

Social Media eWOM Impact on Tourism A PRISMA-Based Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Based on the PRISMA framework, this study conducts a systematic review of 193 peer-reviewed scientific articles published between 2008 and 2024, comprehensively examining the impact of social media electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on tourism. Through bibliometric analysis and content analysis, this paper synthesizes the evolution of research themes, theoretical applications, and methodological characteristics in this field. The findings indicate that: ① The impact of social media eWOM on tourism exhibits multidimensional and whole-process characteristics, encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral intention dimensions, and extends to hospitality management domains such as hotels, catering, medical tourism, ecotourism, and heritage tourism. Among these, trust, attitude, and emotion serve as key mediating variables, while gender, cultural distance, and psychological distance play significant moderating roles; ② Short videos, user-generated content (UGC), and digital marketing constitute the primary carriers, playing prominent roles in enhancing destination attractiveness and crisis management; ③ Theories and methods demonstrate diverse integration, with commonly employed frameworks including the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), predominantly utilizing quantitative methods combined with big data analytics. Future research should strengthen cross-cultural comparisons and studies on technological evolution, and focus on methodological innovations and technology-driven dynamics, thereby providing practical implications for digital marketing, reputation management, and sustainable destination development.

Keywords: Electronic Word-of-Mouth, Tourism, Social Media, Bibliometric Analysis, Influencing Factors, Tourist Behavior

Introduction

In the context of the deep integration of the global economy, society, and technology, tourism has become an important driver of world economic growth and social development ((Thommandru et al., 2023; Robina-Ramírez et al., 2024). According to the World Travel & Tourism Council, tourism accounted for about 10% of global GDP in 2024 and created more than 357 million jobs worldwide (WTTC, 2024). Beyond its economic contribution, tourism

also plays an important role in cultural exchange, regional development, employment growth, and the improvement of destination competitiveness. As the digitalization of the tourism industry continues to deepen, the ways tourists obtain information, evaluate destinations, and make travel decisions are changing significantly. Therefore, understanding how digital communication influences tourist behavior has become an important issue in both tourism research and industry practice.

At the same time, digital transformation has continued to develop rapidly. Social media and user-generated content (UGC) have been widely adopted and have fundamentally changed the production, dissemination, and consumption of tourism information (Bekele & Raj, 2024). Compared with traditional marketing communication, social media platforms allow tourists to share travel experiences instantly and interactively. As a result, tourism information has become more decentralized, open, and influential. This change has significantly reshaped the development model of the tourism industry and transformed tourists from passive information receivers into active content creators and disseminators. By 2024, the number of global social media users had reached 5.04 billion, accounting for 62.3% of the world's population (King et al., 2014). In the tourism context, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on social media platforms has become one of the most important sources of information influencing tourist decisions. This influence mainly results from its fast dissemination speed, wide reach, strong interactivity, and long information availability (Rosario et al., 2020; Sustacha et al., 2023). Many studies have shown that destination management organizations and tourism firms need to adopt more digital solutions to improve tourist experience and strengthen destination competitiveness (King et al., 2014). This trend further highlights the need to better understand the effectiveness, usefulness, and influence mechanisms of eWOM in tourism decision-making and destination marketing strategies (Ortíz Flórez et al., 2019).

In the digital era, tourists increasingly rely on online reviews, travel blogs, short videos, and social media recommendations when selecting travel destinations (Theobald, 2012). About 87% of tourists search for tourism information through social media before traveling (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), indicating that eWOM has become an important information source influencing tourist perceptions, destination image formation, and travel decision-making. At the same time, eWOM directly affects destination marketing performance and sustainable tourism development. Positive eWOM can improve destination credibility, enhance brand awareness, strengthen tourist trust, and increase purchase and revisit intentions (Chong et al., 2018; Pop et al., 2022). In contrast, negative eWOM can damage destination reputation, reduce consumer trust, and even change tourists' travel decisions (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Expedia, 2022). Therefore, in an increasingly competitive tourism market, effective management of eWOM has become an important strategic issue for destination marketing organizations, tourism firms, and policy makers. In addition, eWOM research not only helps tourism businesses improve digital marketing, customer relationships, and online reputation management, but also provides theoretical support for destination branding, crisis communication, and sustainable tourism planning. It also promotes interdisciplinary research in tourism management, consumer behavior, digital communication, and information systems.

Previous studies have mainly focused on the definition of eWOM (Luo & Zhong, 2015),

its mechanisms (Abbasi et al., 2017), influencing factors (Mehmet Özcanlı & Bayram, 2023; Zhang et al., 2010), and research methods (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Research has shown that travel experiences and reviews shared by tourists on social media significantly influence potential tourists' cognitive perceptions, emotional attitudes (Filiari, 2015), destination image (Arruda Filho & Barcelos, 2021), perceived value (Statista, 2023), and purchase and revisit intentions (Filiari & McLeay, 2014). Positive eWOM can improve credibility, brand awareness, and purchase intention (Chong et al., 2018; Pop et al., 2022), while negative eWOM can damage destination reputation and reduce consumer trust (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012), and may even lead tourists to change their destination choices (Expedia, 2022). These findings indicate that eWOM has become an important strategic tool influencing tourist behavior, destination competitiveness, and sustainable tourism development.

However, although the importance of eWOM in tourism has gradually been recognized, several limitations still exist in current research. To our knowledge, although previous studies have attempted to integrate the definitions (Litvin et al., 2008; Huang et al., 2012), mechanisms (Filiari, 2015), influencing factors (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012), and research methods (Xie et al., 2014) of eWOM, systematic review studies on the evolving influence of eWOM in tourism remain limited. Most existing studies focus on static relationship analysis and mainly examine the separate effects of eWOM on destination image, perceived value, or behavioral intention (Jalilvand & Heidari, 2017; Zhang et al., 2010). However, these studies fail to fully explain the dynamic development process, interdisciplinary evolution paths, and overall research structure of eWOM. In addition, with the rapid growth of digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and tourism-sharing communities, the forms and influence mechanisms of eWOM have become more diverse. As a result, conclusions from earlier studies can no longer fully explain new phenomena in the current tourism communication environment.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for a systematic and comprehensive review of eWOM research in tourism. Such a review can help identify the main research themes, theoretical foundations, research methods, and emerging trends in this field. It can also provide practical implications for tourism practitioners and destination managers, helping them use eWOM more effectively to improve destination marketing performance, tourist engagement, crisis management capability, and digital communication performance. Based on this background, this study adopts the PRISMA systematic review process and a deductive content analysis method to comprehensively examine the development of eWOM research in tourism. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following three research questions:

1. In the scientific literature, what aspects of tourism are influenced by eWOM?
2. In the scientific literature, what theories and methods have been used to explain the effects of eWOM on tourism?
3. In the scientific literature, what research areas and key variables have been examined in studies of the effects of eWOM on tourism?

The contributions of this study can be summarized in three main aspects. First, by systematically reviewing research on eWOM in tourism, this study integrates existing findings and highlights its key elements in influencing factors, behavioral outcomes, mechanisms, and industry applications. This work enriches the theoretical framework of tourism management

and information communication. Second, using the PRISMA approach, this study conducts rigorous selection and systematic synthesis of relevant literature. This process not only presents the scientific progress in the field but also provides future researchers with a reproducible and transparent research pathway. Finally, the conceptual framework proposed in this study classifies and maps the components, key variables, research areas, and methodologies of eWOM. This framework offers a systematic reference for future studies and provides practical guidance for tourism firms and destination managers in digital marketing, word-of-mouth management, and crisis response.

Conceptual Background

Concept of Tourism

Tourism is a complex and dynamic phenomenon. Its concept covers diverse motivations, experiential activities, and economic behavior. It links tangible destinations with intangible cultural, social, and personal experiences (Lickorish & Jenkins, 2007). Tourism is not only an important form of leisure and exploration but also a key driver of economic and social transformation. As one of the most influential global industries, tourism is closely connected to multiple economic sectors. It contributes significantly to global GDP and employment (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Tourism also plays an important role in promoting local economic diversification, improving infrastructure, and supporting overall development (Erkan & Evans, 2016). However, the tourism industry lacks a unified structure. Different destinations rely on their unique resources to provide diverse attractions, including cultural heritage, natural landscapes, culinary experiences, and educational opportunities (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In recent years, technological development has profoundly changed the tourism landscape. It has improved efficiency, accessibility, and sustainability. Digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and big data analytics optimize destination marketing and personalized tourist experiences (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). Mobile applications and technologies like virtual reality further strengthen the interaction between tourists and destinations (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Additionally, social media and eWOM significantly influence destination image and travel intentions, continuously shaping tourist decision-making (Chakraborty, 2019). Overall, tourism remains highly dynamic and innovative, with wide-ranging economic, social, and technological impacts. As globalization and digitalization continue to reshape tourist behavior, the industry will need innovative strategies to meet new challenges and realize its potential for sustainable growth.

Concept of Electronic Word-of-Mouth

EWOM is an important phenomenon in the digital age. It has a profound impact on consumer decision-making and brand perception. EWOM is defined as any positive or negative statement made by potential, current, or past consumers about a product or company through the internet, which can be accessed by large numbers of individuals and organizations (Zhang et al., 2014). Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, which relies on direct interpersonal communication, eWOM spreads consumer opinions widely through online platforms, making it more influential in shaping consumer attitudes and behavior (Ayeh et al., 2013).

In the tourism industry, eWOM plays an especially prominent role. Tourists often seek information based on real experiences to reduce decision uncertainty. Research shows that tourism-related eWOM includes online reviews, blogs, forums, and social media interactions,

providing first-hand insights about destinations, accommodations, and services (Luo & Zhong, 2015). Because tourism products are largely intangible, potential tourists mainly rely on such digital content to evaluate quality and authenticity before purchase (Sparks et al., 2013). The credibility and persuasiveness of eWOM are influenced by multiple factors, including information quality, source expertise, and platform characteristics (Wu et al., 2020). Compared with simple star ratings or general recommendations, detailed and well-supported reviews are usually more convincing (Kwok & Yu, 2013). Reviews from experienced travelers or influential users are often valued more than those from anonymous sources (Murgado-Armenteros et al., 2015). Social platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and TripAdvisor further expand the reach and social impact of eWOM, making it a key driver of tourism marketing and destination branding (Web of Science, 2022).

Beyond individual travel decisions, eWOM also has broader macro-level effects on the tourism industry. Tourism companies and destination management organizations often monitor and manage online reputation to improve service quality and brand image (Atsiz et al., 2022). Negative eWOM can seriously damage brand credibility, while positive evaluations help enhance consumer trust and loyalty (Durán-Sánchez et al., 2018). With technological advances, artificial intelligence and big data analytics are increasingly applied to identify eWOM trends and optimize personalized marketing strategies (Law et al., 2022). In summary, eWOM has become an important tool influencing both consumer perceptions and industry practices in contemporary tourism. As digital communication platforms continue to evolve, its influence is expected to grow further, remaining a key area of research in tourism and consumer behavior.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a systematic review approach and follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Figure 1) for literature screening and synthesis. The PRISMA method is suitable for systematically tracing the development of a specific research field, identifying knowledge accumulation, and highlighting emerging trends. It helps researchers understand academic frontiers and plan future research directions (Mavric et al., 2021; Ogretmenoglu et al., 2022). Systematic reviews typically analyze the temporal and spatial distribution of literature, thematic clusters, author collaboration networks, and institutional cooperation to reveal the evolution patterns of a discipline (Tranfield et al., 2003; Snyder, 2019). However, traditional review methods often suffer from strong subjectivity and limited reproducibility due to unstandardized procedures (Bland, 2015). PRISMA improves transparency and reproducibility by providing a structured flowchart and standardized reporting checklist, covering four stages: literature search, screening, eligibility assessment, and synthesis (Cohen et al., 2013).

The PRISMA framework has been widely applied and validated in tourism research. For example, in sustainable tourism, studies have used PRISMA to systematically assess the socio-economic impacts of global ecotourism projects (Tukey, 1977). In cultural heritage tourism, researchers have integrated multi-source data using PRISMA to reveal how digital technologies enhance visitor experiences (Amaral et al., 2024). PRISMA has also been applied in destination management policy analysis (Baker & Kim, 2019) and cross-regional comparisons of rural tourism and community participation (Brochado et al., 2019). These applications demonstrate that PRISMA significantly improves the rigor of literature screening

and evidence synthesis. Therefore, PRISMA effectively addresses common challenges in tourism research, such as high data heterogeneity and multiple stakeholder interests. It is especially suitable for mapping knowledge on tourism policy evolution, visitor behavior patterns, and sustainable development pathways. Moreover, it provides a methodological basis for identifying gaps in the existing research.

Database Selection

In this literature review, we used Web of Science (WOS) as the platform for searching and collecting studies. WOS includes articles, books, conference papers, and more, covering over 21,000 high-impact journals (Ciasullo et al., 2021; D'Acunto et al., 2024). It provides tools for scientific data analysis and has been widely applied in tourism research (Godnov & Redek, 2019; Jyoti et al., 2024). Because studies on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and tourism first appeared in 2008, this review collected scientific articles published between 2008 and 2024, with the cutoff date set at December 31, 2024.

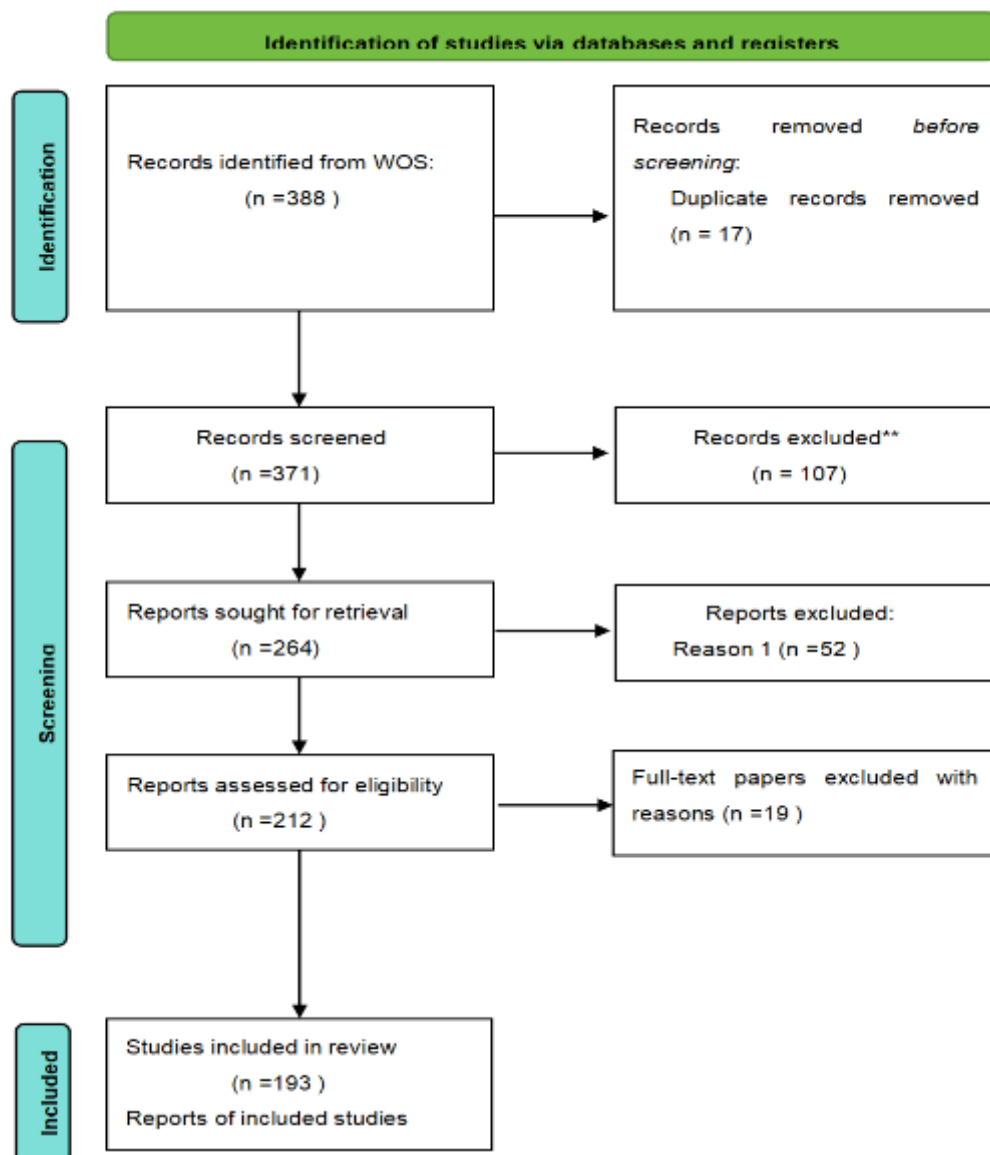


Figure 1 Research plan based on PRISMA guidelines

Keyword Selection

This literature review established a comprehensive, unbiased, and reproducible search procedure (Mora et al., 2024; Pandey & Sahu, 2020). The authors used “electronic word-of-mouth” and “tourism,” as well as combinations of the two, as topic keywords to retrieve all relevant studies on eWOM and tourism.

Screening Criteria

Table 1

Criteria for study inclusion and exclusion.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Language: Although the search was conducted in English, no strict language restriction was applied.	Document type: Books, book chapters, conference papers, letters, notes, and reviews.
Study type: Articles from indexed journals.	Field: Studies from unrelated knowledge domains.
Publication period: Open, not restricted.	
Topic: Related to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and tourism.	
Research area: Social sciences relevant to the study, including business, management, economics, and sociology.	

Data Collection and Filtering

Using the keywords described above, a total of 388 related publications were initially retrieved. Since this review focused on academic journal articles, non-article sources were first removed, leaving 193 relevant scientific articles. Next, the bibliographic information of all included articles was verified to ensure that abstracts and keywords were complete and usable. An Excel database was then created to record attributes for each article, including author, title, publication year, source, keywords, and abstract.

The literature screening strictly followed the PRISMA guidelines and was conducted in three stages (see Table 1). First, an initial screening was performed based on publication year, document type (journal articles only), and language (English). Second, the subset of articles was further refined using the key search terms. Finally, abstracts and full texts were reviewed to select articles that fully met the research topic and design criteria. During data extraction, the focus was on systematically analyzing abstracts with respect to research topic, methodology, and theoretical framework. Key articles were read in full to accurately identify their main findings and contributions.

Results of Bibliometric Analysis*Descriptive Analysis*

Descriptive statistics provide a basic overview of a dataset, showing its main characteristics and distribution patterns in a clear manner. They serve as the starting point for research reports and are essential for understanding complex data structures and conducting exploratory analyses (Sakas et al., 2022). This study analyzed 193 scientific articles published between 2008 and 2024, focusing on the impact of eWOM on tourism (Table 2). The articles had an average of 36.36 citations, indicating a relatively high level of academic attention in this field. During this period, a total of 503 authors contributed to the research,

and 855 keywords were recorded after removing duplicates.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics

Statistic	Result
Time range	2008-2024
Data source	Web of Science
Document type	Scientific articles
Number of articles	193
Average annual publication	18.625
Average citations per article	36.36
Total references	7772
Keywords	855
Author-associated keywords	2515
Authors	503

Annual Publication Analysis

Studies on social media and tourism first appeared in 2008. Therefore, this review collected scientific articles published between 2008 and 2024, with the cutoff date of December 31, 2024 (see Figure 2). The number of publications shows an overall upward trend. Time-based analysis indicates that since 2016, the annual number of publications reached double digits. In particular, the last five years (2020–2024) recorded the highest number of publications. This trend likely reflects the continuous development of information technology and the growing attention and use of eWOM by tourists. It also indicates that eWOM has become increasingly widespread in the tourism field.

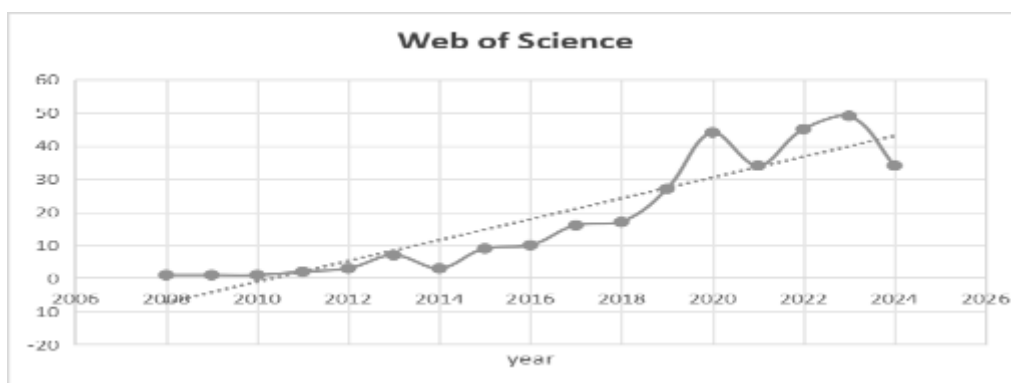


Figure 2 Number of articles on the impact of ewom on tourism

Publication Analysis

This study reviewed the publication patterns of the top 25 journals that published research on eWOM in tourism. The three journals with the highest number of publications were Sustainability (H-index = 18), International Journal of Hospitality Management (H-index = 12), and Current Issues in Tourism (H-index = 11). Other high H-index journals that published relevant articles on eWOM and tourism include: International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology, Journal of Travel Research, Tourism Management, Journal of Destination Marketing & Management, Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, and Tourism and Hospitality Management-Croatia (see Table

3).

Table 3

Number of journal publications on ewom and tourism

Journal	h_index
Sustainability	18
International Journal of Hospitality Management	12
Current Issues in Tourism	11
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	10
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology	10
Journal of Travel Research	9
Tourism Management	9
Journal of Destination Marketing & Management	8
Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing	7
Tourism and Hospitality Management - Croatia	7
Journal of hospitality and tourism insights	6
Information technology tourism	5
Journal of Hospitality Marketing Management	5
Journal of Quality Assurance in HospitalityTourism	5
Online Information Review	4
Tourism Recreation Research	4
Tourism Review	4
Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research	3
Frontiers in Psychology	3
Global Knowledge Memory and Communication	3
International Journal of Tourism Research	3
Journal of Business Research	3
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	3
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	3
Pasos revista de turismo y patrimonio cultural	3

Research Methods on the Impact of eWOM in Tourism

Research on eWOM in tourism primarily employs quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method approaches. Quantitative methods are widely used, with online surveys being the most common data collection tool. They are particularly effective for analyzing the influence of eWOM on tourist behavioral intentions (Azhar et al., 2022; Villacé-Molinero et al., 2023). Experiments are also applied to reveal causal mechanisms. For example, some studies manipulate psychological distance and destination familiarity in scenario experiments to compare the effects of eWOM, traditional word-of-mouth, and official marketing websites on information search (Jan et al., 2023). Big data analysis allows researchers to process large volumes of unstructured data and gain insights into real behavior. For instance, one study analyzed hotel, airline, and attraction reviews using text analysis and regression to identify typical traits of green eWOM sharers (Rahimzhan et al., 2020). Combining website analytics with social media data to build fuzzy cognitive maps or agent-based simulation models can further optimize multi-channel digital marketing strategies (Saidani et al., 2023).

Qualitative methods are also widely applied. For example, researchers conducted content analysis on 954 hotel reviews from Ctrip, segmenting themes by tourist type to reveal differences in experience intensity and the dominant role and trends of eWOM (Le et al., 2020; McNeely et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2024). Mixed methods combine the strengths of qualitative and quantitative approaches, providing a more comprehensive perspective. Examples include: using critical incident technique with experiments to study how exaggerated review language affects trust and behavioral intentions (Izogo et al., 2022); applying exploratory factor analysis and cluster analysis to identify three types of interactions in Italian hotel user-generated content management (Abubakar, 2016); or combining user-generated content analysis with teaching experiments to examine how tourism students use online reviews to improve management practice (Moliner-Tena et al., 2023). New research perspectives are emerging with technological development. Cross-cultural comparative studies, for instance, highlight differences in tourist behavior between India and Vietnam, suggesting that including more countries enhances generalizability (Xia et al., 2023). Some researchers have developed domain-specific sentiment dictionaries to enable multilingual and cross-domain text analysis (Cao et al., 2024).

Despite these advances, current methods have limitations. For example, a survey of 327 foreign tourists showed that service quality influenced eWOM intention through destination attachment, but the sample was limited and may overlook subjective consumer experiences (Ghaderi et al., 2020). Another study analyzing 18,000 Croatian hotel reviews revealed competitive advantage factors but was influenced by researcher judgment, limiting generalizability (Kim & Chang, 2020). Additionally, studies combining surveys with memory theory to examine satisfaction and memory effects on eWOM involve high design and implementation costs and require careful balance between qualitative depth and quantitative breadth (Lacap et al., 2024).

Theoretical Foundations of eWOM Research in Tourism

eWOM is a core element in tourism research in the digital age. It profoundly affects tourist behavior, destination image, and marketing strategies. This study systematically reviews the theoretical foundations and practical applications of eWOM in tourism. Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is widely used to explain how eWOM influences tourist behavioral intentions (Martín et al., 2019; Purbadharmaja et al., 2021). For example, studies apply its four core dimensions—performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions—to the hotel and tourism industry, demonstrating their role in triggering positive eWOM behavior. This shows that TPB provides an effective framework for understanding how eWOM shapes tourist decision-making (Rasool & Pathania, 2023). Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is commonly used to analyze tourists' intention to use eWOM platforms (Alvarez-Bermejo et al., 2016; Neto et al., 2020). Cognitive appraisal theory focuses on the emotional value generated by eWOM and explains its role in eliciting emotions and guiding behavior (Stojanovic et al., 2018; Sutanto & Antonio, 2023). Social comparison theory supplements this by explaining the social-psychological mechanisms of eWOM from a motivational perspective (Tarkang et al., 2022; Le Hong & Hsu, 2023).

Other theoretical approaches have also been applied. Trust transfer theory suggests that eWOM positively influences destination trust and travel intentions in medical tourism, with gender acting as a moderating factor (Mariani et al., 2020). Memory theory indicates that

service experiences indirectly influence positive eWOM through satisfaction and memorability (Ranga et al., 2023). Dual-process theory demonstrates that eWOM of creative tea beverages indirectly affects repurchase intention through emotional pathways, showing that eWOM often involves both cognitive and affective mediators (de Souza et al., 2020). Furthermore, persuasion theory models highlight that perceived usefulness and emotional attitude mediate the relationship between eWOM and decision intention. Group size also moderates the effect of explanation type on eWOM effectiveness, emphasizing the importance of situational factors in eWOM dissemination (Martí-Ochoa et al., 2024). Overall, these theories illustrate that eWOM's influence in tourism is multifaceted, involving cognitive, emotional, and social mechanisms that shape consumer behavior and destination outcomes.

Research Progress of eWOM in Tourism

With the rapid development of information and communication technologies, eWOM has become an important factor influencing consumer behavior and decision-making in tourism. This study reviews the evolution of eWOM research in tourism based on academic literature indexed in Web of Science, focusing on its influencing factors, outcomes, mechanisms, the role of social media, crisis management, and industry applications.

Influencing Factors of eWOM in Tourism

The impact of eWOM on tourism is driven by multiple factors, including information source, perceived value, motivation, trust, cognition, and emotional experience. Studies show that website quality, cognition, trust, and perceived usefulness significantly influence tourists' attitudes toward destinations. This highlights the critical role of high-quality eWOM in promoting the dissemination of online travel information (Nusair et al., 2019). Enhancing the credibility of information sources and the strength of emotional appeal can effectively increase tourists' willingness to recommend a destination (Oliveira & Casais, 2019; Ciasullo et al., 2021). Perceived value is another key driver. By reducing perceived risk, it significantly increases tourists' intention to visit (Martín-Delgado et al., 2020). Some studies indicate that actual value and audience attitudes form a chain effect between trust and visit intention, showing the central role of motivation in the influence of eWOM (Martin-Fuentes, 2016). However, although eWOM positively shapes destination image and encourages visit intention, its direct impact on trust is relatively limited. Geospatial analysis suggests that managers may struggle to achieve expected outcomes if they lack a full understanding of eWOM (Viglia & Abrate, 2017; Zhou et al., 2023). In addition, positive emotional experiences, such as novelty and enjoyment, play an important role in eWOM by increasing tourist engagement and amplifying its effects. In summary, these factors interact with each other, forming a complex network that drives the influence of eWOM on tourism.

Effects of eWOM on Tourism Behavioral Outcomes

eWOM shapes tourism behavioral outcomes across several dimensions, including travel intention, destination choice, revisit intention, purchase intention, customer loyalty, and brand equity. Studies indicate that travel intention and destination choice are directly influenced by eWOM. In addition, eWOM significantly affects visit intention through the mediating role of destination image (Purbadharmaja et al., 2021). Its social value can further enhance visit intention through positive word-of-mouth dissemination (Kim & Chang, 2020). Revisit intention and purchase intention are also affected by eWOM. For example, the

level of eWOM engagement for traditional Chinese cuisine significantly promotes both revisit intention and positive word-of-mouth sharing (Sutanto & Antonio, 2023). Similarly, the alignment of website information effectively strengthens purchase intention (Tarkang et al., 2022). Regarding customer loyalty, researchers suggest that digital loyalty programs can enhance the social reputation effect of eWOM, indirectly increasing loyalty (Stojanovic et al., 2018). Brand equity relies on the long-term accumulation of eWOM. The intensity of social media use positively influences brand awareness, which in turn improves brand quality and loyalty (Tran Thi Tuyet et al., 2024). Data mining on the TripAdvisor platform also shows that sustainability dimensions can replace “resilience” in brand personality, adding new meaning to hotel brand equity (Neto et al., 2020). Overall, eWOM has become a key driver of tourism behavioral outcomes, influencing both consumer decisions and long-term brand development.

Mechanisms of eWOM in Tourism

The mechanisms through which eWOM influences tourism involve mediating variables such as perceived trust, attitude, and emotions, as well as moderating variables like gender, cultural distance, and psychological distance. Perceived trust is a central mediator in eWOM effects. Website quality positively shapes tourists’ attitudes through trust (Ghaderi et al., 2020), while perceived risk significantly influences destination trust (Le Hong & Hsu, 2023). Attitude has been widely validated as a mediator (Lacap et al., 2024). Research indicates that trust in a blogger can indirectly affect visit intention through perceived authenticity and attitude. Emotions act as a catalyst in eWOM. Emotional value can further enhance visit intention by reducing perceived risk (Kim & Chang, 2020). Moderating variables also play an important role. Gender differences are evident, with young male and female tourists showing significant differences in the relationship between perceived risk and trust (Le Hong & Hsu, 2023). Cultural distance influences eWOM effectiveness as well; for example, in Italy and Russia, eWOM in the native language significantly improves online ratings, showing that cultural closeness enhances persuasiveness (Mariani et al., 2020). Psychological distance also moderates eWOM effects by influencing the depth of information processing. Overall, these mechanisms illustrate the complex pathways through which eWOM impacts tourism, highlighting the interplay of trust, attitude, emotions, and contextual factors in shaping tourist behavior.

Social Media and eWOM

Social media serves as the primary carrier of eWOM, encompassing short videos, social networking sites, digital marketing, and user-generated content. It has a profound impact on destination image. Studies show that in culinary tourism, the authenticity and perceived attitude in short videos mediate the relationship between trust and visit intention (Lacap et al., 2024). On social networking sites, eWOM has become a major topic in top journals (Nusair et al., 2019), covering areas such as service recovery and brand image, which highlights the broad application of social media in tourism research. Digital marketing strengthens eWOM effects through technological tools. For example, research using the DAR model indicates that technology-driven eWOM can significantly influence tourist spending (de Souza et al., 2020). UGC has a particularly strong effect on destination image (Muritala et al., 2022). High-quality content positively impacts brand recognition and emotional image, while highly engaged and emotionally positive reviews further enhance destination attractiveness (Martí-Ochoa et al., 2024). Additionally, studies show that user-shared restaurant photos play a key

role in tourists' decision-making (Mladenović & Pracer, 2024). In summary, social media disseminates eWOM across multiple channels, playing a critical role in shaping destination image and attractiveness in tourism.

eWOM and Crisis Management

EWOM presents both challenges and opportunities in crisis management, particularly under contexts such as the COVID-19 pandemic, political risks, and panic-driven risks. Research shows that during the early stages of COVID-19, Twitter data from the cruise industry was dominated by negative eWOM (Santa Cruz & López-Guzmán, 2017). Criticism based on pre-pandemic stereotypes forced the industry to adjust its business models. However, some studies indicate that eWOM can partially reduce risk perception among young tourists (Le Hong & Hsu, 2023), highlighting the complexity of eWOM effects during crises. Regarding political and panic risks, research suggests that even with negative eWOM, tourists may still choose destinations if the environment or cultural heritage is attractive (Martín-Delgado et al., 2020), showing that eWOM has limited deterrent power in such contexts. Additionally, scholars have proposed the concept of "metaverse word-of-mouth," suggesting the use of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) to curb fake eWOM, providing a technological approach to reputation management during crises (Viglia & Abrate, 2017). In practical applications, UK researchers used big data to predict hotel complaint behavior (Sann et al., 2022), finding that high-star hotels focus more on service experience during crises, while lower-star hotels emphasize cleanliness. Overall, effective crisis management requires the coordinated use of technology and strategy to mitigate negative effects and leverage potential opportunities offered by eWOM.

EWOM and Industry Applications

EWOM is widely applied across various tourism sectors, including hotels, restaurants, medical tourism, ecotourism, and heritage tourism. In the hotel industry, research shows that e-commerce can reshape the central hierarchy of hotels through eWOM, thereby influencing spatial patterns (Zhou et al., 2023). Subsequent studies confirmed the correlation between hotel star ratings and eWOM scores (Martín-Fuentes, 2016). However, simplified eWOM management in hotels can limit service improvements (Ciasullo et al., 2021). In the restaurant sector, eWOM engagement for traditional Chinese cuisine significantly increases revisit intention (Sutanto & Antonio, 2023). User-uploaded photos also play a key role in restaurant selection (Oliveira & Casais, 2019). In medical tourism, trust in eWOM and the quality of information directly affect patients' destination choices. For ecotourism, the reputational effects of eWOM enhance both the cultural attractiveness and service competitiveness of agro-tourism offerings (Viglia & Abrate, 2017). In heritage tourism, geospatial analyses reveal that eWOM for rural accommodations plays an important role in amplifying heritage attraction (Martín et al., 2019). Overall, across different tourism sectors, eWOM improves destination competitiveness and enhances tourist experience through diverse mechanisms.

Conclusion

This study followed the PRISMA guidelines to conduct a systematic review of literature on the impact of social media eWOM on tourism from 2008 to 2024. By analyzing 193 core articles, the study aimed to address three key research questions. The main conclusions are summarized as follows:

First, regarding the specific impacts of eWOM on tourism (Research Question 1), this review reveals that its effects are multidimensional and span the entire decision process. Specifically: (1) Cognitive level: eWOM significantly shapes potential tourists' perceptions of destination image, perceived value, and credibility. (2) Affective level: The emotional experiences conveyed through eWOM can trigger tourists' emotional resonance, influencing their attitudes. (3) Behavioral intention level: eWOM directly drives key outcomes such as travel intention, destination choice, purchase decisions, revisit intention, and customer loyalty. Moreover, the influence of eWOM extends beyond individual tourist decisions. It also affects industry and destination management, becoming a core factor in hotel reputation, restaurant selection, medical tourism competitiveness, and crisis management.

Second, regarding the theories and methods used to explain the impact of eWOM (Research Question 2), this review shows a pattern of theoretical diversity and methodological integration. (1) Theoretical frameworks: Scholars have widely drawn from and tested classical theories in social psychology, behavioral economics, and information systems. For example, the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Technology Acceptance Model are commonly used to explain tourists' motivations for generating and adopting eWOM. Cognitive appraisal theory and emotional contagion theory clarify the emotional pathways of eWOM, while trust transfer theory and social comparison theory reveal the social-psychological mechanisms through which eWOM establishes credibility and influences decision-making. (2) Research methods: Quantitative approaches dominate the field, especially for testing causal relationships among variables. The rise of big data and text analysis enables researchers to extract real insights from large volumes of unstructured user-generated content. Qualitative and mixed methods provide deeper contextual understanding and complex explanations. However, current research still requires improvement in areas such as sample cultural diversity, use of longitudinal data, and how emerging technologies are reshaping eWOM forms.

Finally, regarding the research domains and key variables involved in the impact of eWOM on tourism (Research Question 3), this study identifies a complex network system. (1) Research domains: eWOM research has penetrated various subfields of tourism, including but not limited to hotel management, food and beverage services, heritage tourism, ecotourism, medical tourism, and crisis management. This indicates its broad relevance both academically and practically. (2) Key variables: The research constructs a framework that includes antecedent, mediator, moderator, and outcome variables. Key antecedents include information quality, source credibility, and platform characteristics. Core mediators such as perceived trust, affective attitude, and destination image act as crucial bridges linking eWOM to behavioral intentions. Important moderators, including gender, cultural distance, and psychological distance, define how individual differences and contextual factors influence the strength and direction of eWOM effects.

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