# The influence of integrated marketing communication on the cultural tourism product selection intentions among youth in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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## Abstract

This study explores the impact of integrated marketing communications with the following factors: Advertising, Public Relations, Promotion, Direct Marketing, Electronic Word of Mouth, social media, and Digital Marketing, affecting the intention to visit cultural tourism among young people in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Sample survey results with 330 participants in the research area, SPSS 25.0, and SmartPLS 4.1.0.0 software were used to analyze data and test research hypotheses using the PLS-Structural Equation Modeling model. The research results show that there are six factors affecting the intention to choose cultural tourism among young people: Public Relations, Sales Promotion, Direct Marketing, Electronic Word of Mouth, social media, and Digital Marketing. The Advertising factor is not significant in this study. Based on the research results, some implications are proposed for managers of cultural tourism destinations and tourism businesses to develop appropriate marketing strategies to attract tourists in general and young people in particular to choose cultural tourism, contributing to the development of the tourism industry and the effective exploitation and conservation of cultural resources.

**Keywords:** Cultural tourism, Ho Chi Minh City, Integrated marketing communication, Intention to visit, Youth.

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**Transparency:** The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, Vietnam's tourism industry has grown significantly with remarkable achievements. In 2023, the country welcomed 12.6 million international visitors, exceeding the initial target of 8 million by 57% and reaching the adjusted target of 12-13 million visitors. Domestic tourists reached 108 million, exceeding the 2023 plan by 6%. Total tourism revenue is estimated at VND 678 trillion, up 4.3% compared to the 2023 plan. At the 2023 World Travel Awards, Vietnam was honored

for the fourth time as the "World's Leading Heritage Destination" and for the fifth time as "Asia's Leading Destination." Vietnam has become an ideal destination for tourists who love to explore culture and experience new things, with both tangible and intangible cultural heritages [1]. For all countries, cultural heritage is an important resource because, in addition to its historical nature, this resource also contributes positively to economic development through tourism activities [2]. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) orients tourism development to 2030 on the basis of T4SDG [3]. UNESCO has proposed a world heritage and tourism program, aiming at sustainable development connecting cultural heritage and tourism, based on dialogue and cooperation between many parties to promote an integrated approach to managing cultural heritage in countries in the process of sustainable and appropriate tourism development [4]. Cultural tourism is an activity associated with heritages that is considered an important part of the tourism industry. This tourism product is linked to cultural heritages, both tangible and intangible, connecting the present with the past and fostering exchanges and mutual understanding between cultures. Developing the cultural tourism sector effectively contributes to economic value and aids in the preservation and maintenance of cultural heritages.[4, 5]. In the context of Vietnam, cultural tourism is expressed through tourism programs aimed at exploiting Vietnamese cultural values, combined with the preservation and promotion of the country's cultural heritage.[6]. This combination brings benefits to tourism businesses and communities around cultural heritages [7] creating memorable experiences for tourists by linking local cultural values with their personal interests, making them more satisfied with their trip and creating motivation for them to return [8, 9]. Thus, cultural tourism is one of the types that attracts many tourists [10]. However, cultural tourism in Vietnam has not yet fully exploited its potential for many reasons, including the issue of tourism promotion. Therefore, studying the factors belonging to the field of marketing that affect the development of cultural tourism is highly practical. Many countries in the world consider cultural tourism as a strategic product to develop their tourism industry, which makes the level of competition in the tourism industry increasingly fierce. In the context of rapid development of digital technology, marketing activities are expanded in many aspects, beyond geographical areas, spreading all over the world through social networking sites and digital marketing forms. One of the effective tools in this new environment is Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) because they combine traditional methods with modern tools to effectively approach and build relationships with customers. The advent of the internet and social media has significantly increased the tools available for marketing and communication to reach target audiences, making IMC more prominent. IMC facilitates the access, sharing, and conveying of messages to customers on many different platforms in a short time and frequently [11, 12]. IMC requires a more coordinated and strategic approach than simply implementing a few communication activities in the hope of achieving the desired results. Although IMC has been successfully implemented by many businesses, it is still relatively new in the cultural tourism context, with limited research, especially in Vietnam. Vietnamese youth are an important demographic group contributing to today's digital economy, with early access to media leading to diverse perspectives. This demographic group is becoming a major tourist group, contributing to the strong growth of Vietnam's tourism industry [13]. In addition, this group is driving significant changes in tourism trends, bringing new energy to the industry. Previously, beach tourism was a popular trend, but now, young people tend to prefer cultural tourism. In addition to exploring new places, young people also seek to understand the unique cultural values of different regions, immerse themselves in cultural experiences and thereby gain a deeper understanding of history and people, and contribute positively to the local communities they visit. Ho Chi Minh City has 172 ranked relics and 97 listed relics. The ranked relics include many types, including archeology, architectural art and history, with a balanced distribution between architectural art and historical relics compared to archaeological relics. In addition to tangible heritage, the city also has many types of intangible cultural heritage, with great potential for developing unique tourism products. Despite its rich and diverse cultural heritage resources, the city has not yet effectively exploited and used these heritage values as tourism resources. It is clear that Ho Chi Minh City has great potential to develop cultural tourism products and a large number of young tourists, with its role as an educational center with many universities. The city has also implemented a number of policies to develop tourism in general and cultural tourism in particular, with many large tourism businesses operating in the city.

The main question is whether IMC is really effective in attracting young people to choose cultural tourism. Chutimant [12] study identified that IMC elements such as advertising, public relations, and social media significantly and positively influence tourist perceptions and behaviors Chutimant [12]. Sanjaya, et al. [14] also confirmed that IMC has a positive impact on tourism [14]. However, not all studies are consistent in this direction. For example, Li, et al. [15] concluded that IMC has a negative impact on tourism [15]. Looking specifically at each element of IMC, it can be seen that the results of many studies are inconsistent. Many studies have shown that social media platforms are effectively used by tourists in the process of searching for destinations, strongly influencing their travel decisions Murti, et al. [16] promoting purchase intentions [17] and linking to incentive and discount programs Khaleeli [18]. Ahmad, et al. [19] determined that the quality, quantity, and trust of eWOM affect travel intentions [19] while Tabassum, et al. [20] argued that not all eWOM information affects consumers' purchase intentions [21]. Thus, which factors of IMC actually influence the intention to choose cultural tourism of young people in the study area and the extent of their influence are questions that need to be answered in this study. To achieve the research results, the model and hypotheses were built, the survey was built on the basis of inheriting the scales of previous studies and adjusting them to suit the survey subjects, the scale was measured according to 5-level Likert, survey data in a convenient form was collected and analyzed using SPSS 25.0 and SmartPLS 4.1.0.0 software. Based on the results of testing the research hypotheses, the article discusses and proposes management implications for stakeholders.

## 2. Theoretical Overview

### 2.1. Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism is a specific part of the tourism industry related to tours to experience cultural heritage. There are many different concepts of cultural tourism. Poria, et al. [22] believe that cultural tourism originates mainly from the motivation

and perception of tourists, less related to the tangible and intangible characteristics of the destination,... [22]. Cultural tourism is a form of tourism based on the motivation of tourists when visiting a heritage site based on tourists' perception of the destination. Richards believes that cultural tourism occurs when tourists visit attractions far from their place of residence, with the aim of experiencing local cultural values to satisfy their needs Richards [23]. Huang, et al. [24] define cultural tourism as the hospitality of a host community to outside visitors who are interested in the values of the local cultural heritage such as history, art, and unique lifestyle of the host community [24, 25].

## 2.2. Integrated Marketing Communications

Communication theory is the basis for the formation of integrated marketing communications (IMC) [26, 27]. The American Association of Advertising Agencies [28] approaches IMC from the perspective of building a communication plan to create a comprehensive added value approach to consider combining many different communication components to create clarity, consistency and achieve maximum effectiveness for the communication campaign Percy [29]; De Pelsmacker, et al. [30]. Kotler [31] believes that IMC is the sum of a business's marketing measures, based on the customer's perspective when looking at the entire marketing process [29]. IMC focuses on influencing consumer attitudes, needs and motivations [32]. IMC has become an effective tool when delivering appropriate messages to reach the target market [33]. From these definitions, it can be said that IMC aims to build a communication channel to reach actual and potential consumers, with the orientation of creating a positive and sustainable impact on customers, factors from interaction with the organization, products to brands are all conveyed into communication messages. This approach saves costs, enhances value in the process of influencing customers and brings benefits to tourist destinations [34, 35].

## 2.3. Purchase Intention in Cultural Tourism

Purchase intention is the consumer's anticipated decision to buy a particular product or service in the near future and is considered the most accurate predictor of their actual purchasing behavior Fishbein and Ajzen [36]. Um and Crompton [37] investigated the role of perception and attitude in the selection of tourist destinations [37]. When consumers compare and evaluate available options, they often focus on features and advantages that they highly value. From this process, purchase intention naturally arises as they recognize that a product or service best meets their personal needs and expectations. Therefore, after thoroughly analyzing the intention to choose, the purchase intention becomes clearer and more significant. Consumers' understanding of product quality influences their purchase intention [38]. Intention is a crucial predictor of consumer behavior, with activities such as searching, considering, and evaluating options likely driven by emotions and sudden interests that shape intention [39]. When consumers have a positive intention, they tend to form a positive commitment to the brand, motivating them to take real action [36]. In tourism, product and destination marketing activities are among the key factors shaping tourists' travel intentions.

## 2.4. Overview of Related Research

Tourism is the most diverse industry, a smokeless industry that supports national economic development, contributes to job creation, infrastructure development, and promotes the development of the private sector [40]. In addition to economic and social contributions; tourism also contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage, community development, and cultural exchange through communication with tourists [41]. To promote tourist destinations to attract tourists, communication activities play an important role. Traditional forms of marketing are still widely used such as billboards and television commercials [42] however, digital marketing is on the rise due to its ability to reach a wider and more specific audience and the ability to track, update information, and measure the effectiveness of marketing activities [43]. This is the basis for the emergence of IMC. Communication activities are more effective when integrated into a unified block rather than functioning separately. IMC is a method that combines all forms of marketing tools to work together harmoniously and cost-effectively [44, 45]. In the context of technological advancement and a global business environment, media is being reshaped through integrated marketing communication. IMC is considered a strategic process that includes selecting, developing, implementing, evaluating, and coordinating all of an organization's stakeholders over a specified period [46]. Successful marketing communication requires a diverse approach and the skillful combination of these choices in a creative and effective manner [47] integrates marketing components such as sales promotion, advertising, direct marketing, personal selling, public relations, and internet marketing [48]. Its goal is to change perceptions and attitudes, directly influencing behavior [30].

The increasing competition in the tourism market and the rising advertising costs drive companies to enhance marketing cost efficiency. Traditional IMC, encompassing common tools such as advertising, promotion, direct marketing, and public relations, has not sufficiently addressed the younger generation [49, 50]. This provides a basis for integrating traditional IMC with digital and social media communications, transforming it into modern IMC. Digital marketing is viewed as a technology-oriented activity, a potential channel for conveying information to various customer segments [51] attracting target customers, personalizing messages, leveraging user-generated content, fostering social connections, and being environmentally friendly, achieving company goals and enhancing brand value [52]. The strength of social media lies in its operation through websites, where users can easily create and post various content types such as text, images, and videos [53]. Digital marketing in the tourism industry has the ability to bring images of cultural heritage sites blended with natural beauty into cyberspace, combined with digital travel guides to create uniqueness to attract more tourists [54]. Although it brings many advantages and positive points to many tourism activities; however, there are still many barriers and challenges that need to be addressed for digital marketing to be highly effective in the context of the tourism industry in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Numerous studies in tourism indicate that in addition to promotional information from tourism businesses and destination information, communication among tourists in online travel communities can influence destination choices. In modern tourism,

internet-based social media has enabled tourists to share their experiences quickly and conveniently. Information shared on social media is considered an important source that can influence the travel decisions of potential tourists [55]. Many tourism-related studies have shown that this trend significantly impacts tourism products and services in various countries [56]. IMC allows managers to unify different brands, messages, and functions, presenting great potential for enhancing marketing communication activities [27, 57, 58]. This study examines the integration of traditional IMC tools such as advertising, promotion, direct marketing, and public relations [59] combined with modern communication tools like social media [44, 60] eWOM [61] and digital marketing [11] affecting the cultural tourism choices of young people. Tourism, being a service industry, places great importance on online reviews, which serve as a critical reference channel for travelers. The development of websites, blogs, and review platforms has created a space for tourists to share their experiences, increasing interactions among tourists and potential travelers intending to choose tourism products and destinations.

## 3. Hypothesis and Research Model

### 3.1. Research Hypothesis

#### 3.1.1. The Relationship between Advertising and Choice Intention

Before digitalization, the advertising components of IMC relied heavily on physical materials and one-way or impersonal communication. In the current context, advertising has evolved significantly in terms of communication, information levels, and customer information needs. Customers now seek quick access to information about new products, interactive two-way communication, and post-purchase services [44, 62]. Digital advertising, including social media, has effectively supported modern advertising by providing comprehensive solutions, personalized messaging, time and cost efficiency, broader impact, targeted reach, and faster interaction and feedback [44, 63]. Therefore, the hypothesis proposed is:

*H₁: Advertising positively influences choice intention.*

#### 3.1.2. The Relationship Between Public Relations and Choice Intention

Public relations (PR) encompass printed media, television travel news, travel TV programs, and online travel information. PR is an integral part of an organization's advertising strategy. This approach is the most cost-effective method, fostering long-term customer engagement with the company [64]. PR communicates information about new products, repositions services or products, impacts new target customers, and reshapes the organization's product and brand image [65]. Modern PR in integrated marketing communication helps strengthen buyer-seller relationships, focuses on public information flow about business development, and promotes customer relationship management [66]. Thus, the hypothesis proposed is:

*H₂: Public relations positively influence choice intention.*

#### 3.1.3. The Relationship Between Sales Promotion and Choice Intention

Similar to advertising, sales promotions indirectly impact customers' purchase intentions [67]. Digital marketing tools operate in a multidimensional approach through product evaluation tools, price-based promotion campaigns, loyalty programs, discount shopping offers, and dealer promotions [44]. Digital sales promotions have a broad scope due to high traffic on social media platforms, can occur continuously, and yield quick and cost-effective results [68]. Therefore, the hypothesis proposed is:

*H₃: Sales promotion positively influences choice intention.*

#### 3.1.4. The Relationship between Direct Marketing and Choice Intention

Direct marketing strategies aim to bridge the gap between marketers and customers, raising customers' awareness of the company's products [65]. In traditional marketing, this method was limited to a specific location, but now direct marketing with internet coverage can reach a global audience [69]. Digital marketing best supports direct marketing, with outreach activities conducted through emails, electronic brochures, and spreading information via social media to actual and potential customers [44]. Hence, the hypothesis proposed is:

*H₄: Direct marketing positively influences choice intention.*

#### 3.1.5. The Relationship Between Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) and Choice Intention

In the current technological context, tourists increasingly trust online sources to guide their destination choices. Positive consumer reviews, known as electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), play a crucial role for tourism providers because services are intangible and cannot be tried before purchase. Abubakar, et al. [70] state that e-WOM is a written memorandum posted by tourists on online platforms about their experiences at specific destinations Abubakar, et al. [70]. Murray [71] found that service consumers trust personal information more and that personal information significantly influences their purchasing decisions [71]. Since tourism is a service-related field, online reviews serve as a vital reference source [72]. Various perspectives highlight the power of e-WOM on travel-related decisions Gretzel and Yoo [73]. Vermeulen and Seegers [74] demonstrate that positive online hotel reviews can improve travelers' attitudes towards hotels [74]. In summary, numerous studies indicate that e-WOM significantly impacts customer choice intentions [75]. Thus, the hypothesis proposed is:

*H₅: Electronic word of mouth positively influences choice intention.*

#### 3.1.6. The Relationship Between social media and Choice Intention

Technological advancements have driven media to shift towards digital formats, facilitating the creation of non-direct interaction social communication platforms that provide useful and user-friendly information, influencing consumer behavior and perceptions of products or brands. Social media is increasingly used because of its higher impact and effectiveness

compared to traditional marketing [76]. Some social media platforms are customized to allow customers easy access to business products and services, contributing to brand building [77]. Therefore, the hypothesis proposed is:

*H$_6$: social media positively influences choice intention*

### 3.1.7. The Relationship Between Digital Marketing and Choice Intention

Customers in the travel industry include many segments, digital marketing has the ability to reach and provide detailed information for each segment while being able to reach customers on a large scale [14]. With these advantages, digital marketing can create consistent content, convey valuable information to customers to retain loyal customers and attract new customers [78]. With data management advantages, tools like Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and blogs enhance the presence of advertising content with customers [79]. Studies indicate that SEO and content marketing are effective tools in digital marketing [80, 81]. Hence, the hypothesis proposed is:

*H$_7$: Digital marketing positively influences choice intention*
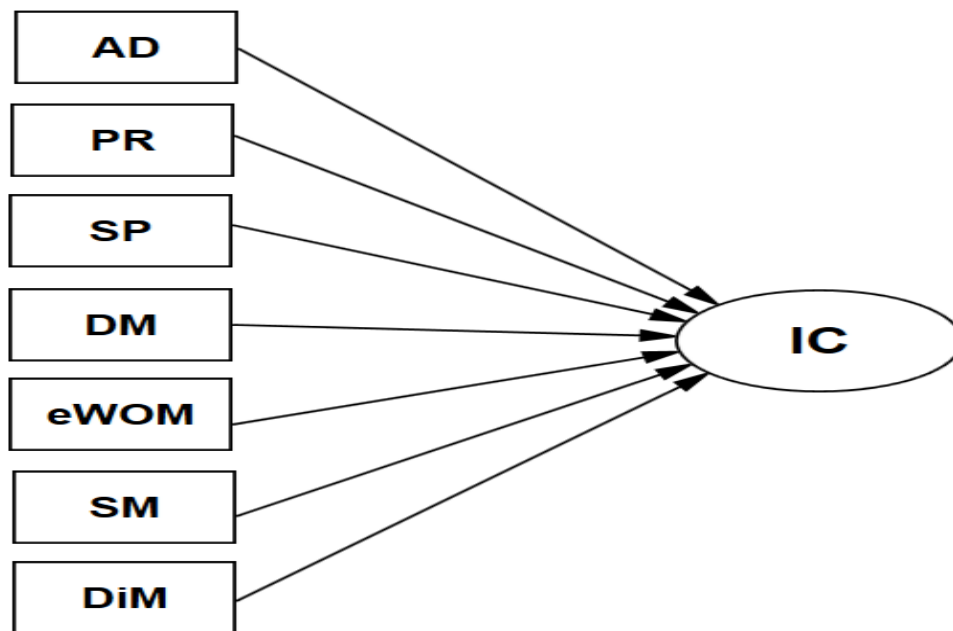
### 3.2. Research Models



**Figure 1.**
Conceptual model.

### 3.3. The Model Includes the Following Components

Advertising (AD, 5 items), Public Relations (PR, 5 items), Sales Promotion (SP, 7 items), Direct Marketing (DM, 5 items), Electronic word of mouth (eWOM, 6 items), social media (SM, 4 items), Digital Marketing (DiM, 4 items), Intention to visit (IC, 5 items).

## 4. Research Methodology

### 4.1. Measurements

The scales were adapted and modified to suit the research context: AD, PR [82, 83] SP [84] DM [85] eWOM [61] SM, DiM [11] IC [86]. The sample size was determined based on the suggestion of Hair, et al. [87] with a sample size five times the number of observed variables. The theoretical research model includes 41 observed variables, necessitating a minimum sample size of 205 (41*5).

### 4.2. Data Collection Procedure

The survey targets young individuals studying, living, and working in Ho Chi Minh City, aged 18 to 29 [13]. The study employed a convenient sampling method, combining both online and face-to-face approaches to enhance accessibility to the survey participants. The observed variables under the research concepts were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The research team accessed the target respondents through universities in the city, enterprises in the high-tech park, and referrals from members who conducted the survey. The collected survey data were entered and reviewed to eliminate non-compliant samples (questionnaires with more than 5% missing data, and non-random information). The final dataset comprised 330 valid samples, which were entered and analyzed using SPSS 25.0 and SmartPLS 4.1.0.0 software.

### 4.3. Data Analysis Method

The study used a mixed method, combining qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative research was used to calibrate the scale using group discussion and expert methods. From the results of qualitative research, a complete survey was used to survey the sample with the survey subjects being young people in the research area. The PLS-SEM model was

used to analyze data and test research hypotheses with the support of SmartPLS 4.1.0.0 software. PLS-SEM analysis has many advantages and is suitable for this study because it does not require a large sample. The measurement model's reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The structural model was assessed for multicollinearity (VIF) [88] in-sample predictive power ($R^2$), and effect size ($f^2$). Hypotheses in the structural model were tested using the bootstrap resampling method, with t-values and p-values used to assess the significance of the path coefficients [89, 90]. The SmartPLS 4.1.0.0 software was used for data analysis.

**Table 1.**
Demographic statistics of the respondents.

| Variable | | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 148 | 44.8 |
| | Female | 182 | 55.2 |
| Age | 18 - 22 | 188 | 57.0 |
| | 23 - 26 | 93 | 28.2 |
| | 27 - 29 | 49 | 14.8 |
| Favorite activity on recent trips | Sightseeing | 108 | 32.7 |
| | Entertainment | 62 | 18.8 |
| | Check-in and take photos | 71 | 21.5 |
| | Learn about local cuisine | 89 | 27.0 |
| Reasons for choosing cultural tourism | Unique cultural experience | 181 | 54.8 |
| | Preserving traditional culture | sixty-four | 19.4 |
| | Promote local economic development | 25 | 7.6 |
| | Others | 60 | 18.2 |
| Learn about cultural tourism through | Social networks | 168 | 50.9 |
| | Online advertising (Banner, Email, Digital Signage,...) | ninety-four | 28.5 |
| | Through traveling companies | 11 | 3.3 |
| | TV, Radio, Newspapers | 48 | 14.5 |
| | Others | 9 | 2.7 |
| Difficulties in choosing cultural tourism products | Lack of information about cultural tourism | 141 | 42.7 |
| | Cultural tourism products are not diverse | 136 | 41.2 |
| | Others | 53 | 16.1 |
| Total | | 330 | 100.0 |

## 5. Research Results

*5.1. Descriptive Statistics*

Table 1 presents the sample statistics for the study, with males comprising 44.8% and females comprising 55.2%. The age group 18-22 constitutes the largest portion of the sample (57.0%), which aligns with the research team's approach of surveying many universities in the city. Among the activities chosen in recent trips, sightseeing is the most popular (32.7%), followed by culinary experiences and photography (27.0% and 21.5%, respectively), with entertainment being the least chosen activity (18.8%).

Cultural experiences were the most selected option in the study sample (54.8%) for the reason of choosing cultural tourism, followed by the preservation of traditional culture (19.4%). The factor promoting local economic development accounted for only 7.6%. Information channels that introduced cultural tourism were primarily through social media (50.9%), followed by online advertising channels (28.5%). This finding is consistent with the current context, where young people adopt and accept technology more easily and quickly than older generations. Most of the younger generation's communication and information searches occur online, with a small percentage (3.3%) obtaining tourism information through travel businesses, indicating that the role of businesses in encouraging youth participation in cultural tourism is not significant. The final issue related to the limitations preventing young people from choosing cultural tourism is the lack of information about cultural tourism products (42.7%) and the lack of diversity and attractiveness in cultural tourism products (41.2%). This information is crucial for stakeholders involved in the development of tourism in general and cultural tourism in particular.

*5.2. Evaluation of Measurement Model*

The structural indices in the measurement model were assessed for internal consistency reliability, as well as convergent and discriminant validity. Cronbach's alpha (CA), composite reliability (CR, rho-A) were utilized to evaluate the reliability of the constructs; factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were used to determine convergent validity. The evaluation criteria are: constructs achieve convergent validity if factor loadings > 0.70, CR > 0.70, and AVE > 0.50 [91, 92]. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion [93] where the square root of each construct's AVE should be greater than its highest correlation with any other construct, the HTMT criterion where correlation coefficients should be lower than 0.850 [91] and cross-loadings.

### 5.2.1. Reliability and Validity Tests

The reliability and validity test results presented in Table 2 show that Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.750 to 0.905 (all > 0.7), composite reliability ranges from 0.753 to 0.907 (all > 0.7), and AVE ranges from 0.640 to 0.709 (all > 0.5), indicating satisfactory analysis results.

**Table 2.**
Construct reliability and validity.

|  | Cronbach's alpha | Composite reliability (rho_a) | Average variance extracted (AVE) |
|---|---|---|---|
| IC | 0.840 | 0.844 | 0.676 |
| AD | 0.831 | 0.858 | 0.661 |
| DM | 0.854 | 0.858 | 0.695 |
| DiM | 0.829 | 0.835 | 0.661 |
| PR | 0.795 | 0.799 | 0.709 |
| SM | 0.750 | 0.753 | 0.667 |
| SP | 0.905 | 0.907 | 0.679 |
| eWOM | 0.887 | 0.894 | 0.640 |

### 5.2.2. Discriminant Validity

The results of the discriminant validity test presented in Table 3 using cross-loading demonstrate that the scales achieve discriminant validity.

**Table 3.**
Discriminant validity based on cross-loading evaluation.

|  | IC | AD | DM | DiM | PR | SM | SP | eWOM |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AD1 |  | 0.863 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| AD2 |  | 0.851 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| AD3 |  | 0.749 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| AD4 |  | 0.783 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| DM2 |  |  | 0.827 |  |  |  |  |  |
| DM3 |  |  | 0.818 |  |  |  |  |  |
| DM4 |  |  | 0.825 |  |  |  |  |  |
| DM5 |  |  | 0.862 |  |  |  |  |  |
| DiM1 |  |  |  | 0.856 |  |  |  |  |
| DiM2 |  |  |  | 0.783 |  |  |  |  |
| DiM3 |  |  |  | 0.776 |  |  |  |  |
| DiM4 |  |  |  | 0.834 |  |  |  |  |
| IC1 | 0.848 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| IC2 | 0.809 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| IC4 | 0.848 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| IC5 | 0.780 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| PR1 |  |  |  |  | 0.827 |  |  |  |
| PR3 |  |  |  |  | 0.864 |  |  |  |
| PR4 |  |  |  |  | 0.834 |  |  |  |
| SM2 |  |  |  |  |  | 0.844 |  |  |
| SM3 |  |  |  |  |  | 0.798 |  |  |
| SM4 |  |  |  |  |  | 0.808 |  |  |
| SP2 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.715 |  |
| SP3 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.824 |  |
| SP4 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.871 |  |
| SP5 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.852 |  |
| SP6 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.830 |  |
| SP7 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.843 |  |
| eWOM1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.812 |
| eWOM2 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.840 |
| eWOM3 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.835 |
| eWOM4 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.788 |
| eWOM5 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.815 |
| eWOM6 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.702 |

**Note:** Excluded Variables: AD5, DM1, IC3, PR2, PR5, SM1, SP1 are extracted due to cross-loading or loading less than 0.5.

Table 4 shows that the correlation coefficients between pairs of constructs (ranging from 0.078 to 0.526) are smaller than the square root of the AVE values, indicating that the scales achieve discriminant validity [92].

**Table 4.**
Fornell-Larcker criterion.

|       | IC    | AD    | DM    | DiM   | PR    | SM    | SP    | eWOM  |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| IC    | 0.822 |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| AD    | 0.174 | 0.813 |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| DM    | 0.495 | 0.131 | 0.833 |       |       |       |       |       |
| DiM   | 0.344 | 0.226 | 0.253 | 0.813 |       |       |       |       |
| PR    | 0.440 | 0.106 | 0.392 | 0.105 | 0.842 |       |       |       |
| SM    | 0.512 | 0.078 | 0.493 | 0.230 | 0.401 | 0.817 |       |       |
| SP    | 0.539 | 0.081 | 0.284 | 0.110 | 0.294 | 0.348 | 0.824 |       |
| eWOM  | 0.625 | 0.096 | 0.283 | 0.275 | 0.328 | 0.315 | 0.526 | 0.800 |

In addition to the Fornell and Larcker [93] criterion used to assess discriminant validity, the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) criterion was also employed for a more stringent assessment [91]. The calculated HTMT values presented in Table 5 are significantly lower than the 0.85 threshold, providing clearer evidence of the discriminant validity of the scales in the research model.

**Table 5.**
Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT).

|       | IC    | AD    | DM    | DiM   | PR    | SM    | SP    | eWOM  |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| IC    |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| AD    | 0.201 |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| DM    | 0.577 | 0.154 |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| DiM   | 0.407 | 0.268 | 0.296 |       |       |       |       |       |
| PR    | 0.537 | 0.125 | 0.474 | 0.131 |       |       |       |       |
| SM    | 0.641 | 0.101 | 0.616 | 0.287 | 0.519 |       |       |       |
| SP    | 0.609 | 0.089 | 0.320 | 0.119 | 0.344 | 0.418 |       |       |
| eWOM  | 0.718 | 0.108 | 0.320 | 0.314 | 0.394 | 0.390 | 0.580 |       |

### 5.3. Assessment of Structural Models

Structural model analysis using PLS-SEM includes the following assessments: multicollinearity [88, 90] with a VIF criterion of $< 5$; the $R^2$ value to measure the influence of latent independent variables on latent dependent variables, with $R^2$ values of 0.75, 0.50, or 0.25 being described as substantial, moderate, or weak, respectively [92] the effect size $f^2$ indicating the impact level of exogenous variables on endogenous variables, with $f^2$ values of 0.020, 0.150, and 0.350 indicating small, medium, or large effects, respectively [89, 90]; and hypothesis testing through path coefficient estimates (*t*-values, *p*-values) using the bootstrap method [94]. The results are presented in Figure 2, Table 6, and Table 7.
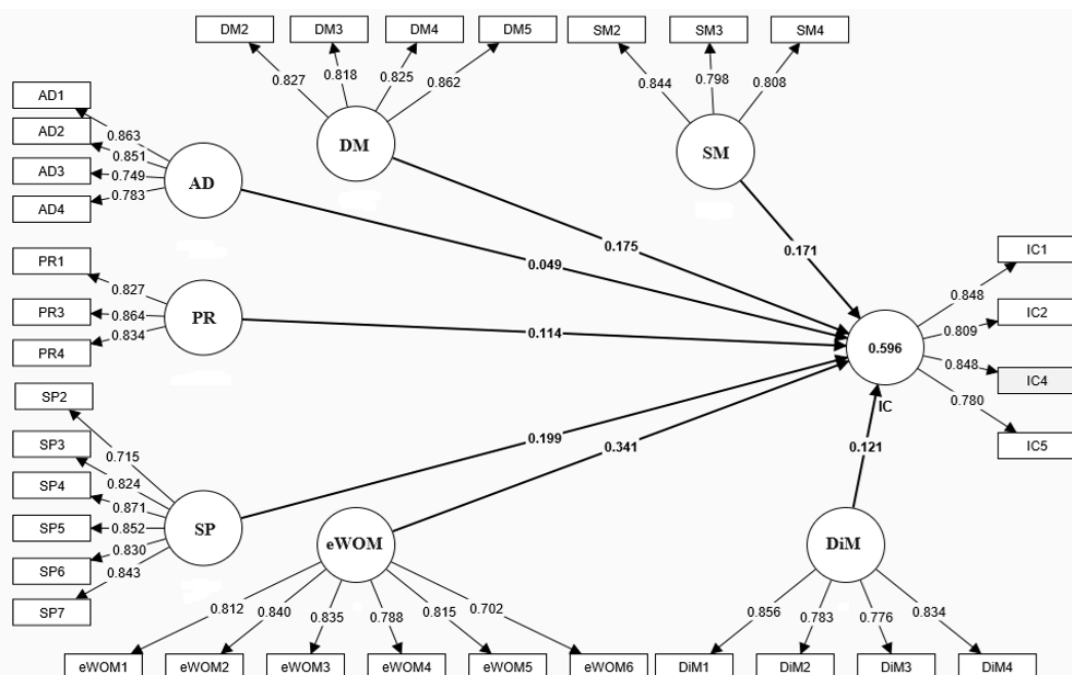


**Figure 2.**
Results of path analysis.

The results in Table 6 show that all VIF values are below the threshold value of 5, indicating no multicollinearity in the model. The $f^2$ value for the relationship (AD $\rightarrow$ IC) has a small predictive level (0.006), while the remaining relationships have moderate predictive levels. The $R^2$ value in this study is 0.596, indicating a moderate level of explanatory power.

**Table 6.**
Multicollinearity, $f^2$ and $R^2$.

|  | **Inner VIF** | ***$f^2$*** | ***R-square*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| AD $\rightarrow$ IC | 1,066 | 0.006 |  |
| DM $\rightarrow$ IC | 1,463 | 0.052 |  |
| DiM $\rightarrow$ IC | 1.192 | 0.030 |  |
| PR $\rightarrow$ IC | 1,338 | 0.024 |  |
| SM $\rightarrow$ IC | 1,507 | 0.048 |  |
| SP $\rightarrow$ IC | 1,485 | 0.066 |  |
| eWOM $\rightarrow$ IC | 1,550 | 0.070 |  |
| IC |  |  | 0.596 |

Statistical significance testing of the parameters in the PLS-SEM model aims to determine the impact of exogenous variables on endogenous variables. PLS-SEM testing was conducted using the bootstrapping method (5,000 resamples) to analyze the relationships between exogenous and endogenous variables, with the results presented in Table 7.

**Table 7.**
Hypothesis testing.

| **Hypothesis** | **Path Direction** | **Path Coefficient** | **t-value** | ***P- values*** | **Conclusion** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $H_1$ | AD $\rightarrow$ IC | 0.049 | 1,335 | 0.182[NS] | *Rejected* |
| $H_2$ | PR $\rightarrow$ IC | 0.114 | 2,357 | 0.018** | *Accepted* |
| $H_3$ | SP $\rightarrow$ IC | 0.199 | 4,041 | 0.000* | *Accepted* |
| $H_4$ | DM $\rightarrow$ IC | 0.175 | 3,375 | 0.001* | *Accepted* |
| $H_5$ | eWOM $\rightarrow$ IC | 0.341 | 6,020 | 0.000* | *Accepted* |
| $H_6$ | SM $\rightarrow$ IC | 0.171 | 2,740 | 0.006* | *Accepted* |
| $H_7$ | DiM $\rightarrow$ IC | 0.121 | 3,053 | 0.002* | *Accepted* |

**Note:** [NS]: not statistically significant, * P-Value < 1%, ** P-Value < 5%.

Based on the results in Table 7, the relationship between AD and IC is not statistically significant. The remaining relationships are statistically significant; specifically, the relationship (PR $\rightarrow$ IC) is significant at the 5% level, and the other relationships are significant at the 1% level. The positive correlations imply that an increase (decrease) of 1 point in the average evaluation of the factors will result in an increase (decrease) in the intention to choose cultural tourism in Ho Chi Minh City among the youth. Corresponding to the Path Coefficients, the relationship (eWOM $\rightarrow$ IC) has the strongest impact ($\beta = 0.341$), indicating that eWOM is the most influential factor affecting the youth's choice. The other relationships have similar impact intensities (ranging from 0.114 to 0.199) respectively.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

The research results indicate that, except for the advertising factor which is not significant in the research model, the remaining factors all influence the intention to choose cultural tourism in Ho Chi Minh City among the youth. The youth today mainly access media through digital devices and do not pay much attention to traditional advertising forms. Modern communication factors such as Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), social media (SM), and Digital Marketing (DiM) influence the youth's choice intention, with eWOM having the strongest impact. This result is consistent with the studies by Reza Jalilvand and Samiei [61]; Grewal, et al. [95] and Laczniak, et al. [96] which show that eWOM affects consumers' consideration, intention, and decision-making behavior. Research by Yang, et al. [72] and Abubakar, et al. [70] also shows that eWOM information has become more popular due to being timely, interesting, useful, and reliable, influencing the choice of tourism products such as tourist destinations, hotels, and restaurants [97]; relying on eWOM to support the travel decision-making process [98]. Therefore, it is necessary to develop good eWOM on online social networks to impact the attitudes and intentions of choosing cultural tourism among tourists in general and the youth in particular. In addition, social media and Digital Marketing also affect the youth's intention to choose cultural tourism. This result is similar to Persuit's research, which concludes that many information-sharing activities, images, events, and other activities frequently occur on Facebook, affecting intentions [99]. Traditional IMC factors such as Public Relations (PR), Sales Promotion (SP), and Direct Marketing (DM) influence the youth's intention to choose cultural tourism, with a relatively similar impact. This result aligns with Thaichon and Quach [82] which show that advertising and promotion can influence customers' switching intentions.

From a managerial perspective, businesses and tourism managers need to understand the cultural tourism needs of the younger generation to develop appropriate communication strategies to attract this customer segment. Social media, Digital Marketing, and Electronic Word of Mouth have proven to be the most effective tools of modern IMC. Although modern communication tools are still necessary to create diversity, the younger generation is mostly associated with digital devices, so

modern IMC tools will be more effective. Young tourists tend to be creative and have higher expectations for cultural tourism experiences. This is also a factor that managers and tourism service providers need to grasp to build various experiential activities at cultural tourism sites (e.g., role-playing games, virtual reality experiences, workshops, volunteer activities) to attract more young tourists. Additionally, managers of cultural tourism sites and tourism businesses should plan to collaborate with universities to organize tours to cultural tourism sites, forming teaching methods combined with tourism experiences. These activities help enhance the younger generation's understanding of cultural heritage, thereby encouraging more students to participate in protecting, inheriting, and developing local cultural values.

From a communication perspective, managers of cultural heritage sites and tourism businesses should develop tourism products that combine tangible products with online space products through reenactments of historical scenes, short films about cultural tourism destinations, or reality shows to evoke interest and create community and youth engagement. Establishing a cooperation mechanism between local cultural heritage management, local tourism agencies, tourism businesses, restaurants, hotels, and festival organizers to create programs or develop special tourism packages related to cultural tourism festivals, combined with attractive incentives and promotions. For example, building a "Festival Experience" tourism package could include festival admission, local accommodation, local cuisine, unique transportation, and entertainment activities to connect cultural tourism sites, creating an attractive product. Through these programs, educational materials can be presented in the virtual world to give the youth a deeper understanding of local cultural values, which can significantly improve their intention to engage in cultural tourism and foster pride in them, forming a desire to preserve and pass on important cultural heritage to future generations.

Management agencies need to develop plans to develop cultural tourism resources, connecting cultural tourism with other types of tourism to create unique and attractive tourism products with the characteristics of Ho Chi Minh City. In addition, it is necessary to pay attention to creating conditions for people around cultural tourism areas to participate in providing services and products to increase income. Develop physical and technical infrastructure, call on tourism companies and tourism training schools to participate in training foreign languages and tour guide skills for local communities so that they can communicate more effectively with tourists, especially foreign tourists. This is also a way to increase the effectiveness of communication campaigns for cultural tourism. Cultural heritage managers need to attract businesses to participate in restoring cultural festivals, repairing historical relics, and renovating degraded temples and pagodas to exploit cultural heritage most effectively. For human resources in the tourism industry, it is necessary to orient training in cultural tourism knowledge for tour guides, this is the force that directly and most effectively promotes the attractiveness and depth of cultural values to tourists.

## *6.1. Limitations and Future Research*

Although this study has made contributions to the development of cultural tourism in the study area from a communication perspective, the article still has some limitations. Firstly, this study only focuses on communication without considering other characteristics such as infrastructure, the current status of connections between cultural heritages and tourism activities. Further studies need to consider combining these factors to produce more comprehensive results. Secondly, this study only focuses on young people, while cultural tourism is highly attractive to international tourists. Further studies need to conduct more in-depth research in this direction, clearly identifying which cultural tourism products are highly appreciated by foreign tourists so that managers can develop plans to exploit and preserve cultural heritages more effectively in combination with tourism development; Tourism businesses have the basis to build communication campaigns to convey information about cultural tourism programs suitable for each customer segment.

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