Homestay experience and eWOM among Generation Z tourists: The role of guest delight, guest satisfaction, and the need for uniqueness

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the relationship between homestay experiences, guest delight, guest satisfaction, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) intention among Generation Z tourists with the need for uniqueness taking a moderating role. Data was collected from 223 young travellers who experienced homestay tourism in Vietnam. A partial least-squares structural equation modelling approach was employed to explore the relationships between the variables. The results showed that guest homestay experiences significantly influence guest delight, satisfaction, and eWOM. Guest delight also partially mediates the impact of the homestay experience on guest eWOM. The relationship between guest experience and guest delight is significantly moderated by customer need for uniqueness. In addition, the need for uniqueness also significantly enhances the impact of guest delight on eWOM intention. The study enriches the body of knowledge on guest experience, guest delight, guest needs for uniqueness, and eWOM intention in the context of homestay services. The theoretical and managerial contributions are also discussed.

1. Introduction

In the highly competitive international market, customer loyalty is recognised as an essential factor in driving a company's profitability and competitiveness (Srinivasan et al., 2002). Much research has concentrated on the role of customer satisfaction in predicting customer loyalty (Ludwig et al., 2017); however, satisfying customers seems insufficient on its own to achieve customer loyalty (Schneider & Bowen, 1999) as even highly satisfied customers still defect at a high rate (Ludwig et al., 2017). Because of this customer defection issue, marketing scholars and practitioners have shifted their attention to customer delight, a positive emotional state generating greater loyalty (Schneider & Bowen, 1999).

Customer delight is an extremely positive state of emotion (Kim et al., 2023) that can be established when a service far exceeds guest expectations (M. Kim, Vogt, et al., 2015). The concept of customer delight is also different from customer satisfaction, in that it is related to emotional (Lee & Park, 2019) appraisal rather than to cognitive evaluation (Lee & Park, 2019). Barnes and Krallman (2019) identified three main groups of determinants of customer delight, namely, employee factors (e.g., expertise, problem resolution), customer factors (e.g., surprise, expectations) and contextual factors (e.g., value, novelty).

Research by Lee and Park (2019) also identified the role of customer experience in achieving guest delight. Meanwhile, the outcomes of customer delight have been determined and include repurchase intention (Bartl et al., 2013), tourist citizenship behaviour (Li et al., 2022), and positive word-of-mouth (Chitturi et al., 2008). In the lodging industry, customer delight was also found to be a key driver of guest attitude and behavioural intention, affecting guest retention (Selem et al., 2023), customer loyalty (Lee & Park, 2019), and guest expenditure (Mohammad, 2021). However, the relationship between guest delight and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has not been widely explored in hotel or homestay industry.

Boolean search using Web of Science and Scopus databases with the query: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("guest delight" OR "visitor delight" OR "customer delight") AND ("Hotel*" OR "homestay*")) generated only 73 research papers. Among those, there are only 16 empirical studies related to guest delight and its antecedents and consequences (Table 1). Most research on guest delight has been conducted in the context of hotels (Kim et al., 2023; Lee & Park, 2019), resorts (Ji & Prentice, 2021; Selem et al., 2023), and cruises (Mohammad, 2021). The role of customer delight in homestay context, which is a part of the hospitality industry, seems to be neglected by academic scholars. Furthermore,

none of them investigated the impact of guest delight on their intention to perform eWOM. According to Serra-Cantallops et al. (2020, p. 3471), eWOM is *"a conscious, deliberate action that involves extra effort in becoming involved actively in creating and spreading content through digital platforms"*, which is different from traditional WOM regarding its nature and antecedents. While WOM is commonly resulted from satisfaction (Tsao & Hsieh, 2012), customer eWOM requires more than just satisfaction feelings (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2020) and depends on their behavioural engagement in social network services (Chinelato et al., 2023). Hence, although the association between delight and WOM has been widely studied, it is still worth for exploring the impact of guest delight on eWOM intention.

Homestay, which provides travellers with more sustainable forms of tourism, has become more popular (Mura, 2015). Post-COVID-19, the homestay industry is undergoing significant change, driven by travellers' evolving needs and expectations. The global homestay market was valued at USD 11.6 billion in 2022 and is expected to reach USD 30.2 billion by 2028 (Homestay Platform Market *2023-2030 Size, Sales By 2030, Revenue Analysis Research*, 2023). The Asia Pacific region is the largest homestay market, accounting for over 50 % of the global market. With homestay, tourists can stay and live with residents in rural areas and experience the local culture (Lynch, 2005). Homestay guests can get involved in the daily activities of host families and exchange culture with them. They can not only have environmental experience and human interaction experience but also activity, knowledge & culture experience during their stay (Musa et al., 2010). Such unique characteristics of homestay can result in different experiences and satisfaction levels according to guest expectations and cultural backgrounds (Mura, 2015).

Generation Z customers are the ones who are 17 to 22 year-old customers by the year 2024 (born between 1997 and 2012) (Goldring & Azab, 2020). They are young tourists, one of the fastest growth segments in the tourism industry, contributing approximately USD 330 billion to revenues in this domain by the year 2019 (Lim et al., 2023). According to Lim et al. (2023), generation Z is distinctive from other groups of travellers regarding travelling motivations such as cultural experiences, learning new cultures, or interacting with local communities. Hence, generation Z travellers may find homestay attractive for their holidays.

Although tourism research has investigated the important role of guest expectations, such as novelty seeking and cultural exploration in explaining guest behaviour, customer need for uniqueness (NFU) has received limited attention from researchers (Dey et al., 2020). NFU is a personal trait that can influence customer perception (Dey et al., 2020) and travel destination decisions (Ek Styvén & Foster, 2018). In tourism, young tourists with a high NFU were found to be more likely to purchase ethnic foods (Cengiz & Akdemir Cengiz, 2023) and share their experiences (Ek Styvén & Foster, 2018). Young tourists with NFU may find homestay interesting and could be enthused by the local cultural experience. Thus, the relationship between guest NFU, guest experiences and emotional responses, such as delight, in the homestay context is a research gap worth exploring.

Given these research gaps, this study aims to contribute to the existent literature by expanding the stimuli-organism-response (SOR) theory in the context of the homestay industry. Proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), the theory provides a mechanism explaining how external environmental factors influence individual internal emotions and consequently determine their behavioural responses. Hence, S-O-R model was implemented in this research as a theoretical framework to investigate the impacts of homestay experience (stimulus) on guest delight, satisfaction (organism) and eWOM intention (response). Research findings reveal that homestay experience positively associated with guest's emotional states such as delight and satisfaction and their eWOM intention. However, only delight feeling, an extreme level of satisfaction (Barnes & Krallman, 2019), significantly determines eWOM intention among Gen Z travellers. Besides, the study also explores the moderating role of NFU. The impact of homestay experience (stimulus) on guest delight (organism) is weakened by the NFU. With the same homestay experience, guests with high level of NFU are less likely to be delighted in comparison to their counterparts. However, the intention to spread eWOM among delighted homestay guests is increased with the

Table 1
Previous studies on guest delight in hotel and homestay sectors *(Source: Authors)*.

No	Author (Year)	Context	Theory	Antecedents	Consequences
1	Selem et al. (2023)	Resort	Cognitive appraisal theory (CAT), stimulusorganism-response model (SOR)	Physical evidence, resort image	Guest retention
2	Kim et al. (2023)	Hotel	CAT	Customization, employee authenticity	Willingness to recommend, Willingness to pay premium price
3	Xiong et al. (2022)	Restaurant	Stress-vulnerability model	Exessive employee effort, social anxiety	Customer loyalty
5	Song et al. (2022)	Hotel	Self-congruity theory, SOR	Physical environment	Subjective wellbeing
6	Saleh and Alameri (2022)	Hotel		Organizational prowess, organizational ingenuity, exploitation, exploration	
7	Anabila et al. (2022)	Hotel		Service quality	Customer satisfaction, customer loyalty
9	Rivera et al. (2021)	Hotels and restaurants	Disconfirmation theory	Service delivery (service staff, service ability, customer service interaction), remarkable tourism experience (happiness, love)	
10	Mohammad (2021)	Cruise		Cruise tourism service scape, national identity	Guest expenditure
11	Ji and Prentice (2021)	Casino resort	Social judgment theory	Customers' transaction specific satisfaction	Place attachment, customer loyalty
12	Hao and Chon (2021)	Hotel	Equity theory		Customer equity, brand trust
13	Lee and Park (2019)	Hotel	Equity theory	Customer experience	Customer equity, customer loyalty
14	Ludwig et al. (2017)	Hotel	Expectancy-disconfirmation theory	Presence of extra value, surprise	Repurchase intention, positive word of mouth
15	Lee and Shea (2015)	Hotel	Equity theory, two-factor theory	Service-related tangibles, property-related tangibles, professional services, friendly services, unexpected services	Customer loyalty (return intention, actual recommendation, recommendation intention)
16	Loureiro et al. (2014)	Rural lodging	Plutchik's theory	Surprising consumption, disconfirmation, arousal, positive affect	Loyalty

presence of NFU (moderating effect).

The study also provides managerial contributions to the hospitality and tourism industry, particularly in the homestay sector by highlighting the role of guest experience and NFU. Homestay managers should concentrate on care, comfort and invite feelings, three essential facets of experience, to satisfy and delight Gen Z customers. Furthermore, strategies should concentrate on stimulating Gen Z guest experience with joy and surprise factors rather than meeting their expectation solely (delighting guests) as satisfaction is not enough to encourage them to share their experiences on the internet. Lastly, the NFU among Gen Z guests should be acknowledged and homestay operators should provide unique services such as exclusive accommodation and cultural experiences to delight guests and stimulate their intention to spread positive reviews on the online platforms.

The paper is structured as follows: (i) conceptual framework and hypotheses development, (ii) research methodology, (iii) results, and (iv) conclusions and discussion.

2. Conceptual framework and hypotheses development

This study applied the SOR theory in developing the research model. The theory has been widely used in hospitality literature to explain guest delight and behavioural intention (Selem et al., 2023; Song et al., 2022). The SOR model suggests that external factors (stimuli) evoke an individual's internal state (organism), which in turn initiates behavioural intentions or actual behaviours (response) (Su & Li, 2023). Much research has referred to guest experience as a stimulus factor (Fan et al., 2023; Kokkhangplu & Auemsuvarn, 2024), guest delight as the organism (Selem et al., 2023; Song et al., 2022), and eWOM intention as the

response (Fan et al., 2023). In this study, we propose that guests' appraisal of the homestay experience can create delightful emotions that further influence their eWOM intention. Further, the research examines the moderating effect of NFU on the relationship between homestay experience and eWOM. The proposed research model is shown in Fig. 1

2.1. Homestay experience as a stimulus

Experience refers to the overall feelings of individuals originating from the interaction between an event and their psychological stage at a certain moment (Shen & Liu, 2015). In the hotel industry, guest experience is defined as a holistic and subjective mental response resulting from the customer journey (from pre-purchase to post-purchase) for a stay at the accommodation (Veloso & Gomez-Suarez, 2023). The foundation of the guest experience is the cognitive and emotional appraisal of interactions with respect to the service provider, physical environment, and social environment (Alnawas & Hemsley-Brown, 2019). These evaluations could be influenced by an individual's psychological state or contextual factors (Shen & Liu, 2015).

Guest experience is the main predictor of guests' affective, cognitive, and behavioural outcomes (Veloso & Gomez-Suarez, 2023). Research by Lee and Park (2019) and Rivera et al. (2021) confirmed the relationship between guest experience and guest delight. As guests' emotional response is evoked by their experience (Yu et al., 2022), positively surprising experiences can result in delight (Finn, 2012; Torres et al., 2020). The impact of hotel experiences on guest satisfaction has been determined in previous studies (Paulose & Shakeel, 2021; Ren et al., 2016). Ren et al. (2016) revealed the predictive role of guest experience in the relationship with guest satisfaction in the budget hotel sector,
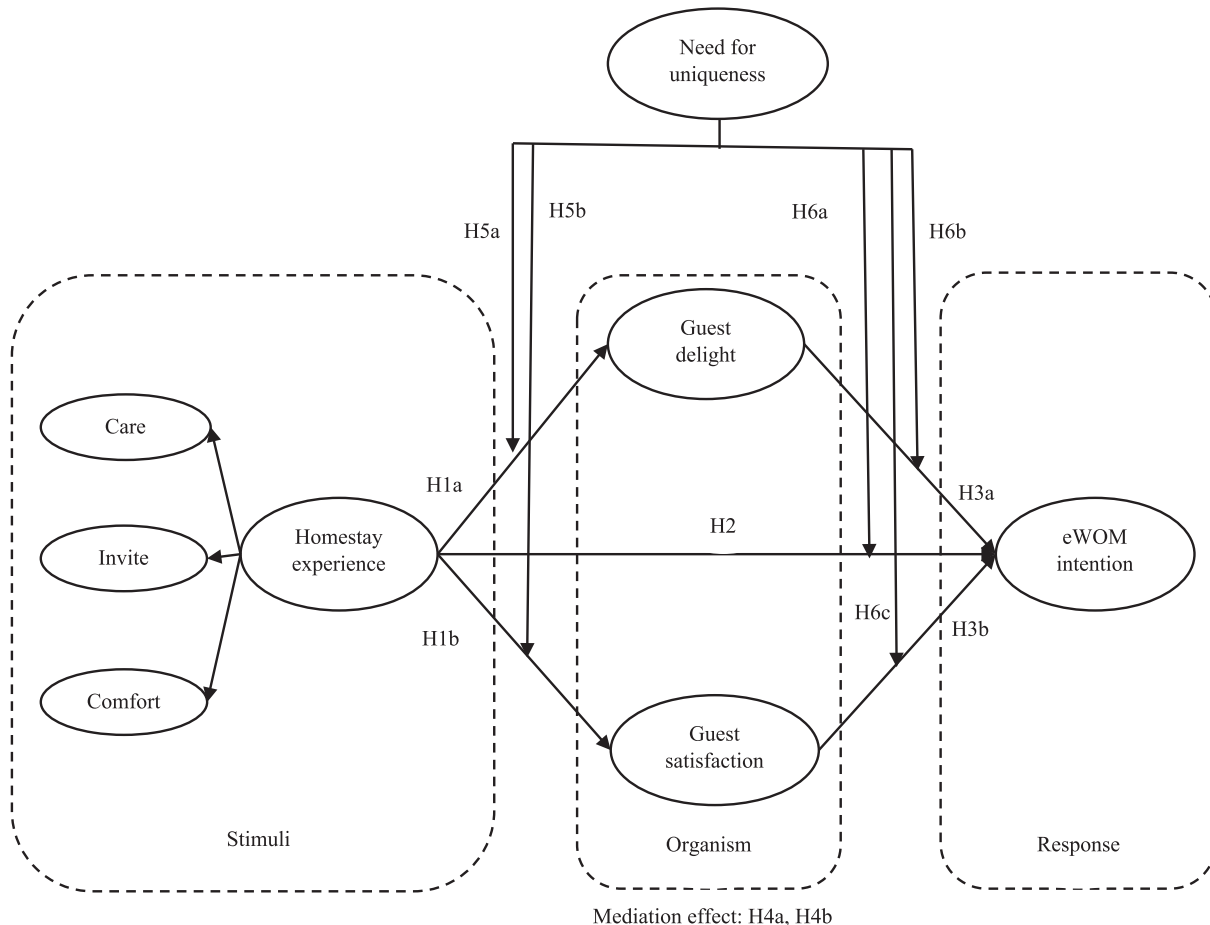

Fig. 1. Research framework (Source: Proposed by author).

while research by Paulose and Shakeel (2021) substantiated a positive relationship in the Indian hotel context.

Homestay is an distinct segment of the hospitality industry with many special intangible characteristics (Shen & Liu, 2015). This kind of accommodation is integrated with the concept "home", which represents a hospitality space where host-guest economic, cultural, social and psychological interactions occur (McIntosh et al., 2010). Homestay provides tourists with authentic experiences regarding lifestyle and culture of local residents while simultaneously offering host families a mean of livelihood (Agyeiwaah, 2013). The preference for homestay over other lodging options is determined by many factors such as comfortable home setting and host hospitality (Patwal et al., 2023). Other essential motivation for selecting homestay accommodation among tourists is the sense of home-like feeling (Huang et al., 2023). According to Huang et al. (2023), such feeling refers to warmth, familiarity and freedom, allowing guests to experience the home-away-from-home atmosphere which is hardly found in the traditional accommodation settings. Thus, this study approached homestay experience based hospitality perspective in which the measurement developed by Pijls et al. (2017) including care, comfort and inviting factors was used to capture guest experience at homestay accommodation.

Homestay is usually available in rural areas where visitors can reside and enjoy local sociocultural activities (Jamal et al., 2011). Tourists keen on authentic sociocultural experiences are motivated to choose homestay (Agyeiwaah et al., 2013; Basak et al., 2021) as it provides guests with an opportunity not only to stay with foster families but also to exchange culture through interacting (e.g., cooking, eating together) and learning (Musa et al., 2010). During the cultural exchange, perceived values that fulfil guest expectations can create guest satisfaction (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2016). If the stay far exceeds guest expectations, according to disconfirmation theory, expectation surpassing can create a rise in feelings of delight (Roberts-Lombard & Petzer, 2018). Thus, this study argues that:

H1a. Homestay experience directly influences guest delight.

H1b. Homestay experience directly influences guest satisfaction.

The effect of guest experience on eWOM intention has also been established in the hospitality literature (Fan et al., 2023; Serra-Cantallops et al., 2020). In the restaurant industry, positive eWOM was found to be significantly triggered by restaurant experiences (Jeong & Jang, 2011). Research by Serra-Cantallops et al. (2020) on hotel guests in the UK, Germany, USA, Canada and Spain also revealed that positive emotional experiences positively influence guest eWOM. In line with this finding, research on resort hotel guests in China conducted by Fan et al. (2023) confirmed the impact of guest experience on eWOM intention with the mediation of guest wellbeing. Thus, the following hypothesis is also proposed.

H2. Homestay experience directly influences eWOM intention.

2.2. Guest delight, guest satisfaction as a mediator

Much research has approached customer delight in different ways and identified many of its determinants (Parasuraman et al., 2020). Customer delight can be defined as the emotional response to a joyful surprise (Kim & Mattila, 2013), a combination of joy and surprise (Valenzuela et al., 2010), or a function of arousal and pleasure (Loureiro et al., 2014). Oliver et al. (1997) and Barnes et al. (2013) proposed a more complex definition that conceptualises customer delight as the positive emotional state that consumers experience when their expectations are not only fulfilled but also exceeded at an unanticipated and surprising level. This study approached guest delight following the need-satisfaction perspective in which delight is "*an extreme form of satisfaction*" (Barnes & Krallman, 2019, p. 174) and need satisfaction (including justice, security, and self-esteem needs) is the main driver of customer delight (Schneider & Bowen, 1999).

According to the model of delight and satisfaction proposed by Oliver et al. (1997), both customer satisfaction and delight originate from positive disconfirmation of expectations. They are both emotional states (Hsu et al., 2021) that exist independently and that positively influence consumer intention (Hsu et al., 2021; Oliver et al., 1997). In the service industry, customer delight and satisfaction have been found to lead to positive outcomes, such as repurchase intention (Bartl et al., 2013; Ludwig et al., 2017), guest retention (Selem et al., 2023), loyalty (Hsu et al., 2021; Xiong et al., 2022), and willingness to pay a premium price for services (Kim et al., 2023) or spend more on services (Mohammad, 2021). Guest delight and satisfaction also enhance positive word-of-mouth (PWOM) (Ludwig et al., 2017) and willingness to recommend to others (Kim et al., 2023), and potentially generate eWOM (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014; Duarte et al., 2018).

eWOM is a form of word-of-mouth that occurs through internet-based technologies (Litvin et al., 2008). Litvin et al. (2008) define eWOM as customer-oriented informational communication based on internet platforms, providing internet users with information about the characteristics of a product, service, or company. This communication can occur between customers, taking the form of online reviews or recommendations (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014). In the hospitality sector, highly satisfied guests are more likely to engage in eWOM (Sijoria et al., 2018). A study by Yu et al. (2022) found that positive affect significantly facilitates online ratings among hotel guests. Satisfied and delighted customers not only share positive experiences with others in person (Jiang, 2019) but are also more likely to make online recommendations to friends or family (Duarte et al., 2018; Kim & Cho, 2022; Sijoria et al., 2018).

H3a. Guest delight directly influences eWOM intention.

H3b. Guest satisfaction directly influences eWOM intention.

Previous research has applied the SOR model to explain the mediating role of customer delight and satisfaction in the relationship between customer experience and behavioural intention (Hsu et al., 2021; Su & Li, 2023). Su and Li (2023) discovered the serial mediating role of delight and satisfaction in the impact of sensory experiences on loyalty behaviours among tourists in China. In the theme park context, Torres et al. (2018) applied a qualitative approach to analyse visitor comments on TripAdvisor and found that customer delight also mediates the effect of customer experience on positive emotion expression via eWOM. An experience that exceeds guest expectations can trigger positive emotions, such as delight and satisfaction, which in turn provoke behavioural responses, including eWOM intention. Thus, the study proposed the following hypotheses:

H4a. Guest delight mediates the relationship between homestay experience and eWOM.

H4b. Guest satisfaction mediates the relationship between homestay experience and eWOM.

2.3. Need for uniqueness as a moderator

NFU is a desire to be distinctive and stand out from the crowd (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). According to Karagöz and Uysal (2020), NFU refers to a personality trait potentially affecting an individual's attitudes, behaviours, consumption preferences or unique place reference. This psychological structure is typically found among Gen Z customers who are keen on expressing a unique style (Goldring & Azab, 2020). NFU portrays customer characteristics and can be fulfilled by interpersonal interaction ((Lindsey-Hall et al., 2020), which is the foundation of customer experience (Alnawas & Hemsley-Brown, 2019). In the tourism domain, NFU is also an essential factor affecting travellers' evaluation of their experiences (Wang & Wang & Hsu, 2010). This psychological need not only influences customers' perceptions of the service they experience (Sengupta & Sreejesh, 2017) but also the formation of their attitudes

(Chark et al., 2019).

Previous research has explored the impact of NFU on tourist attitudes and behaviours. Karagöz and Uysal (2020) investigated tourists in Turkey and found that NFU directly influenced tourist's perception of destination authenticity. Meanwhile, research by Ek Styvén and Foster (2018) determined that such a personality trait significantly predicted young traveller intention to share their experiences on the social media. However, the interaction between NFU and tourist attitudes in explaining their behavioural intentions is less likely to be studied. In fact, the moderating role of customer NFU has been established in the marketing literature (Chark et al., 2019; Dey et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2018; Lindsey-Hall et al., 2020). NFU can moderate the relationship between customer perception and emotional response (Shimul et al., 2021). High NFU customers are motivated to seek a unique experience, and thus, their attention can be directed to homestay tourism (Dey et al., 2020). The unique experience that fulfils guests' need for exclusivity is significantly associated with guest delight (Vigolo et al., 2021). However, failing to provide an exclusive experience can easily result in guest dissatisfaction (Abosag et al., 2019) because the desire to achieve uniqueness leads to high expectations from this special kind of lodging service. The higher that guest expectations are, the harder it is to satisfy them (Yu et al., 2022). Consequently, NFU can lead to a decrease in perceptions of service quality (Sengupta & Sreejesh, 2017) and satisfaction levels. The following hypotheses are proposed:

H5a. NFU moderates the relationship between homestay experiences and guest delight.

H5b. NFU moderates the relationship between homestay experiences and guest satisfaction.

NFU has also been found in previous studies to be a moderator in the relationship between consumer experience, attitude, and behavioural intention (Dey et al., 2020; Roy & Sharma, 2015). Roy and Sharma (2015) found that consumer NFU moderates the effect of scarcity appeal on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. Investigating homestay tourists in India, Dey et al. (2020) indicated that NFU can moderate the impact of perceptions of natural attractiveness on rural homestay choices. High NFU tourists also tend to use social media to share their unique experiences (Dey et al., 2020). The desire to stand out from the crowd not only encourages young travellers to seek an exclusive experience but also motivates them to use social media as a means of eWOM to share such experiences Dey et al. (2020). Further, hotel guests with positive emotional experiences, such as delight, may engage more in eWOM (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2020); the presence of NFU may also increase their intention to share these feelings on social media. Hence, this research proposes that NFU can enhance the impact of guest experiences and emotions on eWOM intention:

H6a. NFU moderates the relationship between homestay experiences and guest delight.

H6b. NFU moderates the relationship between guest delight and eWOM.

H6c. NFU moderates the relationship between guest satisfaction and eWOM.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research instrument

This study adapted the hospitality experience scale developed by Pijls et al. (2017) for measuring guest experience at homestay. This multidimensional construct consists of 13 items with three dimensions: inviting, care, and comfort. The instrument based on guest cognitive perspective to capture the hospitableness of the service. Which is more general and likely more advanced than previous instruments (Pijls et al., 2017). Guest delight was measured by four items adapted from Dey et al.

(2015). Guest satisfaction was measured by three items adapted from Melón et al. (2021). Guest eWOM intention was assessed by three items adapted from D. Kim, Jang, et al. (2015). The need for uniqueness was measured by four items adapted from Lindsey-Hall et al. (2020). All the items were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 as "totally disagree" to 5 as "totally agree".

3.2. Sample and data

Many guidelines for sampling have been suggested by researchers such as Kock (2018) or Kline (2016). Kock (2018, p.5) proposed the 10-times rule suggesting that the minimum sample size for partial least square structural equation modelling analysis should be *"greater than 10 times the maximum number of inner or outer model links pointing at any latent variable in the model"*. The hypothetical research model in this study consists of seven first-order constructs including care, invite, comfort, guest delight, guest satisfaction, eWOM intention, and NFU in which care, invite, and comfort represent three dimensions of homestay experience. Applying the 10-times rule, the required sample size should be >70 (as care has maximum number of outer model links – 7 measurement indicators). Meanwhile, Kline (2016) recommended that a complex research model needs a sample of 200 or more. Further, using G*power for sample size calculation, with the power of 95 %, the result showed that a sample of 74 was required. Accordingly, this research was originally expected to collect data from at least 200 Generation Z guests who had homestay experiences.

The researchers collected data from young Vietnamese travellers who had experienced homestay services in Vietnam from Jan 2024 to March 2024. A convenience sampling technique was implemented for data collection. An online questionnaire was created using Google Forms. Then an invitation message with a link was sent to all young people and community groups (Facebook and Zalo – a social media platform in Vietnam) known by the authors for participant recruitment. After clicking on the link, the participants would be presented with a consent form. The participants can click on the "Accept" button to give consent and continue the survey.

The drawback of convenience sampling technique is that the questionnaire could reach respondents who have not used homestay before or are not Gen Z. Thus, the online questionnaire was designed with 3 main parts. The first part includes a classifying question *"Have you ever stayed in a homestay in Vietnam before?"*. If the respondents answer *"No"*, the form will be submitted automatically, and they do not have to answer the rest questions as they are not qualified for further data collection. The second part is the main part including all the measurement items. The third part is for collecting demographic information such as gender, age, and income. The participants stating their age higher than 22 then were terminated from the final sample.

There were 374 people involved in the survey. However, 57 of them had never stayed in a homestay and 54 were >22 years old. To ensure the questionnaire is answer earnestly, the purposes and benefits of the research were informed to participants by the invitation message. The participants did the survey by volunteering and were free to quit the survey at any time without any consequences. Furthermore, 40 participants choosing the same answer for all the questions was terminated as this means they did not read and answer the questions seriously. After excluding unqualified participants, the final sample of 223 was used for data analysis.

3.3. Data analysis

As data was collected from a single source, common method variance (CMV) may be present and so needs to be examined (Podsakoff et al., 2003). First, the study applied Harmon's one-factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) to explore the presence of CMV. The result showed that the first factor generated from exploratory factor analysis accounted for only 39.97 % of the variance, which is less than the threshold of 50 %.

Thus, CMV was not an issue (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Second, the partial least squares (PLS) algorithm analysis showed that the highest inter-correlation value was only 0.75, which is less than the threshold of 0.9 (Bagozzi et al., 1991), and all variance inflation factor (VIF) values for the latent variables were less than the threshold of 3.3 (Kock, 2015). Therefore, the CMV problem is not present in this study.

This study then applied PLS structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) for research model testing. This technique has been used widely in hospitality research (Ali et al., 2018) as it is effective in theory testing and prediction. Following the two-step procedure suggested by Hair et al. (2014), the measurement model and structural model were assessed in this study. A bootstrapping test with 5000 subsamples was also implemented to test the significance of each relationship in the research model (Hair et al., 2014).

4. Results

4.1. Measurement model assessment

Data analysis showed that all item loadings were above the threshold of 0.7 except two items: CARE2 *"The homestay is involved in me"* and CARE3 *"I feel I am treated like a king/queen"* with outer loadings of 0.619 and 0.648, respectively (Table 2). However, the Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability (CR) values of all constructs were higher than 0.7, and all average variance extracted (AVE) values were above the threshold of 0.5. Hence, these items were retained in the research model (Hair et al., 2014).

The three dimensions of a homestay experience were later processed following guidelines from Sarstedt et al. (2019) for the second-order construct. The results revealed that the loading coefficients of the three factors were above 0.8. The Cronbach's Alpha, CR, and AVE values exceeded the threshold (see Table 1). Thus, the measurement model achieved internal consistency reliability and convergent validity.

To evaluate discriminant validity, the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion and heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) values (Henseler et al., 2015) were used in this research. The discriminant validity test revealed that each construct in the research model had its square root of AVE value higher than the highest correlation value with other constructs (Table 3). Further, the HTMT values ranged from 0.333 to 0.882 and were below the threshold of 0.9 (Table 4). Thus, the discriminant validity of the measurement model was established.

4.2. Structural model assessment

Data analysis showed that all VIF values were lower than 3.3, indicating that collinearity did not exist in the regression model (Hair et al., 2019). Regression analysis also determined a moderate explanatory power of the research model in explaining guest delight, satisfaction, and eWOM intention (R^2 values were 0.604, 0.571 and 0.361, respectively) (Hair et al., 2019). Lastly, the blindfolding test indicated that guest delight, satisfaction, and eWOM intention had Q^2 coefficients of 0.448, 0.457 and 0.266, respectively (Hair et al., 2019). This result confirmed the large and medium predictive accuracy of the PLS path model in predicting guest delight, satisfaction, and eWOM intention.

4.3. Hypothesis testing

As mentioned above, the hypotheses were examined using a bootstrapping test with 5000 subsamples (Fig. 2). Homestay experience significantly influenced guest delight ($\beta = 0.686$, $p < 0.01$), guest satisfaction ($\beta = 0.749$, $p < 0.01$), and eWOM intention ($\beta = 0.279$, $p < 0.05$). Hence, H1a, H1b and H2 were supported (Table 5). Guest delight also exposed a significant and positive relationship with eWOM intention, confirming H3a ($\beta = 0.260$, $p < 0.01$), while H3b was not supported as the impact of guest satisfaction on eWOM was insignificant ($p > 0.05$). In addition, the indirect effect test revealed the partial

Table 2
Construct reliability and validity test results.

Constructs and measurement items	Factor loadings
Invite	
Adapted from Pijls et al. (2017), ρA = 0.786; ρc = 0.869; CA = 0.773; AVE = 0.690	
INV1: At the homestay, I feel invited (welcomed)	0.841
INV2: I experience the openness of the homestay	0.890
INV3: At the homestay, I experience freedom.	0.754
Care	
Adapted from Pijls et al. (2017), ρA = 0.882; ρc = 0.901; CA = 0.871; AVE = 0.568	
CARE1: The homestay provides support to me	0.744
CARE2: The homestay is involved in me	0.619
CARE3: I feel as I am treated like a king/queen.	0.648
CARE4: The homestay relieves me of tasks or worries.	0.780
CARE5: The homestay does it best to take care of me	0.810
CARE6: The homestay is interested in me.	0.867
CARE7: I feel important at the homestay.	0.778
Comfort	
Adapted from Pijls et al. (2017), ρA = 0.822; ρc = 0.894; CA = 0.822; AVE = 0.737	
COM1: I feel at ease at the homestay	0.849
COM2: I feel comfortable at the homestay	0.876
COM3: I feel relaxed at the homestay	0.850
Homestay experience (Second-order construct)	
Adapted from Pijls et al. (2017), ρA = 0.847; ρc = 0.907; CA = 0.847; AVE = 0.765	
Invite	0.889
Care	0.864
Comfort	0.872
Customer delight	
Adapted from Dey et al. (2015), ρA = 0.895; ρc = 0.896; CA = 0.895; AVE = 0.760	
CD1: I was delighted by this experience	0.850
CD2: It was a thrilling experience	0.858
CD3: It was an exhilarating experience	0.896
CD4: I was pleased with this experience	0.882
Customer satisfaction	
Adapted from Melón et al. (2021), ρA = 0.890; ρc = 0.930; CA = 0.887; AVE = 0.815	
SAT1: My general experience at the homestay was satisfactory	0.901
SAT2: I really enjoyed the experience at the homestay	0.910
SAT3: I felt good about my decision to visit the homestay	0.897
eWOM	
Adapted from D. Kim, Jang, et al. (2015), ρA = 0.876; ρc = 0.922; CA = 0.874; AVE = 0.799	
eWOM1: I would like to post about this homestay on a social network (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter…) or personal website	0.870
eWOM2: I would like to add information about this homestay to my social media page	0.918
eWOM3: I would like to update to a social network (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter…) or personal website about this homestay in the future	0.893
Tourist need for uniqueness	
Adapted from Lindsey-Hall et al. (2020), ρA = 0.883; ρc = 0.917; CA = 0.880; AVE = 0.735	
NFU1: I prefer being different from other people	0.850
NFU2: Being distinctive is important to me	0.874
NFU3: I intentionally do things to make myself different from those around me	0.884
NFU4: I have a need for uniqueness	0.820

Note: CA = Cronbach Alpha; AVE = Average variance extracted.

Table 3
The result of the Fornell-Larcker test.

	Guest delight	Homestay experience	Need for Uniqueness	Satisfaction	eWOM
Guest delight	0.872				
Homestay experience	0.768	0.875			
Need for uniqueness	0.378	0.419	0.857		
Satisfaction	0.751	0.755	0.301	0.903	
eWOM	0.473	0.488	0.469	0.348	0.894

Table 4
The result of the HTMT test.

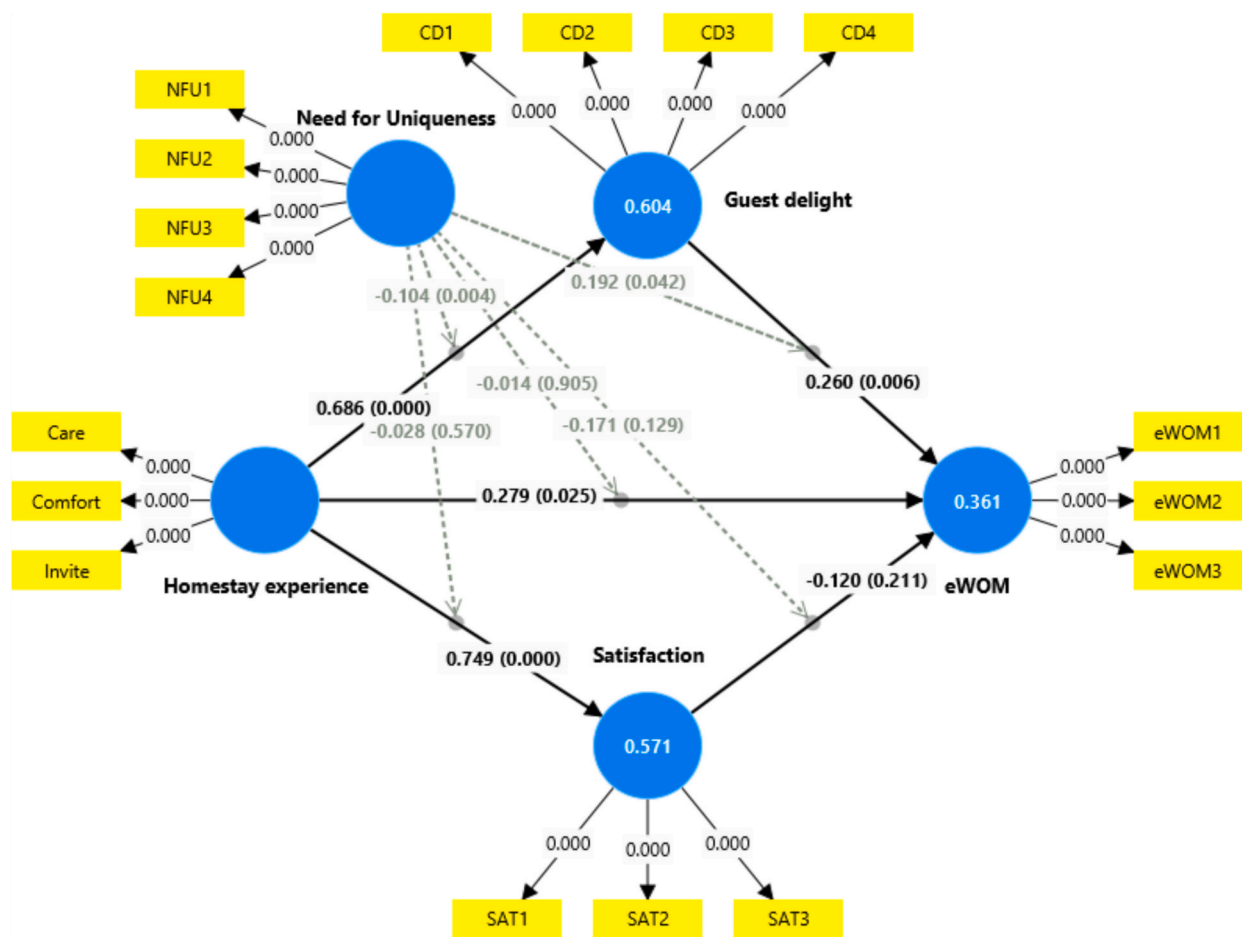|	Guest delight	Homestay experience	Need for Uniqueness	Satisfaction	eWOM
Guest delight					
Homestay experience	0.882				
Need for uniqueness	0.420	0.481			
Satisfaction	0.844	0.870	0.333		
eWOM	0.533	0.569	0.530	0.394	

Fig. 2. Bootstrapping test with 5000 sub-samples.

mediating role of guest delight in the relationship between homestay experience and eWOM intention supporting H4a ($\beta = 0.179$, $p < 0.01$). Meanwhile, guest satisfaction did not mediate such a relationship ($p > 0.05$); hence, H4b was not supported. Finally, interaction constructs were created to test the moderating role of NFU. The test showed that NFU significantly moderated the impact of homestay experience on eWOM intention ($\beta = -0.104$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H5a. The moderating effect of NFU was also found in the relationship between guest delight and eWOM ($\beta = 0.192$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H6b.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The study was based on the SOR model and investigated the effect of homestay experience on guest delight, guest satisfaction, and eWOM intention, and also explored the moderating role of guest NFU in the internal emotional process among Generation Z travellers. This research extends the customer satisfaction literature in the hospitality and tourism industry by providing a better understanding of customer experience, emotional response, and behaviours. The research applied

Table 5
The results of bootstrapping and hypothesis test.

Path	H	β	STDEV	*P* values	Decision
Homestay experience - > Guest delight	H1a	0.686	0.044	0.000	Supported
Homestay experience - > Satisfaction	H1b	0.749	0.055	0.000	Supported
Homestay experience - > eWOM	H2	0.279	0.124	0.025	Supported
Guest delight - > eWOM	H3a	0.260	0.094	0.006	Supported
Satisfaction - > eWOM	H3b	−0.120	0.096	0.211	Not supported
Homestay experience - > Guest delight - > eWOM	H4a	0.179	0.065	0.006	Supported
Homestay experience - > Satisfaction - > eWOM	H4b	−0.090	0.073	0.217	Not supported
Need for Uniqueness × Homestay experience - > Guest delight	H5a	−0.104	0.036	0.004	Supported
Need for Uniqueness × Homestay experience - > Satisfaction	H5b	−0.028	0.049	0.571	Not supported
Need for Uniqueness × Homestay experience - > eWOM	H6a	−0.014	0.119	0.906	Not supported
Need for Uniqueness × Guest delight - > eWOM	H6b	0.192	0.094	0.042	Supported
Need for Uniqueness × Satisfaction - > eWOM	H6c	−0.171	0.113	0.129	Not supported

the hospitality experience scale developed by Pijls et al. (2017) to assess homestay guest experience. Data analysis showed that homestay experience was well measured by three factors including care, inviting, and comfort with the composite reliability of 0.907 and significantly determined guest emotions and behavioural intentions.

The results of this study also revealed the significant impact of the guest experience (Stimuli) on guest delight, guest satisfaction (organism), and eWOM intention (response), supporting the findings of Lee and Park (2019), Rivera et al. (2021), Paulose and Shakeel (2021), and Serra-Cantallops et al. (2020). Homestay guests experience the hospitality during their stay are more likely to achieve satisfaction and delightful feeling and expose willingness to spread eWOM. However, the homestay experience had the greatest impact on guest satisfaction, and the least influence was found in the relationship with eWOM.

Besides, Generation Z travellers are more likely to be motivated to generate eWOM by a feeling of delight rather than satisfaction. The data analysis of the current research confirmed the positive effect of guest delight (organism) on guest eWOM intention (response), supporting the research findings of Torres et al. (2018). However, the relationship between guest satisfaction (organism) and eWOM intention (response) was found to be insignificant, reinforcing the discoveries of Serra-Cantallops et al. (2020) and Kankhuni and Ngwira (2021) but in contrast with Chinelato et al. (2023). This could be because meeting customer expectations may not enough for them to engage in eWOM, which requires more effort than traditional WOM (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2020). According to Serra-Cantallops et al. (2020), satisfaction is a required condition but could not ensure customer's willingness to spread positive comments on the digital platform. Satisfied customers may not perform eWOM if they do not have enough emotional motivation. The satisfaction needs to be transformed into a higher level of emotional state such as commitment to service/product provider (Tsao & Hsieh, 2012) or delight (Chinelato et al., 2023) to promote consumer intention to communicate eWOM. In addition, as eWOM refers to a conscious behaviour of an individual involved in generating and expanding content on the social media platform (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2020), disposition towards social network usage could be an essential element in explaining eWOM intention among satisfied customers. Customers with low level of engagement in social networking service (SNS) may

not communicate eWOM no matter they are satisfied with the services or not (Chinelato et al., 2023). Meanwhile, highly engaged with SNS customers tend to create eWOM more when achieving delightful feeling (Chinelato et al., 2023).

Data analysis highlighted the partial mediating role of guest delight in the relationship between guest experience and eWOM intention. Guests who are delighted with the homestay experience are more likely to express greater intention to pursue widespread eWOM. The finding supports the suggestion by Torres et al. (2018). Meanwhile, data analysis indicates that NFU is negatively associated with guest experience in predicting guest emotional response, and this aligns with the proposed hypothesis. High NFU guests express a decline in service perception (Sengupta & Sreejesh, 2017) and rarely achieve delight because of high expectations. On the other hand, NFU was found to strengthen significantly the impact of guest delight on eWOM intention among Generation Z travellers. Delighted young tourists with high NFU tend to produce more positive online reviews than their counterparts.

5.1. Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on customer behaviour in several ways. Previous research has investigated the impact of customer experience on customer delight, satisfaction, and eWOM intention in lodging services (Fan et al., 2023; Lee & Park, 2019; Paulose & Shakeel, 2021; Serra-Cantallops et al., 2020). However, this is the first study, to the best of the authors' knowledge, to confirm these relationships empirically in the homestay context. Further, this research enriches the literature on customer behaviour by confirming the relationship between customer delight and their eWOM intention, which has still not been fully explored (Liu et al., 2021).

According to the delight theory proposed by Oliver et al. (1997), delight and satisfaction are two distinctive concepts originating from expectation disconfirmation and surprising consumption. The present research contributes to the literature on consumer behaviours by providing evidence of the heterogeneous relationship between guest delight and satisfaction in the context of homestay. In consistence with previous studies (M. Kim, Vogt, et al., 2015; Rodríguez-López et al., 2023), the measurement model test in this research statistically validated the distinction between delight and satisfaction. However, the research extends existing knowledge by characterizing their discrepancy through distinctive relationships with their antecedents and consequences. Tourists appear to achieve satisfaction more easily than delight when encountering the same homestay experience, suggesting that delight is a higher level of positive emotional state (organism). Nevertheless, the spontaneous impacts of homestay experience (stimuli) on both satisfaction and delight reveal that satisfaction (organism) is not a prerequisite for delightful feeling (organism), reinforcing their theoretical distinction. Regarding positive outcomes, satisfaction was found exhibiting greater impact on customer loyalty (Ahrholdt et al., 2016), but such an affective response is insufficient to promote eWOM communication among Gen Z tourists. Instead, delight is a stronger emotional driver for eWOM engagement. Guest experience with homestay directly leads to eWOM intention but its total impact remains unchanged if such experience merely meet the expectations. However, the total effect could be amplified if the experience far exceeds guest expectations and incorporates with joy and surprise elements, provoking a sense of delight.

Furthermore, the findings of this study enrich the existing literature on hospitality marketing by extending the SOR model with the mediating role of delight and the moderating role of consumer traits, including NFU, in explaining guest emotions and behaviours. Firstly, the study seems to be the first empirical research to investigate and confirm the mediating effect of guest delight (organism) in the relationship between guest experience (stimulus) and eWOM intention (response) in the homestay context. Secondly, the study reinforces the moderating role of consumer characteristics, such as hedonic motivation, on the SOR

model (Chang et al., 2011; Watson et al., 2018) by providing evidence of the moderating role of customer NFU in the impact of guest experience on guest delight. The study also supports the research framework proposed by Watson et al. (2018), emphasising the moderation of customer traits, demographics, and situational context in the SOR model. Lastly, the research demonstrates the moderating effect of NFU in the relationship between guest emotional and behavioural responses. The presence of this personal trait can magnify the impact of guest affective responses such as delight on their behavioural intention including eWOM. To the author's best knowledge, this is the first time such relationships have been discovered. NFU is significantly associated with guest experience in predicting guest delight, and this moderating effect is negative. The presence of NFU can weaken the impact of guest experience on guest delight. Nevertheless, the interaction between NFU and guest delight in affecting eWOM intention is significantly positive. This highlights the ambidexterity of the role of NFU in the internal emotional process among homestay guests.

5.2. Managerial implications

This research benefits hospitality and tourism practitioners by providing valuable customer insights into guest perception and reaction in the homestay context. Firstly, customer experience is the key element affecting guest delight, satisfaction, and eWOM intention. The distinctiveness of homestay is that it provides a home-like experience, where the senses of comfort, warmth, familiarity and freedom are essential in satisfying guest expectations. Hence, homestay managers should create a welcoming atmosphere, designing space for physical and emotional comfort, and balancing care and comfort for a home-away-from-home feeling. The hospitality practices such as warm greetings, personalized interaction, or shared cultural activities should be prioritized to make guests feel invited. This not only establish a positive emotional connection between guest and host but also increase guest satisfaction, delight and eWOM engagement. Besides, homestay operators should also offer basic amenities as well as ensure the accommodation is clean and well-maintained to enhance the comfort of the premises. Furthermore, it is essential to keep balance between attentiveness and personal space. This means host family should treat guests like members of the family but the care for them should be at a certain level so that they still feel comfortable and retain their freedoms while living in the homestay.

Secondly, managers in the lodging industry should pay greater attention to guest delight and satisfaction, as it can not only foster increased loyalty but also significantly impact guest eWOM intention. Homestay services should be designed to create emotionally engaging experiences in combination with surprise factors to exceed the basic level of satisfaction. It should be designed to provide guests with exhilarating experiences, and the service-providing process should also focus on satisfying guest need for security, fairness, and self-esteem, as these are closely linked to customer delight (Schneider & Bowen, 1999). For instance, there should be a clear safe protocol to ensure guest always feel physically and emotionally safe. Besides, the price must be transparent, and the services must be delivered as promised. Lastly, guest's special occasions should be acknowledged and meaningful interaction between guests and hosts or local communities should be encouraged.

Finally, homestay managers should pay attention to the guest NFU as it can weaken the effect of experience on guest delight and the impact of guest delight on eWOM intention. Homestay managers can, on the one hand, provide guests with detailed descriptions, high-quality images or virtual tour of the homestay during the pre-purchase stage. By providing clear insights into the design, atmosphere and cultural representation of the homestay, high NFU customers who are not interested in the homestay style or the culture it represents may withdraw early. This helps ensure the suitable guests can be reached in the service-providing stage and higher satisfaction could be achieved. On the other hand, homestay owners can also identify target customers and then modify the service process in response to their needs for exclusivity; doing so can not only satisfy guest NFU but also create guest delight (Vigolo et al., 2021). For example, homestay hosts can offer customizing experiences for guest with high NFU such as exclusive local tours, personalized room setups or services reinforcing their NFU.

5.3. Limitations and future research

This study only surveyed Vietnamese Generation Z travellers; and guest perceptions and emotional reactions could be different according to demographic characteristics (Zhao et al., 2020). Future studies can re-test this research model in different cultural contexts or with different groups of tourists to reinforce the relationship between guest experience, guest delight, guest satisfaction, guest NFU, and eWOM intention. Further, various kinds of accommodation, such as bed and breakfasts or resorts, could provide guests with different experiences based on their unique characteristics. Researchers are encouraged to explore these relationships in other hospitality domains to extend the body of knowledge on the hospitality and tourism sectors. Finally, this study did not consider the role of homestay facilities or guest companions in exploring guest delight. Previous studies confirmed the importance of these two factors in shaping guest perceptions and emotional reactions (Mohammad, 2021; Sengupta & Sreejesh, 2017). Therefore, future studies can include servicescape or companion perception factors together with guest experience in order to investigate guest attitudes and behaviours.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Hoang-Phuong Lam: Writing – original draft, Validation, Software, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Denni Arli:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Methodology, Formal analysis. **Tien Hung Nguyen:** Validation, Resources, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Thanh Quang Nguyen:** Resources, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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