Volume 7 Issue 2 (2026) Pages 1899 - 1216
Economics and Digital Business Review
ISSN : 2774-2563 (Online)

The Effects of Affiliate Credibility, Content Quality, Electronic Word of Mouth, and Customer Experience on Hotel Guest Loyalty

Achmad Aufa Azhar[1] Muhammad Fachmi[2]✉
[1,2] Program Studi Bisnis Digital Fakultas Ekonomika Dan Bisnis Universitas Negeri Surabaya

Abstract

The development of online marketing techniques has drastically changed the way potential customers acquire information and build loyalty for hotel accommodation service. However, the empirical findings on the role of affiliator credibility, content quality, e-WOM, and guest experience in customer loyalty have been inconsistent in previous studies. This paper aims to examine the effect of the four variables mentioned above on customer loyalty in relation to Surabaya and Malang. A quantitative approach has been applied where structured surveys were used to collect data from 125 respondents selected using purposive sampling method. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method has been used for data analysis where SmartPLS 4 was employed to analyze the data. The findings indicate that affiliator credibility, content quality, and e-WOM do not have any significant effects on customer loyalty whereas customer experience positively and significantly affects customer loyalty as shown by a path coefficient of 0.533, a T-statistic of 3.343, and a P-value of 0.001. The research model was found to have an R^2 of 0.701, meaning that a combination of affiliator credibility, content quality, e-WOM, and customer experience has explained 70.1% of variance of customer loyalty. Such findings suggest that the guest experiences that guests undergo when they stay in hotels have a stronger relationship with customer loyalty than the digital marketing components examined in this study. It is therefore imperative that hotel managers concentrate on improving guest experience as an important factor in building customer loyalty.

Keywords: Affiliator Credibility; Content Quality; e-WOM; Customer Experience; Customer Loyalty.

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✉ Corresponding author :
Email Address : achmad.23367@mhs.unesa.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

There is a remarkable change taking place in the hospitality industry in Indonesia and it can be seen mainly due to the integration of online technology and social media sites in Indonesia. The use of online technology has enabled people to find new ways of finding information, making decisions regarding purchasing and developing loyalty to certain hotels. In the digital world, there are many sources through which people can gather information and they include the likes of TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube where affiliates and content creators are considered to be very important influencers in the accommodation selection process. (Saini et al., 2023; Widaningsih & Putranto, 2025).

DOI : 10.37531/ecotal.v7i2.4119

An affiliate is understood to mean an individual or organization that sells products or services using electronic mediums and gets paid a commission or any other type of compensation. In affiliate marketing using social media, creators of content are compensated when their audience interacts with links that have been included in their content. (Mathur et al., 2018) In the present study, affiliates are considered to be content creators or social media influencers who promote hotels. The credibility of an affiliate plays a very important role in promoting hotels since it greatly affects the perception and decisions of potential clients. As per Widaningsih & Putranto (2025), qualities like expertise, reliability, sincerity, and personal charm of an affiliate play an essential role in improving the effectiveness of online communication in the tourism industry. But studies focusing on the relationship between affiliate credibility and client loyalty to hotels are quite limited especially in Indonesia.

In addition to affiliate credibility, the quality of the content disseminated is also crucial in shaping consumer perceptions. Syahhida et al. (2026) indicate that social media content characterized by its informative, relevant, and visually appealing nature can affect consumer loyalty, both directly and indirectly, through brand image, which serves as a mediating variable. Concurrently, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), manifested through online ratings, feedback, and recommendations circulating on social media, contributes to the formation of a hotel's digital image. The impact of such e-WOM on customer loyalty is also under investigation. Sunaryo (2022) discovered that e-WOM has a significant influence on consumer loyalty, with brand image and trust functioning as mediating variables. Similar conclusions were reached by Anggreni et al. (2026), who reported a positive and significant relationship between e-WOM and customer loyalty within the coffee shop sector.

Furthermore, the customer experience associated with hotel services is a vital factor that influences guests' decisions to return or recommend the establishment to others. Branch et al. (2018) assert that there exists a direct correlation between customer experience and loyalty within the hospitality industry. Supporting this notion, Kokkhangplu & Auemsuvarn (2024), has carried out research in relation to boutique hotels in Thailand. The researcher found out that good impression and good experiences in a hotel increase intentions to visit and create loyalty.

Despite the fact that studies have examined affiliate credibility, quality of content, e-WOM and customer experience, the findings in relation to the effect of e-WOM on customer loyalty have not shown consistency. Kesumahati et al. (2025) reported that e-WOM does not significantly affect customer loyalty at international chain hotels in Batam City, although it does impact customer satisfaction. Similarly, a consistent outcome was noted in the case of Martabak Mitra, a micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) in Garut Regency, where e-WOM was found to have no substantial effect on consumer loyalty. Conversely, other research indicates that e-WOM can positively influence customer loyalty, mediated by brand image and trust (Sunaryo, 2022), in a coffee shop business (Anggreni et al., 2026), or among hotel guests (Mukti & Pramadanti, 2026). These differences demonstrate the gap that exists empirically in understanding the relationship between e-WOM and customer loyalty. Furthermore, there is a dearth of research which considers the impact of affiliate credibility, digital content quality, e-WOM and customer experience together to shed light on the issue of hotel guest loyalty in Indonesia. Hence, in this study, the intention is to explore the impact of the four variables on hotel guest loyalty in the hospitality industry of Surabaya and Malang, two major cities in East Java which are noted for their comparatively higher frequency of visits to hotels and use of social media.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this study are: (1) to examine the impact of affiliate credibility on hotel guest loyalty; (2) to explore the role played by the quality of digital content offered by the affiliate in influencing hotel guest loyalty; (3) to examine the contribution of e-WOM in shaping hotel guest loyalty; (4) to understand the relationship between customer experience and hotel guest loyalty; and (5) to look into the cumulative impact of all these

DOI : 10.37531/ecotal.v7i2.4119

independent variables on hotel guest loyalty. It is hoped that the expected results will help in advancing the body of knowledge in the area of digital marketing theory in the hospitality sector, in addition to providing practical implications for hotel managers in developing affiliate marketing strategies and enhancing customer experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hotel Guest Loyalty (Customer Loyalty)

In regard to hotel guests' loyalty, it could be defined as the emotion-driven attachment that drives clients to choose and use the services of the hotel on their repeated visits. It has been noted that such an emotional link is usually related to the tendency of guests to spread positive reviews about the hotel and recommend it to their friends. Hence, hotel guests' loyalty is determined not only by the repeated visits but also by some attitudes towards the specific hotel. (Hutagalung et al., 2022).

Evaluation of guest loyalty at hotels can be done using five key factors, including (1) guests' perception of positive aspects about the hotel; (2) guests' recommendations of the hotel as an accommodation; (3) guests' predispositions towards revisiting the same hotel; (4) preference for the hotel over other accommodations; and (5) the hotel becomes the most preferred place for staying in future. There are two types of loyalty that are captured through these factors, namely, behavioral loyalty, which is based on the predisposition to revisit the same hotel and choose it over others, and attitudinal loyalty, which is based on recommendations and positive assessments of the hotel.

Affiliate Credibility

Affiliate credibility is defined as the assessment by the audience of affiliate as the trustworthy source of information which is qualified, competent and honest to endorse goods or services, including promotion of hotels on social media (Widaningsih & Putranto, 2025). In terms of digital marketing, affiliates act as mediators between hotels and their potential clients. The higher the degree of perceived credibility will be, the better the potential of persuasive message will be in terms of influencing client attitudes and decision making process. This construct includes five dimensions such as expertise of affiliate in hospitality industry, credibility of provided information, honesty in content promotion, reliability of provided information and personal attractiveness of affiliate.

Affiliates that are considered to be expert and trustworthy while providing information about hospitality industry usually have greater influence on trust building by potential clients towards promoted hotel. This can be achieved through continuous use of content provided by credible affiliates. It can not only influence decision making of clients to stay in hotel but also promote tendency of staying and recommending hotel to other people. Based on this idea, the following hypothesis is posited.

H1: Affiliate credibility has a positive and significant effect on hotel guest loyalty.

Content Quality

Content quality is the audience's evaluation of the digital content item in terms of its informational clarity, informativeness, usefulness, and attractiveness to the audience. In relation to affiliate marketing for hotels, content quality is the ability of an affiliate to present hospitality information in such a digital way that provides potential clients with an image of the hotel in advance, allowing them to make a decision about their stay at that hotel (Huang et al., 2024).. The five indicators used to evaluate content quality include: (1) the degree of consistency between the depiction of the promoted object and the actuality of the content created by the affiliate; (2) the informativeness of the hotel content presented; (3) the usefulness

DOI : 10.37531/ecotal.v7i2.4119

of the travel information provided in the video; (4) the conformity of the video content to audience needs; and (5) the visual quality of the hotel video content.

Quality content is a significant factor influencing the formation of guest's expectations about the hotel in advance and thus about the experience of staying there. If the expectations formed in the process of interaction with the content are confirmed in reality, the level of satisfaction with the stay may rise, resulting in increased cand loyalty toward the promoted hotel can become stronger. Based on this description, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H2: Content quality has a positive and significant effect on hotel guest loyalty.

Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM)

Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) refers to the ratings, comments, and recommendations obtained through social media regarding a particular product or service, including hotel services (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2019). In the hospitality sector, e-WOM on social media is considered to be more credible than traditional promotion since it comes from consumers who have tried out the hotel's services. According to Reyes-Menendez et al. (2019) applying the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the credibility of online reviews is a factor of importance in establishing the reputation of a hotel among potential clients. Indicators used in measuring e-WOM include: (1) the availability of hotel reviews on social media; (2) the amount of hotel information posted on social media by the consumers; (3) the high overall rating of the hotel according to other consumers; (4) the likelihood of consumers taking hotel information recommended by other consumers; and (5) the ability of hotel reviews on social media to influence consumer decision-making.

As the number of positive reviews about a hotel increases, the higher is the possibility of trust built between potential and past guests. Trust generated from e-WOM can make potential guests loyal to their chosen hotel and motivate them to share positive experiences. This condition can create a cycle of online communication that supports the formation of loyalty. Based on this explanation, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H3: Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) has a positive and significant effect on hotel guest loyalty.

Customer Experience

The term "customer experience" means the perceptions and evaluations of the experience that customers receive when engaging with the hotel services, ranging from the level of service provided by hotel employees to the impressions that they retain even when their stay is over. According to Branch et al. (2018), customer experience includes the overall evaluation of interactions between customers and the hotel. Furthermore, according to Kokkhangplu & Auemsuvarn (2024, the enjoyment and emotional impressions gained during the stay add up to the experience of the guests. The following five factors are used to evaluate the construct: the knowledge and skills of hotel employees, satisfaction with the service, intention to utilize the services more in the future, level of enjoyment of the stay, and general good impressions of the hotel.

Having a pleasant and consistent experience of the stay is one of the determinants of customer loyalty in the service industry. Customers with a good experience, whether because of the quality of the service provided by employees or the comfort of the facilities, feel motivated to visit the hotel again and to recommend it to other people. On this basis, the following hypothesis is formulated.

A pleasant and consistent stay experience is an important determinant of customer loyalty in the service sector. Guests who have a satisfying experience, whether through the quality of staff service or the comfort of the facilities, generally have a stronger drive to return

DOI : 10.37531/ecotal.v7i2.4119

and to recommend the hotel to others. Drawing on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H4: Customer experience has a positive and significant effect on hotel guest loyalty.

METHODOLOGY

The research design that this study used was quantitative, which entails the usage of a questionnaire as the primary means of collecting numerical data, which were then subjected to statistical analysis in assessing the proposed relationships between the variables. The target population of the study was the guests of hotels in Surabaya and Malang, who had already been exposed to the hotel promotions information through the affiliates using social media. Determination of sample size for the study was based on the principle of using 5-10 times more respondents than the total number of measures. Because the instrument used was composed of 25 measures, the sample size was to be at least 125 (5 × 25) respondents. Purposeful sampling technique was used in this study, wherein respondents should have viewed the hotel promotion information by the affiliates using social media and stayed in the hotel being promoted.

The theoretical framework of this research is anchored on the five constructs, which are affiliate credibility (AC), content quality (CQ), electronic word of mouth/e-WOM (EW), customer experience (CE), and hotel guest loyalty (CL) which is the dependent construct. Affiliate credibility, content quality, electronic word of mouth, and customer experience are the four dependent constructs The first four independent constructs are direct predictors of hotel guest loyalty, as can be seen in Figure 1.

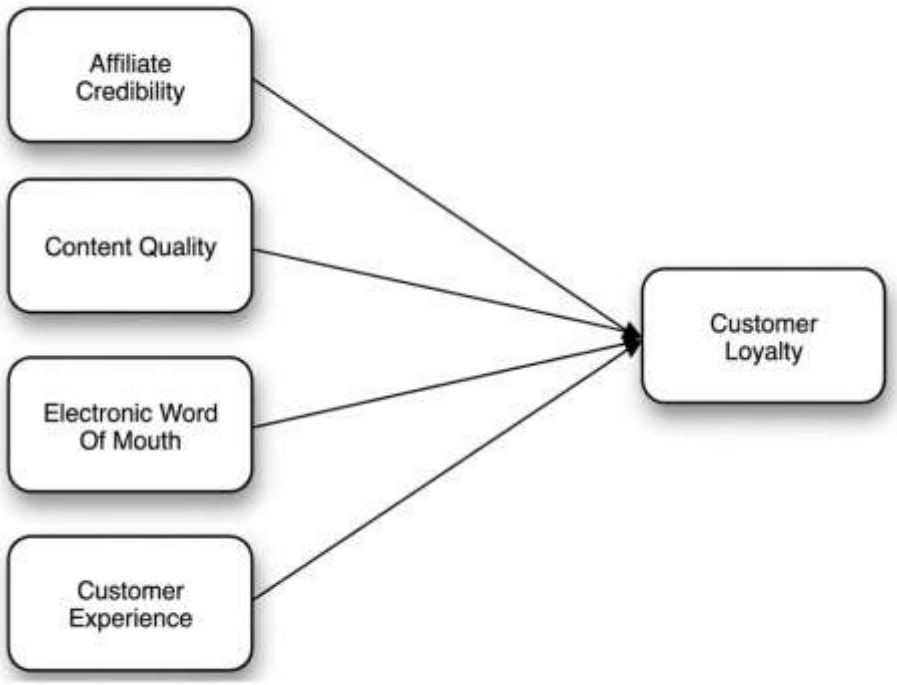


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

The empirical data was collected through the use of an online questionnaire disseminated via Google Forms and posted on social media for participants meeting the criteria of purposive sampling. Each item was assessed by using a five-point Likert scale

DOI : 10.37531/ecotal.v7i2.4119

ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The scale was used to measure the level of agreement of the respondents concerning each construct being analyzed.

Data analysis was performed using SmartPLS 4 with partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Data analysis was done in two evaluative phases. The first phase involved the measurement model that consisted of convergent validity evaluation based on Average Variance Extracted (AVE) ≥ 0.50 and factor loadings ≥ 0.70, discriminant validity evaluation with the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio < 0.85, and construct reliability with Composite Reliability (CR) ≥ 0.70 and Cronbach's alpha ≥ 0.70. The second phase of the data analysis was the structural model with path coefficient analysis aimed at assessing the strength and direction of the relationships between the variables, coefficient of determination (R^2) used for evaluation of the predictive power of the model and f^2 used for effect size evaluation of each relationship.

Tabel 1. Operasionalisasi Variabel

Konstruk	Definisi Operasional	Butir Pernyataan	Referensi
Affiliate Credibility (AC)	Respondents' assessment of the extent to which a digital affiliate is regarded as competent, trustworthy, honest, and attractive when promoting hotels through social media accounts.	1. The affiliate I follow appears to understand the hospitality field. 2. I consider the information conveyed by this affiliate to be trustworthy. 3. This affiliate presents hotel content honestly. 4. This affiliate's hospitality content deserves to be trusted. 5. This affiliate has an attractive personal character.	(Widaningsih & Putranto, 2025)
Content Quality (CQ)	Respondents' assessment of the quality of the digital content created by the affiliate, including the relevance of the information, visual strength, and depth of the message about the hotel.	1.The affiliate's content depicts the hotel clearly. 2. The hotel content presented by the affiliate contains adequate information. 3. The travel information in the video is useful to me. 4. The travel videos presented suit my needs. 5. The hotel videos published are of good visual quality.	(Huang et al., 2024)

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Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM/EW)	Respondents' responses to the volume of online reviews, comments, and recommendations circulating on social media about the hotel promoted by the affiliate.	1. Reviews of the hotel are available in large numbers on social media. 2. Hotel information shared by consumers on social media is fairly abundant. 3. The overall ratings of the hotel from other consumers are relatively high. 4. I tend to consider other consumers' advice about hotels on social media. 5. Hotel reviews on social media encourage me to make a purchase decision.	(Reyes-Menendez et al., 2019)
Customer Experience (CE)	Respondents' assessment of their overall experience when interacting with hotel services, covering physical, emotional, social, and relational aspects.	1. The hotel staff have adequate knowledge. 2. I am satisfied with the hotel services recommended by the affiliate. 3. I intend to use more of the services offered by the hotel. 4. My stay at the hotel recommended by the affiliate was a pleasant experience. 5. I gained a positive impression of the hotel recommended by the affiliate.	(Branch et al., 2018),(Kokkhangplu & Auemsuvarn, 2024)

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Customer Loyalty (CL)	Respondents' commitment and tendency to use the hotel's services again and to recommend it to others after being satisfied with the service and experience received.	1. Guests give positive assessments of the hotel I visited. 2. Guests recommend the hotel to others as a place to stay. 3. Guests are likely to stay at the same hotel again. 4. The hotel I visited is a priority over other hotels. 5. The hotel I visited is my first choice when I want to stay again.	(Hutagalung et al., 2022)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Respondent Description

Prior to examining the measurement and structural models, this paper starts by describing the characteristics of the respondents in order to provide an insight into the profile of the respondents. According to the findings based on the questionnaire responses, a total of 125 respondents answered the survey questions and therefore constitute the sample under investigation. The characteristics of the respondents include gender, age, preferred social media platform for accommodation searches, and booking accommodation through affiliates in the last one year.

Characteristic	**Categori**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Gender	Female	70	**56,00%**
	Male	55	**44,00%**
Age	< 20 Tahun	17	**13,60%**
	20–25 Tahun	81	**64,80%**
	26–30 Tahun	24	**19,20%**
	> 30 Tahun	3	**2,40%**
Social media platform	TikTok	66	**52,80%**

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	Instagram	23	**18,40%**
	X (Twitter)	17	**13,60%**
	Facebook	12	**9,60%**
	Threads	6	**4,80%**
	YouTube	1	**0,80%**
Frequency of booking through affiliates	Once	43	**34,40%**
	2–3 times	51	**40,80%**
	> 3 times	31	**24,80%**
Total Respondents		**125**	**100%**

From the above table, it can be seen that the number of female respondents was higher at 56.0%, compared to male respondents, which **were at 44.0**%. In terms of age, most of the respondents belonged to the **20–25 age category (64.8%).** In relation to the social media application where respondents searched for accommodation-related information, TikTok was the most used at 52.8%. Most of the respondents, in relation to the number of bookings done using the affiliates, had done 2–3 bookings in the previous **year (40.8%).** These statistics demonstrate that those surveyed were primarily from the 20–25 years old age bracket and are active users of social media, especially TikTok, and are also experienced with booking accommodations via affiliate websites.

Convergent Validity and Reliability Test (Outer Model)

Tabel 2. Measurement Model Results

Variabel	Indikator	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Customer Experience (CE)	CE1	0,784	0,843	0,847	0,889	**0,615**
	CE2	0,782				
	CE3	0,736				
	CE4	0,786				
	CE5	0,831				
Customer Loyalty (CL)	CL1	0,788	0,872	0,873	0,907	**0,662**
	CL2	0,816				
	CL3	0,825				
	CL4	0,79				
	CL5	0,847				
E-WOM (EW)	EW1	0,804	0,829	0,837	0,886	**0,661**
	EW2	0,78				
	EW4	0,839				

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	EW5	0,756				
Affiliate Credibility (AC)	AC1	0,781	0,837	0,838	0,885	**0,606**
	AC2	0,775				
	AC3	0,718				
	AC4	0,781				
	AC5	0,834				
Content Quality (CQ)	CQ1	0,828	0,841	0,847	0,887	**0,612**
	CQ2	0,762				
	CQ3	0,821				
	CQ4	0,784				
	CQ5	0,711				

The outcomes of the measurement model as provided in Table 2 reveal that all used indicators have outer loadings higher than 0.70. At first, the indicator EW3 had an outer loading equal to 0.688 and, therefore, it did not meet the criteria of convergent validity and was excluded from the research model. After removing this indicator, it was found out that the outer loadings of all indicators associated with Customer Experience (CE), Customer Loyalty (CL), e-WOM (EW), Affiliate Credibility (AC), and Content Quality (CQ) ranged between 0.711 and 0.847. Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values of each construct were above 0.50: CE = 0.615, CL = 0.662, EW = 0.661, AC = 0.606, and CQ = 0.612. Hence, it is obvious that each construct meets the requirements of convergent validity. Besides, the values of Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, and Composite Reliability for all constructs were above 0.70. Therefore, it is safe to claim that all constructs in the research meet the requirements of reliability standards and are suitable for subsequent structural model analysis.

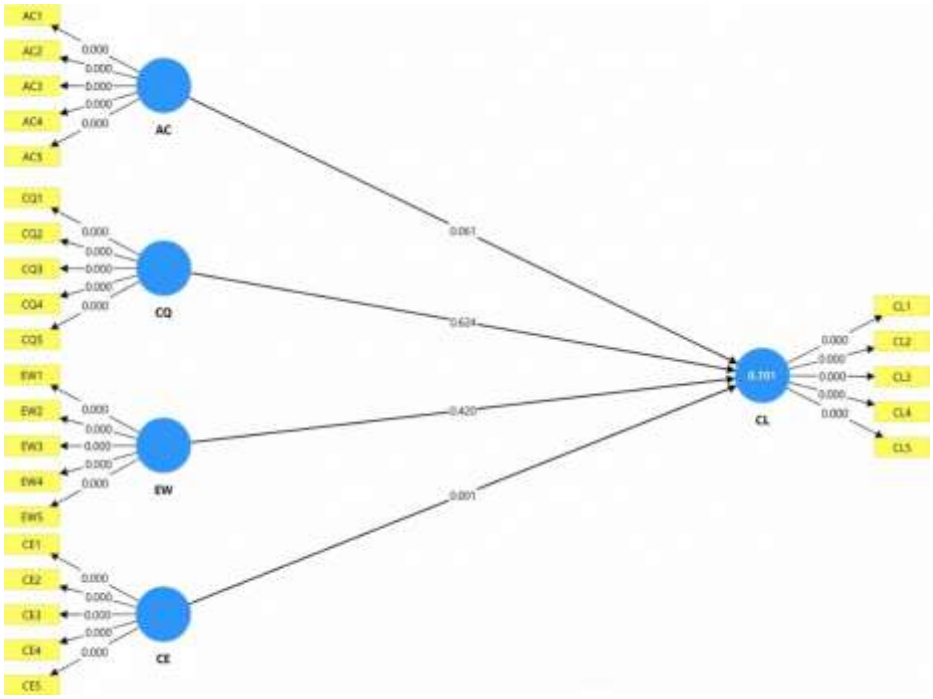
Tabel 3. Summary of the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Pasangan Konstruk	**HTMT (O)**	**2,5%**	**97,5%**
CL ↔ CE	0,961	0,880	**1,031**
EW ↔ CE	0,969	0,874	**1,057**
EW ↔ CL	0,861	0,725	**0,981**
AC ↔ CE	0,887	0,768	**0,987**
AC ↔ CL	0,838	0,708	**0,952**
AC ↔ EW	0,876	0,710	**1,003**
CQ ↔ CE	0,977	0,860	**1,082**
CQ ↔ CL	0,857	0,696	**0,987**
CQ ↔ EW	0,948	0,813	**1,055**
CQ ↔ AC	0,894	0,773	**0,984**

Looking at Table 3, it can be seen that just one out of the ten pairs of constructs is below the HTMT criterion of less than 0.85, i.e., AC ↔ CL (0.838). The remaining nine pairs of constructs surpass this criterion. There are several pairs that exhibit a 97.5% upper bound confidence interval of 1.0 or above: EW ↔ CE (0.969; CI 0.874–1.057), CQ ↔ CE (0.977; CI 0.860–1.082), CL ↔ CE (0.961; CI 0.880–1.031), CQ ↔ EW (0.948; CI 0.813–1.055), and AC ↔ EW (0.876; CI 0.710–1.003). These numbers show that there is still no optimal empirical separation

DOI : 10.37531/ecotal.v7i2.4119

between constructs, especially since customer experience shows significant overlap with the other constructs. Therefore, the measurement model complies with the criteria of convergent validity and reliability, but not with those of discriminant validity. This condition should be taken into account when interpreting the structural model results and is revisited in the Research Limitations section.



Gambar 2. Structure of the Research Model

In Figure 2, the framework of the relationship between affiliate credibility, content quality, e-WOM, and customer experience towards guest loyalty is illustrated.

Tabel 4. Summary of R-Square

Konstruk	R2
Customer Loyalty	0,701

As indicated in Table 4, the value of R-square of hotel guest loyalty is 0.701. This means that affiliate credibility, content quality, e-WOM, and customer experience account for 70.1% of the variation in hotel guest loyalty while 29.9% of the variation in hotel guest loyalty may be attributed to some other factors not captured in the research. These factors include hotel facility quality, cost, hotel brand image, customer satisfaction, or any other external factor that was not considered in this study. Subsequently, hypothesis testing was performed to determine the role played by each independent variable in hotel guest loyalty.

Tabel 5. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Relationship	**Path Coefficient (O)**	**T-statistic**	**P-value**	**Conclusion**
AC -> CL	0,175	1,875	0,061	**Not supported**
CQ -> CL	0,074	0,490	0,624	**Not supported**
EW -> CL	0,119	0,806	0,420	**Not supported**
CE -> CL	0,533	3,343	0,001	**Supported**

Based on the bootstrapping method applied, it can be noted that three out of the four evaluated paths did not meet the criteria for hypothesis acceptance, considering the values of p and t statistics being above 0.05 and 1.96 respectively. In particular, it is evident that the

DOI : 10.37531/ecotal.v7i2.4119

coefficient for affiliate credibility was calculated as 0.175; its t and p statistics were 1.875 and 0.061 respectively. Therefore, it becomes clear that H1 cannot be validated. In addition, the coefficient for content quality was identified as 0.074, while its t and p statistics were 0.490 and 0.624 respectively, which also proves the inability to validate H2. In turn, the coefficient for e-WOM was identified as 0.119, while t and p statistics were 0.806 and 0.420 correspondingly, indicating that H3 is rejected. At the same time, the path coefficient of customer experience proved to be 0.533, while t and p statistics were 3.343 and 0.001 correspondingly, indicating the presence of significant positive correlation between the variable and hotel guest loyalty, which allows validating H4. Thus, it becomes clear that only customer experience had a considerable influence on hotel guest loyalty.

Tabel 6. Summary of f^2 Effect Sizes

Relationship	f2	Classification
CE -> CL	0,240	**Medium**
EW -> CL	0,014	**Very small**
AC -> CL	0,039	**Small**
CQ -> CL	0,005	**Very small**

According to Table 6, the effect size (f^2) of each independent variable as contributor to the hotel guest loyalty can be seen below. Customer experience was found to have the highest effect size (0.240), which can be considered as medium. Thus, it can be concluded that customer experience is the most dominant variable that influences variations in hotel guest loyalty from the other variables.

On the other hand, affiliate credibility was found to have a very low effect size (0.039), which can be considered as small. The same was true for e-WOM and content quality effect sizes, which were 0.014 and 0.005, respectively. These results show that the influence of e-WOM and content quality on hotel guest loyalty is relatively weak in this research model.
Thus, the results from hypothesis testing and effect sizes confirm the finding that customer experience is the main determinant of hotel guest loyalty. It is thus better to improve the experience of guests while they are staying in the hotel rather than focus on other things like affiliate credibility, e-WOM, or content quality, or e-WOM activity.

Discussion

The Effect of Affiliate Credibility on Customer Loyalty

Kredibilitas Affiliate credibility has not significantly influenced the formation of loyalty among hotel guests ($\beta = 0.175$; $T = 1.875$; $p = 0.061$). Therefore, the hypothesis H1 is not confirmed. There is a positive correlation, and the influence is very close to the level of significance, but the expertise, honesty, and attractiveness of the affiliate are not enough to form loyalty directly. Affiliate credibility affects primarily the stages of information search and initial consideration, while loyalty arises as a result of the experience of hotel services. This result is similar to the findings of Kristanti et al. (2026) that affiliate credibility has not influenced the intention to stay at The Sunan Hotel Solo of millennials through Instagram influencers, while the attractiveness of the content has influenced it significantly. If the affiliate credibility does not significantly affect the intention to stay yet, its impact on loyalty will be even smaller.

This finding is different from that of Widaningsih & Putranto (2025), whose findings suggest that the influence of the credibility of an influencer on the behavioral outcomes of Gen Z travelers is significant, and Saini et al. (2023) literature review, in which social media influencers are presented as determinants of travel decisions. The reason for the difference can be found in the dependent variables used for the analysis. While previous research examined

DOI : 10.37531/ecotal.v7i2.4119

travel intentions or travel decisions in the pre-purchase phase, this paper considers loyalty in the post-stay phase. As the respondents, the majority of whom were users of TikTok aged 20-25, showed significant affiliation exposure, there seems to be no basis to say that low significance is due to low exposure.Accordingly, affiliate credibility remains valuable as an entry point for prospective guests, but it is not a direct determinant of their loyalty.

The Effect of Content Quality on Customer Loyalty

Content quality had no significant impact on the loyalty of hotel guests ($\beta = 0.074$; $T = 0.490$; $p = 0.624$) and the lowest effect size of all the four variables ($f^2 = 0.005$). Therefore, H2 is not supported. Informative and attractive content aids in creating the first impression about the hotel in the minds of potential customers, but whether they will visit again or not is based on the experience gained after using the services. These findings contradict the study by Gouda & Halim (2025), which reported that both hotel-generated and user-generated social media content enhanced customer loyalty in the Egyptian hospitality sector. Also, Syahhida et al. (2026) reported that the quality of social media content impacted consumer loyalty towards skincare products, both directly and indirectly via brand image.

There are three possible explanations for the disparities. First, hotel services are not pretestable before consumption; therefore, the value of content gets evaluated after guests stay in the hotel, unlike skin care product consumers who can easily test and repurchase a product. Second, the sample size of Gouda & Halim (2025) included 88 social media experts alongside 132 hotel guests; therefore, evaluations of content might vary from the one based on a sample made exclusively of guests. Third, Syahhida et al. (2026) set brand image as a mediator, while in the present study, only direct effects were tested. In general, the findings of the current study are similar to those of Huang et al. (2024), who set tourism content on TikTok as a predictor of enjoyment and behavioral intention, meaning affective reactions at an early stage. Another study by Majeed et al. (2022) discovered that for hotels in Ghana, guest satisfaction comes first, then it leads to social media involvement, and then to repurchase intention. This sequence suggests that online activity grows out of satisfying experiences rather than replacing them.

The Effect of Electronic Word of Mouth on Customer Loyalty

e -WOM had no significant influence on the level of hotel guest loyalty ($\beta = 0.119$; $T = 0.806$; $p = 0.420$; $f^2 = 0.014$). Thus, the hypothesis H3 is not proven. The above statement corresponds with the findings of Kesumahati et al. (2025) that stated that e-WOM had no significant influence on loyalty of international chain hotels in Batam although it significantly influenced satisfaction of consumers. Also similar are the findings of ((Cemara & Murweni, 2025) about the Martabak Mitra MSME. No significant impact of word of mouth on the level of loyalty at Hotel Guciku was also found by Darmawan et al. (2026) In their study they found that the effect of word of mouth was indirect and it influenced satisfaction. Similar results were obtained by Vo et al. (2022), who researched online reviews and their influence on the evaluation of service quality, satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty of users of luxury hotels in Vietnam.These findings indicate that the relationship between online reviews and loyalty needs to be understood by considering customer evaluation and engagement processes, not only direct effects.

By contrast, Sunaryo (2022) and Anggreni et al. (2026) found a positive effect of e-WOM on loyalty. Mukti dan Pramadanti (2026), on the other hand, found out in their study involving guests of Grand Zuri Jababeka Hotel that e-WOM has a significant positive effect on customers' loyalty and served as a mediating variable in the relationship between perceived value and loyalty, as well as between trust and loyalty. However, differences in the results can be attributed to several things. First, there may be intermediary variables that affect loyalty through e-WOM, while the proposed model evaluates the direct influence of e-WOM on

DOI : 10.37531/ecotal.v7i2.4119

loyalty. Second, revisit intention is not the same as loyalty based on attitudinal and behavioral measures through attitudinal and behavioral indicators. Third, according to the Elaboration Likelihood Model used by Reyes-Menendez et al. (2019), online reviews can influence hotel evaluations before booking, whereas after a stay, guests also evaluate the hotel based on the experience they have directly felt. Wu (2025) positions information search and advocacy as behaviors that bridge brand love and loyalty, while Seow et al. (2024) found that e-WOM acts as a mediator in the relationship between satisfaction and revisit intention. This means that the effects of e-WOM on loyalty have to be assessed in light of other factors and the study environment.

The Effect of Customer Experience on Customer Loyalty

Customer experience showed a positive and statistically significant influence on guest loyalty of hotels ($\beta = 0.533$; $T = 3.343$; $p = 0.001$) and exhibited the highest value of path coefficients among all variables and thus H4 is supported. The higher the positive experience of the guest when dealing with the hotel, the greater his likelihood to stay and recommend the hotel again. This study is aligned with previous studies conducted in hospitality context. Branch et al. (2018), position experience, satisfaction, and customer loyalty as a sequence that determines the strength of a hotel brand. Kokkhangplu & Auemsuvarn (2024), found that positive experiences at boutique hotels in Thailand contribute to revisit intention and long-term loyalty. Ogunnaike et al. (2022), In researching the hospitality industry in Nigeria, it was determined that social and cultural factors jointly account for 38% of the variation in loyalty with satisfaction being a partial mediator. Hutami et al. (2023) also reported that service experience has a positive and significant effect on hotel guest loyalty, and Darmawan et al. (2026) found that customer experience significantly affects loyalty at Hotel Guciku ($\beta = 0.474$). In other service sectors, Manyanga et al. (2022) in banking and Seow et al. (2024) n wellness tourism reached similar conclusions, so the role of experience as a determinant of loyalty does not appear to be limited to one type of service.

Conceptually, one way of explaining this outcome is by using the theory of expectancy disconfirmation; that is, if the experience of the clients matches or surpasses their expectations, they end up being satisfied, and that satisfaction encourages revisits and recommendations (Darmawan et al., 2026; Seow et al., 2024). In terms of hospitality, the performance of the guest is assessed through not only the assessment of the facilities but also that of the competence of the staff, comfort levels, interaction, and overall impression during the stay. There are two important points worth mentioning. One is that customer experience has a measure assessing the satisfaction with the service; also, HTMT value between customer experience and loyalty is very high (0.961), so the magnitude of the path coefficient may partly reflect the conceptual closeness of the two constructs. Second, Hutami et al. (2023) found that satisfaction had no effect on loyalty even though service experience did, whereas Ogunnaike et al. (2022) and Darmawan et al. (2026) found a mediating role of satisfaction. This difference suggests that the position of satisfaction in the model still needs further testing.

Implications of the Findings

Theoretical Implications. First, this paper provides an addition to the existing literature by showing that in hotel affiliate marketing, the impacts of affiliate credibility, content quality, and e-WOM on loyalty are not direct but occur at the pre-purchase phase. Second, discrepancies in results between studies such as Kristanti et al. (2026), Mukti & Pramadanti (2026), serta Widaningsih & Putranto (2025), Highlight the significance of taking into account differences in outcome variables, research settings, and mediator variables in explaining the link between digital marketing and customer loyalty. The next study must differentiate between pre-purchase and post-stay phases. Satisfaction, trust, and brand image must be investigated as mediator variables (Darmawan et al., 2026; Mukti & Pramadanti, 2026;

DOI : 10.37531/ecotal.v7i2.4119

Sunaryo, 2022), accompanied by improvements to the indicators so that the separation between constructs is clearer.

First, hotel management should concentrate on the quality of the stay experience, which includes the skillfulness and responsiveness of staff members, the comfort of the facilities, and the consistency of the services, because these factors matter the most in terms of loyalty. Hutami et al. (2023) note that hotel consumers usually change when their experience is not satisfying. Second, affiliates should be regarded as a way of acquiring new customers. According to the survey results, 65.6% of the participants have been using affiliates more than once to book rooms in hotels. In this situation, affiliates act as the booking channel; however, the loyalty to the particular hotel depends on the experience that one can get from staying there. Thus, it is necessary for hotels to select proper affiliates and provide some recommendations concerning the presentation of services that will meet expectations. Third, e-WOM should be considered as the consequence of a positive experience of guests, which means that it is possible to ask guests to write reviews after visiting the hotel and answer them professionally. Fourth, the efficiency of affiliate campaigns should be measured in the number of bookings as well as post-stay actions.

Research Limitations

However, several limitations should be mentioned in regard to the interpretation of the results of this study. In particular, the results in terms of Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) demonstrate that nine out of ten construct pairs have values higher than 0.85, which means that discriminant validity among the constructs is not optimal, especially in case of the customer experience construct in comparison to other constructs. Specifically, it is possible to mention several pairs with extremely high HTMT values, such as KK ↔ CE with 0.977, EW ↔ CE with 0.969, and CL ↔ CE with 0.961, which means that there is quite high empirical similarity among the constructs in the context of hospitality digital marketing. Moreover, the study was conducted with 125 respondents based on purposive sampling method, and therefore the number of participants should be considered when applying the findings to a larger population of hotel guests. In addition, in the process of checking convergent validity, the indicator EW3 had an outer loading of 0.688, which is lower than the criterion of 0.70, and thus it was excluded from the research model. After removal, the e-WOM construct had four indicators that provided a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.829, rho_A of 0.837, Composite Reliability of 0.886, and an AVE of 0.661, which is sufficient to meet reliability and convergent validity requirements. Considering these limitations, the findings need to be interpreted within the context of the nature of the sample and the measurement model used in the study. Further studies can use a larger and more diverse pool of respondents along with a review of indicators in order to achieve better conceptual distinctiveness between constructs. Another recommendation is to include relevant variables like customer satisfaction in order to better understand the causes of loyalty.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to investigate the effects of affiliate credibility, content quality, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), and customer experience on hotel guest loyalty in Surabaya and Malang. Analysis performed through PLS-SEM using the sample of 125 respondents revealed that out of four examined variables, customer experience positively and significantly affects hotel guest loyalty and, thus, hypothesis H4 is supported. On the other hand, affiliate credibility, content quality, and e-WOM do not show any significant effects on hotel guest loyalty, which leads to rejection of H1, H2, and H3 hypotheses. Lack of significance means that there were no effects of these three variables on hotel guest loyalty directly; however, their importance should not be ignored because the significance of these three variables is higher in the pre-purchase stage when guests seek information and make first

DOI : 10.37531/ecotal.v7i2.4119

impressions while loyalty is connected to experiences that guests obtain from using hotel services. Taken together, all four variables explain considerable part of variance in hotel guest loyalty, while the rest is explained by external factors which are not included into this model. From a theoretical point of view, it provides the results that prove that in terms of hotel affiliate marketing, the effects of the affiliate credibility, content quality, and e-WOM on loyalty cannot be direct; therefore, further research needs to make a distinction between the pre-stay and post-stay stages. As far as practice is concerned, it is necessary for hotel managers to focus on improving the stay experience by means of employee skillfulness and responsiveness, facilities' comfort, and service consistency. While affiliate networks and content could be used as tools for drawing potential guests, it is vital for content to depict hotel services, meeting guest expectations with reality. Assessment of the effectiveness of the affiliate marketing strategies should not be made just by analyzing booking numbers, but also repeat visits and referrals after staying at the hotel.

There are limitations associated with the conducted study. The discriminant validity of the constructs used has not yet reached an optimal level in relation to customer experience. Thus, one should make conclusions regarding the impact of customer experience on loyalty with caution. Also, the sample of respondents used in the research was limited since it was selected through the purposive sampling technique, and one of the e-WOM indicators was excluded during the measurement model assessment. Future research is suggested to increase the sample size and diversify the sample, reassess measurement indicators in order to differentiate constructs, and explore satisfaction, trust, or brand image as mediating variables to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the formation of hotel guest loyalty.

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