



## Research Article/Araştırma Makalesi

### The Effect of Electronic Word-of-Mouth Marketing (e-WOMM) on Consumers' Hotel Preferences

#### Elektronik Ağızdan Ağıza Pazarlamanın (e-WOMM) Tüketicilerin Otel Tercihleri Üzerindeki Etkisi

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#### Abstract

Today, with the development of information and communication technologies, the usage area of online social networking sites has expanded, and consumers are offered unlimited sharing and information opportunities. Consumers can access the ease of sharing their opinions, thoughts and experiences through various channels on the internet. Especially in the tourism sector, where experiences are important, the intangibility of the products offered and the lack of the opportunity to try before purchasing create uncertainty for consumers. Therefore, the sharing and comments of those who experience the services constitute an important data source for consumers who want to make hotel choices. In this context, it is useful to examine the effects of e-WOMM (e-word of mouth marketing), which refers to the sharing of experiences and opinions in an online social network environment, on consumer decisions and preferences. Within the scope of the research, in order to measure the effect of e-WOMM on consumers' hotel preferences, 415 valid questionnaires were obtained through an online questionnaire directed to participants aged 18 and over who were determined by judgmental/purposive sampling method and who had previously participated in tourism activities. In addition to descriptive statistics, reliability, t-test, ANOVA and regression analyses were conducted on the data obtained. The results of the study revealed that e-WOMM influences consumers' hotel preferences and that positive/negative online reviews, as well as the reliability of reviews, the number of reviews, and the quality of reviews have a high impact on consumers' hotel preferences.

**Jel Codes:** M31, M310, Z330

**Keywords:** Electronic Word of Mouth Marketing, Consumer Preferences, Hotel Establishments, Tourism

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## Öz

Günümüzde bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerinin gelişmesiyle çevrimiçi sosyal ağ sitelerinin kullanım alanını genişletmiş ve tüketicilere sınırsız paylaşım ve bilgi edinme imkânı sunulmuştur. Tüketiciler internet ortamında çeşitli kanallar aracılığıyla görüş ve deneyimlerini paylaşma kolaylığına erişebilmektedir. Özellikle, deneyimlerin önemli olduğu turizm sektöründe sunulan ürünlerin soyut olması ve satın almadan önce deneme imkanının bulunmaması tüketiciler açısından bir belirsizlik yaratmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, hizmetleri deneyimleyenlerin paylaşım ve yorumları otel tercihi yapmak isteyen tüketiciler için önemli bir veri kaynağını oluşturmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, deneyim ve görüşlerin çevrimiçi sosyal ağ ortamında paylaşımını ifade eden elektronik ağızdan ağıza pazarlamanın e-WOMM (e-word of mouth marketing) tüketici karar ve tercihlerindeki etkilerinin incelenmesinde fayda vardır. Bu araştırmada amaç, elektronik ağızdan ağıza pazarlamanın (e-WOMM) tüketicilerin otel tercihlerini etkileyip etkilemediğini tespit etmektir. Araştırma kapsamında, e-WOMM' un tüketicilerin otel tercihine etkisini ölçmek amacıyla, yargısal/amaçlı örnekleme yöntemiyle belirlenen ve daha öncesinde turizm faaliyetlerine katılan 18 yaş ve üstü katılımcılara yöneltilen çevrimiçi anket aracılığıyla 415 geçerli anket elde edilmiştir. Elde edilen veriler üzerinde tanımlayıcı istatistiklerin yanı sıra, güvenilirlik, t-testi, ANOVA ve regresyon analizleri yapılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçlarında, e-WOMM' un tüketicilerin otel tercihini etkilediği ve olumlu/olumsuz çevrimiçi yorumlar ile birlikte yorumların güvenilirliği, yorum sayısı, yorumların kalitesinin de yüksek ölçüde tüketicilerin otel tercihlerini etkilediği ortaya çıkmıştır.

**Jel Kodları:** M31, M310, Z330

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Elektronik Ağızdan Ağıza Pazarlama, Tüketici Tercihleri, Otel İşletmeleri, Turizm



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## 1. Introduction

Online social networking sites, which have become widespread with the development of information and communication technologies, offer consumers many unlimited sharing and information opportunities (Aslan, 2020; Yılmaz & Abdulmanafov, 2020). With the widespread use of the Internet and the increase in social networking, consumers can communicate with each other online and share their experiences and comments about products (Park & Lee, 2009). Especially in the tourism sector, where experiences are important, the intangibility of the products offered and the lack of the opportunity to try before buying create uncertainty for consumers (Zhang et al., 2010: 695). Because the tourism sector is a service sector compared to other sectors, and due to the structure of the service sector, it has a number of unique characteristics due to variables such as consumption as soon as it is produced, non-storage, and intangibility (Sayım & Aydın, 2015: 246-248). Due to these characteristics, the benefit provided is mostly based on experience. In this case, consumers have the opportunity to evaluate the quality, value and quality of the service offered in tourism enterprises only after experiencing the service (Sayım & Aydın, 2015: 246-248). For this reason, the recommendations and comments of those who have experienced the services offered by hotel businesses constitute an important source of data for other consumers who want to make hotel choices. In this sense, it is important to ensure customer satisfaction in hotel businesses. Because a satisfied customer can influence potential customers, even a customer on the other side of the world, through recommendation (Kalpaklıoğlu, 2016: 88). However, the presence of an ever-increasing number of hotel establishments in the dynamic market not only makes it difficult for consumers to choose, but also makes it difficult for businesses to survive in an intensely competitive environment. Therefore, recommendation has an important place in marketing activities both in terms of facilitating consumers' preferences and ensuring that businesses can be recognized among their competitors (Kalpaklıoğlu, 2016; Kitcharoen, 2019; Viglia et al., 2016; Ye, Law & Gu, 2009; Zhang et al., 2010). Word-of-mouth marketing, which is a form of marketing based on recommendation, has emerged as electronic word-of-mouth marketing (e-WOMM) in the digital environment with the development of information technologies (Viglia et al., 2016: 2036). Electronic word-of-mouth marketing (e-WOMM) refers to the sharing of consumers' opinions, thoughts, and experiences by transmitting information to other users through various channels on the internet (Akdeniz & Özbölük, 2019: 3105). In the information age, individuals' opinions about products and businesses have become easily accessible on the internet, which has increased the impact and distribution of e-WOMM (Ye, Law & Gu, 2009: 180). Moreover, with electronic word-of-mouth, consumers can access more information about the opinions and experiences of others on the internet than with word-of-mouth marketing during the research phase before choosing a product (Kitcharoen, 2019: 64). Because with online social networking channels, consumers who can access a wide range of users can access more information about products and businesses (Çakır et al., 2017: 125). This situation shortens the time for consumers to search for information in pre-purchase research, provides the convenience of comparing products without the need to change time limit and location, and can be effective in consumers' determination of alternatives and decision-making stages (Akdeniz & Özbölük, 2019; Kalpaklıoğlu, 2016; Obalıoğlu, 2017).



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This study investigates the impact of electronic word-of-mouth marketing on consumers' hotel preferences in the tourism sector. However, unlike word-of-mouth marketing, in e-WOMM, shared experiences and recommendations are usually shared by unknown individuals through an online text-based format (Park & Lee, 2009). Therefore, it is useful to look at the impact of positive and negative online reviews on consumers' hotel preferences, as well as the impact of the quality, quantity and reliability of reviews on consumers' hotel preferences. In this context, it is thought that the research will contribute to the literature in terms of better understanding of electronic word-of-mouth marketing, which is thought to have an impact on consumers' hotel preferences, in hotel businesses in particular and in service businesses and other businesses in general. In addition, based on these effects, appropriate suggestions have been made for hotel business managers. In this respect, the research provides important practical contributions.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

Under this heading, electronic word-of-mouth marketing (e-WOWW), consumer purchase decision process and the importance of the subject with the related literature studies have been put forward respectively and the study has gained conceptual integrity.

### 2.1. Electronic Word-of-Mouth Marketing (e-WOWW)

With the diversification of communication channels, businesses have the opportunity to meet with consumers through many different channels. In this respect, reaching the target audience through accurate and effective communication channels, getting to know consumers and staying alive in their memories give businesses an important competitive advantage (Çalık et al., 2013; Tolon & Zengin, 2016; Verma & Yadav, 2021). Developments in communication technologies have created the concept of marketing communication in terms of creating significant effects on marketing activities that connect businesses with the outside World (Çalık et al., 2013: 138).

Marketing communication is defined as the persuasive communication process carried out by businesses using various marketing communication tools in order to directly or indirectly introduce products to customers, provide information about their products, persuade and remind them (Tolon & Zengin, 2016: 8).

Word-of-mouth marketing, which is one of the marketing communication tools and the starting point of e-WOMM, which is discussed within the scope of this study, and which is seen as an old communication channel (Arndt, 1967: 291), is still used as one of the marketing communication tools that are still strong in terms of impact today (Yozgat & Deniz, 2011: 46). Word-of-mouth marketing refers to consumers sharing their opinions about their personal experiences and evaluations of a business or product with each other (Zhang et al., 2010: 695). In other words, it is defined as the dissemination of a consumer's experience by sharing it with his or her immediate environment. In particular, word of mouth from peers is generally recognized as more reliable and effective than advertising (Viglia et al., 2016: 2036).

With the transition of communication platforms from physical to digital spaces, the impact and distribution of word-of-mouth marketing has evolved further and has been referred to in



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the literature as electronic word-of-mouth marketing. Electronic word-of-mouth marketing refers to the sharing of comments and experiences on online social networks (Akdeniz & Özbölük, 2019: 3105). Electronic word-of-mouth marketing activities allow consumers to communicate with each other without time and space limitations through internet technologies and to share their experiences about products and to access unlimited information (Akdeniz & Özbölük, 2019; Özbay, 2013; Park & Lee, 2009). For businesses, e-WOMM activities are important in terms of maintaining contact with existing customers with less cost, as well as providing the opportunity to reach potential new customers (Çalık et al., 2013; Tolon & Zengin, 2016; Verma & Yadav, 2021; Yorgancı, 2020).

## 2.2. Consumer Purchasing Decision Process

In order to understand the purchase decision process, it is first necessary to understand consumer behavior. In this context, consumer behavior is defined as the activities related to the selection, purchase, use or disposal of products, ideas or experiences by individuals or organizations to satisfy their wants and needs, and the decision processes that determine these activities (Odabaşı, 2012: 4). According to Ling et al. (2015: 6), consumer behavior is defined as a process that includes activities related to how consumers behave in pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase situations related to products.

The consumer purchase decision process takes place in five stages in the marketing literature. The process starts with the realization of the need, the consumer collects information about the products that will meet their needs, determines the alternatives, evaluates the alternatives, decides whether to buy or not, and ends with satisfaction or dissatisfaction after the purchase. (Odabaşı, 2012: 12; Yıldırım, 2016: 216). On the other hand, there are a number of factors that affect the decision process and play a role in the emergence of consumer behavior. Odabaşı (1988: 81) identifies these factors as social (culture, family, roles and statuses, social class, counseling group), psychological (personality, beliefs and attitudes, learning, perception, motivation), economic and demographic factors. Businesses that desire their products and brands to be preferred by consumers should be able to analyze the consumer purchasing decision process well at this point.

When considered in terms of tourism, comments made on the internet constitute a very important source of information for those who plan to travel, the tourism destination, hotels and tourism services they intend to prefer during the research phase (Göral, 2015; Kalpaklıoğlu, 2016; Kutlu & Ayyıldız, 2017). In the process that starts with the emergence of various wants and needs of consumers such as accommodation, food and beverage, entertainment, desire to see new places, and while choosing a destination, tour or hotel to meet these needs, consumers collect information in order to determine the best alternatives and may turn to the destination or hotel establishments that they think will benefit them among the alternatives (Göral, 2015: 3). However, consumers who are aware that they do not have the opportunity to experience the services offered by hotels before purchasing them, feel the need to research and learn more about it (Kutlu & Ayyıldız, 2017: 54). The information acquired helps consumers in the purchase decision process in many ways (Yıldırım, 2016: 225). Because the cost incurred and the time spent are too valuable for consumers to waste. At this



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point, the posts, opinions, and evaluations of those who have experienced services on online social networking platforms constitute an important source of data, especially for consumers who want to make hotel choices. Moreover, it is also supported in the literature that electronic word-of-mouth marketing (e-WOMM), which provides the opportunity to obtain more information as opposed to word-of-mouth communication, affects consumer preferences.

### 2.3. Literature Review on Electronic Word-of-Mouth Marketing

Electronic word-of-mouth marketing (e-WOMM) has been addressed in many different academic studies in tourism and marketing literature, and as a common outcome of these studies, it has been observed that e-WOMM has persuasive and significant effects on consumer preferences. For example, Kalpaklıoğlu (2016), who examined the impact of online reviews on consumers' tourism product preferences, found that when consumers are dissatisfied with a touristic product (hotel, destination, tour), they share it in online social networking environments and that e-WOMM has a significant effect on consumers' tourism product preference. Kitcharoen (2019) also found that e-WOMM significantly influenced consumers' decisions to make hotel reservations and that consumers perceived electronic word-of-mouth as an effective and secure source of information transfer.

Obalıoğlu (2017) conducted a study in Muğla and found that 94.8% of the participants (94.8%) paid attention to get someone's opinion when choosing a hotel and the most effective source of information affecting hotel preferences was social media tools (45.7%). In addition, it is among the results of the research that consumers (56.6%) who are dissatisfied with the hotel they stayed at share this situation on websites and forums. Çakır et al. (2017) found that positive consumer opinions shared on hotel booking websites positively affect consumers' purchase decisions. In addition, hotel managers emphasized the necessity of closely following the reservation websites and taking into account the comments and evaluations made about the business. Similarly, Orakçı & Eren (2021), emphasizing the importance of electronic word-of-mouth marketing for hotel businesses, found that managers carefully follow electronic word-of-mouth communication processes and that consumer reviews affect hotel occupancy and room rates in their interviews with five-star hotel managers operating in Manavgat, Antalya. The authors also found that negative online reviews have a significant impact on hotel sales. Similar findings are also seen in the study conducted by Ye, Law & Gu (2009). In their study of consumer reviews and ratings on a major travel website in China, they found that electronic word-of-mouth marketing has a direct impact on hotel bookings and that positive online reviews significantly increase the number of hotel bookings. Therefore, considering the positive impact of e-WOMM on hotels' business performance and room sales, hotel managers should take online consumer comments and reviews about their hotels, especially those posted on third-party websites, seriously. Similarly, Kitapçı et al. (2012) found that customer opinions have an impact on the consumer purchase decision process. The research indicates that potential customers who want to plan a vacation want to learn the reviews about the hotel from customers who have experienced hotel services before choosing a hotel and make their hotel choices in the light of this information. On the other hand, Park & Lee (2009)



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revealed in their research that negative online reviews are more influential on consumers' purchase intention than positive reviews.

In another study on electronic word-of-mouth marketing, Sparks & Browning (2011) found that consumers tend to pay more attention to negative online reviews and that negative online reviews are more influential in hotel preferences, as this triggers consumers' cautious attitude. Similarly, Akdeniz & Özbölük (2019) found that online reviews have an impact on consumer purchasing decisions. In another study, Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan (2018) examined the impact of electronic word-of-mouth communication (e-WOMM) on the hospitality and tourism industry and suggested that e-WOMM has significant impacts on the hospitality and tourism industry and will continue to play an important role in hospitality marketing for the foreseeable future. Göral (2015) also found in his study that consumers, who are influenced by the ratings and opinions shared by hotel customers on the TripAdvisor website, an international platform, of hotel businesses operating in Konya province, make the decision to purchase or not to purchase. Özbay (2013), in his thesis study examining the effects of virtual consumer reviews on the use of information in purchasing, found that consumers tend to read virtual consumer reviews primarily in order to be comfortable during accommodation and to be sure of their decisions, to avoid economic loss, and to reduce risk.

Yorgancı (2020), who investigated the effect of e-WOMM on consumers' purchase intentions in the food and beverage sector, which is one of the service sectors, concluded that e-WOMM has a significant and positive effect on purchase intention in his research conducted with domestic and foreign tourists in Cappadocia destination. On the other hand, there are studies suggesting that not only positive and negative online comments made by consumers, but also the quality, number, and reliability of comments significantly affect consumer purchasing behavior. For example, Moqadamsalimi (2019), in a study conducted with undergraduate students, found that the quality, reliability and number of comments and positive online comments positively affect consumers' purchase decision. Similarly, Park et al. (2007) found that especially the quality of online reviews and the high number of reviews have significant effects on consumers' purchase intention. Zhang et al. (2010) found that the number of online positive and negative consumer reviews, as well as the number of reviews about the food, environment and service quality of restaurants significantly affect the popularity of restaurant businesses.

In the light of the studies, the importance of e-WOMM in the hospitality industry, the intangible nature of the products offered and the lack of pre-purchase trial opportunity and the risk that consumers take, they search for information and use e-WOMM to make the right decision among the alternatives to be chosen before making a hotel choice. From this point of view, e-WOMM is beneficial for hotel businesses both to maintain their existence under intense competition and to attract potential customers in the target audience. Considering the theoretical background and studies on the subject, it is an opinion that 5 sub-dimensions of e-WOMM (online reviews) can affect consumers' hotel preferences. In this context, the following hypotheses were established and the symbolic model of the research is shown in Figure 1.

**Hypothesis 1 (H<sub>1</sub>):** Online reviews of a hotel business affect consumers' hotel preferences.

**H<sub>1a</sub>**: Positive online reviews positively affect consumers' hotel preferences.

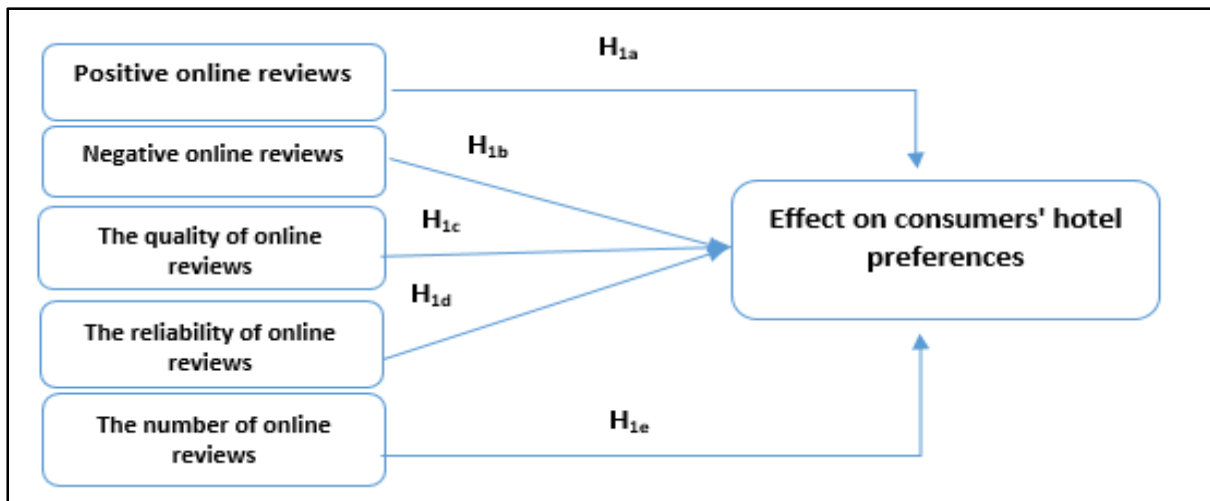
**H<sub>1b</sub>**: Negative online reviews of the hotel business negatively affect consumers' hotel preferences.

**H<sub>1c</sub>**: The quality of online reviews about the hotel business affects consumers' hotel preferences.

**H<sub>1d</sub>**: The reliability of online reviews about the hotel business affects consumers' hotel preferences.

**H<sub>1e</sub>**: The number of online reviews about the hotel business affects consumers' hotel preferences.

**Figure 1: Symbolic Model of the Study**



Another aim of the research is to determine whether e-WOMM differentiates consumers' hotel preferences according to some demographic variables of the participants in the research. For this purpose, the answer to the following research question (RQ1.) is sought in this study.

**Research question (RQ1.)** Does e-WOMM significantly differentiate consumers' hotel choice according to demographic variables (gender, marital status, age, education level, income)?

Finally, the following research questions are also sought to be answered in order to reveal the attitudes of the participants towards receiving recommendations.

**Research question (RQ2.)** How much time do the respondents spend on social networking websites daily?

**Research question (RQ3.)** Which social media tools are the most used by the respondents?

**Research question (RQ4.)** Do most of the respondents get recommendations from others before choosing a hotel?

**Research question (RQ5.)** Do most of the respondents consider themselves as loyal customers to hotels?





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**Research question (RQ6.)** Do most of the participants give up on choosing a hotel because of the comments on the web pages?

**Research question (RQ7.)** Do most of the participants recommend a hotel they are satisfied with to others over the internet?

**Research question (RQ8.)** Do most of the respondents get the opinion of anyone online before choosing a hotel?

**Research question (RQ9.)** Do most of the participants attach importance to the experiences of the people from whom they get information about the hotel regarding goods and services?

**Research question (RQ10.)** Do most of the participants share their dissatisfaction with their preferred hotel on web pages/forums?

**Research question (RQ11.)** What are the opinions of the participants about giving recommendations to each other over the internet?

### 3. Methodology

This descriptive study aims to determine the impact of electronic word-of-mouth marketing (e-WOMM) on consumers' hotel preferences. The research population consists of participants who have participated in tourism activities at least once before. The sample of the research consists of participants over the age of 18 who have previously participated in tourism activities. In this study, the sample size of 384 was considered as the lower limit in order to reach the population size at 95% reliability level. According to Yazıcıoğlu & Erdoğan (2004: 50), the population size is 1 million and the required sample size for this population is 384. In addition, it is more accurate to use non-probability-based sampling techniques in studies where the people in the population do not have an equal chance of being selected for sampling (Coşkun et al., 2017: 141). From this point of view, since there is no complete list of the population in the study and the participants do not have equal chances of being included in the sample, it was evaluated that non-probability based sampling techniques were appropriate. In addition, since the participants were required to have participated in tourism activities at least once before, judgmental/purposive sampling technique was preferred.

The data were obtained through an online questionnaire prepared in an electronic environment. In addition to demographic statements in this questionnaire form, in order to measure the effects of e-WOMM on consumers' hotel preference, Moqadamsalımı (2019: 96-98) prepared "*The Effect of Electronic Word of Mouth Marketing on Consumer Purchase Decision: An Application*" by Moqadamsalımı (2019: 96-96), 25-items, single-dimensional scale was used to measure the quality, number and reliability of electronic word-of-mouth communication (online reviews) and consumer attitude towards online reviews. In order to measure the reasons why consumers prefer hotels, Obalıoğlu (2017: 98-101) adapted the statements in his master's thesis "*Word of Mouth Marketing in Hotel Businesses and Its Importance in Hotel Preferences of Domestic Tourists: Muğla Case*" in his master's thesis was adapted to the study and included in the questionnaire. The items in the scale used to collect data in the study were subjected to a five-point Likert-type rating (1-Strongly disagree / 5-



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Strongly agree). In addition, in order to determine the comprehensibility of the scale statements, a pilot study was conducted on 20 people and the construct validity of the scale was determined by making the necessary arrangements in the questionnaire forms. The prepared questionnaire was sent online and the voluntary participation of the participants in the research was taken into consideration. The questionnaire prepared in electronic environment was applied between June 15 and July 15, 2023, and a total of 415 questionnaires were received by the researchers.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Findings on Demographic Characteristics of Participants

When the findings regarding the demographic characteristics of the participants were examined, it was found that more than half of the participants (53%) were male and single (52.8%), 41% (170 people) were between the ages of 25-34, 37.3% (155 people) were undergraduate graduates and 45.3% (188 people) had a middle income of 15001-25000TL. In response to the question "How much time do you spend daily on social networking websites?" 47.5% (197 people) of the participants answered 2-6 hours. Participants were asked to mark the social media applications they use the most and the most frequently marked application was Instagram (354 times). Finally, 40% of the participants (166 people) stated that they get advice when they need more information when asked the question "Do you get advice from others before choosing a hotel?". Information on the demographic characteristics of the participants is summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants**

| Demographic Features         | f   | %    | Demographic Features                                                      | f    | %    |
|------------------------------|-----|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| <b>1. Gender</b>             |     |      | <b>6. How much time do you spend daily on social networking websites?</b> |      |      |
| Female                       | 195 | 47,0 | 1 hour and less                                                           | 54   | 13,0 |
| Male                         | 220 | 53,0 | 2-6 hours                                                                 | 197  | 47,5 |
| Total                        | 415 | 100  | 7-11 hours                                                                | 131  | 31,6 |
| <b>2. Marital Status</b>     |     |      | 12-16 hours                                                               | 30   | 7,2  |
| Married                      | 196 | 47,2 | 17 hours and more                                                         | 3    | 0,7  |
| Single                       | 219 | 52,8 | Total                                                                     | 415  | 100  |
| Total                        | 415 | 100  |                                                                           |      |      |
| <b>3. Age</b>                |     |      | <b>7. Which social media tools do you use the most? (Multiple choice)</b> |      |      |
| 18-24                        | 38  | 9,2  | Instagram                                                                 | 354  | 29,3 |
| 25-34                        | 170 | 41,0 | Facebook                                                                  | 177  | 14,7 |
| 35-44                        | 141 | 34,0 | Twitter                                                                   | 255  | 21,2 |
| 45-54                        | 55  | 13,3 | Whatsapp                                                                  | 223  | 18,5 |
| 55 and over                  | 11  | 2,7  | Youtube                                                                   | 194  | 16,1 |
| Total                        | 415 | 100  | LinkedIn                                                                  | 1    | 0,08 |
| <b>4. Level of Education</b> |     |      | TikTok                                                                    | 1    | 0,08 |
| Primary education            | 12  | 2,9  | Tumblr                                                                    | 1    | 0,08 |
| High School                  | 56  | 13,5 | Total                                                                     | 1206 | 100  |
| Associate Degree             | 123 | 29,6 |                                                                           |      |      |
| Bachelor's degree            | 155 | 37,3 | <b>8. Do you get advice from others before choosing a hotel?</b>          |      |      |
| Post-graduate                | 69  | 16,6 | Yes, I'll take it.                                                        | 106  | 25,5 |
| Total                        | 415 | 100  | No, I won't.                                                              | 18   | 4,3  |
| <b>5. Revenue</b>            |     |      | When in doubt                                                             | 125  | 30,1 |
| 8506 TL and below            | 32  | 7,7  | When I need more information                                              | 166  | 40,0 |
| 8507-15000 TL                | 113 | 27,2 | Total                                                                     | 415  | 100  |
| 15001-25000TL                | 188 | 45,3 |                                                                           |      |      |
| 25001-35.000 TL              | 68  | 16,4 |                                                                           |      |      |
| 35001-45000 TL               | 9   | 2,2  |                                                                           |      |      |
| 45001 TL and above           | 5   | 1,2  |                                                                           |      |      |
| Total                        | 415 | 100  |                                                                           |      |      |

#### 4.2. Findings Regarding Participants' Reasons for Choosing a Hotel and Their Attitudes Towards Recommendations

After revealing the profile of the participants, the time they spend on social networking websites and their social media usage patterns, the frequency and percentage calculations of the participant statements for the research questions below are presented in Table 2 in order

to reveal the attitudes of the participants towards receiving advice from others regarding their hotel preferences.

**Table 2: Participants' Attitudes Towards Receiving Recommendations**

| Statements                                                                                                                  | f   | %    | Statements                                                                                                                                   | f   | %    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|------|
| <b>1. Do you consider yourself a loyal customer to hotels?</b>                                                              |     |      | <b>5. Does the experience of the person from whom you get information about the hotel with this good or service matter to you as a user?</b> |     |      |
| Yes                                                                                                                         | 146 | 35,2 | Yes                                                                                                                                          | 370 | 89,2 |
| No                                                                                                                          | 150 | 36,1 | No                                                                                                                                           | 45  | 10,8 |
| Partially                                                                                                                   | 119 | 28,7 | Total                                                                                                                                        | 415 | 100  |
| Total                                                                                                                       | 415 | 100  | <b>6. When you are not satisfied with your vacation hotel, do you share this on the website or forums?</b>                                   |     |      |
| <b>2. Have you been put off choosing a hotel because of someone's negative recommendation in a review on their website?</b> |     |      | Yes                                                                                                                                          | 346 | 83,4 |
| Yes                                                                                                                         | 307 | 74,0 | No                                                                                                                                           | 69  | 16,6 |
| No                                                                                                                          | 108 | 26,0 | Total                                                                                                                                        | 415 | 100  |
| Total                                                                                                                       | 415 | 100  | <b>7. What do you think about people giving advice to each other on the Internet/Web pages? (Multiple choice)</b>                            |     |      |
| <b>3. Would you recommend a hotel you are satisfied with to others over the internet?</b>                                   |     |      | Desire to help                                                                                                                               | 149 | 22,2 |
| Yes                                                                                                                         | 339 | 81,7 | Giving ideas by sharing positive/negative experiences                                                                                        | 245 | 36,6 |
| No                                                                                                                          | 76  | 18,3 | Saving time spent on preliminary research                                                                                                    | 232 | 34,6 |
| Total                                                                                                                       | 415 | 100  | Social responsibility                                                                                                                        | 44  | 6,6  |
| <b>4. Have you ever asked someone's opinion online before choosing a hotel?</b>                                             |     |      | Total                                                                                                                                        | 670 | 100  |
| Yes                                                                                                                         | 304 | 73,3 |                                                                                                                                              |     |      |
| No                                                                                                                          | 111 | 26,7 |                                                                                                                                              |     |      |
| Total                                                                                                                       | 415 | 100  |                                                                                                                                              |     |      |

The status of the research questions answered as a result of the frequency analysis conducted to reveal the participants' attitudes towards receiving advice is summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3: Answers to Research Questions**

| Research Questions                                                                                                                                                        | Response                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>(RQ2.)</b> How much time do the respondents spend on social networking websites daily?                                                                                 | 2-6 hours                                                                                           |
| <b>(RQ3.)</b> Which social media tools are the most used by the respondents?                                                                                              | Instagram                                                                                           |
| <b>(RQ4.)</b> Do most of the respondents get recommendations from others before choosing a hotel?                                                                         | Advice is sought when more information is needed.                                                   |
| <b>(RQ5.)</b> Do most of the respondents consider themselves as loyal customers to hotels?                                                                                | No                                                                                                  |
| <b>(RQ6.)</b> Do most of the participants give up on choosing a hotel because of the comments on the web pages?                                                           | Yes                                                                                                 |
| <b>(RQ7.)</b> Do most of the participants recommend a hotel they are satisfied with to others over the internet?                                                          | Yes                                                                                                 |
| <b>(RQ8.)</b> Do most of the respondents get the opinion of anyone online before choosing a hotel?                                                                        | Yes                                                                                                 |
| <b>(RQ9.)</b> Do most of the participants attach importance to the experiences of the people from whom they get information about the hotel regarding goods and services? | Yes                                                                                                 |
| <b>(RQ10.)</b> Do most of the participants share their dissatisfaction with their preferred hotel on web pages/forums?                                                    | Yes                                                                                                 |
| <b>(RQ11.)</b> What are the opinions of the participants about giving recommendations to each other over the internet?                                                    | Giving ideas by sharing positive/negative experiences and saving time spent on preliminary research |

First of all, missing data analysis, multiple deviant analysis and multiple normal distribution tests were applied to the data set before proceeding with the analyses. Outliers that affect the results of statistical tests should be checked using multiple slope analysis (Çokluk, Şekercioğlu & Büyüköztürk, 2021: 12). Multiple outlier analysis was applied for outlier detection in the analyzes. The t-test approach was preferred in determining multiple outlier observations. In order for any Mahalanobis value to be considered as outlier, MD2 /df values must be greater than the t-value at 1% based on the number of parameters (Kalaycı, 2010: 212). According to the results of the multiple slingshot analysis, the t-value found for the 24-item scale based on the number of 23 parameters at a significance level of 1 per thousand is 3.48. When Mahalanobis values are divided by the number of parameters, since there are no questionnaires to be excluded because there are no values greater than the t value in the data set, the analyzes continued with 415 valid questionnaires collected. In the table "Critical correlation coefficients for normal probability graph" to determine whether the data set shows multiple normal distribution, the value corresponding to 0.005 level of significance for the 24-item scale is 0.926. Since the correlation coefficient between the calculated Mahalanobis values and kikareters is  $0.968 > 0.926$ , we can say that the scale shows multivariate normal distribution.

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In the literature, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is most commonly used to test the reliability of a Likert-type scale (Alpar, 2018: 547). The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of the 24-item scale used in the study was determined as 0.972. Accordingly, it is concluded that the scale is reliable. Factor analysis was applied to the 24-item scale measuring the effect of electronic word-of-mouth marketing on hotel preference. According to the reliability analysis, factor analysis was started with 24 items without removing any item. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacy was found to be 84.3%. Chi-Square for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: 24771,754; this value is significant at 0.001 level. After looking at the multiple normal distribution, multiple deviant and reliability analyses related to the data set, T-test, ANOVA and regression analyses were applied together with descriptive statistics for the purpose of the study.

### 4.3. Difference Tests Analysis Results

After the findings on the participants' profile, social media patterns and their thoughts on the reasons for choosing a hotel and their attitudes towards receiving recommendations, in order to answer the other research question, it was examined whether electronic word-of-mouth marketing (e-WOMM) differs in consumers' hotel preference according to demographic variables (gender, marital status, age, education level, income). T-test was used to determine the differences according to gender and marital status variables; ANOVA test was used to determine the differences according to age, education level and income variables. According to the homogeneity of variances (Levene test) for the findings obtained in the ANOVA test, Scheffe test, one of the post-hoc tests, was used to find out between which groups there were significant differences due to the homogeneity of variances ( $p > 0.05$ ) of the dimension of online comments.

**Table 4: Comparison of e-WOMM (Online Reviews) on Consumers' Hotel Preference by Gender (n: 415)**

| Gender | n   | Mean   | Std. Deviation | Levene test p value | t-value | p-value |
|--------|-----|--------|----------------|---------------------|---------|---------|
| Female | 195 | 4,2767 | ,48485         | p=0,499             | 2,469   | 0,014   |
| Male   | 220 | 4,1598 | ,47785         |                     |         |         |

According to Table 4, it was revealed that e-WOMM (online reviews) significantly differentiated the hotel preferences of women compared to men and online reviews influenced female respondents more than male respondents in hotel preference ( $p = 0.014$ ).

**Table 5: Comparison of e-WOMM (Online Reviews) on Consumers' Hotel Preference According to Marital Status (n: 415)**

| Marital Status | n   | Mean   | Std. Deviation | Levene test p value | t-value | p-value |
|----------------|-----|--------|----------------|---------------------|---------|---------|
| Married        | 196 | 4,2092 | ,47668         | p=0,448             | ,222    | ,825    |
| Single         | 219 | 4,2197 | ,49169         |                     |         |         |

According to Table 5, e-WOMM (online reviews) does not significantly differentiate hotel preference according to marital status ( $p=0.825$ ).

**Table 6: Comparison of e-WOMM (Online Reviews) on Consumers' Hotel Preference by Age (n: 415)**

| Age         | n   | Mean   | Std. Deviation | Levene test p value | t-value | p-value |
|-------------|-----|--------|----------------|---------------------|---------|---------|
| 18–24       | 38  | 4,2895 | ,39847         | ,483                | ,393    | ,813    |
| 25–34       | 170 | 4,2115 | ,45729         |                     |         |         |
| 35–44       | 141 | 4,1906 | ,53169         |                     |         |         |
| 45-54       | 55  | 4,2447 | ,45170         |                     |         |         |
| 55 and over | 11  | 4,1667 | ,69597         |                     |         |         |

According to Table 6, e-WOMM (online reviews) does not significantly differentiate hotel preference by age ( $p= 0.813$ ).

**Table 7: Comparison of e-WOMM (Online Reviews) on Consumers' Hotel Preference by Education Level (n: 415)**

| Level of Education | n   | Mean   | Std. Deviation | Levene test p value | t-value | p-value |
|--------------------|-----|--------|----------------|---------------------|---------|---------|
| Primary education  | 12  | 4,2569 | ,45465         | ,256                | 5,038   | ,001    |
| High School        | 56  | 4,1659 | ,49201         |                     |         |         |
| Associate Degree   | 123 | 4,1463 | ,51321         |                     |         |         |
| Bachelor's degree  | 155 | 4,1812 | ,43034         |                     |         |         |
| Post-graduate      | 69  | 4,4444 | ,48867         |                     |         |         |

According to Table 7, e-WOMM (online reviews) significantly differentiates hotel preference according to education level ( $p=0.001$ ). Accordingly, Scheffe test, one of the post-hoc tests, was applied in order to see that the variances of the dimension of online comments are homogeneous ( $p>0.05$ ) and that there are differences between the groups at educational level. Accordingly, while there was no significant difference between graduate graduates and

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primary school graduates, there were significant differences between high school ( $p=,011$ ), associate degree ( $p=,000$ ) and undergraduate ( $p=,001$ ) graduates.

**Table 8: Comparison of e-WOMM (Online Reviews) on Consumers' Hotel Preference by Income (n: 415)**

| Revenue            | n   | Mean   | Std. Deviation | Levene test p value | t-value | p-value |
|--------------------|-----|--------|----------------|---------------------|---------|---------|
| 8506 TL and below  | 32  | 4,3138 | ,43751         | ,666                | 1,871   | ,098    |
| 8507-15000 TL      | 113 | 4,1165 | ,54799         |                     |         |         |
| 15001-25000TL      | 188 | 4,2347 | ,42900         |                     |         |         |
| 25001-35.000 TL    | 68  | 4,2322 | ,52489         |                     |         |         |
| 35001-45000 TL     | 9   | 4,4630 | ,50494         |                     |         |         |
| 45001 TL and above | 5   | 4,3667 | ,30533         |                     |         |         |

According to Table 8, e-WOMM (online reviews) does not significantly differentiate hotel preference according to income ( $p=0.098$ ).

According to the results of the analysis, women have higher averages than men; postgraduate graduates have higher averages than high school, associate and undergraduate graduates in the effect of online reviews on hotel preference. According to the results of other difference tests, there is no significant difference according to marital status, age and income. After answering the research questions, regression analysis was applied to test the hypotheses in the study.

#### 4.4. Regression Analysis Results

The results of the regression analyses of e-WOMM's five sub-dimensions of online comments (positive online comments, negative online comments, quality of online comments, credibility of online comments and number of online comments) are summarized in Table 9.



**Table 9: Regression Analysis Result Regarding the Effect of Online Reviews on Consumers' Hotel Preferences**

| Model                              | Not standardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t       | Level of significance | R <sup>2</sup>       |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|---------------------------|---------|-----------------------|----------------------|
|                                    | B                             | Std. Error | Beta                      |         |                       |                      |
| (Constant)                         | 1,014                         | ,009       | ,983                      | 108,351 | ,000                  | R <sup>2</sup> =.966 |
| Pozitif Çevrimiçi Yorumlar         | ,543                          | ,036       | ,599                      | 15,198  | ,000                  | R <sup>2</sup> =.359 |
| Negatif Çevrimiçi Yorumlar         | ,601                          | ,039       | ,605                      | 15,455  | ,000                  | R <sup>2</sup> =.366 |
| Çevrimiçi Yorumların Kalitesi      | ,779                          | ,009       | ,976                      | 91,069  | ,000                  | R <sup>2</sup> =.953 |
| Çevrimiçi Yorumların Güvenirliliği | ,969                          | ,007       | ,988                      | 132,420 | ,000                  | R <sup>2</sup> =.977 |
| Çevrimiçi Yorum Sayısı             | ,673                          | ,014       | ,922                      | 48,299  | ,000                  | R <sup>2</sup> =.850 |

**Hypothesis 1 (H<sub>1</sub>): Online reviews of a hotel business affect consumers' hotel preferences.**

Online reviews of the hotel business significantly affect consumers' hotel preferences ( $p < 0.05$ ). Approximately 96% of consumers' hotel preferences are explained by online reviews ( $R^2 = .966$ ). An increase of 1 unit in online reviews of the hotel business will cause an increase of approximately 0.9 units in consumers' hotel preferences ( $\beta = .983$ ).

**H<sub>1a</sub>: Positive online reviews positively affect consumers' hotel preferences.**

Positive online reviews of the hotel business significantly affect consumers' hotel preferences ( $p < 0.05$ ). Approximately 36% of consumers' hotel preferences are explained by positive online reviews ( $R^2 = .359$ ). An increase of 1 unit in positive online reviews of the hotel business will lead to an increase of approximately 0.6 units in consumers' hotel preferences ( $\beta = .599$ ).

**H<sub>1b</sub>: Negative online reviews of the hotel business negatively affect consumers' hotel preferences.**

Negative online reviews have a significant effect on consumers' hotel preferences ( $p < 0.05$ ). Approximately 36% of consumers' hotel preferences are explained by negative online reviews ( $R^2 = .366$ ). An increase of 1 unit in negative online reviews of the hotel business will cause an increase of approximately 0.6 units in consumers' hotel preferences ( $\beta = .605$ ).

**H<sub>1c</sub>: The quality of online reviews about the hotel business affects consumers' hotel preferences.**

The quality of online reviews of the hotel business has a significant effect on consumers' hotel preferences ( $p < 0.05$ ). Approximately 95% of consumers' hotel preferences are explained by the quality of online reviews ( $R^2 = .953$ ). An increase of 1 unit in the quality of online reviews of a hotel business will lead to an increase of approximately 0.9 units in consumers' hotel preferences ( $\beta = .976$ ).

**H<sub>1d</sub>: The reliability of online reviews about the hotel business affects consumers' hotel preferences.**

The reliability of online reviews has a significant effect on consumers' hotel preferences ( $p < 0.05$ ). Approximately 97% of consumers' hotel preferences are explained by the reliability of online reviews ( $R^2 = .977$ ). An increase of 1 unit in the reliability of online reviews of a hotel business will lead to an increase of approximately 0.9 units in consumers' hotel preferences ( $\beta = .988$ ).

**H<sub>1e</sub>: The number of online reviews about the hotel business affects consumers' hotel preferences.**

The number of online reviews of the hotel business has a significant effect on consumers' hotel preferences ( $p < 0.05$ ). Approximately 85% of consumers' hotel preferences are explained by the number of online reviews ( $R^2 = .850$ ). An increase of 1 unit in the number of online reviews of the hotel business will cause an increase of approximately 0.9 units in consumers' hotel preferences ( $\beta = .922$ ).

According to the results of the regression analyses, hypotheses H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>1a</sub>, H<sub>1b</sub>, H<sub>1c</sub>, H<sub>1d</sub>, H<sub>1e</sub> developed within the scope of the research were statistically supported. A summary of the results related to the research hypotheses is presented in Table 10.

**Table 10: Results Related to the Research Hypotheses**

|                                                                                                                         |                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Hypothesis 1 (H<sub>1</sub>):</b> Online reviews of a hotel business affect consumers' hotel preferences.            | <b>Accepted</b> |
| <b>H<sub>1a</sub>:</b> Positive online reviews positively affect consumers' hotel preferences.                          | <b>Accepted</b> |
| <b>H<sub>1b</sub>:</b> Negative online reviews of the hotel business negatively affect consumers' hotel preferences.    | <b>Accepted</b> |
| <b>H<sub>1c</sub>:</b> The quality of online reviews about the hotel business affects consumers' hotel preferences.     | <b>Accepted</b> |
| <b>H<sub>1d</sub>:</b> The reliability of online reviews about the hotel business affects consumers' hotel preferences. | <b>Accepted</b> |
| <b>H<sub>1e</sub>:</b> The number of online reviews about the hotel business affects consumers' hotel preferences.      | <b>Accepted</b> |

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study conducted on the effects of e-WOMM (e-word of mouth marketing), which refers to the sharing of experiences and opinions in an online social network environment, on consumer decisions and preferences, whether e-WOMM (online comments) affect consumers' hotel preferences and whether online comments affect consumers' hotel preferences in terms of positive / negative online comments, quality, number and reliability of comments, and 415 valid questionnaires were analyzed in the research.

Considering the demographic characteristics of the participants, it was found that the majority of the participants were men, single individuals, in the 25-34 age group, with a bachelor's degree, and with a middle income of 15001-25000TL. It was revealed that most of the participants spent between 2-6 hours on social media during the day and the most used social media application was "Instagram". In addition, according to the results regarding the attitudes of the participants towards receiving hotel recommendations, it was revealed that most of the participants, when choosing a hotel, get advice from others when they need more information about the hotel (40%; 166 people) and that anyone can be consulted online about choosing a hotel (73.3%; 304 people). However, it was also found that the people they get information about the hotel should also have experience with the goods and services (89.2%; 370 people). In addition, the majority of the respondents have given up on choosing a hotel due to negative reviews on the web pages (74%; 307 people) and do not consider themselves as loyal customers (35.2%; 150 people).

On the other hand, most of the respondents reported that they recommend a hotel they are satisfied with to others online (81.7%; 339 respondents) and also about recommending a hotel to each other online, the respondents reported that sharing positive/negative experiences about a hotel allows them to give opinions to others (36.6%; 245 respondents) and saves time spent on preliminary research in hotel search (34.6%; 232 respondents). In addition, it is also among the findings that most of the participants share this situation on web pages/forums (83.4%; 346 people) when they are dissatisfied with their preferred hotel. On the other hand, as a result of the difference tests, it was determined that the effect of online reviews on hotel preference did not show significant differences according to marital status, age and income, but showed significant differences according to gender and education level. According to the findings, women are more influenced by online reviews than men, and graduate graduates are more influenced by online reviews than high school, associate, and undergraduate graduates.

In the next step of the study, the research hypotheses were tested. Within the scope of the research, firstly, the effect of online reviews on consumers' hotel preferences was analyzed. According to the results of the regression analysis, approximately 96% of consumers' hotel preferences are explained by online reviews ( $R^2=.966$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). According to this result, e-WOMM has a significant and significant effect on consumers' hotel preferences. In another step, the reliability of online reviews (97%); the number of online reviews (85%) and the quality of online reviews (95%) have a significant and high impact on consumers' hotel preferences. On the other hand, negative online reviews (36%) and positive online reviews (36%) were found to have a significant, moderate and equal impact on consumers' hotel



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preferences. In this context, hypotheses H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>1a</sub>, H<sub>1b</sub>, H<sub>1c</sub>, H<sub>1d</sub>, H<sub>1e</sub> developed within the scope of the research were statistically supported.

In the study, e-WOMM has a significant and high level of influence on consumers' hotel choice and therefore, consumers' shared experiences, opinions and recommendations about hotel businesses in electronic environments have significant effects on consumers' hotel choice. This result obtained in the research is similar to the studies revealing that online reviews have a direct impact on hotel reservations and positive online reviews significantly increase the number of hotel reservations (Ye, Law & Gu, 2009), e-WOMM affects consumers' tourism product preference (Kalpaklıoğlu, 2016), positive consumer opinions positively affect the purchase decision (Çakır et al., 2017), and e-WOMM significantly affects consumers' decisions to make hotel reservations (Kitcharoen, 2019). Based on these results, hotel business managers should not only maintain their presence in the physical environment, but also manage their positions on various platforms on the internet in a good way.

With the development of information and communication technologies, it is a supported view in the literature that the impact of experiences and recommendations shared in electronic environments and the ability to reach large masses in a short time affect consumer preferences positively or negatively and this situation reflects on the business performance of businesses. Therefore, hotel businesses can determine their strengths and weaknesses and draw a road map in line with this information by correctly analyzing customer shares and comments on electronic platforms. Because the use of this information is important for the correct and effective management of businesses. For this reason, hotel managers should take online consumer reviews and evaluations published about their hotels seriously, considering the impact of e-WOMM on hotels' business performance and room sales. In addition, feedback should be provided to the comments made about hotel businesses. As a matter of fact, the people who make the evaluation and read these comments will create the impression that the business values and cares about customer opinions. In this sense, it is useful to have a unit that will deal with the opinions communicated via the internet and even the hotel's own evaluation forms.

The study revealed that the majority of respondents are influenced by what others say when choosing a hotel, they care about recommendations and reviews, and even tend to share their own experiences. Therefore, hoteliers should design unique experiences for their hotel guests and leave a good impression on them by ensuring that hotel guests leave their hotels satisfied. It can be suggested that hotel businesses should encourage hotel guests to share their experiences and increase their interactions about their businesses in electronic media. In order to encourage sharing and commenting on the internet, hotel guests can be promised discounts or free participation in activities or facilities that customers can benefit from inside or outside the facility or discounts under various campaigns if they tag the relevant business and share it on various platforms, make comments and reviews. This can make hotel guests feel special and have a good hotel experience. This approach may encourage existing guests to visit the same hotel establishment again. On the other hand, as the number of online reviews, the quality and reliability of the reviews increase, this may attract the attention of other consumers looking for a hotel. Especially in the tourism industry, where experiences are important, the intangible nature of the products offered and the lack of the opportunity to try



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before buying will help consumers to eliminate uncertainty in the decision-making process. Thus, with e-WOMM activities, hotel businesses will gain a significant competitive advantage in terms of reaching potential new customers as well as maintaining their relationships with their existing customers with less cost.

Within the scope of the study, the effect of e-WOMM on consumers' hotel preferences was examined. In future studies, the scope of the study can be expanded in future studies by conducting different studies by examining the relationship between different concepts and variables in marketing in the effect of e-WOMM on consumers' hotel preferences.

The study has limitations such as the fact that it only includes participants over the age of 18 who have previously engaged in tourism activities and that some units could not participate in the research at all. Considering the time and cost constraints, the online questionnaire was completed by the participants between June 15 and July 15, 2023. Another limitation of the study is the collection of data within a certain date range. Data collected in different periods may yield different results. In addition, the data obtained in the study is based on the personal statements of the participants who participated in the survey and the participants may not reflect what is actually happening by giving the answers they think are ideal to the questions posed to them.

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