



SWISS BUSINESS SCHOOL

UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES INSTITUTE

Working Paper Series

**Influencer Marketing and eWOM
Credibility in Airline Product Purchase
Intentions in Hong Kong**

Wing Yin, Leung

SBS-WP-2026-XX

DD MM YYYY

ISSN (Print): xxxx-xxxx

ISSN: (Online): xxxx-xxxx

**SBS SWISS BUSINESS SCHOOL – UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
INSTITUTE
WORKING PAPER SERIES**

At SBS Swiss Business School – University of Applied Sciences Institute, we believe that managerial success in the 21st Century will be related to the ability to put business knowledge into practice in a way that can be understood and shared by all the stakeholders of the organization.

In order to support this idea and contribute to excellence in management skills, SBS Swiss Business School – University of Applied Science Institute has developed the SBS Working Paper Series.

The purpose of SBS - Working Papers is to create a fast channel for the dissemination of early - stage research findings and ideas from the work-in-progress by professors, lecturers and students at SBS. In addition, provided that there is a co-author with SBS Swiss Business School affiliation, executives, policy makers and administrators in the private and public sectors, strategists, management consultants and others interested in the field of first class management and postgraduate education are also welcome to submit their work-in-progress to open up further discussion on their topics . SBS Working Papers also aim to promote academic discussion and strategic analysis for practitioners on managing global competition in products and services for all sectors on a worldwide basis.

SBS Working Papers Series represent a first concrete step towards academic publications. They are not formally peer reviewed; but they are screened for their academic suitability. The findings and ideas presented in the working papers may be improved upon further research by the authors.

SBS Working Paper Series particularly welcomes conceptual and applied research papers that advance knowledge in the fields of General Business, Human Resources, Marketing and Sales Management, Economics ,Finance, International Business, Sustainable Business, Management Information Systems, and Digitalization.

The authors of the working papers are solely responsible for the contents of their work. The views expressed in the papers do not necessarily represent those of SBS Swiss Business School. The material presented in the working papers may be cited or quoted with full indication of source.

The working papers should be sent to the Head of Research at SBS, Prof. Dr. Milos Petkovic, at editor@sbs.edu

All work must abide by the formatting guidelines found at https://jabr.sbs.edu/JABR_SubmissionGuidelines.pdf. The referencing style should follow the APA Version 7. For further information on policies or on the preparation of manuscripts, please contact Prof. Dr. Milos Petkovic.

*SBS Swiss Business School
Flughafenstrasse 3
8302 Kloten-Zurich
Switzerland
Call us: +41 44 880 00 88
General inquiries: editor@sbs.edu
Working Paper Series Inquires: editor@sbs.edu*

Influencer Marketing and eWOM Credibility in Airline Product Purchase Intentions in Hong Kong

Wing Yin, Leung

Abstract

Many airlines have been using influencers to market their products. However, in the competitive airline industry, the factors associating with the effectiveness of influencer marketing remain a question. This dissertation aims to investigate how influencer expertise and argument quality are associated with eWOM credibility, as well as how brand image and customer price sensitivity moderate the relationship between eWOM credibility, brand credibility, and purchase intention for airline products in Hong Kong. An online quantitative survey and focus group interviews were used to investigate the issue. The quantitative survey involved 258 respondents who were airline passengers originating from the Greater China region. The results indicate that influencer expertise (.697, $p < .001$) was more important than argument quality (.202, $p < .001$) in associating with eWOM credibility, and brand credibility partially mediates the relationship between eWOM credibility and purchase intention. It also suggests that airline brand image amplified the relationship between eWOM credibility and brand credibility. At the same time, purchase intention and consumer price sensitivity weakened the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention. Lastly, a one-way ANOVA analysis suggests that customers of low-cost airlines are more price sensitive. The focus group interviews consisted of two groups, each with 10 members. The interviews revealed that influencer expertise, experience, authenticity, objectivity, the interaction between influencers and their subscribers, and their track record are key factors in establishing trust in influencers. Theoretically, the result confirmed that consumers rely more on expertise for more complicated products. It also suggests that eWOM credibility can be associated with brand credibility before associating with purchase intention. Practically, the results suggest that airlines should prioritize influencer expertise and focus on both branding and pricing, depending on customer segmentation.

Keywords: Airlines, influencer expertise, eWOM credibility, brand credibility, consumer price sensitivity

1. Introduction

Influencer marketing has become more important due to the proliferation of social media platforms. However, questions remain about what factors are associated with the effectiveness of influencer marketing in airline products. More importantly, there are questions on: (1) the relative importance of argument quality and influencer expertise in associating with electronic word-of-mouth credibility (eWOM credibility), (2) whether influencer marketing can help the branding of airline companies, and (3) the relative importance of branding and price competition in airline companies. The results can potentially advise airline companies' practices on the types of influencers to recruit and whether consumers' airline product purchase decisions can be moderated by the existing brand image of airlines and consumers' price sensitivity.

Influencer marketing is increasing in popularity. According to Statista (2022, 2024b), influencer marketing was estimated to be worth approximately US\$24 billion in 2024. It was more than three times the size in 2019 and 10 times the amount in 2016 (Statista, 2024a). At the same time, there has been a rise in influencer marketing in promoting travel and tourism products, including airline products (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020). Airlines have been promoting airline products through offering air travel to influencers, having an influencer to promote selected aspects of an airline, and asking influencers for travel tips to destinations to promote an airline (Digital Visitors, 2022). The airline industry is a subset of travel experience in travel and tourism influencer marketing. Examples of influencer marketing of airline travel experience include promotion of frequent flyer programs and first-class travel experiences (Page & Negra, 2022). Currently, airlines are sponsoring trips for influencers to travel on their airline, including first and business class. Influencers then upload videos to social media platforms. (Digital Visitors, 2022). Such marketing efforts in the airline industry may be driven

by its intense price competition (Ambrose & Waguespack, 2021) and the pressure to increase passenger load factor (i.e., the percentage of seats occupied in each flight).

Although there have been previous studies on influencer marketing in travel and tourism (for example, Ong and Ito (2019), Femenia-Serra and Gretzel (2020), Kapoor et al. (2022) and Zhang and Huang (2022)), influencer marketing in the airline industry is still a new area to explore. This research encompasses several key constructs of influencer marketing and brand marketing: (1) argument quality, (2) influencer expertise, (3) eWOM credibility, (4) brand credibility, (5) brand image, and (6) customer price sensitivity. This study offers indications of the types of influencers (i.e., argument quality or expertise) airline companies should seek, which brand attribute(s) (i.e., brand credibility and brand image) an influencer can add to the promotion of an airline company, and whether the price sensitivity of customers can moderate the impact of airline influencer marketing.

More specifically, this study has three research questions. The first one is the relative importance of argument quality and influencer expertise in associating with eWOM credibility. The second research question is how credible influencer marketing can influence brand credibility for airline companies. The third research question is how brand image and consumer price sensitivity moderate the relationship between eWOM credibility and brand credibility, as well as the relationship between eWOM credibility and purchase intention.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is defined as marketers using influencers to shape audiences' attitudes using social media such as video, blogs, and posts to promote their brands and products (Freberg et al., 2011). Influencer marketing is regarded as a more effective means of marketing than traditional marketing because it offers more content options (Kapitan et al.,

2021). The contents can be in the form of texts, images, videos, or combined with sounds through Facebook and Instagram posts, X (formerly Twitter) tweets, TikTok short videos, and YouTube videos. They are entertaining and more interactive than the traditional forms of text and image advertising (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Moreover, they offer better access to potentially highly engaged audiences through their organic reach, specific group targeting, and more consumer attention (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Because every influencer has an audience from a specific demographic and psychographic segment, marketers achieve better group targeting by selecting influencers based on their target audiences. Marketers can also garner more attention than traditional advertisements through the content editing skills of influencers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

Moreover, influencer marketing may offer a higher perceived authenticity than traditional advertisements. Influencers' role as fellow consumers can be valuable because their perceived first-hand experience of the products/services offers greater authenticity than traditional celebrity endorsers. In essence, consumers may perceive celebrity endorsers as distant from them in terms of power and status. Consumers are more likely to regard them as less persuasive, especially for those who endorse multiple brands (Hung et al., 2011). Lastly, influencers are social media managers who produce and strategize content, as well as act as community managers. They also combine their knowledge of their audience and the needs of their branded clients to produce resonating and compelling content. Influencers then gain a deeper understanding of their audience through interacting with followers. They then expand their pool of followers to benefit marketers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

2.2 eWOM Credibility

eWOM credibility refers to the degree to which consumers perceive the online reviews as believable, true, or factual (Verma et al., 2023). eWOM credibility is needed because eWOM also gives rise to the issue of its credibility because everyone on the internet can post comments

about goods or services (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Because credibility is important for eWOM, positive eWOM credibility is an antecedent of eWOM adoption (Lee & Hong, 2019; McKnight & Kacmar, 2006; Roy et al., 2022; D. Verma et al., 2023), consumers are willing to accept electronic information presented in a review for a purchase decision only if the internet comments are credible (Lee & Hong, 2019). Besides, eWOM credibility leads to purchase intention, repurchase decision, and sales (Lee & Hong, 2019; McKnight & Kacmar, 2006; Roy et al., 2022; D. Verma et al., 2023). Therefore, high eWOM credibility is important for influencer marketers and other online marketers to boost purchase intention and sales.

Moreover, according to D. Verma et al. (2023), the two types of antecedents of eWOM credibility are reviewer-related antecedents and review-related antecedents. Reviewer-related antecedents include source credibility, source expertise, source trustworthiness, tie strength, and homophily. Review-related antecedents include argument quality, recommendation consistency, recommendation valence, recommendation sidedness, and recommendation rating (D. Verma et al., 2023). Apart from source expertise and argument quality, other antecedents may be significantly positively related to eWOM credibility in some research studies but not significantly related or negatively related to eWOM credibility in other research studies (D. Verma et al., 2023). However, the critical question is which of them (i.e., influencer expertise and argument quality) is more important in associating with eWOM credibility. It thus constitutes H1 and H2.

The question is motivated by the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) and previous empirical studies. On the one hand, when consumers are motivated to process the product information, people tend to rely on argument quality to decide their attitudes towards products (Kitchen et al., 2014). However, if the product/service has high financial and performance risks to the consumers, consumers tend to rely on the source expertise (Pornpitakpan, 2004). In the context of airline products, consumers are motivated to process information about airline

products. However, airline products also have a high financial and performance risk. Such a situation shows that consumers may rely on both argument quality and influencer expertise. Therefore, it is relevant to examine the relative importance of argument quality and influencer expertise in guiding airline companies' influencer recruitment processes. Therefore,

H1₀: Influencer expertise does not have a significant positive effect on eWOM credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.

H1_a: Influencer expertise has a significant positive effect on eWOM credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.

H2₀: Argument quality does not have a significant positive effect on eWOM credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.

H2_a: Argument quality has a significant positive effect on eWOM credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.

2.3 Brand Marketing

According to Keller (2013) and the American Marketing Association (2023), a brand is a symbol or design to illuminate the goods and services of a seller or sellers to distinguish them from competitions. In brand marketing, brand is about offering products or services with brand equity (Keller, 2013). A brand marketing program usually involves: (1) choosing brand elements to build brand equity, (2) designing marketing programs to build brand equity, (3) integrating marketing communication to build brand equity, and (4) leveraging secondary brand associations to build brand equity (Keller, 2013). All these brand marketing programs are to create customer-based brand equity, including brand image and brand awareness, brand

loyalty, and perceived quality (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993). This customer-based brand equity comes from brand elements or brand personality, including sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness (Aaker, 1997). They then contribute to brand awareness, brand image/association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty step-by-step sequentially (Keller, 2016).

2.3.1 Brand Credibility

Brand credibility is defined as the magnitude of which a consumer believes that the brand is trustworthy and with expertise (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Therefore, brand credibility consists of two key characteristics: trustworthiness (i.e., the belief that a company is willing to deliver on its promises) and expertise (i.e., the confidence that a company can deliver on its promises) (Sweeney & Swait, 2008). Brand credibility reduces the perceived risk by consumers due to insufficient knowledge about a product or service, while increasing the perceived quality (Jeng, 2016; Wang et al., 2021).

According to attribution theory (Kelley & Michela, 1980), individuals interpret information they get and form their judgements. Individuals act or decide to attribute to a cause or factor (Kelley & Michela, 1980). It helps an individual understand why other individuals make decisions or act. Attribution theory influences how other people relate and think about others. Applying the attribution theory, eWOM credibility may lead to brand credibility, and purchase intention because individuals may perceive that eWOM by influencers is credible. They attribute an association with the positive brand credibility of airline travel products to explain others' purchase intention. More specifically, eWOM credibility may represent consistent, distinctive, and consensus information about the perceived credibility of information given by influencers. With such eWOM credibility, others may perceive a positive brand credibility of an airline and its travel products. They then attribute such to purchase intention.

In the attribution theory, consumers attribute the purchase intention by a consistent, distinctive, and consensus of eWOM credibility (Chang et al., 2015; Kelley & Michela, 1980; Ullrich & Brunner, 2015). They then judge that because eWOM credibility projects brand credibility of the airline, it leads to purchase intention of airline travel products. Last, in the theory of reasoned action, brand credibility is one of the attitudes of consumers towards airline travel products. It then leads to purchase intention. Therefore,

H3₀: eWOM credibility does not have a significant positive effect on purchase intention for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.

H3_a: eWOM credibility has a significant positive effect on purchase intention for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.

H6₀: eWOM credibility does not have a significant positive effect on brand credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.

H6_a: eWOM credibility has a significant positive effect on brand credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.

H7₀: Brand credibility does not mediate the relationship between eWOM credibility and purchase intention for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers.

H7_a: Brand credibility mediates the relationship between eWOM credibility and purchase intention for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers.

2.3.2 Influencer Expertise, Argument Quality, and Brand Credibility

As derived from Ohanian (1990)'s source expertise, influencer expertise refers to the degree to which an influencer is perceived to have valid assertions. Besides, argument quality

refers to the degree to which consumers perceive the eWOM message as valid and convincing to support its position (Chakraborty, 2019a, 2019b). Last, brand credibility refers to the degree to which a consumer believes that a brand is trustworthy with expertise (Erdem & Swait, 2004). From these definitions, influencer expertise and argument quality can influence brand credibility because valid assertions and compelling arguments can potentially lead consumers to believe in the credibility of a brand in service delivery.

Previous studies also provide indications for this conclusion. For example, Till and Busler (2000) suggest that source expertise can influence brand attitude and purchase intention. When an influencer is regarded as an expert, consumers are more probable to believe in the message in the advertisement (Amos et al., 2008; Ohanian, 1991) because they are perceived as more persuasive (Erdogan, 1999; Ohanian, 1990). In terms of argument quality, Chu and Kamal (2008) suggest that argument quality can influence brand attitudes. Similar findings were suggested in Jiao et al. (2022) and Coulter (2004). Because argument quality can lead to favorable attitudes towards a brand, it can potentially lead to a perception of brand credibility.

H4₀: Influencer expertise does not have a significant positive effect on brand credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.

H4_a: Influencer expertise has a significant positive effect on brand credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.

H5₀: Argument quality does not have a significant positive effect on brand credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.

H5_a: Argument quality has a significant positive effect on brand credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.

2.4 Moderating Role of Brand Image and Customer Price Sensitivity

Brand image and consumer price sensitivity may moderate the relationship between brand image and purchase intention. It means that, even though an airline has its brand image to support customers' purchase intention, the strength of its relationship may be moderated by customer price sensitivity and brand image. Such a hypothesis comes from the differences between brand image (Parris & Guzman, 2023), brand credibility (Erdem & Swait, 2004), and customer price sensitivity (Low et al., 2013).

Specifically, brand image is about how consumers associate a brand with certain product or service attributes, benefits, and attitude, as well as their human characteristics (Parris & Guzman, 2023). Brand credibility is about how trustworthy a brand is in delivering a product or service (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Customer price sensitivity refers to the degree of awareness and response exhibited by consumers when facing price changes of products or services (Low et al., 2013). Therefore, these three constructs are different in their scope of describing and perceiving a brand.

Some previous studies have used brand image as a moderator between the independent variable and the dependent variable. Brand image tends to be a positive moderator between them. For example, Wang and Yang (2010) found that brand credibility is positively related to consumers' brand purchase intention. The relationship is amplified by brand image. Moreover, brand image amplifies the relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction, customer value, and customer relationship management quality (Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh, 2016). Furthermore, brand image was also found to slightly attenuate the impact of negative reviews on hotel booking online review reliance on decision-making (El-Said, 2020). Last, Narteh and

Braimah (2020) suggest that brand image was a positive moderator between corporate reputation and bank selection.

Essentially, because consumers associate a brand with images including service attributes, benefits, and even human characteristics after their first encounter (Parris & Guzman, 2023), such as a preexisting mental image in consumer memory (Chan et al., 2018) can then interact with how consumers see the credibility of a brand through the peripheral route in ELM (Petty & Briñol, 2011) and even associate with their purchase intention (Wang & Yang, 2010). Brand image is hypothesized to amplify the relationship between eWOM credibility and brand credibility, as well as between brand credibility and purchase intention.

As for customer price sensitivity, it may attenuate the impact of constructs such as attitude, subjective norm, environmental knowledge intention. Specifically, customer price sensitivity attenuates the impact of attitude, subjective norm, and intention towards electric vehicle purchase intention (Bhutto et al., 2022). Similarly, customer price sensitivity attenuates the relationship between environmental knowledge and purchase intention. However, the evidence may be mixed. In the scenario of green products, price sensitivity amplifies the green attitude towards green product purchase behaviour (Hahnel et al., 2014; Lavuri, 2022). It shows that activating a green attitude may reduce consumers' price sensitivity. In the case of Airbnb, room price sensitivity also amplifies the relationship between perceived value and Airbnb repurchase intention (Liang et al., 2018). Therefore,

H8₀: Brand image with an airline does not moderate the relationship between eWOM credibility and brand credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers.

H8_a: Brand image with an airline moderates the relationship between eWOM credibility and brand credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers.

H9₀: Brand image with an airline does not moderate the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers.

H9_a: Brand image with an airline moderates the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers.

H10₀: Consumer price sensitivity with an airline does not moderate the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers.

H10_a: Consumer price sensitivity with an airline moderates the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers.

3. Methodology

3.1 Questionnaire Survey

This study investigated the research questions through quantitative survey and qualitative focus-group interviews. First, the questionnaire survey instrument included questionnaire information, a declaration of consent to participate in the survey, a demographic information section, and the main section. The questionnaire survey included information about the study, the study title, participants' rights to take part, confidentiality, and data privacy. The declaration of consent to participate in the survey involved a question asking whether respondents had given their consent to participate in the survey. The questionnaire survey started with a screening question asking the potential respondents whether they watch influencers' promotions for airline products in Hong Kong. It then proceeded to the main section, which consisted of measures related to the seven constructs in the study: argument quality, influencer credibility, eWOM credibility, brand image, brand reputation, brand credibility, and purchase intention, comprising 25 measurable items. Table 3 shows the measurable items of the questionnaire. The measurable items were all measured by a 7-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) slightly disagree, (4) neutral, (5) slightly agree, (6) agree, and (7) strongly agree. The questionnaire survey concluded with

demographic information, including gender, age, highest level of education attained, place of origin, monthly income level, annual frequency of air travel, and the most frequently used Hong Kong airline company for travel.

The measurable items were adopted from established questionnaire scale. Three items of argument quality were taken from Zhu et al. (2016). Five items of influencer expertise were taken from Ohanian (1990). Three items of eWOM credibility were taken from Shamhuyenzva et al. (2016). Three items of brand image were taken from Dirsehan and Kurtuluş (2018). Four items of brand credibility were taken from Jeng (2016). Four items of customer price sensitivity were taken from Low et al. (2013). Lastly, three items of purchase intention were taken from Majeed et al. (2021).

This study recruited respondents primarily from social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Xiaohongshu, and LinkedIn. Advertisements were posted on various social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Xiaohongshu, and LinkedIn, to invite respondents without randomization. The target respondents were mainly those from Hong Kong, mainland China, Macau, and Taiwan, as they are more familiar with airlines based in Hong Kong. The data collection lasted from August 2024 to October 2024. The survey was conducted on Qualtrics, an online tool to collect data from questionnaires.

The questionnaire was delivered in three versions: traditional Chinese, simplified Chinese, and English. The questionnaire was first produced in English. It was first translated into Chinese. It was then reverse translated into English through a professional translator. It was then cross-checked against the reverse translation with the original English version to detect any discrepancies, as well as the consistency in wordings and its cultural sensitivity. Because there were no major discrepancies, the traditional Chinese was then transformed into simplified Chinese using a function embedded in Microsoft Word.

Before conducting the large-scale survey, a pilot study was conducted to test the feasibility of the questionnaire, including its wording and translation, data analysis, and the time required to complete it. The pilot study was conducted on a small scale among friends,

relatives, and colleagues. Twenty people participated in the pilot study, including both Chinese and individuals from other nations, to assess the wording and translation of the questionnaire and the time required to complete the survey.

The study employed both convenience and snowball sampling methods. Three hundred ninety-two questionnaire responses were initially collected from the Qualtrics platform. The first round of data cleaning involved excluding respondents who completed the task within 70 seconds, one-third of the median time for completion as indicated in the pilot study. It is because fast completion may indicate quality issues. After excluding those respondents who completed the questionnaire within 70 seconds, three hundred and twenty responses remained. The second round of data cleansing procedure was conducted to ensure that only effective responses were included before going to the data analysis procedures. The data cleansing procedure focused on responses that had the same Likert rating over multiple items, as well as outliers. As a result, sixty-two responses were removed as ineffective responses. Two hundred fifty-eight effective responses thus remained. The valid percentage was therefore 65.82% after the two rounds of data cleaning.

Partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyze the statistical relationship between the construct and offer evidence for causal modelling for the underlying statistical relationships (Hair et al., 2019).

3.2 Focus Group Interviews

The study applied two focus-group interviews because they are cost-effective and offer the potential to gain many perspectives from the interviewees, as discussed by Nyumba et al. (2018). In each focus group, Krueger (2014) suggests that ten participants were the most appropriate number of participants to obtain a variety of perspectives without disorderly or fragmented management. To obtain a variety of perspectives, two focus group interviews were conducted among Hong Kong airline consumers. They were recruited among customers

of a Hong Kong-based airline company to which the study personnel are connected. There were two focus groups, each with ten members. They were all frequent consumers of airline companies and had been watching influencers promote them.

Qualitative data analysis was conducted after the first interview process to assess data adequacy and determine the need for additional interviews, utilizing a coding process with NVivo 14 software. Data saturation was determined by whether there would be new information to be obtained from additional interviews. The coding process was initiated after the first focus group interview. Following the second focus group interview, it was deemed unnecessary to conduct another, as no new information was obtained and data saturation had been reached. It also represents a certain generalizability.

The discussion in the focus group interview was conducted in Chinese. During the focus group interview, the recruited interviewer first explained the study's context, including its research aim and questions. The interviewer then began to ask the following questions:

1. What are the major factors you would look at when you choose to believe in an airline influencer?
2. How would you evaluate the argument of an airline influencer before you choose to believe in them?
3. How would you consider the level of skill and knowledge of an airline influencer in believing in them?
4. Which factors, i.e., the influencer's skill and knowledge or their argument, would you weigh as more important?
5. Would you like the airline to have more credible comments from influencers? For example, would you consider the well-crafted comments from YouTube reviews from KIKI & MAY (an airline influencer from Hong Kong)? Why?
6. Would this (KIKI & MAY) increase your feeling of airline brand credibility?

7. Would these electronic comments contribute more to your willingness to purchase the airline product of a certain airline, such as Cathay Pacific and Hong Kong Airlines?
8. Which factor(s) do you consider the most important for choosing an airline: price, brand credibility, or brand image?
9. Would you try the airline with more influencer recommendations even if the price is slightly higher than other similar airlines with the same service level? Why?
10. Which one would you prefer to buy an airline product: a credible airline brand that delivers the service promised, or an airline with a good image?
11. Any other considerations of your choosing airline products other than brand image, brand credibility, influencer expertise, and their argument quality, as well as price?

When the interviewee asked the fifth and sixth questions, the interviewees were presented with one of the videos made by Kiki & May and were shown the comments below the videos. The focus group members then took turns answering each of the above questions first. After their answers, the interviewer then summarized some of their key points and asked follow-up questions about their responses. For example, they identified expertise and experience as the major factors in evaluating the performance of influencers. The interviewer then asked them follow-up questions about how they regard the travel influencers as having expertise and experience. A similar process was then repeated for all eleven questions until the end. Each focus group interview lasted for about 1.5 to 2 hours. During the interview process, the interviewer took note of the key points in their answers. After the interviews, he summarized the key points to form the interview notes and transcripts and then proceeded with the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

4. Results

4.1 Questionnaire Survey

This study yielded the results in the form of PLS-SEM analysis. Demographically, valid survey responses were collected from 128 male and 130 female respondents, respectively. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

	Male (n=128) (%)	Female (n=130) (%)	Total (n=258) (%)
Age			
18-25	8(6.3)	5(3.8)	13(5.0)
26-35	57(44.5)	42(32.3)	99(38.4)
36-45	45(35.2)	41(31.5)	86(33.3)
46-55	15(11.7)	34(26.2)	49(19.0)
56-65	3(2.3)	7(5.4)	10(3.9)
Over 65	-	1(0.8)	1(0.4)
Highest education			
Secondary or below	6(4.7)	17(13.1)	23(8.9)
Vocational education	23(18.0)	13(10.0)	36(14.0)
Associate degree or higher diploma	49(38.3)	31(23.8)	80(31.0)
Bachelor's degree	26(20.3)	51(39.2)	77(29.8)
Master's degree or above	24(18.8)	18(13.8)	42(16.3)
Origin			
Hong Kong	74(57.8)	95(73.1)	169(65.5)
Mainland China	24(18.8)	16(12.3)	40(15.5)
Macau	18(14.1)	12(9.2)	30(11.6)
Taiwan, China	12(9.4)	5(3.8)	17(6.6)
Others	-	2(1.5)	2(0.8)
Monthly income			
HK\$0-HK\$9,999	55(43.0)	27(20.8)	82(31.8)
HK\$10,000-HK\$19,999	21(16.4)	21(16.2)	42(16.3)
HK\$20,000-HK\$29,999	16(12.5)	28(21.5)	44(17.1)
HK\$30,000-HK\$39,999	14(10.9)	18(13.8)	32(12.4)
HK\$40,000-HK\$49,999	7(5.5)	11(8.5)	18(7.0)
HK\$50,000-HK\$59,999	5(3.9)	6(4.6)	11(4.3)
HK\$60,000 or above	8(6.3)	5(3.8)	13(5.0)
Unwilling to disclose	2(1.6)	14(10.8)	16(6.2)
Frequency of travelling			
Less than three times	61(47.7)	46(35.4)	107(41.5)
3-5 times	28(21.9)	57(43.8)	85(32.9)
6-10 times	21(16.4)	22(16.9)	43(16.7)
11-15 times	9(7.0)	2(1.5)	11(4.3)
16-20 times	6(4.7)	1(0.8)	7(2.7)
21-30 times	1(0.8)	1(0.8)	2(0.8)
More than 30 times	2(1.6)	1(0.8)	3(1.2)
Airlines frequently travel with			
Cathay Pacific	48(37.5)	65(50.0)	113(43.8)
Hong Kong Express	27(21.1)	21(16.2)	48(18.6)
Hong Kong Airlines	31(24.2)	27(20.8)	58(22.5)
Greater Bay Airlines	15(11.7)	6(4.6)	21(9.1)
Did not disclose	7(5.5)	11(8.5)	18(7.0)

Note. Adapted from data analysis

4.1.1 Validity and Reliability

This study first ensured the validity and reliability of the questionnaire scale. First, outer loading and average variance extracted (AVE) assess the convergent validity of the measurable items (Hair et al., 2017). Validity is about how well a scale measures the construct it purports to measure (Hair et al., 2017). Convergent validity refers to the extent to which an indicator of a scale correlates with the variance of a construct (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The results of outer loading are all greater than 0.70, indicating an acceptable convergent validity.

Table 2

Outer Loadings

	AQ	IE	eWOM	BI	BC	CPS	PI
AQ1	0.86						
AQ2	0.87						
AQ3	0.86						
IE1		0.80					
IE2		0.80					
IE3		0.84					
IE4		0.84					
IE5		0.84					
eWOM1			0.87				
eWOM2			0.85				
eWOM3			0.84				
BI1				0.88			
BI2				0.88			
BI3				0.87			
BC1					0.79		
BC2					0.84		
BC3					0.83		
BC4					0.83		
CPS1						0.85	
CPS2						0.82	
CPS3						0.73	
CPS4						0.83	
PI1							0.82
PI2							0.84
PI3							0.80

Note. AQ---Argument quality, IE---Influencer expertise, eWOM---eWOM credibility, BI---Brand image, BC---Brand credibility, CPS---Customer price sensitivity, PI---Purchase intention. Adapted from data analysis

Second, AVE represents the grand mean value of the square loadings of the indicators related to a construct. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), an AVE value of 0.50 or higher indicates that the construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators. The AVE results are higher than 0.50, indicating acceptable AVE and convergent validity.

Table 3

AVE, Cronbach's Alpha, and Composite Reliability

	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
AQ	0.741	0.826	0.896
IE	0.68	0.882	0.914
eWOM	0.73	0.815	0.89
BI	0.773	0.853	0.911
BC	0.678	0.841	0.894
CPS	0.653	0.822	0.883
PI	0.671	0.755	0.86

Note. AQ---Argument quality, IE---Influencer expertise, eWOM---eWOM credibility, BI---Brand image, BC---Brand credibility, CPS---Customer price sensitivity, PI---Purchase intention. Adapted from data analysis

Discriminant validity is referred to as the degree to which a construct is distinct from other constructs (Henseler et al., 2015). PLS-SEM analysis uses heterotrait- monotrait ratio (HTMT) to determine discriminant validity to determine discriminant validity. According to Henseler et al. (2015), an HTMT of above 0.85 or 0.90 suggests a lack of discriminant validity. Otherwise, the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loading need to be checked.

Table 4

HTMT Result

	AQ	BC	BI	CPS	IE	PI	eWOM
AQ							
BC	0.38						
BI	0.44	0.84					
CPS	0.43	0.36	0.27				
IE	0.56	0.38	0.43	0.38			
PI	0.62	0.54	0.39	0.67	0.62		
eWOM	0.65	0.46	0.42	0.48	0.93	0.76	

Note. AQ---Argument quality, IE---Influencer expertise, eWOM---eWOM credibility, BI---Brand image, BC---Brand credibility, CPS---Customer price sensitivity, PI---Purchase intention. Adapted from data analysis

Table 4 indicates that, apart from the HTMT, eWOM credibility and influencer expertise of 0.93, all other HTMTs are lower than 0.85, indicating acceptability. To further check the discriminant validity, the Fornell-Larcker criterion is considered. The Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loadings do not indicate potential issues.

Table 5
Fornell-Larcker Criterion Result

	AQ	BC	BI	CPS	IE	PI	eWOM
AQ	0.861						
BC	0.314	0.823					
BI	0.372	0.717	0.879				
CPS	0.352	0.303	0.224	0.808			
IE	0.477	0.325	0.372	0.326	0.825		
PI	0.494	0.433	0.314	0.526	0.512	0.819	
eWOM	0.534	0.381	0.349	0.39	0.793	0.598	0.854

Note. AQ---Argument quality, IE---Influencer expertise, eWOM---eWOM credibility, BI---Brand image, BC---Brand credibility, CPS---Customer price sensitivity, PI---Purchase intention. Adapted from data analysis

In PLS-SEM, composite reliability is used to measure internal consistency reliability. Internal consistency reliability is about how consistent an indicator in a scale is in measuring the construct (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). It is better than Cronbach’s Alpha in measuring internal consistency reliability because it is insensitive to the number of items on the scale. A composite reliability of .60 to .70 is acceptable in exploratory research (Hair et al., 2017). Last, a variance inflation factor (VIF) test was conducted to ensure that there is no multicollinearity problem in the scale. A multicollinearity of less than five is considered not to have a multicollinearity problem (Hair et al., 2017). The result is that the variance inflation factor (VIF) does not indicate the presence of multicollinearity.

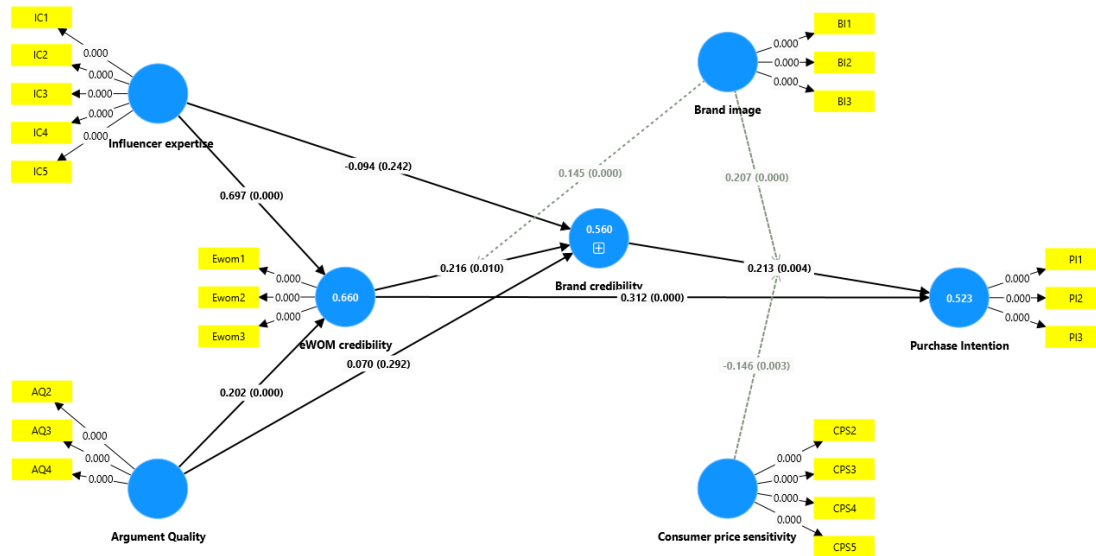
Last, for common method bias, Harman’s one-factor test does not indicate common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The total variance explained by one factor is only 35.81% as indicated by the test. It is below the recommended 50% threshold (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

4.1.2 Main Results

Figure 1 displays the path analysis result after bootstrapping.

Figure 1

Path Analysis Result After Bootstrapping



Note. Derived from data analysis

Figure 1 shows the result of data analysis. First, influencer expertise ($.697, p < .001$) has a stronger impact than argument quality ($.202, p < .001$) on associating with eWOM credibility. Second, both influencer expertise and argument quality are associated with brand credibility through the mediation of eWOM credibility ($.216, p < .05$). Third, eWOM credibility's association with brand credibility is amplified by brand image ($.145, p < .001$). Fourth, while brand credibility is associated with purchase intention ($.213, p < .01$), its effect is amplified by brand image ($.207, p < .001$). Lastly, customer price sensitivity weakens the association with brand credibility on purchase intention ($-0.146, p < .01$). The adjusted R-squared (coefficient of determination) for eWOM credibility, brand credibility, and purchase intention were estimated to be 0.657, 0.551, and 0.512, representing adequate levels of explanatory power.

Table 6
Indirect and Total Effects

	eWOM credibility		Brand credibility		Purchase intention	
	Indirect	Total	Indirect	Total	Indirect	Total
Argument quality		.202***	.044*	.114	.087***	.087***
Influencer expertise		.697***	.150**	.056	.229***	.229***
eWOM credibility				.216**	.046*	.358***
Brand image x eWOM credibility				.145***	.031*	.031*
Brand credibility						.213***
Brand image x Brand credibility						.207***
Consumer price sensitivity x brand credibility						-.146**

Note. $p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$ Adapted from data analysis.

Table 7
Specific Indirect Effects

Path	Indirect effect	Bias-corrected confidence intervals		
		2.5%	97.5%	p-value
IE>eWOM>BC>PI	.032	.006	.073	.049*
AQ>eWOM>BC>PI	.009	.002	.024	.077

Note. $p < .05^*$, IE-Influencer expertise, eWOM-eWOM credibility, BC- Brand credibility, PI-Purchase intention. Adapted from data analysis.

Table 6 presents the indirect and total effects of the model, excluding the total effect between argument quality and brand credibility, as well as influencer expertise and brand credibility. All the indirect effects and total effects are significant. The linkage between influencer expertise and eWOM credibility is the highest (.697, $p < .001$), followed by the total effect from eWOM credibility to purchase intention (.358, $p < .001$) and the indirect and total effect from influencer expertise to purchase intention (.229, $p < .001$). Table 7 shows the specific indirect effects. The specific indirect effect from influencer expertise to eWOM credibility to brand credibility to purchase intention was significant (.049, $p < .05$). However, the specific indirect effect from argument quality to eWOM credibility to brand credibility to purchase intention was insignificant (.009, $p > .05$). Table 13 shows the summary of hypotheses testing results. Table 8 shows the summary of hypotheses testing.

Table 8
Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results

	Hypotheses	RQ	Result
H1 ₀	Influencer expertise does not have a significant positive effect on eWOM credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.	1	Not supported
H1 _a	Influencer expertise has a significant positive effect on eWOM credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.	1	Supported (.697, p<.001)
H2 ₀	Argument quality does not have a significant positive effect on eWOM credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.	2	Not supported
H2 _a	Argument quality has a significant positive effect on eWOM credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.	2	Supported (.202, p<.001)
H3 ₀	eWOM credibility does not have a significant positive effect on purchase intention for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.	-	Not supported
H3 _a	eWOM credibility has a significant positive effect on purchase intention for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.	-	Supported (.312, p<.001)
H4 ₀	Influencer expertise does not have a significant positive effect on brand credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.	-	Supported (-.094, p>.05)
H4 _a	Influencer expertise has a significant positive effect on brand credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.	-	Not supported
H5 ₀	Argument quality does not have a significant positive effect on brand credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.	-	Supported (.070, p>.05)
H5 _a	Argument quality has a significant positive effect on brand credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.	-	Not supported
H6 ₀	eWOM credibility does not have a significant positive effect on brand credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.	3	Not supported
H6 _a	eWOM credibility has a significant positive effect on brand credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers as measured by a self-reported questionnaire instrument.	3	Supported (.216, p<.05)
H7 ₀	Brand credibility does not mediate the relationship between eWOM credibility and purchase intention for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers.	-	Not supported
H7 _a	Brand credibility mediates the relationship between eWOM credibility and purchase intention for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers.	-	Supported (indirect effect: .046, p<.05)
H8 ₀	Brand image with an airline does not moderate the relationship between eWOM credibility and brand credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers.	4	Not supported
H8 _a	Brand image with an airline moderates the relationship between eWOM credibility and brand credibility for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers.	4	Supported (.145, p<.001)
H9 ₀	Brand image with an airline does not moderate the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers.	4	Not supported
H9 _a	Brand image with an airline moderates the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers.	4	Supported (.207, p<.001)
H10 ₀	Consumer price sensitivity with an airline does not moderate the relationship between brand image and purchase intention for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers.	5	Not supported
H10 _a	Consumer price sensitivity with an airline moderates the relationship between brand image and purchase intention for Hong Kong airline travel product consumers.	5	Supported (-.143, p<.01)

Note. Analyzed from the data analysis. “RQ” is the abbreviation for “research question.” Refer to p. 17 for the list of research questions.

4.1.3 Bayesian One-way and Two-way ANOVA

ANOVA analysis refers to whether there are statistically significant differences in the mean scores of constructs in terms of different demographic groups including age, gender, highest level of education attainment, monthly income, air travel frequency, airline frequently traveled with, and origin (Ott & Longnecker, 2015). Specifically, Bayesian one-way and two-way ANOVA were applied because the data violate the assumption of normal distribution, which makes typical one-way and two-way ANOVA less reliable (Zellner, 1971).

4.2 Qualitative Results

Four themes were discovered in this study. Theme 1 is that influencer expertise and experience are the most important factors in associating with eWOM credibility. Influencer expertise and experience are the most frequently identified codes for the first five questions. From the interviewees' point of view, expertise and experience encompass the influencers' background in the aviation industry, travel experiences, specialized knowledge of the airline industry, familiarity with airline services, such as cabin classes, onboard amenities, or frequent flyer programs. Other key indicators of experience and expertise include whether the reviews are professionally researched and informative, featuring high-quality images and videos, logical arguments, consistency in posting high-quality content, sharing views that differ from others, and offering critical remarks about airlines. A final indicator of knowledge and expertise is a commitment to continuous learning and staying up-to-date with industry developments. Lastly, experience and expertise can also be demonstrated by consistency and quality of content.

The second theme is, other than influencer expertise and experience, authenticity, objectivity, interaction, and their track record are important to eWOM credibility. Interviewees also rely on the authenticity and objectivity of influencers. From the interviewees' point of view, authenticity is a broad-encompassing term. It can represent

influencers' passion for travel and aviation, the genuineness of reviews and contents, transparency about their partnerships, sponsorships, or biases, if any that may associate with their recommendations, and objective analysis. Apart from authenticity and objectivity, interviewees also consider the interaction between influencers and followers to assess the credibility of influencers. These indicators include the number of followers and comments, as well as the level of engagement and interactions. Another popular indicator is to assess an influencer's credibility by examining the comments sections below their posts or videos. Also, they may conduct broader research to cross-check the comments from many influencers regarding the same products or services. Another less-mentioned factor is the alignment of influencer comments with personal values.

The third theme is about whether eWOM credibility can translate into brand credibility depending on the expertise and reputation. Brand credibility is more important than brand image. Question 6 asked whether the example YouTube channel comment ("KIKI & MAY) increases their feeling of airline brand credibility. The interviewees respond that it depends on their expertise and experience, matching their expertise and experience to the services they offer, their reputation, positive comments from followers, and the content. A critical comment indicated a straight no because KIKI & MAY is a food blogger. Therefore, they are not matching their identity to introduce air services, and if they sense they are advertisements. In terms of comparing brand credibility and brand image, consumers consider brand credibility more than brand image. According to the interviewee's definition, brand credibility is an airline that delivers the service as promised and consistently performs well. Brand image is how an airline occupies the minds of consumers. However, they may not always show their true service quality. Therefore, interviewees indicate they care about the credibility of airline brands because they are the ones that deliver the service as promised. These service criteria include safety issues and punctuality.

The last theme is that price is still the most important factor in selecting airlines, followed by services and needs. Price and value for money were still considered the most important factors by some interviewees when selecting an airline. The above comments suggest a strong consideration of price or value for money. Other comments on service price as the primary consideration, followed by schedule and travel goals. Travel goals are dependent on individuals. Some may be more practical and budget-oriented. However, some travellers may opt for long-haul flights, particularly those seeking aspirational or luxury experiences. Therefore, comfort becomes a higher priority. Other factors include baggage allowance, cheaper prices, comfort, discounts, and services such as food, as well as safety records. Lastly, some interviewees indicate that if the price difference is small enough, they will then consider the airline's services.

Table 9
Bayesian one-way and two-way ANOVA result (result in Bayes factor)

	Gender	Age	Education	Monthly income	Origin	Airline	Frequency of travelling	Origin x Airline
AQ	.141	.056	.034	.039	.047	.225	.034	.020
IE	.142	.396	.026	.034	.446	.187	.025	.071
eWOM	.243	.089	.047	.011	20.250**	.713	.035	7.535*
BI	.143	.583	.022	.124	.931	.098	.087	.052
BC	1.127^	.861	.037	.020	.233	.091	.058	.027
CSP	.143	.453	.045	.016	1.803^	36.412**	.236	75.880**
PI	.216	.419	.068	.286	48.138**	48.606**	.229	334.740***

Note: Bayes factor: 1.0-3.2^, 3.2-10.0, 10.0-100**, >100****

AQ---Argument quality, IE---Influencer expertise, eWOM---eWOM credibility, BI---Brand image, BC---Brand credibility, CPS---Customer price sensitivity, PI---Purchase intention. Adapted from data analysis.

Specifically, the posterior mean analysis indicates the details of the group differences. First, regarding origin, those from mainland China appear to be more likely to believe eWOM as credible and have higher customer price sensitivity, and purchase intention than the other three origins: Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, China. Second, customers of Hong Kong Express and Greater Bay Airlines appear to be more price sensitive. Third, customers of Hong Kong Express, Hong Kong Airlines, and Greater Bay Airlines have greater purchase intention. In terms of two-way Bayesian ANOVA, those from mainland China and customers

of Hong Kong Express and Greater Bay Airlines appear to have greater price sensitivity and purchase intention. Mainland China customers also appear to believe in the credibility of eWOM.

5. Discussion

In the quantitative results, Theoretically, the study results show how credible influencer marketing can be associated with purchase intention by enhancing consumers' current perception of brand credibility in the Hong Kong airline industry. Moreover, because the airline industry offers relatively homogeneous services (Shaw, 2016), customer price sensitivity can weaken the relationship. Also, consumers' existing perception of brand image can amplify the relationship. Furthermore, influencer expertise was found to be significantly more influential ($\beta = 0.697$) than argument quality ($\beta = 0.202$) in determining the credibility of influencer marketing. Therefore, marketers should prioritize influencer expertise in selecting airline influencers. Practically, the finding signifies the importance of branding in the Hong Kong airline market, not just price competition. Also, the Hong Kong airline industry should prioritize influencer expertise over argument quality in selecting its influencers. The following sections provide a detailed discussion of the theoretical and practical implications.

The qualitative result suggests four themes. First, influencer expertise and experience are the most important factors in associating with influencer eWOM credibility. Second, apart from influencer expertise and experience, authenticity, objectivity, the interaction between influencers and their subscribers, and their track record also associate with their credibility. These two themes confirm the quantitative findings that airline consumers rely on the peripheral route in selecting their airline products. Third, eWOM credibility can translate into brand credibility depending on the expertise and reputation. The findings are consistent with

the direction and degree of the questionnaire survey findings. Fourth, price and brand credibility are more important than brand image when selecting an airline. It is partly consistent with the questionnaire's findings. The difference is that. Although brand image moderates the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention, brand image is not found to associate with purchase intention directly, indicating an inconsistency in the results.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study yields three major findings. First, influencer expertise is more important than argument quality in associating with the credibility of eWOM. Second, brand credibility partially mediates the relationship between eWOM credibility and purchase intention. Third, both brand image and consumer price sensitivity moderate the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention. The study result has theoretical implications. First, this study presents a mechanism that explains what leads to credible eWOM and how it influences brand perception and purchase intention. Specifically, influencer expertise is more important than argument quality in forming credible eWOM. Secondly, credible eWOM is associated with brand perception and purchase intention. It is crucial because it demonstrates that airlines can utilize effective influencer marketing to establish their brand.

Lastly, existing brand image is more important than customer price sensitivity in associating with purchase intention. It shows that branding is as important as price competition in airline companies. The one-way ANOVA also implies market segmentation in airline marketing. Full-service airlines and discounted airlines should use different marketing strategies. The former should focus on branding, while the latter should still focus more on price. However, the findings are inconsistent with that in the qualitative study. It signals the needs for further investigation.

5.2 Practical Implications

The findings suggest that airlines should prioritize expertise in selecting influencers and focus on both branding and pricing, depending on segmentation and situation.

First, airlines need to find influencers with expertise to promote their airline brands. The qualitative findings suggest that they should seek influencers with a background in the aviation industry, travel experiences, specialized knowledge of the airline industry, familiarity with airline services, long-term travel experience, well-researched comments accompanied by high-quality photos and videos, consistency, and a track record. Apart from expertise, airline companies need to find influencers who are authentic and objective, with good interaction with their audiences. According to the qualitative interviews, these individuals can be identified by their passion for travel and aviation, as demonstrated in the content they create, the perceived genuineness of their reviews and content, and their transparency regarding partnerships, sponsorships, and potential biases. Other indicators include the number of followers of influencers, the stances of comments below posts or videos, and whether the comments of various influencers regarding a service align with each other.

Second, in terms of branding and pricing, airline marketers should prioritize both brand credibility and value for money simultaneously. These suggestions are indicated in the qualitative findings. Specifically, interviewees find brand credibility more important than brand image because the former suggests genuine service quality, while the latter may only be a projection of a marketing image. In terms of value for money, key factors include price, schedule, service such as food, and baggage allowance. The findings are also supplemented by quantitative results indicating that both brand image and consumer price sensitivity moderate the key relationships.

Lastly, consistent with the original airline brand positioning, discount airlines (for example, Hong Kong Express and Greater Bay Airlines) should focus more on pricing, as consumers of these two airlines are found to be more price sensitive. On the other hand, full-service airlines (Cathay Pacific and Hong Kong Airlines) should focus more on brand image because consumers are less price sensitive.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Research Limitations and Recommendations for Future Studies

The first limitation is that the study is a non-probability sampling. It did not find a representative sample in Hong Kong. The second limitation is the lack of explanation of why influencer expertise is more important than argument quality. This study only suggests that influencer expertise is more important than argument quality in associating with eWOM credibility. However, it does not suggest the reason behind it. To potentially find the reasons behind it, previous studies about ELM also collected data about the involvement of consumers and knowledge of consumers to test their motivation and ability to process (Petty & Briñol, 2011). Without this data, this study cannot determine whether ELM is valid in the current situation. The study's last limitation is its focus on Hong Kong. This may not apply to other geographical contexts. The third limitation is the simplicity of only having influencer expertise and argument quality as the antecedents. Some other variables may be omitted. Additionally, there are measurement constraints of the self-reported scale. The antecedents of influencer expertise and argument quality may be oversimplified and potentially ignored some omitted variables such as parasocial relationships.

Therefore, it is recommended that this study can be repeated in other places. More importantly, to test the validity of ELM in this context and suggest the reason behind the importance of influencer expertise, future studies need to collect more data, such as the

involvement of consumers in selecting airlines, their knowledge level in airlines, and their general favorability towards influencers. It can potentially test the validity of ELM in this context. Moreover, the study can be replicated and compared across long-haul flights and short-haul flights, as well as between full-service and discount airlines. Such a study may reveal different situations about the importance of brand image and consumer price sensitivity in these situations. Furthermore, this study can be replicated for a cross-country study, with one in the Greater China region and another in the US or the UK. Other study designs, such as experimental studies that manipulate both expertise and argument quality, and longitudinal studies that assess brand credibility over time, may also be applicable.

6.2 Closing Remarks

Theoretically, this study highlights the significance of the peripheral route in ELM in shaping credibility in the minds of airline customers. Second, it extends the theoretical applications of the dual mediation marketing model to experience goods. Specifically, it demonstrates how cognitive responses (i.e., influencer expertise) are associated with the reaction to an advertisement (i.e., eWOM credibility) and the brand attitude (i.e., brand attitude), ultimately associating with purchase intention. Third, it shows that price sensitivity can be an important moderator for how brand credibility moderates purchase intention.

Practically, airline marketers should prioritize influencer expertise in selecting airline influencers. They should prioritize brand credibility and value for money simultaneously. They should also promote more pricing for discounted airlines and brand images for full-service airlines.

References

- Aaker, D. A. (1996). Measuring brand equity across products and markets. *California management review*, 38(3), 102-120.
- Aaker, J. L. (1997). Dimensions of brand personality. *Journal of marketing research*, 34(3), 347-356.
- Ambrose, S., & Waguespack, B. (2021). *Fundamentals of Airline Marketing*. Routledge.
- American Marketing Association. (2023). *Branding*. Retrieved July 8 from <https://www.ama.org/topics/branding/>
- Amos, C., Holmes, G., & Strutton, D. (2008). Exploring the relationship between celebrity endorser effects and advertising effectiveness: A quantitative synthesis of effect size. *International journal of advertising*, 27(2), 209-234.
- Bhutto, M. H., Tariq, B., Azhar, S., Ahmed, K., Khuwaja, F. M., & Han, H. (2022). Predicting consumer purchase intention toward hybrid vehicles: testing the moderating role of price sensitivity. *European Business Review*, 34(1), 62-84.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic Analysis. In H. Cooper (Ed.), *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology Vol.2* (pp. 57-71). APA.
- Campbell, C., & Farrell, J. R. (2020). More than meets the eye: The functional components underlying influencer marketing. *Business horizons*, 63(4), 469-479.
- Chakraborty, U. (2019a). The impact of source credible online reviews on purchase intention: The mediating roles of brand equity dimensions. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 13(2), 142-161.
- Chakraborty, U. (2019b). Perceived credibility of online hotel reviews and its impact on hotel booking intentions. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 31(9), 3465-3483.
- Chan, H.-Y., Boksem, M., & Smidts, A. (2018). Neural Profiling of Brands: Mapping Brand Image in Consumers' Brains with Visual Templates. *Journal of marketing research*, 55(4), 600-615. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.17.0019>
- Chang, H. H., Tsai, Y.-C., Wong, K. H., Wang, J. W., & Cho, F. J. (2015). The effects of response strategies and severity of failure on consumer attribution with regard to negative word-of-mouth. *Decision support systems*, 71, 48-61.
- Chu, S.-C., & Kamal, S. (2008). The effect of perceived blogger credibility and argument quality on message elaboration and brand attitudes: An exploratory study. *Journal of interactive Advertising*, 8(2), 26-37.
- Cooper, D. R., & Schindler, P. S. (2014). *Business Research Methods*. McGraw-Hill.
- Coulter, K. S. (2004). The effects of cognitive resource requirements, availability, and argument quality on brand attitudes: A melding of elaboration likelihood and cognitive resource matching theories. *Journal of Advertising*, 33(4), 53-64.
- Digital Visitors. (2022). *5 Creative Influencer Marketing Tactics for Airlines*. Retrieved March 2 from <https://digitalvisitor.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Airlines-ebook-FINAL.pdf>
- Dirsehan, T., & Kurtuluş, S. (2018). Measuring brand image using a cognitive approach: Representing brands as a network in the Turkish airline industry. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 67, 85-93.
- El-Said, O. A. (2020). Impact of online reviews on hotel booking intention: The moderating role of brand image, star category, and price. *Tourism management perspectives*, 33, 100604.
- Erdem, T., & Swait, J. (2004). Brand credibility, brand consideration, and choice. *Journal of consumer research*, 31(1), 191-198.
- Erdogan, B. Z. (1999). Celebrity endorsement: A literature review. *Journal of marketing management*, 15(4), 291-314.
- Femenia-Serra, F., & Gretzel, U. (2020). Influencer marketing for tourism destinations: Lessons from a mature destination. Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2020: Proceedings of the International Conference in Surrey, United Kingdom, January 08–10, 2020,

- Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating Structural Equation Models with Unobservable Variables and Measurement Error. *Journal of marketing research*, 18(1), 39-50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224378101800104>
- Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K., & Freberg, L. A. (2011). Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. *Public relations review*, 37(1), 90-92.
- Hahnel, U. J., Ortmann, C., Korcaj, L., & Spada, H. (2014). What is green worth to you? Activating environmental values lowers price sensitivity towards electric vehicles. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 40, 306-319.
- Hair, J. F., Risher, J. J., Sarstedt, M., & Ringle, C. M. (2019). When to use and how to report the results of PLS-SEM. *European Business Review*, 31(1), 2-24. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-11-2018-0203>
- Hair, J. F. J., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2017). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)*. Sage Publication.
- Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2015). A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 43, 115-135.
- Hung, K., Chan, K. W., & Caleb, H. T. (2011). Assessing celebrity endorsement effects in China: A consumer-celebrity relational approach. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 51(4), 608-623.
- Jeng, S.-P. (2016). The influences of airline brand credibility on consumer purchase intentions. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 55, 1-8.
- Jiao, J., Levin, I. P., Gaeth, G. J., & Chatterjee, S. (2022). Sincere or exciting? Brand personality and argument quality on brand attitude. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 21(6), 1268-1279.
- Kapitan, S., van Esch, P., Soma, V., & Kietzmann, J. (2021). Influencer Marketing and Authenticity in Content Creation. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 30(4), 342-351. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18393349211011171>
- Kapoor, P. S., Balaji, M., Jiang, Y., & Jebarajakirthy, C. (2022). Effectiveness of travel social media influencers: a case of eco-friendly hotels. *Journal of Travel Research*, 61(5), 1138-1155.
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity. *Journal of marketing*, 57, 1-22.
- Keller, K. L. (2013). *Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity*. Pearson.
- Keller, K. L. (2016). Reflections on customer-based brand equity: perspectives, progress, and priorities. *AMS review*, 6, 1-16.
- Kelley, H. H., & Michela, J. L. (1980). Attribution theory and research. *Annual review of psychology*, 31(1), 457-501.
- Kitchen, Kerr, G., E. Schultz, D., McColl, R., & Pals, H. (2014). The elaboration likelihood model: review, critique and research agenda. *European Journal of Marketing*, 48(11/12), 2033-2050. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-12-2011-0776>
- Krueger, R. A. (2014). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Sage publications.
- Lavuri, R. (2022). Organic green purchasing: Moderation of environmental protection emotion and price sensitivity. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 368, 133113.
- Liang, L. J., Choi, H. C., & Joppe, M. (2018). Understanding repurchase intention of Airbnb consumers: perceived authenticity, electronic word-of-mouth, and price sensitivity. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 35(1), 73-89.
- Low, W.-S., Lee, J.-D., & Cheng, S.-M. (2013). The link between customer satisfaction and price sensitivity: An investigation of retailing industry in Taiwan. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 20(1), 1-10.
- Majeed, M., Owusu-Ansah, M., & Ashmond, A.-A. (2021). The influence of social media on purchase intention: The mediating role of brand equity. *Cogent Business & Management*, 8(1), 1944008.
- Narteh, B., & Braimah, M. (2020). Corporate reputation and retail bank selection: the moderating role of brand image. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 48(2), 109-127.

- Nyadzayo, M. W., & Khajehzadeh, S. (2016). The antecedents of customer loyalty: A moderated mediation model of customer relationship management quality and brand image. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 30, 262-270.
- Nyumba, T., Wilson, K., Derrick, C. J., & Mukherjee, N. (2018). The use of focus group discussion methodology: Insights from two decades of application in conservation. *Methods in Ecology and Evolution*, 9(1), 20-32. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/2041-210X.12860>
- Ohanian, R. (1990). Construction and validation of a scale to measure celebrity endorsers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. *Journal of advertising*, 19(3), 39-52.
- Ohanian, R. (1991). The impact of celebrity spokespersons' perceived image on consumers' intention to purchase. *Journal of advertising Research*, 31(1), 46-54.
- Ong, Y. X., & Ito, N. (2019). "I want to go there too!" Evaluating social media influencer marketing effectiveness: a case study of Hokkaido's DMO. Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2019: Proceedings of the International Conference in Nicosia, Cyprus, January 30–February 1, 2019,
- Ott, R., & Longnecker, M. (2015). *An introduction to statistical methods and data analysis*. Cengage Learning Inc.
- Page, A., & Negra, D. (2022). Status economies and frequent flier expertise: YouTube first class travel videos. *Cultural Studies*, 36(4), 543-567.
- Parris, D. L., & Guzman, F. (2023). Evolving brand boundaries and expectations: looking back on brand equity, brand loyalty, and brand image research to move forward. *Journal of product & brand management*, 32(2), 191-234.
- Petty, R. E., & Briñol, P. (2011). The elaboration likelihood model. *Handbook of theories of social psychology*, 1, 224-245.
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J.-Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: a critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(5), 879.
- Pornpitakpan, C. (2004). The Persuasiveness of Source Credibility: A Critical Review of Five Decades' Evidence. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 34(2), 243-281. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2004.tb02547.x>
- Shamhuyenhazva, R. M., Van Tonder, E., Roberts-Lombard, M., & Hemsworth, D. (2016). Factors influencing Generation Y consumers' perceptions of eWOM credibility: a study of the fast-food industry. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 26(4), 435-455.
- Shaw, S. (2016). *Airline marketing and management*. Routledge.
- Statista. (2022). *Influencer marketing worldwide - statistics & facts*. <https://www.statista.com/topics/2496/influence-marketing/#topicOverview>
- Statista. (2024a). *Influencer marketing market size worldwide from 2016 to 2024*. Retrieved December 10 from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1092819/global-influencer-market-size/>
- Statista. (2024b). *Influencer marketing worldwide - statistics & facts*. Retrieved December 10 from <https://www.statista.com/topics/2496/influence-marketing/>
- Sweeney, J., & Swait, J. (2008). The effects of brand credibility on customer loyalty. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 15(3), 179-193.
- Till, B. D., & Busler, M. (2000). The match-up hypothesis: Physical attractiveness, expertise, and the role of fit on brand attitude, purchase intent and brand beliefs. *Journal of Advertising*, 29(3), 1-13.
- Ullrich, S., & Brunner, C. B. (2015). Negative online consumer reviews: effects of different responses. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 24(1), 66-77.
- Verma, D., Dewani, P. P., Behl, A., Pereira, V., Dwivedi, Y., & Del Giudice, M. (2023). A meta-analysis of antecedents and consequences of eWOM credibility: Investigation of moderating role of culture and platform type. *Journal of Business Research*, 154, 113292.
- Wang, S., Liao, Y.-K., Wu, W.-Y., & Le, K. B. H. (2021). The role of corporate social responsibility perceptions in brand equity, brand credibility, brand reputation, and purchase intentions. *Sustainability*, 13(21), 11975.

- Wang, X., & Yang, Z. (2010). The effect of brand credibility on consumers' brand purchase intention in emerging economies: The moderating role of brand awareness and brand image. *Journal of global marketing*, 23(3), 177-188.
- Zellner, A. (1971). Bayesian and non-Bayesian analysis of the log-normal distribution and log-normal regression. *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 66(334), 327-330.
- Zhang, T., & Huang, X. (2022). Viral marketing: Influencer marketing pivots in tourism—a case study of meme influencer instigated travel interest surge. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 25(4), 508-515.
- Zhu, D. H., Chang, Y. P., & Luo, J. J. (2016). Understanding the influence of C2C communication on purchase decision in online communities from a perspective of information adoption model. *Telematics and Informatics*, 33(1), 8-16.