The Relationship Between Website Quality, University Image, e-WOM and Intention to Follow the University Website

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between website quality, university image, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and intention to follow the university's website in Thailand. The online questionnaires of 214 were employed for the quantitative study through convenience sampling. The complete collected data were analysed using the PLS-SEM program for hypothesis testing. The results show that website quality significantly impacts the university's image and turns it into the intention to follow the university's website. University image significantly influences e-WOM and turns it into the intention to follow the university's website. The implication could be applied to explain the relationship between website quality, brand image, e-WOM and intention to follow the website of companies or organisations in any sector. The recommendation is to expand more sampling to other countries to understand the relationship. Also, qualitative research could give insight results for further study.

Keywords: *Website Quality; Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM); University Image; Intentions to Follow; Digitalisation*

1. INTRODUCTION
1.1. Background of the Study
The use of digital technologies has evolved into a critical cultural technique that increasingly determines educational opportunities, the possibility of upward social mobility, social participation, and good job prospects (Janschitz & Penker, 2022; Tohara, 2021). As a result, digitalisation impacts almost every aspect of life in this technological and social phenomenon. It is also accurate for educational institutions under increasing pressure to keep up with digitalisation and provide students with relevant and up-to-date educational offerings (Janschitz & Penker, 2022). A university's website, one critical digitalisation, is the primary medium for disseminating information (Alexander & Ishak, 2018). The use of websites in educational contexts is rising by the day. Technology has a significant impact on the educational system. The World Wide Web (www) allows for content delivery via websites. It serves as a foundation for quickly making content available to beneficiaries (Rosliana et al., 2021). Thus, the quality of the website is

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essential (Chen et al., 2021). A university brand image is crucial in education marketing, as a good university brand image is identified as a university's impression (Azam & Qureshi, 2021). With the advancement of internet technologies, many people use it to obtain information online. Furthermore, with the evolution of the internet and the widespread adoption of social media applications, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), a type of digital communication, has evolved into an impactful tool in every sector (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Kurnaz & Duman, 2021). Therefore, the antecedents of the quality of the university's website, e-WOM, and university image affecting intentions to follow the university's websites are vital to study.

1.2. Problem Statement
Websites are a system of related resources, such as multimedia content or web pages, typically identified by a common domain name and published on at least one web server. A university website is one example of how universities use technology to help disseminate information to the academic community and promote events outside of the university (Kaur & Sharma, 2018; Sukmasetya et al., 2020). Therefore, web-based public services play an essential role in a university's success (Sukmasetya et al., 2020). Furthermore, brand image, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and product or service quality are crucial attributes of behavioural intention. They can influence an individual's willingness or behavioural intention (Yunus et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2019). Several studies confirmed the relationship between website quality, e-WOM, and brand image on customers' intention to buy healthcare products (Tajuddin et al., 2020), tourists'

intentions to visit (Purbadharmaja et al., 2021), individuals' intentions to travel (Ahmad et al., 2019), and buyers' intention to purchase a smartphone (Yohana et al., 2020). However, only a few studies support the relationship between website quality, university image, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and an individual's intention to follow the university's website. It may benefit educational leaders, education administrators, and web developers to implement the appropriate strategies to increase an individual's intention to follow the university's website in Thailand.

1.3. Research Objective
This study examines the relationship between website quality, university image, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and intention to follow the university's websites in Thailand.

1.4. Research Question
Is there any relationship between website quality, university image, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and intention to follow the university's website in Thailand, and how?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1. Digitalisation and University
Digitalisation has an impact on our daily routines. Its goal is to increase the number of opportunities for positive learning. The rise of digital structures affects access to learning materials, communication, and cooperation among various interest groups. Digitalisation is a trend that many universities are adopting (Brink et al., 2020). Digitalisation was recognised as a massive opportunity (Sørensen, 2018). Furthermore, today's technologies provide powerful tools for developing high-quality learning resources, such as learning

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applications and university websites (Coskun, 2015; Undu & Akuma, 2018; Zhou et al., 2020). Digitalisation benefits universities in a variety of ways. Implementing modern technologies, for example, assists universities in remaining digitally relevant and differentiating themselves as digital leaders (Khalid et al., 2018). Therefore, digitalisation and university are related and crucial to study.

2.2. Intention to Follow the University's Website

Websites are becoming an increasingly important component of an organisation's success in this increasingly globalised and competitive world (Hill, 2010; Undu & Akuma, 2018). The website represents an organisation interacting with or projecting the principles, culture, values, vision, and perspectives. It serves as a link between organisations and their customers. As an academic institution, the university uses a website to communicate with and provide computing services to its stakeholders, including students, faculties, university administrations, and others (Undu & Akuma, 2018). There are several benefits to following and using a website for a university, such as introducing profiles of higher education, facilitating communication, bringing in new students and candidates, becoming a tool of official publications, and gaining branding (Alexander & Ishak, 2018). Therefore, an individual's intention to follow the university's website is the outcome of this study.

2.3. Website Quality

Website quality was defined as a user's perception of how a website meets their needs in terms of features. Website quality can also be defined as the consumer's assessment of a given site's overall excellence and suitability for use in assisting with the task or goal of making an online purchase (Giao et al., 2020). Online marketers should focus on the seven effective website designs: context, content, community, customisation, communication, relationship, and trade. Besides, website quality can be measured in three categories: quality of information, the quality of interaction, and quality usability (Barnes & Vidgen, 2003; Dapas et al., 2019). Boon-itt (2019) investigated the quality of health websites and their influence on perceived usefulness, trust and intention to use. Health website quality influenced Thai users' willingness to use the health website. Qalati et al. (2021) investigated the effects of perceived service quality, website quality, and reputation on purchase intention. There was a significant effect of website quality on intent to purchase online. Sun et al. (2021) confirmed that website quality enhanced Chinese online users' intention to repurchase. Ashrafi et al. (2020) confirmed that website quality significantly influenced students' intentions to use the learning management system (LMS). Furthermore, Jones and Kim (2010) examined the influence of retail brand trust, off-line patronage, clothing involvement, and website quality on online apparel shopping intention for young female US consumers. It was confirmed that there was a relationship between website quality and brand image. Foroudi et al. (2019) also investigated the causality between university websites, customer value co-creation behaviour, university brand image and reputation. A well-designed website significantly influenced the university's image. Therefore, the hypothesis is shown as follows.

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H1: The university's website quality significantly influences the university's image.

2.4. University Image

University image was defined as the sum or quantity of an individual's beliefs about the university (Lafuente Ruiz de Sabando et al., 2018). In education marketing, university brand image has been identified as a competitive advantage (Panda et al., 2019). The higher the university's reputation, the better its brand image. Therefore, university chancellors have begun to recognise the strategic value of having a solid brand and have set aside increasing resources to improve the image of the universities they manage (Foroudi et al., 2019; Lafuente Ruiz de Sabando et al., 2018). Mun et al. (2018) investigated the factors of international students' intentions to pursue their tertiary education in countries (destination) and universities. The students' intentions to recommend the university were influenced by the university's image. Furthermore, Saleh et al. (2012) confirmed that university image significantly influenced international students' intention to study. Darmawanto et al. (2019) also demonstrated a significant effect of university image on students' intentions to choose a university. Furthermore, Nuseir (2019) investigated the impact of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on the online purchase intention of consumers in Islamic countries. It was confirmed that there was a significant relationship between e-WOM and brand image. Elseidi & El-Baz (2016) and Reza Jalilvand & Samiei (2012) also confirmed a relationship between brand image and e-WOM. Therefore, the hypotheses are shown as follows.

H2: University image significantly influences electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM).

H3: University image significantly influences individuals' intentions to follow the university's website.

2.5. Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)

Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) was defined as communication that has evolved from face-to-face communication to electronic word-of-mouth enabled by the Internet. It has evolved into a powerful communication tool in the virtual environment (Al-Ja'afreh & Al-Adaileh, 2020; Sosanuy et al., 2021). e-WOM is a typical customer practice with undeniable effects on profits. It remains an over-labelled and under-theorised concept (Babić Rosario et al., 2020). Delafrooz et al. (2019) investigated the influence of e-WOM on Instagram users. There was a significant effect of e-WOM on users' intentions to use Instagram. Furthermore, Mensah (2020) examined the moderating effect of e-WOM communications on the relationship between the perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of mobile government services and the intention to use mobile government services. e-WOM communications significantly influenced individuals' intentions to use mobile government services. Zoghlami et al. (2018) also confirmed that e-WOM significantly influenced users' intentions to use mobile banking applications. Therefore, the hypothesis is shown as follows.

H4: Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) significantly influences

individuals' intentions to follow the   *university's*   *website.*

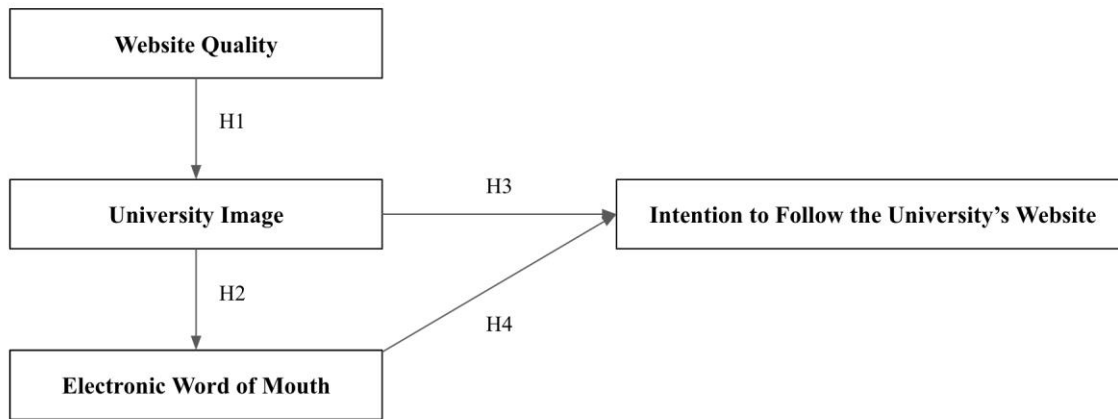## 2.6. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Method

The instrument for data collection in this study was a closed-end questionnaire (Likert's Rating Scale). The researchers developed the questionnaire items based on previous research. The data collection instrument was a closed-ended questionnaire. The reliability and validity of the measuring instruments were determined. The validity of a tool is determined by its ability to accurately measure the researcher's concept (Kaewnaknaew et al., 2022). The main variables in this study were evaluated using a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The demographics of those who responded to the survey questions were derived from a study conducted by Napawut et al. (2022) and Sitthipon et al. (2022). The questionnaire items in website quality and electronic word of mouth were based on Septiari (2018). The questionnaire items in

the university image were based on Hou & Wonglorsaichon (2011). Finally, the questionnaire items for intention to follow the website construct were based on Casaló et al. (2017).

3.2. Population and Sample

The population of the study's target population is unknown. A typical survey has a 95% confidence level. Accordingly, collecting data using a sample error of 5% and a precision level of 95% (Si Dah et al., 2022). The sample size determination for an infinite population was over a minimum of 100 as required for inferential statistics following the recommendation of Kock & Hadaya (2018). The total number of participants in the study was 214, over the minimum required sample size of 100. The population was Thai people who had the experience of visiting a university's website. The study's samples included Thai people over 18 years old who had

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experience visiting a university's website in Thailand.

3.3. Data Collection
Data was collected between February 20th and March 30th, 2022, adopting convenience sampling and a self-administered online survey. Before distributing online questionnaires, the researchers explained the study's objective to the respondents and solicited their participation.

3.4. Data Analysis
The respondents' demographics were analysed using SPSS Version 27 for descriptive statistical analysis (frequency and percentage). Mean analysis and standard deviation were used to calculate each variable's results and questionnaire items. The Cronbach's Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the data set at 0.7. The validity test was carried out using the factor loadings and was set at 0.7, SRMR was set at lesser than 0.08 following the study of Napawut et al. (2022). The completed data was analysed using a partial least square structural equation model (PLS-SEM: ADANCO 2.3) to test the hypotheses.

4. RESULTS

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (n=214)

Demographics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	167	78.0%
	Male	47	22.0%
Age	18 - 25 years old	158	73.8%
	26 - 30 years old	23	10.7%
	31 - 35 years old	13	6.1%
	36 - 40 years old	7	3.3%
	41 years old or over	13	6.1%
Status	Single	206	96.3%
	Married	8	3.7%
University	Public University	167	78.0%
	Private University	47	22.0%
University's Setting	Thailand	179	83.6%
	Other Countries in Asia	27	12.7%
	Other Countries outside Asia	8	3.7%
Education	Bachelor's Degree	164	76.6%
	Master's Degree	32	15.0%
	Doctorate Degree or Higher	18	8.4%

Field of Education			
	Business Management	56	26.2%
	Science / Health Science	24	11.2%
	Education	36	16.8%
	Languages / Arts	73	34.1%
	Humanities and Social Sciences	20	9.4%
	Others	5	2.3%
Occupation			
	Student	157	73.4%
	Civil Servant	6	2.8%
	Private Company Employee	30	14.0%
	Personal Business	19	8.9%
	Unemployed	2	0.9%
Monthly Income			
	Less than 10,000 THB	117	54.7%
	10,001 - 20,000 THB	38	17.8%
	20,001 - 30,000 THB	8	3.7%
	30,001 - 40,000 THB	18	8.4%
	40,001 - 50,000 THB	8	3.7%
	More than 50,000 THB	25	11.7%
	Total	214	100%

Two hundred and fourteen (214) participants completed online questionnaires. The results revealed that most respondents were female (78.0%), aged between 18 and 25 (73.8%), single (96.3%), and earned a monthly income of fewer than 10,000 baht (54.7%). Moreover, most of the respondents were university students (73.4%), with bachelor's degrees (76.6%) from public universities (78.0%), in the field of languages-art (34.1%), business (26.2%), education (16.8%), science-health science (11.2%). Most university settings are in Thailand (83.6%). The demographic profile was represented as the study's sample.

4.1. PLS-SEM Results

Table 2. Item Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha and Average Variance Extracted (n=214)

Items	Factor Loadings	Mean	SD.
Website Quality (WQ) **Cronbach's Alpha = 0.9279, AVE = 0.7359**			
1. The university's website content meets my needs.	0.872	4.64	0.567
2. The university's website is easy to use.	0.871	4.62	0.652
3. The university's website content can be loaded quickly.	0.858	4.58	0.679
4. The internal search capabilities of the university's website meet my needs.	0.883	4.57	0.707

5. Little search effort is needed to find information.	0.780	4.57	0.752
6. The university's staff support me promptly if required.	0.879	4.47	0.897

University Image
Cronbach's Alpha = 0.8968, AVE = 0.7645

1. University image is presented through the website.	0.837	4.71	0.652
2. The university is an attractive institute and reliable.	0.899	4.72	0.551
3. The university provides various educational services.	0.917	4.64	0.675
4. The university is a reputable one.	0.843	4.75	0.512

Electronic Word-of-Mouth
Cronbach's Alpha = 0.9343, AVE = 0.7927

1. I read online comments on the university's website.	0.867	4.54	0.875
2. I often see positive online comments about the university on the website.	0.932	4.53	0.826
3. I often read positive online reviews about the educational services belonging to the university.	0.924	4.54	0.820
4. My e-community frequently posts online recommendations for the university's educational services.	0.859	4.43	0.950
5. Alumni and students' online positive comments make me more confident in the university.	0.867	4.60	0.749

Intention to Follow the University's Websites
Cronbach's Alpha = 0.9477, AVE = 0.9054

1. I have the intention to visit the university's website.	0.950	4.49	0.854
2. I will follow the university's website.	0.963	4.54	0.837
3. I usually look for new content published on the university's website.	0.941	4.53	0.837

Table 3. R-Squared (n=214)

Construct	Coefficient of Determination (R^2)	Adjusted R^2
Electronic Word of Mouth	0.5888	0.5869
University Image	0.6271	0.6254
Intention to Follow University's Websites	0.7396	0.7372

Table 4. Effect Overview (n=214)

Effect	Beta	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Cohen's f^2

Website Quality → E-Word of Mouth		0.6077	0.6077	
Website Quality → University Image	0.7919		0.7919	1.6818
Website Quality → Intention to Follow		0.6190	0.6190	
E-Word of Mouth → Intention to Follow	0.5595		0.5595	0.4944
University Image → E-Word of Mouth	0.7673		0.7673	1.4319
University Image → Intention to Follow	0.3523	0.4293	0.7816	0.1960

Table 5. Total Effects Inference (n=214)

Effect	Original Coefficient	Standard Bootstrap Results					Percentile Bootstrap Quantiles		
		Mean Value	Standard Error	T-Value	P-Value (2-Sided)	P-Value (1-Sided)	0.5%	2.5%	97.5%
WQ → e-WOM	0.6077	0.6143	0.0552	11.0043	0.000	0.000	0.4615	0.4964	0.7174
WQ → UI	0.7919	0.7953	0.0381	20.8084	0.000	0.000	0.6935	0.7132	0.8625
WQ → IF	0.6190	0.6244	0.0483	12.8199	0.000	0.000	0.5020	0.5216	0.7177
e-WOM → IF	0.5595	0.5617	0.0879	6.3634	0.000	0.000	0.3244	0.3805	0.7182
UI → e-WOM	0.7673	0.7711	0.0379	20.2366	0.000	0.000	0.6627	0.6901	0.8404
UI → IF	0.7816	0.7844	0.0326	23.9967	0.000	0.000	0.6991	0.7165	0.8437

WQ = Website Quality, UI = University Image, e-WOM = Electronic Word of Mouth,
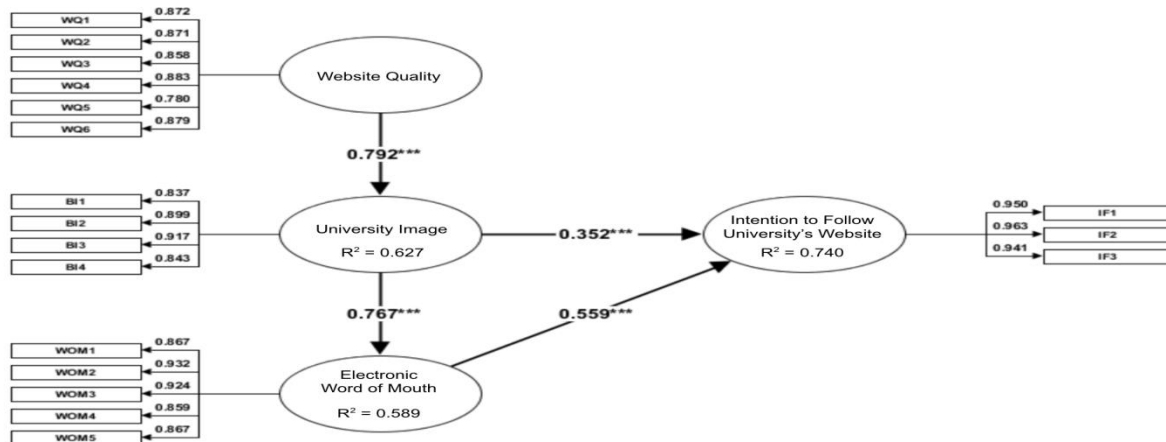IF = Intention to Follow the University's Website

Figure 2. PLS-Structural Equation Model of the Study (SRMR=0.0547)

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Website quality can predict university image at β=0.792, p<0.001 (Two tails at 0.0000 and one tail at 0.0000). The university image can predict e-WOM at β=0.767, p<0.001 (Two tails at 0.0000 and one side at 0.0000). The university image can predict the intention to follow the university's website at β=0.352, p<0.001 (Two tails at 0.0000 and one side at 0.0000). e-WOM can predict the intention to follow the university's website at β=0.559, p<0.001 (Two tails at 0.0000 and one side at 0.0000). The mediator role of university image can be explained by 62.7% (R^2=0.627). Also, the mediator role of e-WOM can be explained by 58.9% (R^2=0.589). Overall, the relationship phenomenon predicting customers' intention to follow the university's website can be explained by 74.0% (R^2=0.740).

4.2. Assumptions

Table 6. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses	Results	Actions
H1: Website Quality → University Image	β=0.792 at p<0.001 (R^2=0.627)	Accepted
H2: University Image → Electronic Word of Mouth	β=0.767 at p<0.001 (R^2=0.589)	Accepted
H3: University Image → Intention to Follow University's Websites	β=0.352 at p<0.001	Accepted
H4: Electronic Word of Mouth → Intention to Follow University's Websites	β=0.559 at p<0.001	Accepted
		Overall, the relationship phenomenon can be explained by 74.0% (R^2=0.740).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION
5.1. Discussion
The study's hypothesis testing results confirmed the proposed conceptual framework. The results indicated a relationship between website quality, university image, electronic word of mouth, and intention to follow the university's websites. The findings supported the previous research of Foroudi et al. (2019) and Jones & Kim (2010) that website quality significantly impacted brand image. Therefore, the university's website quality significantly influences the university's image. The findings supported the previous research of Elseidi& El-Baz (2016), Nuseir (2019), and Reza Jalilvand & Samiei (2012) that there was a relationship between brand image and e-WOM. Therefore, the university image

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significantly influences e-WOM. The findings supported the previous research of Darmawanto et al. (2019), Mun et al. (2018), and Saleh et al. (2012) that there was a relationship between university image and individuals' intentions. Therefore, the university image significantly influences individuals' intentions to follow the university's website. The findings supported the previous research of Delafrooz et al. (2019), Mensah (2020), and Zoghlami et al. (2018) that e-WOM significantly influenced individuals' intentions. Therefore, e-WOM significantly influences individuals' intentions to follow the university's website.

5.2. Conclusions

The results show that website quality significantly impacts a university's image. The university's image significantly influences the intention to follow its website. University image significantly influences e-WOM, and e-WOM impacts the intention to follow the university's website. The educators should pay attention to website quality about the university's website content that meets the university websites' visitors' needs and is easy to use. The university's image is from the university's reputation. Also, the university image is presented through the website's attractiveness and its reliability. The respondents perceived e-WOM as an

essential factor because alumni and students' online positive comments make them more confident in the university. Moreover, the intention to follow the university's website could be measured using the visitors who have the intention to visit the university's website, follow the university's website and usually look for new content published on the university's website. Therefore, the intention to follow the university's website could be gotten more attractive through these measurements.

5.3. Research Implication

The relationship phenomenon can be explained with high predicting power. The implication could be applied to explain the relationship between website quality, brand image, e-WOM and intention to follow the website of companies or organisations in any sector. The marketers and strategic planners should pay attention to the variables in the assumption model.

5.4. Limitations and Recommendations

The sample is mainly explained for Thailand. The recommendation is to expand more sampling to other countries to understand the relationship. Also, this study employed a quantitative study, it may not explain insight details of the relationship. Therefore, qualitative research could give insight results for further study.

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