

ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (E-WOM) IN ECO-TOURISM

Dr. Jitender Kumar¹, Jyoti², Ankush Wadhwa³

¹Assistant Professor, IMSAR, Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak, Haryana, India

²Research Scholar, IMSAR, Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak, Haryana, India

³Research Scholar, IMSAR, Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak, Haryana, India

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the current study is to understand how tourists use the internet to look up eco-tourism related information. The authenticity of the destination is evaluated by tourists using both online and offline media. With the help of the word cloud created by R Studio, eco-tourism as a component of sustainability was discovered to be the most important area of research in the tourism industry. The study primarily focuses on how e-WOM influences the choice of destinations of eco-tourism. The study's conclusions recommend that travelers do their research before choosing a destination. The tourist's choice to purchase or not to purchase the destination is influenced by various reviews and ratings, such as positive, moderate, and negative ones. A potential tourist is more influenced by an open review of a previous visitor. The research also offers helpful tips for the website designers on how to offer a traveler interaction and reliable content to affect visitors' behavior.

Keywords: *Electronic word of mouth, e-WOM, Sustainability, eco-tourism.*

1. Introduction

The widespread use of the internet has transformed brand visibility through messages, photos, and video content. Internet users prefer social media over other tools because it allows them to express themselves more freely and widely. Internet users frequently use social media to find information because they can express their ideas, opinions, and suggestions there [Poturak & Turkyilmaz, 2018]. Consumers in Internet marketing interact with one another to verify the authenticity of the product. Consumer involvement in online reviews posted by authors, content creators, and commentators is motivational [Hussain et al., 2020]. The selection of destinations is influenced by their appearance, geographic area, advice from family and friends, ratings, and comments on social networking sites. The choice of a destination is influenced by the photos, videos, and experiences of visitors who have already been there. Constantinides et al., [2016] states 93 percent of consumers believe that online reviews provide real-time recommendations and have an influence on their purchasing behavior. When making a choice, reviews and ratings left by previous consumers are regarded as trustworthy sources [Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Park & Nicolau, 2015].

1.1 Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM)

The sharing of knowledge about products and brands among consumers is now made simpler by new technologies. They have access to a range of platforms, including email, blogs, forums, social networking sites, chat rooms, online communities, and review websites, through which they can communicate with other consumers. Electronic word of mouth is the name given to this novel method of exchanging individual opinions. Electronic word of mouth refers to any comments, whether favorable or unfavorable, that consumers leave about a business or product and make available to a large group of people and organizations online. To put it simply, when purchasing a product, consumers frequently read online content written by other consumers; this is known as e-WOM. The most accessible and common type of e-WOM is consumer reviews and ratings [Chatterjee, 2001]. Marketers always want to know what triggers buying decisions, and e-WOM is imperative because modern consumers usually search for more information before making any buying decision. e-WOM has a multiplier effect because it is an effective tool, offers real-time information, is trustworthy, and has first-hand knowledge of the product.

Travel decisions were found to be influenced by the three dimensions of e-WOM namely e-WOM quality, quantity, and credibility. Considering all three dimensions is necessary because no single dimension can contain all the features. These are the three dimensions:

e-WOM Quality: The quality of e-WOM refers to online review characteristics that influence the trustworthiness of the reviews. There are mainly six distinct characteristics of online reviews which are identified as follows: the review's valence, elaborateness, timeliness, relevance, and accuracy. The review's positivity or negativity is also noted.

e-WOM Quantity: The quantity of e-WOM reveals how many online reviews are currently available for a product. Consumers believe that the overall information from the reviews is more informative when there are more reviews available [Petty & Cacioppo, 1984]. It helps to lessen the uncertainty and perceived risks related to intangible, experiential travel-related services when the consumer can read a lot of reviews. A conformity effect is also brought on by a lot of reviews being available [Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975].

e-WOM Credibility: The consumer's ability to assess the value of online information is greatly aided by the credibility of e-WOM [Wathe & Burkell, 2002]. The degree to which a consumer considers an online review to be trustworthy and believable is known as e-WOM credibility [Cheung et al., 2008]. Only if a consumer regards the message source as credible will he find an online review to be helpful and follow its recommendations (adopting the e-WOM).

1.2 e-WOM in tourism

With the emergence of the internet, e-WOM has grown in importance as a factor influencing consumers' opinions of products, particularly in a multidisciplinary industry like tourism. Potential tourists look up information on tourism-related goods and services as they plan their trips and vacations to lessen uncertainty and perceived risks. Traveler decision-making is aided by travel reviews in the tourism sector because they give them access to indirect experiences [Park et al., 2007]. Purchases of intangible goods and services carry a higher risk because they cannot be evaluated before consumption; as a result, consumers are more reliant on the interpersonal influence of e-WOM [Lewis & Chambers, 2000].

A 2013 Google study outlines the five key stages of travel, including going to dream, going to plan, being able to book, beginning to experience, and sharing images and feedback of purchases. The consumer's behavior is shown in these steps before, during, and after the journey.

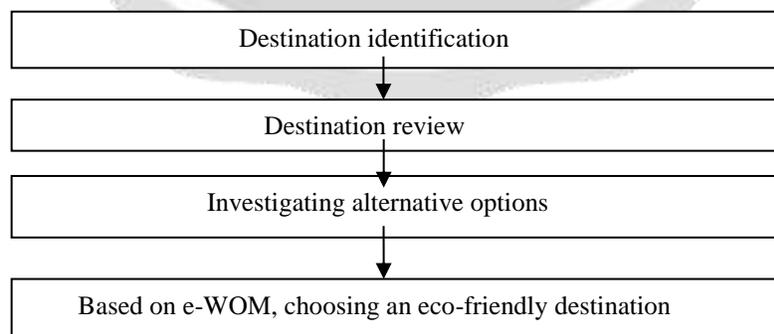


Figure 1: Process of choosing eco-tourism destinations

The consumer chooses their preferred eco-tourism destination and evaluates it by looking at its familiarity, recommendations, and ranking. Additionally, consumer investigates the options based on price and length of stay.

The development of technology has fundamentally altered how information about everything, including ecotourism, is found [Standing et al., 2014]. Search engines (Google and Yahoo), social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter), as well as Making My Trip and Yatra.com are some of the popular places for travelers to look up holiday destinations and reviews [Standing et al., 2014]. With the growth of electronic culture, the influence of electronic word-of-mouth on tourists is growing [Lopez et al. 2014]. Consumers may not choose a product if there are no reviews because they may believe it to be of lower quality. Similar to this, a high rating might encourage a potential consumer to buy the item. [Blackshaw & Nazarro, 2006]. Before choosing a destination, a traveler looks at nearly 38 websites [Dennis Schaal, 2013].

The tourism industry is regarded as the most productive sector that sustainability has affected, the question of how to use technology to look up information related to ecotourism is timely and pertinent [Chan, 2010]. According to Buhalis & Law (2008), tourism-related information is one of the most popular topics on the internet. Because of this, marketers and internet users need to comprehend the enormous scope and potential of the topic "of ecotourism" [Buhalis & Law, 2008; Buhi et al., 2009].

1.3 Eco-tourism

Eco-tourism refers to traveling to a natural area, which is created to preserve the environment's wildlife, habitat, and plant life. Allcock et al. [1993] defined eco-tourism as nature-based tourism that includes an educational component and is managed to be sustainable.

Eco-tourism provides numerous opportunities for environmentally friendly travel by avoiding motorized vehicles and airplanes. It involves recycling, reusing, sustainable agriculture, and fishing. Ecotourism is defined as "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people and involves interpretation, education, and cultural exchange, preservation of biodiversity, livelihood improvement and strengthening of human rights."

Environmental awareness education has become essential. This area of tourism focuses on visitors who care about the environment. By adhering to sustainable practices, such as staying away from flights to lessen carbon emissions, going for a walk, traveling by bicycle, driving a battery-powered vehicle, reducing plastic usage, and other environmentally friendly measures, eco-friendly destinations aim to reduce their carbon footprint. According to Dolnicar & Long [2009], tourists who are concerned about the environment are more likely to research the destination, including whether it is eco-friendly or not. Green travelers found e-WOM persuasive because it provides timely recommendations based on happy consumers.

2. Research Gap

With the help of the Scopus database, the data file of recent articles published in tourism and e-WOM within the last four years [2018-2021], is extracted. To identify current issues that present research can take into account and encourage further research in this area, we formed a word cloud with the help of R Studio. The analysis findings are shown in Figure 1, which primarily focuses on Ecotourism. The circular economy, on the other hand, focuses on sustainability, which has become a crucial area of research in the tourism industry. Ecotourism is regarded as a part of sustainable tourism and is anticipated to grow as a new industry [Lai & Shafer, 2005]. Also, there are very limited studies conducted to find the relationship between e-WOM and eco-tourism. Therefore, our study attempts to find the role of e-WOM in eco-tourism.



Figure 2: Visual representation of last 4 years [2018-2021] textual data in the form of word cloud

3. Research objective

1. To enrich the existing literature on e-WOM and eco-tourism.
2. To identify the role of e-WOM in choosing eco-tourism locations.

4. Research methodology

The researcher looked into the literature to close the knowledge gap regarding the function of e-WOM in determining the selection of eco-tourism destinations. The user reviews posted on social media platforms and travel review websites are the main focus of this study. The researchers have looked into top publications, websites that offer reviews, messages that go viral, and social media. The descriptive-analytical method is used to conduct this research paper, and reports and other previous studies were also gathered. The information, pictures, travel tips, suggestions, activities on a site, and reviews were all carefully examined by the researcher when reviewing tourism review websites. Websites like TripAdvisor and Travelok offer the best reviews of the location through a variety of star ratings, text, images, verified user reviews, and video ratings.

5. Findings

In line with the study, the idea of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) is more relevant than previously thought and plays a bigger part in choosing ecotourism destinations. Every stage was found to be influenced by previous users' opinions, particularly those posted on social media and review websites. To increase traffic, review websites are updated frequently with images and videos. Interaction with consumers keeps social media sites buzzing and attracting users.

6. Conclusion

E-WOM appears to have a positive influence to choose a product and come to an agreement about buying it. Consumers' opinions, location, cost, amenities, pictures, videos, and virtual tours all factor into how prospective buyers choose which products to buy. Travelers are encouraged to visit a destination by the availability of information; reviews of the destination in the form of text, images, and videos are the most frequently searched item on the Internet. The decision to travel to a destination is positively influenced by positive reviews. Due to the fact that reviews and ratings on travel websites are based on user opinions, a negative review or rating may turn away

potential consumers. A website with engaging content, lovely images and videos can keep visitors interested and also positively influence them for eco-tourism destination selection.

7. References

1. Allcock, A., Jones, B., Lane, S. and Grant, J. (1994) *National Ecotourism Strategy*, Australian Government Publishing Service: Canberra.
2. Buhalis, D., & Law, R. (2008). Progress in information technology and tourism management: 20 years on and 10 years after the Internet—The state of e-tourism research. *Tourism Management*, 29(4), 609–623. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2008.01.005>
3. Buhi, E. R., Daley, E. M., Fuhrmann, H. J., & Smith, S. A. (2009). An Observational Study of How Young People Search for Online Sexual Health Information. *Journal of American College Health*, 58(2), 101–111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448480903221236>
4. Blackshaw, P. & Nazarro, 2006. Consumer-generated Media (cgm) 101: Word-of-mouth in the age of the web-fortified consumer.
5. Burnkrant, R. E., & Cousineau, A. (1975). Informational and Normative Social Influence in Buyer Behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2(3), 206. <https://doi.org/10.1086/208633>
6. Chan, R. Y. K. (2001). Determinants of Chinese consumers' green purchase behavior. *Psychology and Marketing*, 18(4), 389–413. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.1013>
7. Chatterjee, P. (2001). Online reviews: do consumers use them? *Advances in Consumer Research*, 28(1), 129-33.
8. Cheung, C. M. K., Lee, M. K. O., & Rabjohn, N. (2008). The impact of electronic word-of-mouth: The adoption of online opinions in online consumer communities. *Internet Research*, 18(3), 229–247. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10662240810883290>
9. Constantinides, E., & Holleschovsky, N. I. (2016). Impact of Online Product Reviews on Purchasing Decisions. *Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Web Information Systems and Technologies*. <https://doi.org/10.5220/0005861002710278>
10. Dennis Schaal, S., 2013. Travellers visit 38 sites before booking a vacation, a study says. [Online] Available at: <https://skift.com/2013/08/26/travelers-visit-38-sites-before-booking-a-vacation-study-says>.
11. Dolnicar, S., & Long, P. (2009). Beyond ecotourism: The environmentally responsible tourist in the general travel experience. *Tourism Analysis*, 14(4), 503–513. <https://doi.org/10.3727/108354209X12596287114291>
12. Gretzel, U., & Yoo, K. H. (2008). Use and Impact of Online Travel Reviews. *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2008*, 35–46. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-211-77280-5_4
13. Hussain, S., Song, X., & Niu, B. (2020). Consumers' Motivational Involvement in eWOM for Information Adoption: The Mediating Role of Organizational Motives. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.03055>
14. Lai, P. H., & Shafer, S. (2005). Marketing Ecotourism through the Internet: An Evaluation of Selected Ecolodges in Latin America and the Caribbean. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 4(3), 143–160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/jet.v4.i3.pg143>
15. Lewis, C. R. C. (2022). *Marketing Leadership in Hospitality: Foundations and Practices: 3rd (Third edition)* (Third Edition). John Wiley & Sons.
16. López, M., & Sicilia, M. (2014). Determinants of E-WOM Influence: The Role of Consumers' Internet Experience. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, 9(1), 7–8. <https://doi.org/10.4067/s0718-18762014000100004>
17. Park, D. H., Lee, J., & Han, I. (2007). The Effect of On-Line Consumer Reviews on Consumer Purchasing Intention: The Moderating Role of Involvement. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 11(4), 125–148. <https://doi.org/10.2753/jec1086-4415110405>
18. Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1984). The effects of involvement on responses to argument quantity and quality: Central and peripheral routes to persuasion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 46(1), 69–81. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.46.1.69>
19. Poturak, M., & Turkyilmaz, M. (2018). The Impact of eWOM in social media on Consumer Purchase Decisions: A Comparative Study between Romanian and Bosnian Consumers. *Management and Economic Review*. <https://doi.org/10.24818/MER/2018.12-02>

20. Standing, C., Tang-Taye, J. P., & Boyer, M. (2014). The Impact of the Internet in Travel and Tourism: A Research Review 2001–2010. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 31(1), 82–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2014.861724>
21. Wathen, C. N., & Burkell, J. (2002). Believe it or not: Factors influencing credibility on the Web. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 53(2), 134–144. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.10016>

