsmacker et al. (2018) stated that hotels with more effective eWOM tend to receive high consumer ratings and are likely to facilitate reservations. However, the study setting plays an important role; for example, Yorganci's (2020) study was in the food and beverage sector in Turkey, while De Pelsmacker et al. 's (2018) research was conducted in Belgium. Differences in cultures, attitudes, and behaviours can produce varying results. Similarly, Cheng and Thadani (2021) conducted a comprehensive review of the literature and found that positive eWOM significantly enhances customers' booking intentions.

This study suggests that the influence of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on customer booking intentions may be limited for several reasons. First, consumer skepticism about the authenticity of online reviews can weaken eWOM's impact, as people may question the credibility of feedback due to concerns about fake or manipulated reviews. Additionally, review quality is crucial; while detailed and informative reviews may be persuasive, generic or superficial comments often fail to influence booking intentions significantly. In competitive markets, other factors such as price, promotions, and direct advertising may diminish the impact of eWOM. Consumer preferences also vary, meaning different customer segments might prioritize other factors over eWOM in their booking decisions. Finally, shifts in consumer behavior and digital marketing trends may reduce eWOM's effectiveness over time, making its influence on booking intentions more context-dependent. Thus, while eWOM has potential, its actual effect on customer booking decisions may be limited and vary based on specific contexts. Other than that, consumers experiencing information overload due to the abundance of eWOM content such as reviews, social media posts and influencer opinions. Too much information can dilute trust and lead consumers to rely on alternative cues or decision heuristics.

According to the results of Hendrayati et al (2021), due to the positive effect of social media marketing on brand image, businesses can be confident that when the use of social media increases, the brand image will also improve. Similarly, Pertiwi et al (2020) found that social media marketing significantly affects brand image. Hence, purchase intention can also be affected by brand image. Erida and Rangkuti (2017) noted that brand image can influence consumers' purchase intention and increase the value of purchase intention (Takaya, 2019). Araújo et al. (2023) stated that if businesses can improve their brand image, they will attract more consumers. Brand image is a suitable predictor that may influence consumers' purchase intention (Park & Seo, 2018). which confirms that hypotheses H2 was supported in the study.

The relationship between brand image and customer booking intention also showed a significant relationship. Since the study focused on hotel booking, it was decided to use brand image, as agreed by (Park & Seo, 2018). The path analysis results confirmed that brand image positively affects customer booking intention. This outcome complements the work of other scholars in the past (Pertiwi et al., 2020; Erida & Rangkuti, 2017; Takaya, 2019; Dehesti

et al., 2016; Park & Seo 2018), who also proposed a positive relationship between trendiness and customer booking intention. The hypotheses H3 was supported in the study.

### **Managerial Implications and Recommendations**

In the hotel industry, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) direct effect insignificant, leveraging it strategically may still enhance brand image, which in turn drives booking intention. Encouraging satisfied guests to share their experiences on social media can enhance a hotel's online reputation and attract new customers. Research confirms that eWOM significantly influences consumer behavior in hospitality, where reviews and recommendations play a key role in booking decisions (Alrwashdeh et al., 2019). Additionally, hotels can strengthen their online reputation by responding to reviews—both positive and negative—demonstrating a commitment to customer feedback and fostering a sense of community and trust (Litvin et al., 2008). Hotels can further encourage guests to share photos and videos of their stays on platforms like Instagram and Facebook. Studies suggest that eWOM is perceived as more trustworthy and credible than traditional advertising (Ibáñez-Sánchez et al., 2021). Collaborating with influencers who are active in the travel and hospitality sector can also amplify eWOM by providing authentic and engaging content about the hotel (Khaskheli, 2023). These strategies not only attract potential guests but also provide insights into customer preferences, allowing hotels to adapt their services to meet customer expectations.

In summary, by managing and leveraging eWOM through guest reviews, influencer partnerships, and active engagement, hotels can improve their online reputation, build trust, and increase bookings.

### **Conclusion**

Despite what was presented in the findings and analysis, particularly when the developed hypotheses were reported or proved otherwise, it is noteworthy to finally prove all the relationships between constructs in the final study framework. The influence of eWOM on booking intention highlights the importance of online reviews and recommendations in the decision-making process. As potential customers increasingly rely on the experiences of others, hotels can enhance their marketing strategies by encouraging satisfied guests to share their experiences on social media platforms. This can increase trust and credibility, ultimately driving bookings.

The finding that the mediating variables effectively played their roles in the intended relationships enhances the value of this study. The mediating effect of brand image highlights its significance in bridging the gap between social media marketing activity and customer booking intentions. This study extends social media marketing literature in the Malaysian hospitality context by showing that brand image is a stronger predictor of booking intention than eWOM, offering both theoretical and practical insights. Hotels that effectively manage and cultivate their brand image through social media can enhance their attractiveness and desirability, ultimately leading to increased bookings.

### **Acknowledgement**

The study would like to acknowledge the respondents, social media users in Malaysia, for participating in the survey and making it possible for the authors to complete this research.

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