

Emotional intelligence and social media site experiences' effects on college choice behavior: The mediating role of brand attitude

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Abstract. This study examines how students use social networks to choose their universities, looking at the effects of online experience, Emotional intelligence, and brand attitude as a mediating variable. The postulated connections between emotional intelligence, social media site experiences, brand attitude, and decision-making have led to the construction of a model. Students who used to base their institution choice on information found on social networks comprised the 310 respondents to a study that was conducted. Utilizing a quantitative method, the findings show that the more pleasant a student's social media site experiences are, the more positive a student's opinion toward the social media site is, which affects the student's behavior when choosing a university. Also, it was revealed by the results that emotional intelligence influences students' university decisions in a good way.

Keywords: - Social media site experiences, Emotional intelligence, choice behavior, brand attitude

1 Introduction

The past two decades have experienced a dramatic shift in Internet applications. E-Commerce is becoming increasingly common; Digital marketing tools gradually replace traditional tools. In particular, the explosion of social media channels has changed how many consumers interact with each other and businesses. This has led to a significant shift in the operations of organizations in all sectors as well as changes in consumer behavior.

According to Cho & Park, 2001[5]; an online customer is not simply a shopper but also an information technology user. So, the online experience is a more complicated issue than the physical shopping experience. There are many surveys of adult internet users showed that the website experience had changed their opinion of brands, transforming brands during purchases. For example, according to Nua Internet Surveys, 2002[6], 60 % of respondents (adult Internet users) whose opinions changed switched brands at purchase due to negative online experience, whether they bought via the Net or at a brick-and-mortar store. The survey result also underlines the synergic effects of the positive Web experience on the decision to use Website next to traditional channels. Moreover, academic studies have found a relationship between

website experience and buying behavior (Lorenzo, Carlota, et al. 2007; Leung et.al, 2015) [16], [14].

In the field of education in Vietnam, universities are constantly expanding their online presence, especially their presence on social networks. According to the Vietnam Digital Development Overview Report 2021 published by we are social and Kepios in early 2022 [23], Vietnam has 76.95 million social media users, and the number of Vietnamese social network users is mainly aged 18-34. The potential and existing customers of universities are mostly Generation Z, belonging to the group of people with a high rate of social media use. Therefore, using social media channels to reach learners is necessary, and the quality of online experience is a problem requiring special attention at universities. However, only some studies fully describe how web experiences impact learners' responses in this field. Whether poorly designed or dysfunctional social media Pages provides a negative experience and influence learners' decision to choose a school.

Besides the website experience, emotional intelligence (EI) is also a factor that is being emphasized in research, and the impact of EI on decision-making is noteworthy. A better understanding of EI can expand our knowledge of customer behavior, providing answers to questions such as People with high EI versus low EI, who make easier decisions? How might consumer EI impact relationships between crucial consumer aspects such as Attitude and purchase intention? Previous studies on EI identified the relationships between people's emotional processing abilities and the quality of decision-making and performance. Higgs, 2004 [11] and Rozell et al., 2006 [21] found that higher EI results in higher performance. Kidwell et al, 2008 [13] identified the EI to be related to shopping behavior; Consumers with higher EI make better choices than those with lower EI. Therefore, there is a difference in the consumer's choice decision based on their level of EI.

Until now, there exist many studies on consumers' psychological status by taking an emotive approach in the e-commerce context. The studies also highlight the importance of emotional intelligence in consumer behavior. However, there needs to be a framework to reflect the impact of these influences, especially in the field of education. From the gaps indicated above, we constructed a model based on the proposed relationships of emotional intelligence, website experience, brand attitude, and choice behavior. This work aims to explain the effects of website experience, emotional intelligence, and brand attitude as mediating variables on the university choice behavior of students through social media channels. A survey was carried out with a sample size of 310 students who used to select a university based on information provided on social media channels.

2 Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1. Website experiences and Emotional intelligence

Website experiences

Both academics and practitioners have identified the "online experience" or "virtual experience" as a significant issue in the digital marketing field. The Web experience is defined as the consumer's overall impression of the online company, resulting from exposure to a combination of virtual marketing tools under the marketer's direct control, likely to influence the buying behavior of the online consumer (Lorenzo, Carlota,

et al., 2007) [16]. The Web experience embraces elements like searching, browsing, finding, selecting, comparing, evaluating information, interacting, and transacting with the online firm. The virtual customer's total impression and actions are influenced by design, events, emotions, atmosphere, and other elements experienced during interaction with a given Web site; features aim to create customer goodwill and affect the outcome of the online exchange.

Researchers and practitioners have used several terms, such as Online Web Experience, Site Experience and Online Experience, to describe Consumers' experiences with websites. Generally, these terms have the same meaning. They are the overall perception of consumers of the site.

Emotional intelligence

In recent years, emotional intelligence (EI) has created much interest and concern within the scientific community. EI is also known as emotional quotient (EQ). It refers to positively understanding, utilizing, and managing emotions to decrease stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges, and defuse conflict. Similarly to this point of view, Goleman, 1995 [9] defined Emotional intelligence as the capacity to distinguish, be aware of, comprehend, and regulate our own emotions and sentiment as well as other people's sentiment to inspire ourselves and manage feelings very well concerning ourselves and our interactions.

According to Mayer et al., 1997 [18] the consumer's emotional Intelligence (EI) is "a person's ability to use emotional information to achieve a desired consumer outcome, comprised as a set of first-order emotional abilities that allow individuals to recognize the meanings of emotional patterns that underlie consumer decision making and to reason and solve problems based on them."

2.2. The Attitude toward website Model – Aws model

The Attitude toward the advertising model (Aad) is a popular framework used to measure the effectiveness of traditional advertising on consumers' Attitudes and behavior. This model is developed into four different forms based on four alternative hypotheses: ATH (affect transfer hypothesis), DMH (Dual mediation hypothesis), RMH (reciprocal mediation hypothesis), and IIH (independent influences hypothesis). All four models describe the relationship between brand cognitions, attitudes toward the brand, and behavior intention differently. Mackenzie et al., 1986 [17] and Homers, 1990 [12] performed comparative studies between these four models based on experiment data, the results of which indicated that the DMH model best matched the data. This again confirms that attitudes towards advertising have both direct and indirect influence through brand cognitions on attitudes towards the brand.

In the past few years, the intense and rapid development of information technology has shifted the way companies do business; traditional advertising has changed by online advertising, and digital Marketing tools play an essential role in marketing activities. In the web environment, Attitude toward the website (Aws), a new variable is added to evaluate the effectiveness of advertising. Similar to Aad, Aws is defined as "predispositions to respond favorably or unfavorably to web content in natural exposure situations" of the web user (Chen & Wells, 1999) [3]. In the same view, Bruner & Kumar, 2020 [2] proposed that customer's reactions to the context where an advertisement is displayed also affect how consumer react to the advertising. They tested their new model of web advertising effectiveness. Their findings showed that one's web experience plays a vital role in Attitude toward the web along with

webpage complexity and interestingness. More specifically, the relationship between Attitude toward the website, Attitude toward the advertising, brand attitude, and purchase intention was found. Thus, this work provided evidence that the Aad model can be extended into research concerning the Web and marketing communication. Integrating the three aspects of Aws (entertainment, informativeness, and organization) proposed by Chen & Wells, 1999 [3] and the research results of Bruner & Kumar 2020 [2], Poh & Adam, 2002 [22] developed the Attitude toward the website model. This model can explain the relationship between Attitude toward the website, Attitude toward the advertising, Brand attitude, and purchase intention in the Internet context.

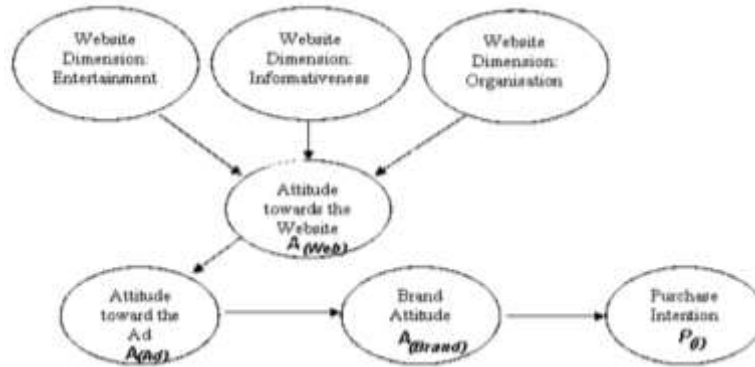


Fig 1. The Attitude toward website Model

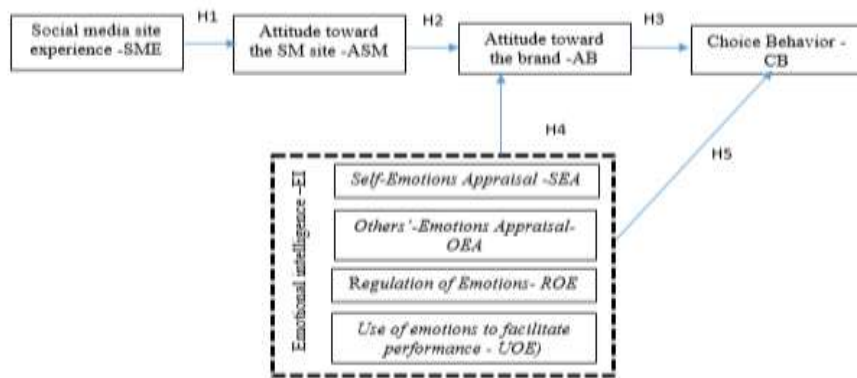
2.3. The research model and hypotheses

As analyzed above, the authors suggested that the Aws model can be applied as a theoretical framework to explain the influence of website experiences on university-choosing behavior. This study will focus on testing the influence of website experience on attitudes toward advertising and brand attitude, which influences university choice behavior.

Social networks are interactive applications based on Web 2.0 (Obar, Jonathan A., Wildman, Steve, 2015) [20]. Therefore, Social network is considered a type of website. In this study, the concept of Website experiences is actual social-media-site experiences, and Attitude toward the website is Attitude toward the social media site.

Besides, the study added emotional intelligence, which is believed to be an essential factor in making a difference in consumer behavior. Accordingly, authors can expect that EI has both direct and indirect effects through Attitude toward brand on the university choosing behavior of the student. Specifically, five hypotheses were proposed:

- + **H1:** The more positive student's social media site experiences, the more positive student's Attitude toward the social media site
- + **H2:** The more positive student's Attitude toward the social media site, the more positive student's Attitude toward the university brand
- + **H3:** The more positive a student's Attitude toward a university brand, the higher student's university-choosing behavior
- + **H4:** Emotional intelligence has a positive influence on student's Attitudes toward the university brand
- + **H5:** Emotional intelligence has a positive influence on student's university choice behavior



5

Fig 2. Research Model (authors)

A path model was constructed (Fig 2) to examine these hypotheses, and the scale of Variables was also specifically proposed as follows:

Social media site experience (SME) factor and factor-related Attitude (ASM, AB) were measured by 5-point semantic differential scales anchored by not at all (1) and very much (5). The social media site experience scale has 14 items developed by Vaughan, Edwards, and Peres, 2009 [19]; the Aad scale has eight items (Choi, Y. K., 2000) [7]; and the Attitude toward brand scale has six items (Chiang & Jang, 2006) [4].

Emotional intelligence and choosing behavior were measured by a 5-point Likert scale. Emotional intelligence was measured based on the Wong and Law (2002) [24] developed scale. This scale is based on the four dimensions, including SEA, OEA, ROE, and UOE, with 16 items. Choosing behavior was developed by Chiang and Jang (2006) [4] with three items.

3 Research Method

Google Forms conducted the online survey in January 2023. The authors implemented cluster sampling. Using this strategy, the authors divide the students in Da Nang into two groups, equivalent to 310 students belonging to 2 areas: Public universities and Private universities. Then, the research utilized Random Sampling technique with the Forms link was shared on the social media page of colleges and institutions. A total of 310 participants completed the survey within a month of data collection.

The questionnaires consisted of two sections. The first part included several demographic questions regarding gender, the usage extent, and the purpose of social media. The second section consists of questions regarding Social media site experience, Attitude toward the social media site, Attitude toward the brand, emotional intelligence, and choice behavior with 43 observed variables. Which, 24 items belonging to Social media site experience and factors related to Attitude (ASM, AB) were measured by 5-point semantic differential scales anchored by not at all (1) and very much (5). All items belonging to emotional intelligence and choice behavior were measured by 5-point Likert scales anchored by strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (5).

After screening and coding, data were entered into SPSS and smartPLS software for measurement and analysis, including (1) Analysis of Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient. The scale has acceptable reliability when Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is more significant than 0.6; (2) Exploratory factor analysis EFA to evaluate the scale's validity; (3) Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique was utilized to test the research model.

4 Research Result

4.1. Descriptive Data Statistics

With 310 samples included in the data analysis, 86 males (27.7%), 215 females (42.5%), and 09 unknown (2.9%) participated in the survey. Regarding major, the authors divided into five fields: 126 Social Sciences (40.6%), 104 Engineerings and technology (33.5%), 24 Medical sciences, pharmacy (7.7%), 09 Agricultural Sciences (2.9%), 47 Humanities (15.2%). The results also showed that 100% of students participating in the survey used social networks. The rate of social media use from 1 hour to less than 3 hours/day is the highest (accounting for 69%); over 3 hours accounts for 25%, the level of social media use under 1-hour accounts for the lowest rate (6%). This result is similar to the results of other studies on the level of social media use among Vietnamese students. Most students utilize social channels to contact relatives and friends (94.8%), followed by Entertainment (reading news, watching videos/movies, games...) and updating information about ongoing social activities and events with 93.9% and 84.2%, respectively

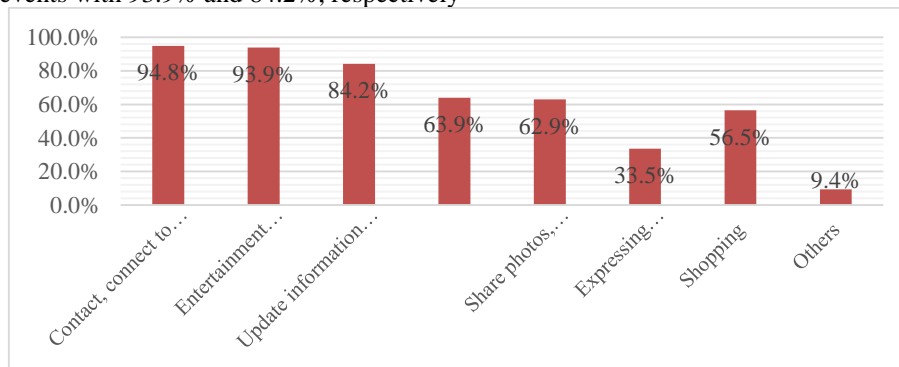


Fig 3. Purpose of using social networks

4.2. Reliability Test Results

According to the Cronbach's Alpha reliability test findings, all observable variables of the Attitude toward social media (ASM), Attitude toward brand (AB), Emotional intelligence, and Choice behavior have a Corrected item-total Correlation higher than 0.30. All scales have a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient better than 0.6. Therefore, these scales ensure reliability.

The reliability test findings also showed Cronbach's Alpha for the Social media site experience factor is 0.95. According to Hair et al., 2006 [10], Cronbach's Alpha ≥ 0.95 may not be good. This suggests that may have "overlapping" phenomena between observed variables. Therefore, the authors recheck the scale and remove the duplicate observation variables (remove EMS7, EMS10). After deleting the SMS7 and SMS10 variables from the model. The Corrected Item – Total Correlation for all observed variables is more significant than 0.3. The alpha coefficient of the scale is 0.946, more than 0.6, and less than 0.95. Thus, the scale guarantees dependability. Therefore, all remaining 41 observed variables will be used for exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha of the scales

Observed variables	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Social media site experience (SME) = 0.946 (N=12)				
SME1	42.49	68.613	.704	.945
SME2	42.50	67.435	.809	.943
SME3	42.60	68.984	.752	.945
SME4	42.55	68.526	.784	.944
SME5	42.68	68.200	.716	.946
SME6	42.71	69.074	.718	.946
SME8	42.69	68.242	.736	.946
SME9	42.79	69.624	.671	.946
SME11	42.48	67.849	.838	.942
SME12	42.75	68.436	.757	.945
SME13	42.60	67.276	.840	.942
SME14	42.62	67.886	.792	.944
Attitude toward Social media site (ASM) = 0.915 (N=4)				
ASM1	10.64	7.681	.832	.880
ASM2	10.61	7.358	.837	.878
ASM3	10.74	7.373	.828	.881
ASM4	10.51	8.251	.727	.914
Attitude toward brand (AB) = 0.934 (N=6)				
AB1	19.00	16.689	.756	.928
AB2	19.06	16.284	.845	.917
AB3	19.08	16.851	.773	.926
AB4	18.94	16.384	.822	.920
AB5	19.05	16.363	.819	.920
AB6	19.08	16.579	.815	.921
Emotion intelligence (EI)				
Self-Emotions Appraisal –SEA = 0.887 (N=4)				
SEA1	11.26	6.839	.746	.857
SEA2	11.25	6.328	.810	.831
SEA3	11.12	6.688	.792	.839
SEA4	11.15	7.199	.664	.886
Others' - Emotions Appraisal – OEA = 0.831 (N=4)				
OEA1	11.25	5.925	.637	.796
OEA2	11.21	5.435	.735	.752
OEA3	11.00	5.647	.613	.808
OEA4	11.42	5.512	.656	.788
Regulation of Emotions – ROE = 0.907 (N=4)				
ROE1	10.55	7.290	.780	.883
ROE2	10.58	7.216	.810	.873
ROE3	10.56	7.011	.774	.887
ROE4	10.55	7.213	.799	.877
Use of Emotions to facilitate performance – UOE = 0.872 (N=4)				
UOE1	11.52	6.037	.703	.844
UOE2	11.61	5.558	.729	.836
UOE3	11.37	5.948	.739	.830
UOE4	11.26	6.124	.737	.832
University choice behavior- CB = 0.917 (N=3)				
CB1	7.41	3.672	.793	.912

CB2	7.36	3.564	.851	.865
CB3	7.38	3.381	.854	.862

4.3. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) Results

EFA was performed by the principal axis factoring method with Promax rotation to examine the dimensionality of independent factors. As a result of the first EFA analysis, there were four observable variables SME6, SME12, SME9, and ASM4, with a factor loading < 0.5 . Therefore, the authors removed those variables from the model. After deleting, the factor analysis findings indicated that $KMO = 0.944$, $Sig. = 0.000$, demonstrating that the data is consistent with the EFA analysis; 34 observed variables were extracted into seven factors at Eigenvalues = 1.060; the total variance extracted reached 69.14 % $> 50\%$; the observable variables all have a Factor loading factor > 0.5 , and each observable variable is guaranteed to be uploaded for a factor.

The findings indicated that Bartlett's test had $Sig. 0.05$ for dependent variables. KMO coefficient = $0.749 > 0.5$. This demonstrated that factor analysis is compatible with research data. The EFA analysis yielded one extracted component. The total variance extracted reached 78.87 % $> 50\%$, Eigenvalues of all factors greater than one, and factor loading coefficients greater than 0.5. According to the above findings of the factor analysis, all study model variables had convergent and discriminant values. Therefore, the authors decided to stop the EFA analysis moving on to the next analysis steps.

4.4. Research model Testing

The findings identified the composite Reliability (CR) of all concepts as more than 0.7; the average variance extracted as more than 0.5. This proves scales of the variables in the model ensure reliability and convergence values. The structural model after analysis for the VIF coefficient of the variables is at the level of < 5 , so it can be concluded that there is no multicollinearity phenomenon. (Table 2)

Table 2. Results of analysis of concepts in the model

<i>Variables</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>AVE</i>	<i>VIF</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>R²adj</i>
<i>SME</i>	0.829	0.658	2.401		
<i>ASM</i>	0.828	0.592	2.351	0.674	0.670
<i>AB</i>	0.832	0.607	1.945	0.626	0.621
<i>EI</i>	0.838	0.658	1.134		
<i>CB</i>	0.790	0.608		0.470	0.467

R^2_{adj} coefficient of ASM is 0.670, so the SME independent variable explains 67% of the variation of the ASM variable. R^2_{adj} coefficient of AB is 0.621, which shows that the two variables ASM and EI explain 62.1% of the variation of AB. Finally, the R^2_{adj} coefficient of CB is 0.467, and the variables AB and EI explain 46.7% of the variation of the choice behavior.

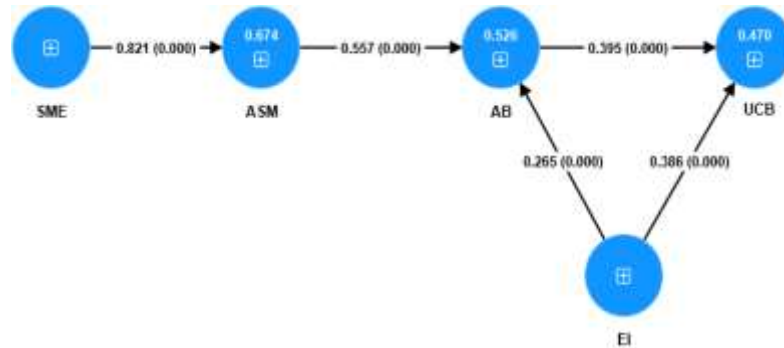


Fig 4. Model testing Results

After analyzing Bootstrap for relationships in the study model, the results are shown in Fig 4 and Table 3. The relationships are accepted and statistically significant. The social media site experience positively affects Attitude toward the social media site with a normalized coefficient (original sample) equal to 0.821. In other words, the more positive student's social media site experiences, the more positive student's Attitude toward the social media site. The two factors, the Attitude toward social media and Emotional intelligence had a positive effect on the AB variable with impact coefficients is 0.557 and 0.265, respectively. In turn, AB affects the students' behavior when they select a university (0.395). This means that the more positive the student's Attitude towards the university brand, the higher the student's university choice behavior. In addition, EI also has a direct positive impact on CB with an Original sample coefficient = 0.386.

Table 3. Results of analysis of hypothetical relationships

Hypotheses	Relationship	Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values	Result
H1	SME -> ASM	0.821	0.822	0.019	43.610	0.000	Supported
H2	ASM -> AB	0.557	0.555	0.059	9.378	0.000	Supported
H3	AB -> CB	0.395	0.394	0.066	5.989	0.000	Supported
H4	EI -> AB	0.265	0.266	0.058	4.560	0.000	Supported
H5	EI -> CB	0.386	0.389	0.068	5.672	0.000	Supported

5 Discussion

In this paper, the authors provided a complete research methodology to demonstrate the relationships between social media site experience, emotional intelligence, and choice behavior via mediating role of factors related to Attitude. An online survey was conducted by Google Forms to test the hypothesized model. The data analysis findings illustrated the validity and dependability of the model's scales. All proposed hypothesis relationships are accepted and statistically significant at 5%.

The construction of the proposed research model is based on the Attitude toward the website Model of Poh & Adam, 2002 [22] and documents explaining the relationship between emotional intelligence and consumer decision-making (Se Hun Lim & Dan J. Kim, 2020; Anastasiadis, Lazaros, 2020) [15], [1]. This research contributed to

the current literature on the influence of social media marketing efforts on behavior in Vietnam's education sector. Colleges and institutions are constantly expanding their online presence, especially their presence on social networks. Utilizing social media channels to reach learners is necessary, and determining the quality of the social media experience and the emotion' effects is crucial. This is the foundation upon which managers plan communication strategies, create conditions for the organization to quickly reach target customers-high school students, easily collect feedback, and provide timely helpful information to increase experiences and positive emotion. This contributes to forming a positive attitude towards the university brand and promoting student behavior when choosing a university.

A prior study by Leung et al., 2015 [14] explored the social media marketing effectiveness of two different social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter) in the hotel industry. The results demonstrated that the customer's social media experiences affect their attitudes toward social media site, which impacts attitudes toward hotel brand. Thereby toward hotel brand has a positive effect on booking intention. Although, the authors conduct research in other areas (Education) along with other data analysis techniques - PLSSSEM compared with studies of Xi Y. Leung. However, the findings once again confirm that the more positive student's social media site experiences, the more positive student's Attitudes toward the social media site. This finding is also consistent with Bruner & Kumar, 2000 [2]. Their study suggested that an individual's web experiences positively affect their Attitude toward website.

The support of the hypothesis regarding the relationship between attitudes toward the social media site and attitudes toward the brand illustrates that if a student has a favorable attitude toward the university's social channel, the student's Attitude toward the university brand is more positive. This result suits all studies related to the Attitude toward the website model, which examines by studies by Poh & Adam, 2002; Bruner & Kumar, 2000 [22], [2]. It defines the significance of social media marketing in education organizations. Especially it is essential to leverage social media pages to impress students and change their attitudes to become more positive.

Besides that, the acceptance of the hypothesis "the more positive student's Attitude toward the University brand, the higher choice behavior" proposed that if a student has a positive attitude toward a University brand; they are more likely to decide to choose this institution when they select the university. Both Aad and Aws model results suggested that attitudes toward brand positively influence purchase intention. According to the Theory of Reasoned Action – TRA (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) [8], behavior intention is a powerful predictor and explanation of actual behavior, and intention is a part of behavior-oriented attitudes. However, in this study, the author ignores behavior intention and attempts to explain the influence of attitudes on behavior. Empirical results showed that attitudes toward brand directly affect choice behavior.

Furthermore, there was one new finding from SEM analysis. This study expands the examination of emotional intelligence's influences on students' university choice behavior. According to the data research findings, emotional intelligence has both direct and indirect influence through Attitude toward brand on college choice behavior. This result contributes to the theoretical foundations of current research on emotion. The practical results again demonstrate the role of the emotion aspect on consumer behavior, as mentioned in several previous studies (Se Hun Lim & Dan J. Kim, 2020; Rozell et al., 2006; Kidwell et al., 2008) [15], [21], [13].

6 Conclusion

The study provides practical evidence to support utilizing the Aws model to explain the relationship between emotional intelligence, social media site experiences, brand attitude, and decision-making. The findings found that the model's application is entirely consistent with the survey data in Vietnam. The findings identified that the social media site experience has a positive effect on Attitude toward the social media site with a normalized coefficient (original sample) equal to 0.821. The two factors, attitudes toward social media site and Emotional intelligence, positively affect the attitudes toward brand, with impact coefficients of 0.557 and 0.265, respectively. In turn, attitudes toward brand affect the student's behavior when they choose a university (0.395). This means that the more positive the student's Attitude towards the university brand, the higher the student's university choice behavior. Additionally, emotional intelligence also has a direct positive impact on choice behavior, with an original sample coefficient = 0.386.

From a theoretical perspective, research on the experiences and emotional intelligence's effects in the education area is minimal. Moreover, the paper has valuable contributions to both academic and practical researchers. Our study is one of the efforts to apply attitudes toward the website model in social media context to explore student choice behavior in the education sector.

Practically, the universities' managers can utilize these findings to improve their social media communication strategies. Organizations should make their social media page more attractive and appealing, provide timely helpful information, and user-centric aims to increase interaction and promote members' engagement. The university should then concentrate on Social media page design to enhance user experiences. This facilitates the organization to quickly reach target customers (high school students) and create and maintain positive emotions and experiences for users. This will contribute to form a positive attitude towards the university brand, and promoting student's behavior when choosing a university.

Similar to another study, there are several limitations are noted in this examination. The major limitation of our study is that data just collected in Da Nang as a sample. Because this is an exploratory study in the education area – University education, further work is going to expand collecting the research data to universities in another region of Viet Nam as Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh. Besides, the study tests the relationship between emotional intelligence, social media site experiences, brand attitude, and decision-making with data from social media platform – Facebook. Currently, the organizations have been integrated many platforms to reach the target customer. So, the examination of the relationships with data from different social media channels is necessary in future.

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