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An Investigation of Factors Influencing Tourists' Loyalty to Revisit Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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ABSTRACT

Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital is a popular destination for both domestic and foreign tourists because of its rich cultural legacy, numerous natural and man-made attractions, recreational facilities, retail possibilities, and tourist amenities. This research investigates factors influencing tourist loyalty in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, examining factors influencing tourists' decisions and loyalty to Phnom Penh as a tourism destination reveals a high crime rate of 62.18% in 2018, with a 73.08% increase over the past of three years. Factors such as E-WOM, brand knowledge, and perceived risk contribute to this issue. Based on the literature, it has been determined that electronic word-of-mouth and destination brand knowledge are the independent variables, while destination brand knowledge is the dependent variable. This research uses a quantitative and correlational research methodology to gather data from 384 respondents using non-probability samplings. Further, the procedure of the statistical analytical tools is conducted using SPSS version 25 and the Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) version 23. As the statistical result, the study investigates the relationship between Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM), Destination Brand Knowledge, Perceived Risk, and Tourist Loyalty in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. It found a positive correlation between E-WOM and destination knowledge, influencing tourists' decisions and loyalty. However, it also revealed a negative association between perceived risk and loyalty, suggesting strategies for risk mitigation and trust enhancement. The findings can help policymakers and stakeholders foster sustainable tourism growth and enhance destination competitiveness in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Keywords: *Loyalty, Phnom Penh, Revisit, Tourist*

INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is a vital industry in today's society, with significant growth rates and a significant impact on the sustainable economic development of various nations. It emerges as a consequence of technological advancements, industrialization, urbanization, and population growth, leading to economic and social progress, increased disposable income, extended leisure time, and the proliferation of tourist facilities. Global interest in tourism continues to escalate, with the Asia-Pacific region experiencing substantial growth, particularly Southeast Asia.

In 2019, global international tourist arrivals reached 1,464.3 million, with Southeast Asia welcoming 3.8 million more international tourists compared to the previous year. Cambodia's private sector, particularly in accommodation, transportation, and tour operations, has thrived, with the Royal Government of Cambodia envisioning the country as a premier tourist destination. Tourism contributed 12.1% to Cambodia's GDP in 2019, supporting over 2.2 million jobs. Key attractions drawing tourists to Cambodia include its rich cultural heritage, stunning natural landscapes, and ongoing efforts to enhance tourism infrastructure.

Cambodia, with a population of 17.2 million, holds a significant position in Southeast Asia, renowned for its economic vitality. In 2019, the country welcomed 6,610,592 international tourists, marking a 6.6% increase from the previous year. Projections by the World Tourism Travel Council (2020) anticipate that by 2027, international tourist arrivals in Cambodia will reach 8,037,000, supporting 3,389,000 jobs, constituting 33 percent of total employment. This growth trajectory is expected to generate an expenditure approximately USD 7 billion.

The capital city Phnom Penh is a highly sought-after destination for both domestic and international tourists due to its rich cultural heritage, diverse natural and man-made attractions, recreational facilities, shopping opportunities, and tourist amenities. However, in 2018 the safety concerns persist, the average crime rate stands at 62.18%, with a 73.08% increase over the past three years, particularly in Phnom Penh, raising questions about factors influencing tourists' decisions to visit the destination and their loyalty to the destination. To challenge this, this research aims to examine the interplay between factors such as electronic word of mouth (E-WOM), brand knowledge, and perceived risk contributes to tourists' decisions and loyalty to visit Phnom Penh as a tourism destination.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism Industry in Cambodia

Cambodia's tourism sector has seen significant growth, with international tourism earnings reaching \$1.41 billion in 2022, and domestic travelers contributing \$650 million. This accounted for 3.6% of the country's GDP. In 2022, international tourists reached 2.28 million, a 1058.6% increase from the previous year. National tourism also saw a surge, with 13.93 million domestic tourists recorded. The tourism industry has become a key driver of job creation, providing employment opportunities for around 320,000 individuals. The Ministry of Tourism anticipates welcoming approximately 4.5 million international tourists and 16 million domestic tourists in 2023. Tourism Minister Thong Khon expects a surpassing of pre-COVID-19 tourist numbers by 2025. The Asian Development Bank and World Bank forecast an acceleration in Cambodia's growth trajectory due to ongoing tourism recovery. Chinese tourist arrivals have shown signs of recovery following the country's reopening.

Tourist Destinations and Plants in Phnom Penh

In addition to the previously mentioned attractions, Phnom Penh hosts several other significant tourist sites and landmarks. The Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, once a school transformed into a prison during the Khmer Rouge era, provides a poignant insight into Cambodia's tumultuous history. Likewise, the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek, situated on the outskirts of the city, stand as a poignant memorial to the victims of the Khmer Rouge regime's atrocities. Furthermore, the Independence Monument and the lively Riverside Promenade are favored destinations for sightseeing and leisurely walks.

Definitions of Factors Influencing Tourists' Loyalty to Revisit.

Destination loyalty involves tourists' commitment to continue patronizing or visiting a destination in the future, as well as recommending it to other potential travelers (Hurriyati, 2015). To ensure tourists remain loyal to destinations, it is imperative to offer excellent and dependable services that encourage repeat visits, even in the face of potential situational influences or marketing endeavors that may alter individuals' behavior (Rizal et al., 2019). Revisit Intention is a repetition of arrivals when tourists feel that all expectations have been realized and have a tendency to return (Handayani et al., 2022). Tourist loyalty holds critical importance for destination stakeholders within the tourism sector, influencing tourists' repeat visitation behaviors, positive word-of-mouth referrals, and overall destination image (Yan et al., 2018).

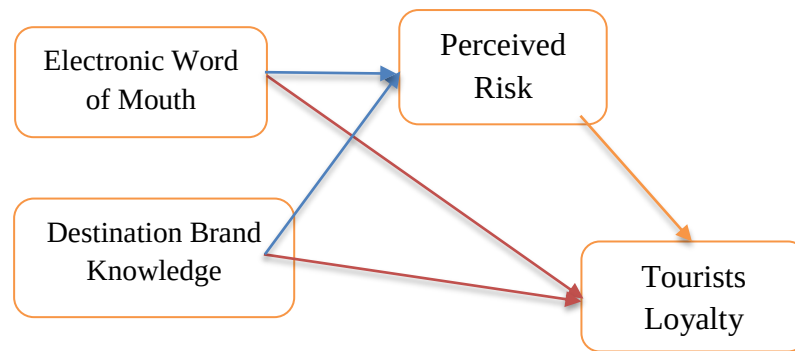


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
Source: Processed Data by Researcher

Hypothesis Development

Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) and Destination Brand Knowledge (DBK)

Referring to Rivai et al., (2022) e-WOM is a positive or negative comment made by future, present, or past customers about a product or company that is accessible to many people and institutions over the Internet. Additionally, this phenomenon plays a pivotal role in generating and distributing destination-related content, fostering engagement, and facilitating interaction among tourists and stakeholders (Hudson et al., 2016). He also highlighted that destination management organizations and tourism enterprises strategically employ E-WOM to cultivate relationships with tourists, promote brand advocacy, and enrich destination brand knowledge.

H₁: Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) has a positive impact on destination brand knowledge (DBK)

Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) and Perceived Risk (PR)

Praharjo (2016) demonstrated that Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) significantly influences consumers' perceptions of risk, particularly in the tourism industry. E-WOM, through digital platforms like social media, can mitigate perceived risk by providing information, reassurance, and social validation. E-WOM plays a critical role in reducing customers' perception of risk regarding their intended destinations. Consumers can minimize risk in online transactions by seeking credible information about the product to be purchased (Z. Zhang & Hou, 2017). Further, consumers sharing negative experiences or warnings online contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the risks involved, enabling others to make more informed decisions. In this regard, travelers depend more profoundly on E-WOM to decrease perceived risk and doubt, thereby impacting their decisions and intentions regarding booking (Hussain et al., 2017; Tsao et al., 2015).

H₂: Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) has a positive impact on perceived risk (PR)

Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) and Tourist Loyalty (TL)

As travelers share experiences, tips, and recommendations on digital platforms, they establish connections with like-minded individuals and become part of a virtual travel community, thereby enhancing loyalty and advocacy. Regarding online communication, young people exhibit a willingness to engage in the E-WOM context, favoring reading and writing comments and evaluations on sites, thus confirming the substantial online influence of this segment (Yan et al., 2018). In additional value, E-WOM plays a pivotal role in shaping tourists' perceptions of destinations by influencing their image and reputation (Kanwel et al., 2019; Xiang et al., 2017). For Hu & Kim (2018) E-WOM has increasingly influenced consumer behavior, especially among Generation Y.

H₃: Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) has a positive impact on tourist loyalty (TL)

Destination Brand Knowledge (DBK) and Perceived Risk (PR)

Destination Brand Knowledge (DBK) refers to tourists' comprehension and familiarity with a destination's brand, encompassing key dimensions such as brand awareness, brand image, and brand experiences, which collectively influence tourists' perceptions of perceived risk across various sectors, notably in the tourism industry. Referring to Buhalis & Foerste (2015) emphasized that the destination brand knowledge enhances trust and credibility among tourists because integrated marketing communication strategies play a pivotal role in shaping brand perceptions and reducing perceived risk (Litvin et al., 2018). Destination marketers can enhance brand awareness and image by using consistent messaging across various channels, such as advertising, social media, and public relations. Aligning communication with tourists' preferences can reduce perceived risk and build trust. Negative brand image can discourage tourists, while positive reviews and recommendations can validate perceived risk (Gretzel, Werthner, et al., 2015). Further, Choi et al., (2023) found that the tourists equipped with comprehensive destination brand experiences tend to perceive lower levels of risk when contemplating travel to a destination. Previous research indicates that memorable tourism experiences correlate with tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty (Azis et al., 2020).

H₄: Destination brand knowledge (DBK) has a positive impact on perceived risk (PR)

Destination Brand Knowledge (DBK) and Tourist Loyalty (TL)

Positive brand associations such as safety, authenticity, and uniqueness cultivate emotional bonds with the destination, nurturing long-term loyalty. A favorable brand image influences tourists' perceptions of value and satisfaction, fostering repeated visitation and advocacy (Su et al., 2017; H. Zhang et al., 2014). Not far from the above concepts, Wisker et al., (2023) highlighted that consumers are inclined to favor a brand aligned with their self-perceived identities. The congruence between consumers' self-images and the functional aspects they associate with a brand contributes to bolstering destination brand loyalty.

H₅: Destination brand knowledge (DBK) has a positive impact on tourist loyalty (TL)

Perceived Risk (PR) and Tourist Loyalty (TL)

Psychological risk, as defined by McLeay et al., (2018), encompasses feelings of anxiety or discomfort stemming from anticipated post-behavioral emotions like worry and tension, which can decrease tourist loyalty toward a destination. High crime rates, political instability, or natural disasters can foster negative safety perceptions, resulting in decreased TL and potential reputational harm. Unexpectedly perceived risk can elevate the likelihood of negative evaluations and decrease loyalty toward the destination (Sohn et al., 2016). Moreover, managing perceived risks effectively can foster a positive feedback loop wherein satisfied and loyal tourists advocate for the destination or brand (Han et al., 2018).

Simultaneously, in Cambodia, perceived risk may negatively influence loyalty across various sectors, including the tourism industry. Addressing risk perceptions and implementing strategies to mitigate risk factors are critical for destination stakeholders to cultivate long-term loyalty and satisfaction among visitors. Consequently, the following hypothesis is posited:

H₆: Perceived risk (PR) has a negative impact on tourist loyalty (TL)

Conceptual Framework

Bases on the literature, the electronic word of mouth and the destination brand knowledge have been considered as the independent variable, while the destination brand knowledge has been examined as dependent variable. Further, the perceived risk has been taken as mediating variables, and tourists' loyalty has been regarded as dependent variable. In the case, the following figure is showed below:

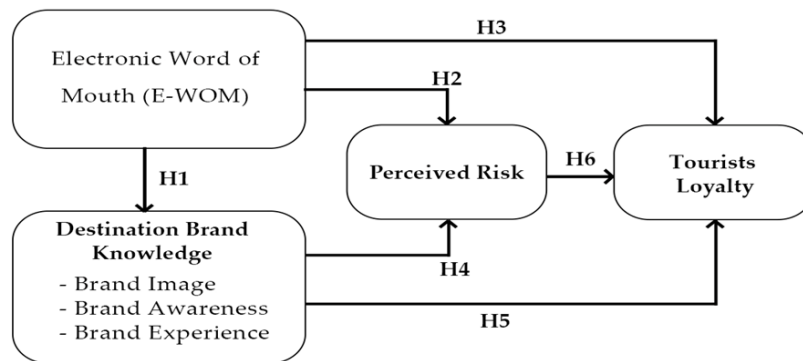


Figure 2. Hypothesis Development
Source: Processed Data by Researcher

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling and Sample Frame

The current study analyzes the factors influence on the tourists' revisit in Phnom Penh, Cambodia by using 384 samples (Cochran formula for unknown population) selected from non-probability sampling to target tourists aged under 20 or older who have visited Phnom Penh, Cambodia for at least three months. Non-probability sampling method is used when the population size is unknown and indivisible, and techniques like Convenience, purposive and snowball sampling were employed. Convenience sampling is based on the researcher's accessibility and involves approaching international tourists at various locations. Purposive sampling is chosen to provide the most relevant information for the study, and snowball sampling is used to select a sample based on referrals within a network. Snowball sampling was used to distribute questionnaire surveys to individuals who have visited Phnom Penh, Cambodia, with referrals from acquaintances to expand the respondent pool.

Research Instrument

This study collected primary data from domestic and foreign tourists through direct personal interviews and a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire included questions about respondents' profiles, such as gender, age, occupation, income, and nationality. The hypothesis development aimed to

determine the effects of destination advertisement (E-WOM) on brand knowledge such as brand image, experience, and awareness. The study also sought to understand the impact of advertisement groups and destination brands on tourist loyalty. The questionnaire was pre-tested and modified before finalization. Secondary sources were collected in a structured format. The research instruments used included normal scales, such as age, gender, occupation, education, and monthly income, and a Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Undecided; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree) to measure for hypothesis development.

Data Analysis

Factor analysis is a crucial tool for examining the structure of variables in a study (Anderson et al., 2019). In this research, an exploratory approach was used to identify discrepancies and refine the dataset, ensuring reliable outcomes. A reliability test was conducted to assess the dependability of the research variables. A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was administered to assess the sample's adequacy for factor analysis. As Anderson et al., (2019) recommended specifications for factor analysis and reliability tests include a factor loading score of 0.6 or higher, a cumulative percentage of variance explained exceeding 60%, eigenvalues exceeding 1, inter-total correlation values of 0.5 or higher, and a Cronbach alpha (α) value greater than or equal to 0.6.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Result

Personal Profiles

The data shows that 12.12% of males and 9.13% of females are over 50, while 27.27% of males and 14.16% of females are in the 40-49 age bracket. The majority of respondents have Bachelor's degrees, with 23.96% having Master's degrees. The majority of respondents are businessmen, government officers, and employed in private organizations. The geographic diversity of the respondents is significant, with the largest proportion hailing from ASEAN at 35.94%. European respondents constitute 28.91%, while Chinese respondents accounted for 10.42%.

Table 1. Personal Profiles

Demographic	Category (384)	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	165	43.0
	Female	219	57.0
	Total	384	100.0
Ages	Under 20	5	1.3
	20-29	136	35.4
	30-39	127	33.1
	40-49	76	19.8
	Over 50	40	10.4
	Total	384	100.0
Education	High School	42	10.9
	Bachelor	236	61.5
	Master	93	24.2
	Doctoral	13	3.4
	Total	384	100.0
Occupation	Student	15	3.9
	Government officer	74	19.3
	Private Org	49	12.8
	NGOs	28	7.3
	Businessman	170	44.3
	Farmer	4	1.0
	Retirement Or Pension	29	7.6
	Wife house	8	2.1
	other	7	1.8
	Total	384	100.0
Nationality	Asean	146	38.0
	Asian	25	6.5
	Chinese	39	10.2
	Korea	10	2.6
	USA	23	6.0
	Japanese	3	.8
	Australia	21	5.5
	New Zealand	8	2.1
	European	109	28.4
	Total	384	100.0

Source: Processed Data by Researcher

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Based on the result of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) showed that the model fit assessment values: $\chi^2/df = 1.869 < 2$, $GFI = 0.932 > 0.90$, $AGFI = 0.90 \geq 0.90$, $CFI = 0.968 > 0.95$, $NFI = 0.933 > 0.90$, and $RMSEA = 0.048 < 0.05$ (David a. Kenny, 2020).

Table 2. Result of CFA

GOF Index	GOF	Index
CMIN/DF (χ^2/df)	1.869 < 5	Good fit
RMSEA	0.048 < 0.10	Good fit
GFI	0.932 > 0.90	Good fit
AGFI	0.90 $\geq$ 0.90	Acceptable fit
NFI	0.933 > 0.90	Acceptable fit
CFI	0.968 > 0.95	Good fit

Source: Processed Data by Researcher

Factor Loading

Further, variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). These findings indicate the achievement of construct reliability, validity, and a favorable model fit.

Table 3. The Results of Validity (AVE) and Reliability (CR) in CFA

Constructs	Items	Standardize loading >0.70	t-value (>1.96)	AVE (>0.50)	CR (>0.70)
Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM)	EW9	0.686***	13.442	0.588	0.809
	EW10	0.877***	A		
	EW11	0.724***	14.364		
Destination Brand Knowledge	BA1	0.667***	10.031	0.652	0.785
	BA2	0.927***	A		
	BI6	0.675***	12.348		
	BI12	0.726***	12.825	0.504	0.802
	BI13	0.676***	11.884		
	BI15	0.76***	A		
	BE10	0.759***	15.021	0.606	0.822
	BE11	0.821***	A		
	BE12	0.754***	14.975		
Perceive Risk	PR2	0.667***	14.713	0.582	0.959
	PR3	0.78***	18.352		
	PR4	0.709***	15.877		
	PR5	0.885***	A		
	PR6	0.771***	18.26		
	PR7	0.747***	17.443		
Tourist Loyalty	TL4	0.710***	14.793	0.641	0.842
	TL5	0.822***	17.306		
	TL6	0.862***	A		

Source: Processed Data by Researcher

A = parameter regression weight was fixed at 1.000 and significant level of p-value < 0.05 ***P < 0.001.

Structural Equation Model

Table 4. The Result of SEM

H	IV	Path	DV	S.E. (β)	C.R. (t-value)	P-Value	Interpretation
H1	E-WOM	→	DBK	0.512	7.575	***	Accepted
H2	E-WOM	→	PR	0.303	4.545	***	Accepted
H3	E-WOM	→	TL	-0.025	-0.402	0.687	Rejected
H4	DBK	→	TL	0.319	4.509	***	Accepted
H5	DBK	→	TL	0.808	9.227	***	Accepted
H6	PR	→	TL	-0.172	-2.84	0.005	Accepted*

Source: Processed Data by Researcher

After conducting structural equation modeling (SEM) using AMOS software, the results depicted in Figure 5-8 and Table 5-11 revealed the following findings:

H₁: There is a positive relationship between Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) and destination brand knowledge. The SEM analysis indicated a standardized coefficient of 51% for the relationship. E-WOM significantly influenced destination knowledge, with a t-value of 7.575, and p-value < 0.01. Thus, H₁ is accepted.

H₂: There is a positive relationship between E-WOM and perceived risk. A standardized coefficient of 0.303 in the SEM data indicated that 30% of the association between perceived risk and e-womb is explained. Furthermore, a t-value of 4.545 and a p-value < 0.001 indicated that H₂ is accepted.

H₃: There is a positive relationship between E-WOM and tourist loyalty. A standardized coefficient found that $\beta = -0.025$, t-value = -0.402 (< 1.96) and p-value > 0.05. It indicates that the tourist loyalty has been insignificantly influenced by E-WOM. In other words, H₃ is rejected.

H₄: There is a positive relationship between destination brand knowledge and perceived risk. The SEM findings $\beta = 0.319$, t-value > 1.96) and p-value < 0.001, has indicated the relationship between Destination Brand Knowledge and Perceived Risk. Thus, H₄ is accepted.

H₅: There is a positive relationship between destination brand knowledge and tourist loyalty. The SEM analysis showed that $\beta = 0.808$, (t-value > 1.96) and

p-value < 0.001, has indicated the relationship between Destination Brand Knowledge and Tourists Loyalty. Hence, H₅ is accepted.

H₆: There is a negative relationship between perceived risk and tourist loyalty. The SEM results showed that $\beta = -0.172$, t-value = -2.84 (> 1.96) and p-value < 0.01. In the case, it indicates that there is a negative relationship between perceived risk and tourist loyalty. Accordingly, H₆ is accepted. In other words, perceived risk does not improve the prediction of tourist loyalty*.

Research Discussion

The study found a positive correlation between Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM) and Destination Knowledge, supporting hypothesis H₁. E-WOM enhances understanding of destinations, as evidenced by prior studies (Anubha & Shome, 2021; Aprilia & Kusumawati, 2021; Xiang et al., 2017). For Cambodia's attractions, enhancing tourists' experiences and fostering a sense of connection, potentially leading to increased loyalty. This deeper understanding enhances tourists' experiences.

The study supports the hypothesis that exposure to E-WOM mitigates perceived risks associated with traveling to Cambodia, aligning with prior research (Hu & Kim, 2018; Hussain et al., 2017; Lim, 2017). For the real destination, positive online reviews about safety measures and infrastructure in Cambodia enhance tourists' perception of safety, reducing risk perception and increasing satisfaction and likelihood of future visits.

The study refutes the hypothesis H₃, suggesting a positive relationship between E-WOM and tourist loyalty, indicating that online reviews and social media recommendations do not singularly influence loyalty as evidenced by previous studies (Buhalis et al., 2020; Hu & Kim, 2018; Kanwel et al., 2019). It revealed that online reviews and recommendations do not solely influence loyalty. Personal experiences and connections with the destination are crucial for fostering lasting loyalty, beyond the influence of online reviews and recommendations.

The study confirms that H₄: Destination Brand Knowledge inversely impacts perceived risk in tourists. As tourists become familiar with a destination's brand, their perception of associated risks decreases. a finding consistent with previous research in tourism (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015; Choi et al., 2023; Gretzel, Sigala, et al., 2015). This enhances confidence in visiting a destination, contributes to satisfaction, and increases the likelihood of recommending it.

The study supports hypothesis H₅, indicating that destination brand knowledge positively influences tourist loyalty. in line with various studies in the tourism sector (Azis et al., 2020; Su et al., 2017; Wisker et al., 2023). This knowledge leads to increased familiarity with Cambodia's brand, resulting in

increased recommendations and repeat visits. This loyalty also boosts Cambodia's reputation as a tourist destination.

Hypothesis H_6 shows a negative correlation between perceived risk and tourists' loyalty to Cambodia, echoing previous research findings (Han et al., 2018; McLeay et al., 2018; Sohn et al., 2016). Thus, it suggested that increased risks may deter tourists from recommending the destination. This highlights the need for effective risk management strategies and destination branding to maintain loyalty.

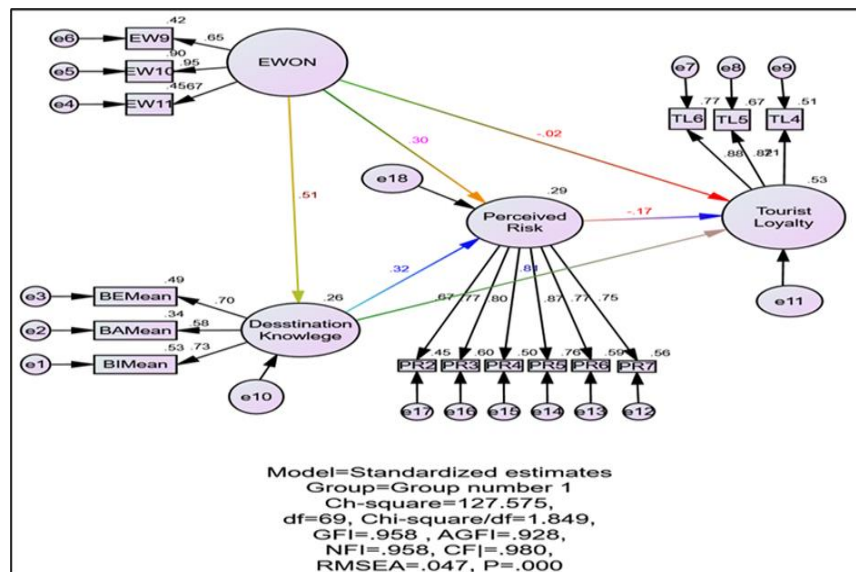


Figure 3. Structure Equation Model
 Source: Processed Data by Researcher

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to explore the correlation between Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM), Destination Brand Knowledge, Perceived Risk, and Tourists Loyalty in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The study used SPSS and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyze data from 384 samples. The research focused on identifying tourist resources, focusing on E-WOM, destination brand knowledge, and perceived risk as key predictors. The study found a positive correlation between E-WOM and destination knowledge, which in turn influenced tourists' decisions and loyalty. The study also examined the relationship between perceived risk and tourist loyalty, finding a negative association, prompting strategies for risk mitigation and trust enhancement. The study indirectly contributed to understanding the challenges and opportunities in tourism development in Phnom Penh by highlighting factors influencing tourists' decisions and loyalty. Strategies were presented to mitigate perceived risks, improve safety perceptions, and cultivate trust among tourists to foster loyalty.

However, the study did not extensively explore the influence of destination image and media on tourists' loyalty.

LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study provides valuable insights for policymakers, destination managers, and stakeholders in Cambodia, guiding them in developing strategies for sustainable tourism growth, destination competitiveness, and tourist loyalty. The study on electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) and destination brand knowledge in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, has limitations. It focuses on a narrow range of factors influencing tourism, such as economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects. The research does not explore moderating factors or contextual nuances, lacks an exhaustive analysis of tourism development issues, and does not extensively explore destination image and media's impact on tourists' loyalty. The findings are specific to Phnom Penh, requiring further research.

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