The impacts of self-congruity and positive emotional experience on positive e-WOM with customer satisfaction as a mediator: study on 4-star hotel consumers in Malang City

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ABSTRACT

Hotel accommodation is one of the most essential things in the tourism industry because it functions as a place to rest after a day of activities. The large number of hotel choices requires marketers in their fields to have a strategy that can make the best choice by consumers, especially in today’s digital era. One of the measuring tools that can be used as the most effective promotional media is positive e-WOM. This helps marketers to determine what strategies can be maximized. This is self-congruity by matching perceptions between consumer self-concept and consumer image and positive emotional experience, which can also help consumers form positive perceptions of a place to create a satisfying experience or consumer satisfaction to 4 Star Hotels in Malang City. This study uses a quantitative approach. The population in this study are consumers from 4 Stars Hotels in Malang. Sampling was carried out by using the non-probability sampling method. In this study, the sample was determined, namely the research item, so the number of respondents was 110. To get the desired result, as many as 190 respondents. Data collection techniques in this study were carried out by distributing questionnaires. Data analysis techniques were carried out by SEM-PLS using software 3.0. The results of this study indicate that there is an influence between self-congruity, positive emotional experience, and customer satisfaction to positive e-WOM Hotel in Malang City.

Introduction

Along with the end of the pandemic due to the COVID-19 virus, the world of tourism began to experience an increase. The World Tourism Organization or UNWTO predicts the tourism sector will recover after the pandemic. In 2022, the tourism sector will be in recovery mode, along with various efforts made that will impact increasing tourist arrivals (tempo.co, 2022). Malang City is one of the cities in Indonesia that is known to have various tourist destinations. One of the famous tourist attractions in Malang City is Mount Bromo. Mount Bromo Malang is one of 14 destinations famous in foreign countries (tokopedia.com, 2020). The number of tourist destinations in Malang city has made the tourism industry in Malang city also experience development.

Hotel accommodation is one of the most essential things in the tourism industry. Hotel accommodation is a place to rest after a day of activities (solo.co.id, 2023). Several star levels of hotels reflect the quality of the hotel, ranging from 1-star to 5-star. 4-star and 5-star hotels are the top two ranks in the star rating system used to rank hotel quality. A 4-star hotel offers high-quality services that do not differ much from a 5-star hotel. This research was conducted on tourists staying at 4-star hotels in Malang City, with several considerations, including that there are more 4-star hotels than 5-star hotels in Malang. The number of 4-star hotels in Malang City has led to increasingly fierce competition, especially to attract consumers to stay. Increasingly fierce competition makes parties

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One of the essential marketing strategies to improve business performance is through promotion through social media, one of which is electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM). Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) is a development of traditional WOM used in a virtual environment (Matute et al., 2016), which is a positive or negative statement made by customers, either potential customers, actual customers or former customers, about a product or company, which is available to people and institutions via the internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Visitors can share their reviews, both negative and positive, on the website through experiences experienced by consumers when visiting hotels and tourist attractions. Currently, consumers can freely express their opinions and tell experiences of a product or service by writing on their respective websites or social media. This behavior benefits the company, where consumers persuade other consumers to use the product or service or assist in developing a favorable perception of the company’s offerings (Parsa and Sadeghi, 2015). Several studies have confirmed the strong influence of e-WOM on consumer attitudes (Gaviland et al., 2018; Ladhari and Michaud, 2015). The impact of positive e-WOM will increase consumers' willingness to pay for hotel services.

One of the factors that can influence consumers to give positive stories (positive e-WOM) is self-congruity. Self-congruity is a perceptual match between the consumer's self-concept and the user image of the product or service used. A person's self-image helps form his or her self-image, for example, how the person sees himself or herself as he or she imagines others will see him or her (Solomon, 1996).

In general, a person's social identity can be seen based on what they consume. For example, someone who sees himself as a classy individual (who has a good image) will visit and stay at a hotel at least a 4-star hotel rather than staying at a 3-star hotel. This shows the influence of the self-congruity relationship with positive e-WOM. Consumers will tend to provide information about favorable products and services if they match their self-image because certain products or services will be related to the individual's ego or self-image. Several previous studies related to the effect of self-congruity with positive e-WOM were conducted by Kim et al. (2015) Yang and Lee (2016). Different results were found in the research of Hartini et al. (2020), which stated that self-congruity had no significant effect on e-WOM.

Another factor that plays a role in influencing positive e-WOM is a positive emotional experience, which is a positive experience felt by consumers in using a company's products or services. Barlow and Maul in Azhari et al. (2015) state that currently, many consumers need not only high-quality services or products but also positive experiences or experiences that are emotionally very touching and memorable. Experience gives consumers their memories; if consumers have positive memories, they will tell their experiences to others. This is supported by the results of research by Jeong and Jang (2011), Serra et al. (2020) and Wijaya and Yulita (2020). However, Bangsawan et al. (2017) found the opposite: positive consumer experiences do not have a significant effect on positive e-WOM, or it can be said that not all consumer experiences encourage consumers to do e-WOM.

Customer satisfaction is one of the main goals of a business because the creation of customer satisfaction will provide several positive benefits for the company, including the creation of a harmonious relationship between the company and its consumers, as well as providing a reasonable basis for repeat purchases and the creation of customer loyalty. Customer satisfaction is one of the essential things in every business because satisfied customers will provide many benefits for the company in addition to being able to encourage the realization of consumer loyalty but can also be an effective means of promotion. Satisfied consumers will tell other people, and of course, this will have a positive impact on the company.

Given the increasingly sharp competition amid the many tourist charms in Malang City, the hotel must strive to provide the best experience and impression on its customers so that consumers can provide positive reviews and recommendations through their social media and influence consumers to try to spend the night. Based on the explanation above and several previous studies that have been conducted, the researcher is interested in conducting research on the effect of self-congruity and positive emotional experience on positive e-WOM and customer satisfaction as a mediating variable.

**Literature Review**

**Positive e-WOM**

Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) is a development of WOM used in a virtual environment. WOM conducted via the internet is called electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). E-WOM is a positive or negative statement by potential, actual, or former consumers about a product or company via the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2009). Key aspects of social networks are word of mouth and the number and nature of conversations and communications between various parties. (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The occurrence of e-WOM cannot be separated from the consumer experience of the product or service consumed. If consumers get satisfaction from their consumption experience, they will voluntarily make a statement about a product or service.

**Customer Satisfaction**

Consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction results from differences between consumer expectations and the performance these consumers feel. Westbrook & Reilly (1983) and Tjiptono (2014) argue that customer satisfaction is an emotional response to
experiences related to certain products or services purchased, retail outlets, or even behavior patterns (such as shopping behavior and buyer behavior), as well as the market as a whole. Customer satisfaction lies in customer expectations of a product. Customers will feel satisfied if the product they consume is what the customer wants the product to be. Customer satisfaction becomes essential when competition is higher and customers have more choices for a particular product category.

**Self-congruity**

Self-concept or self-image is something about individuals based on thoughts about who they are and what they want to be like. Self-concept, according to Jamal and Goode (2001), is a thought of a person as a whole and a person's feelings towards an object. Self-concept is a perception and feeling that a person has towards himself or herself; in other words, a person's self-concept is formed from the attitude in viewing oneself (Hawkins et al., 2007). Self-congruity consists of 4 self-concepts, namely actual self-congruity, ideal image congruity, social self congruity and ideal social self congruity.

**Positive Emotional Experience**

The overall experience reflects how consumers feel about the offer provided (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2018). According to Chen and Lin (2015), consumer experience is a perception that can stimulate and motivate consumers. In other words, consumer experience results from consumer interactions with companies physically and emotionally. For companies engaged in services, such as hospitality service companies, it is essential to create a positive emotional experience.

**Conceptual Framework of the Research**

This study investigates five main constructs consisting of three two independent variables, namely self-congruity and positive emotional experience, and one dependent variable, namely positive e-WOM. In addition, this study also adds a mediating variable (customer satisfaction). For more details, see Figure 1 below:

![Figure 1: Research Framework and Hypothesis](image)

The hypotheses of this study are:

H1: There is a significant influence between self-congruity on positive e-WOM

H2: There is a significant influence between positive emotional experience on positive e-WOM

H3: There is a significant influence between self-congruity on customer satisfaction

H4: There is a significant influence between positive emotional experience on customer satisfaction

H5: There is a significant influence between customer satisfaction on positive e-WOM

H6: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between Self-congruity and positive e-WOM

H7: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between positive emotional experience and positive e-WOM

**Research and Methodology**

**Participants and Data Collection**

The population in this study are 4-star hotel visitors in Malang City. Sampling was carried out by using the non-probability sampling method. In this study, the sample was determined, namely the research item, 19 multiplied by 10 = 190, so the number of respondents was 190. To get the desired results, as many as 190 respondents. The sample criteria specified in this study were over 18 years of age because they could make decisions independently and determine their preferences in research (Mothersbaugh, 2010). Have purchased at least 1 (once) time at 4-hotels in Malang and have a account media social media.
### Data Analysis

This research uses Structural Equation Model (SEM) analysis with Variance Based SEM approach or better known as Partial Least Square (PLS) and the software used in data analysis to test the hypothesis in this study WarpPLS 3.0.

### Measurements

The self-congruity variable is measured using the actual self-congruity, social self-congruity, ideal self-congruity, ideal social self-congruity indicators developed by Schiffman & Kanuk, (2008). Positive emotional experience variables were developed by Chen & Lin (2015). Variable customer satisfaction consists of satisfaction with product purchase decisions, enjoyment of consuming products, and satisfaction with product service quality which was developed by Khoo (2020). Finally, the positive e-WOM variable consists of the quality of e-WOM, the quantity of e-WOM, the expertise of the e-WOM message sender which was developed by Lin et al., (2013).

### Findings

Statistical tests were conducted to measure the validity and reliability of this study. Table 1 indicates that the scale, magnitude, and statistical fit have been accepted. The average variance extracted (AVE) values of all latent variables show a score of 0.804 for the self congruity variable, 0.726 for the positive emotional experience variable, 0.880 for the consumer satisfaction variable, and 0.787 for the positive e-WOM variable. The Cronbach alpha value for the reliability criterion is relatively high; customer satisfaction has the highest Cronbach alpha value. Sequentially, the Cronbach alpha coefficient values for the four variables used in this study range from 0.7 and they are acceptable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Composite Reliability</th>
<th>Cronbach Alpha</th>
<th>AVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Congruity</td>
<td>0.942</td>
<td>0.918</td>
<td>0.804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotional Experience</td>
<td>0.949</td>
<td>0.937</td>
<td>0.726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.957</td>
<td>0.932</td>
<td>0.880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive E-WOM</td>
<td>0.949</td>
<td>0.932</td>
<td>0.787</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primer Data, 2022

The composite reliability (CR) values were 0.942, 0.949, 0.957, and 0.949, respectively (above 0.80). It can be concluded that all constructs are reliable, both according to composite reliability and Cronbach alpha. The R-square value of the positive e-WOM variable in this research model is 0.572. The goodness of Fit (GoF) in this study was calculated using the equation GoF = √( [AR]^2 x Acom) =√(0.799x0.529) =0.650. The score of 0.780 on the Q-Square calculation shows that the model in this study can be said to have immense goodness of fit.

### Table 2: Results of Direct Effect Hypothesizes Testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Relationship Between Variables</th>
<th>Path Coefficient</th>
<th>t-statistic</th>
<th>p-values</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>Self-Congruity -Positive E-WOM</td>
<td>0.355</td>
<td>5.910</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Significant Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>Positive Emotional Experience -Positive E-WOM</td>
<td>0.199</td>
<td>3.050</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>Significant Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>Self-Congruity - Customer Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.446</td>
<td>4.484</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Significant Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
<td>Positive Emotional Experience - Customer Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.314</td>
<td>3.236</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>Significant Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5</td>
<td>Customer Satisfaction - Positive E-WOM</td>
<td>0.306</td>
<td>3.870</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Significant Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6</td>
<td>Self-Congruity -Customer Satisfaction - Positive E-WOM</td>
<td>0.133</td>
<td>2.657</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>Significant Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7</td>
<td>Positive Emotional Experience -Customer Satisfaction - Positive E-WOM</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>3.153</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>Significant Accepted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on the analysis results in the table, it is known that the magnitude of the direct influence of the self-congruity variable on the positive e-WOM variable is 0.355. As for the influence of self-congruity on positive e-WOM, it has a t-statistic value more significant than the t-table value (5.910 > 1.96). So, the self-congruity variable significantly affects positive e-WOM, so H1 is accepted. The magnitude of the direct effect of the positive emotional experience variable on the variable of positive e-WOM is 0.199. The effect of positive emotional experience on positive e-WOM has a t-statistic value more significant than the t-table value (3.050 > 1.96). It can be concluded that the positive emotional experience has a significant positive effect on positive e-WOM, so H2 is accepted. The magnitude of self-congruity variables' direct influence on consumer satisfaction is 0.446. The effect of self-congruity on consumer satisfaction has a t-statistic value more significant than the t-table value (4.484 > 1.96). So the self-congruity variable significantly positively affects consumer satisfaction, so H3 is accepted.

The magnitude of the direct influence of the positive emotional experience variable on the variable of customer satisfaction is 0.314. The effect of positive emotional experience on customer satisfaction has a t-statistic value more significant than the t-table value (3.236 > 1.96). So, it can be concluded that the positive emotional experience variable significantly positively affects the customer satisfaction variable, so H4 is accepted. The magnitude of the direct influence of the consumer satisfaction variable on the variable of positive e-WOM is 0.306. The effect of consumer satisfaction on positive e-WOM has a t-statistic value more significant than the t-table value (3.870 > 1.96). So, the consumer satisfaction variable significantly positively affects positive e-WOM, so H5 is accepted. The magnitude of the indirect effect of the self-congruity variable on the variable of positive e-WOM through consumer satisfaction is 0.133. The total effect of the self-congruity variable on the positive e-WOM variable through the consumer satisfaction variable is 0.355. This value is greater than the direct effect of self-congruity variable influence on positive e-WOM, which is 0.133. The effect of self-congruity on positive e-WOM through consumer satisfaction has a t-statistic value more significant than the t-table value (2.657 > 1.96). It can be concluded that the self-congruity variable significantly positively affects positive e-WOM through consumer satisfaction, so H6 is accepted.

The magnitude of the indirect effect of the positive emotional experience variable on the variable of positive e-WOM through consumer satisfaction is 0.092. The total effect of the positive emotional experience variable on the variable of positive e-WOM through the consumer satisfaction variable is 0.199. This value is greater than the direct effect of the positive emotional experience variable on the positive e-WOM of 0.092. The effect of positive emotional experience on positive e-WOM through consumer satisfaction has a t-statistic value more significant than the t-table value (3.153 > 1.96). It can be concluded that the positive emotional experience variable has a significant positive effect on positive e-WOM through consumer satisfaction, so H7 is accepted.

**Discussion**

**Self-Congruity has a significant effect on positive e-WOM**

This study found that self-congruence or compatibility of the customer's self-concept with the characteristics of the product or service offered can influence positive customer e-WOM on the experience felt while staying at a 4-star hotel in Malang City (H1). The results of this study follow previous research conducted by Kim et al. (2015) that the match between consumers and the products or services consumed is due to the match of self-value attached to consumers. Consumers tend to consume a product or service that has an image similar to themselves. Consumers often choose and use brands that have a brand personality that is consistent with their self-concept (the way we see ourselves), even though that adjustment may be based on the consumer's ideal self-concept (the way we see ourselves) or even based on the self-concept of others / the way others see us (Kotler and Keller, 2016). If consumers consume products or services that match their self-image, consumers will be emotionally attached, encouraging consumers to express themselves about their experiences when consuming these products or services.

**Positive emotional experience has a significant effect on positive e-WOM**

The results of this study are in line with the results of previous research conducted by Serra-Cantallops et al. (2017) and Serra-Cantallops et al. (2020), which show that positive emotional experience has a direct influence on positive e-WOM. Generally, when someone uses a product or service, there will be an experience that causes emotions and is stored in someone's mind. Emotional experiences usually come through events that consumers experience during their stay at the hotel. Other events, such as interactions with hotel staff and employees during their stay at the hotel, can also lead to emotional experiences. Hotel staff and employees who are friendly and responsive in serving the needs and obstacles faced by consumers will give hotel visitors an emotional experience. The results of this study are in line with the results of previous research conducted by Serra-Cantallops et al. (2017) and Serra-Cantallops et al. (2020), which show that positive emotional experience has a direct influence on positive e-WOM. Generally, when someone uses a product or service, there will be an experience that causes emotions and is stored in someone's mind. Emotional experiences usually come through events that consumers experience during their stay at the hotel. Other events, such as interactions with hotel staff and employees during their stay, can also lead to emotional experiences. Hotel staff and employees who are friendly and responsive in serving the needs and obstacles faced by consumers will give hotel visitors an emotional experience.

**Self-congruity has a significant effect on customer satisfaction**

The findings of this study support the results of previous research conducted by Jamal and Goode (2001), Kim and Thapa (2017), and He and Mukherjee (2010), which found that self-congruity has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction. The
feeling of satisfaction expressed by consumers shows that the services offered by the hotel provide comfort and satisfaction. Westbrook and Reilly (1983) and Tjiptono (2014) argue that customer satisfaction is an emotional response to experiences related to certain products or services purchased. It is further explained that this indicates how consumers assess and determine the level of satisfaction felt based on consumer preferences and attitudes after consuming a product or service. Feelings or emotional conditions of consumers can affect the overall level of satisfaction and consumer preferences in consuming a product or service (Gountas and Gountas, 2007).

**Positive emotional experience has a significant effect on customer satisfaction**

The findings of this study support Kartajaya's (2006) opinion that experience provides memories to consumers; if consumers get positive memories, they will feel satisfied. Customer satisfaction is the consumer's response to the experience felt while staying at a 4-star hotel in Malang City. Consumers need not only high-quality services or products but also positive experiences or experiences that are emotionally very touching and memorable, and this positive experience will satisfy consumers with 4-star hotels in Malang City.

**Customer satisfaction has a significant effect on positive e-WOM**

Research by Casallo et al. (2008) and Serra et al. (2020) shows that customer satisfaction has a significant influence on positive e-WOM. Consumers who feel satisfied have a higher probability of giving a positive response. Customer satisfaction is the most important of e-WOM behavioral intentions because it makes consumers voluntarily provide positive reviews on their social media (positive E-WOM), which will undoubtedly benefit the company.

**Customer satisfaction can mediate the relationship between self-congruity and positive e-WOM**

The findings in this study follow the C-A-B theory proposed by Holbrook and Batra (1987), which explains that the cognitive state of consumers can affect their affective state. Then, the affective state will affect consumer behavior. In this study, the cognitive aspect is self-congruity. When consumers feel a match with 4-star hotels in Malang City, a positive consumer attitude will be formed towards 4-star hotels in Malang City. This positive attitude makes consumers emotionally attached, so that it encourages consumers to express themselves about their experiences when consuming these products or services. Wallace et al. (2014) explain in their research that if a product or service is felt to represent or describe well the expression of the consumer, then the consumer will be emotionally attached, and they will share their experience on social media.

**Customer satisfaction can mediate the relationship of positive emotional experience to positive e-WOM**

Often, consumers will look for a pleasant experience when visiting hotels and tourist attractions. A pleasant experience will cause positive emotions in consumers. Consumers will remember positive experiences, and this will affect customer satisfaction. In order to generate positive experiences from consumers, companies must be able to make consumers feel satisfied. With customer satisfaction, consumers will have a positive experience in using the company's services to trigger consumers to give positive recommendations to others, which is currently often done through various social media (positive e-WOM). This positive attitude makes consumers emotionally attached, so that it encourages consumers to express themselves about their experiences when consuming the product or service. Wallace et al. (2014) explained in their research that if a product or service is felt to represent or describe well the expression of the consumer, then these consumers will be emotionally attached, and they will share their experiences on social media.

**Conclusion**

This study found that self-congruity or the match of consumer self-concept with the characteristics of the product or service offered by 4-star hotels in Malang City can directly influence positive consumer e-WOM towards the hotel. Based on the results of this study, self-congruity is one of the essential aspects that must be considered to produce a positive attitude and brand image and increase positive e-WOM so that profitability and business sustainability are more secure. Suppose a product or service is felt to represent or describe well the expression of the consumer. In that case, the consumer will be emotionally attached, and they will share their experience on social media. Self-congruity can also directly affect customer satisfaction. **Recommendation for Future Research:**

i. Future researchers can expand the variables not discussed in this study to get even better results.

ii. This research data was disseminated through WhatsApp social media. In the future, the distribution of questionnaires is expected to be carried out in accordance with the existing database on each research object directly.
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Author Contributions: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Collection, Formal Analysis, Writing—Original Draft Preparation, Writing—Review And Editing by authors with equal participation. All authors have read and agreed to the published the final version of the manuscript.

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Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Reference


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