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Personal Motivations Influencing Green Purchase Intention in Gastronomic Tourism and the Role of Environmental Concern

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Sustainable tourism aims to ensure long-term development through economic balance, resource conservation and cultural heritage; however, global strategies underestimate psychological, social and cultural aspects, creating gaps between scientific debates and practical applications. Gastronomic tourism is considered an integral part of sustainable tourism development, as it contributes to the differentiation of destinations, the preservation of cultural heritage, the reduction of negative impacts on the environment and growth of the local economy through the involvement of local producers and the promotion of short supply chains, influenced by the motivations that drive tourists' decision-making. Based on such evidences, this study aims to test a conceptual model that integrates personal motivations and environmental concern as predictors of green purchase intention in the Albanian gastronomic tourism sector. The analysis uses the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling method. The main finding is that, in the context of gastronomic tourism, social motivations (SSM) and sensory motivations (SAM) are the main factors that drive green purchasing (GPI), while environmental concern (EC) acts as a mediating mechanism only in the case of social sustainability motivation (SSM). From a theoretical perspective, the study integrates different dimensions of personal motivations within a unified theoretical framework, combining TPB, VBN, NAM and SDT to explain the formation of GPI. It contributes to the literature by positioning SSM and SAM as important elements in gastronomic tourism. Future studies could use longitudinal designs to test changes in GPI and EC over time, and apply experimental methods to assess the impact of specific marketing and communication variables.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, gastronomic tourism, personal motives, environmental concern, green purchase intention



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Introduction

The Sustainable Tourism Research Problem

Sustainable tourism aims to ensure long-term development through economic balance, resource conservation and cultural heritage (Hall, 2000). The discourse on authenticity and social equity shows the tension between profit and social justice and the interconnection of stakeholders to create and add value in the process (Pahor Žvanut & Vodeb, 2023). To operationalize this concept, the literature has shifted the focus from normative discussions of sustainable tourism to applied analyses (Amoako et al., 2022). However, while global strategies for sustainable tourism address economic and environmental dimensions, they underestimate psychological, social and cultural aspects, creating gaps between discourse and practice (Paniccia & Baiocco, 2020).

Gastronomic tourism is considered an important vector of sustainable tourism development, as it contributes to the differentiation of destinations, the preservation of cultural heritage, the reduction of negative impacts on the environment and the growth of the local economy through the involvement of local producers and the promotion of short supply chains (Chowdhury et al., 2021), which not only offer authentic experiences for tourists, but also help in the development of innovative mechanisms for the growth of the local economy (Chowdhury et al., 2021).

On the other hand, in gastronomic tourism, the motivations that drive tourists' decision-making are interconnected and are replacing the current strategies by prioritizing health, culture, outdoor experiences, nature, and well-being in addition to the physical, economic, social, cultural, prestigious and symbolic needs (Potti et al., 2023). Hu et al. (2010) note that it is shaped by the combination of functional factors (quality, service, environment) and ethics (environmental and social commitment). Also, organic and local foods are associated with different attributes: organic foods with health, safety and reduction of pesticides (Wier & Calverley, 2002) and local foods with freshness, authenticity and community support; each has gained importance in the selection of culinary destination.

Despite the extensive observation and treatment of these motivations, Auger and Devinney (2007) find an 'attitude-behaviour gap', similar to Ajzen's (1991) 'ethical gap' showing that consumers declare pro-environmental preferences, which do not always translate into sustainable behaviour due to economic reasons, lack of information and lack of access to sustainable products. To explain this gap, the literature studies the role of Environmental Concern (EC), a key mechanism that mediates the relationship between personal motivations and sustainable behaviour, directly influencing consumers' sustainable choices (Chen et al. 2022).

Moreover, Green Purchase Intention (GPI), primarily grounded in Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), is a well-established construct used as an indicator of sustainable behaviour. Joshi and Rahman (2015) predict attitudes, norms, trust and environmental concern as determinants of GPI. This framework has been further expanded with environmental knowledge and ecological concern (Irfan, 2019), sustainability awareness (Gulzar et al., 2024), moral intelligence, environmental concern (Akan-dere & Gümrak, 2025), attitudes, and communication (Pinto-Coelho, 2018), which have been identified as determinants and enhancers of GPI. Despite this expansion, the applications of GPI in gastronomic tourism remain limited and there is a need to develop new models that more deeply examine personal motivations, the mediating role of EC, and the interaction with GPI in this sector.

In this context, Albania offers considerable potential for the development of sustainable tourism. In recent years, gastronomic tourism has grown significantly, supported by the country's rich biodiversity and traditional cuisine. The Albanian Agribusiness Support Facility (2019) report assesses that rural gastronomy has potential, but faces challenges in knowledge, awareness, infrastructure, institutional coordination and managerial capacities, suggesting the need for a national strategy. These findings are also related to the earlier observations of Hall (2000), who noted that, despite the potential, the development of tourism in Albania remains limited by structural and institutional problems.

Research Gap

First, studies on gastronomic tourism have mainly focused on hedonic, cultural and economic motivations, while personal dimensions have been underestimated, limiting the full understanding of the types of motivations (Galati et al., 2023). Second, the literature confirms EC as a strong predictor of GPI (Gulzar et al., 2024; Akandere & Gümrah, 2025) but this remains contradictory as an ‘attitude-behaviour gap’ is still present and much discussed in the literature (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015) and suggests further study on tourism product development and consumer behaviour (Čivre et al., 2024). Third, there is still uncertainty about the mediating role of EC. So far, it is noted that its impact is weak and replaceable by social and moral factors, while Chen et al. (2022) support the mediating role of EC. In this context, Irfan (2019) proposes an integrated model where EC acts as a mediator. Fourth, cultural and geographical limitations: most research on EC and GPI has been conducted in developed European or Asian countries with different cultures, while emerging markets such as Albania, despite their potential, remain unexplored. Fifth, although PLS-SEM is widely used as a predictive method in marketing and management (Cheah et al., 2023), it has not been applied to test the integration of personal motivations, EC, and GPI into a single model in gastronomic tourism.

Research Questions and Study objectives

Based on the problem posed, the study is guided by two main questions: (1) *What are the personal motivations that most strongly influence EC and GPI?*, and (2) *What is the mediating role of EC in the relationship between personal motivations and GPI within gastronomic tourism in Albania?*

The study aims to test a conceptual model that integrates personal motivations and EC as predictors of GPI in the Albanian gastronomic tourism sector. The specific objectives are: (1) to analyse the impact of six personal motivations: HM, CM, PM, EM, SAM and SSM on EC and GPI; (2) to assess the mediating role of EC; (3) to provide empirical evidence from a developing economy and sector like Albania, addressing cultural and geographical gaps in the literature; and (4) to de-

rive the results from the model combination of factorial analysis and regression function such as through a PLS-SEM approach.

The introductory section is followed by a review of the literature on motivations, EC, and GPI; the methodology and measurement instruments with PLS-SEM; the empirical analysis of the results; a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature; and conclusions, limitations and suggestions for future research.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual model of the study is based on four widely used theories to explain pro-environmental behaviours and provides the basis for integrating personal motivations, EC, and GPI. First, Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) explains intentions and behaviours through attitudes, subjective norms and perception of control and is widely used in studies on sustainable consumption. Researchers such as Kwon and Boger (2021), Iqbal et al. (2023), Gulzar et al. (2024) and DiPietro and Levitt (2019) have expanded it to include moral norms and environmental awareness, thus increasing its validity through the conduct of international evidence.

Second, Stern et al.'s (1999) Value-Belief-Norm Theory (VBN) argues that pro-environmental behaviours stem from values, ecological beliefs, and moral norms. Personal values and health beliefs influence organic purchases (Finch, 2006), while Islamic values and moral intelligence (Hasnah Hassan, 2014) influence sustainable purchases. Likewise, self-efficacy and the belief that green purchases improve the environment and that EC influences sustainable behaviour have a stronger effect on individuals with high prosociality (Chen et al., 2022).

Third, Schwartz's (1977) Norm Activation Model (NAM) argues that personal norms are activated when individuals feel moral responsibility for the consequences of their actions. In this context, altruism, nature-human balance, environmental protection, cultural and spiritual dimensions, and social sustainability are associated with change and changeable behaviours (Passafaro et al., 2015).

Fourth, Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, which influence sustainable goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to Caracciolo et al. (2019), intrinsic motivations are related to personal values and the desire to protect the environment, while extrinsic motivations are related to social pressure, status, or economic benefits.

Green Purchase Intention (GPI) in Sustainable Tourism

Green Purchase Intention (GPI) indicates consumers' willingness to purchase green products, becoming one of the most widely used concepts to explain sustainable behaviours. According to the literature, GPI is influenced by a combination of personal, social, and cultural factors: environmental knowledge, environmental concern, subjective norms, attitudes (Jaiswal & Kant, 2018), hedonic and functional values (Mishra, 2023), trust, and communication (Pinto-Coelho, 2018) are all reported as factors with a strong influence on GPI. Akandere and Gümrah (2025) show that environmental knowledge affects GPI both directly and through EC. In addition, the literature also emphasizes the influence of cultural factors that orient consumers towards sustainable behaviours. According to Nguyen and Tran (2025), while minimalism positively influences GPI, collectivist norms reinforce this relationship.

Personal Motivations as Predictors of EC and GPI

Health Motivation (HM)

In gastronomic tourism, sustainability (health, lack of chemicals, locality and contacts with producers) emerges as a separate motivating dimension and defines distinct tourist segments, where a significant part of the market, in addition to hedonism and authenticity, chooses gastronomic destinations for eco-social reasons. This shows that tourists are attracted by offers that promise freshness, traceable origin and health benefits and that bring them closer to sustainable practices (Galati et al., 2023). Thus, naturalness is a key determinant of sustainable purchases (Caracciolo et al., 2019), while environmental knowledge and concern strengthen this relationship by

increasing the sense of responsibility for sustainable behaviour (Akandere & Gümrah, 2025). These findings suggest that HM increases both sensitivity to environmental concern (EC) and predisposition to GPI in the context of gastronomic tourism, as consumers who have strong biospheric values and believe in the organic-health connection are more likely to purchase organic products (Finch, 2006). In this context, the study raises the first hypothesis:

H1A HM positively affects Environmental Concern (EC).

H1B HM positively affects Green Purchase Intention (GPI).

Cultural Motivation (CM)

Cultural motivation (CM) is defined by the literature (Kim & Eves, 2012; Kim et al., 2022) as an essential dimension of sustainable tourism, as traditional food and sustainable practices are closely linked to identity, image, authenticity, experience and cultural heritage. Therefore, gastronomic tourism cannot be limited only to food consumption because it is multidimensional and influences destination selection. At the same time, it includes education, socialization, preservation of traditions, respect for the community, creation of cultural memory and promotion of fair practices where, by placing culture at the centre of the tourist experience, it positively affects EC and GPI (Broccardo et al., 2017; Galati et al., 2023). Thus, food is an irreplaceable element of authenticity and tourist experience, making the destination unique and helping to differentiate it (DiPietro & Levitt, 2019) and serving as a tool for preserving traditions, involving communities and sustainable development of rural areas (Ciolac et al., 2020). In this context, the second hypothesis of the study is raised:

H2A CM positively affects EC.

H2B CM positively affects GPI.

Environmental Motivation (EM)

Environmental motivation (EM) is one of the main drivers of sustainable behaviour in tourism, as it is related to consumers' awareness of environmental impacts and responsibilities. Abdul-Muhmin (2007)

notes that environmentally conscious tourists are more likely to choose sustainable practices. In the gastronomic tourism sector, choosing local and sustainably produced food serves as a direct indicator of this motivation, positively influencing the perception of green consumption (Kim & Eves, 2012). Furthermore, Akandere and Gümrah (2025) highlight that environmental motivation is closely related to environmental education and knowledge, which shape sustainable consumption behaviour and increase the predisposition to translate attitudes into concrete actions. Also, its impact is supported by moral and social mechanisms, where consumers with strong ecological values exhibit higher sustainable purchase intentions (Galati et al., 2023). In this context, the third hypothesis of the study is raised:

H3A EM positively affects EC.

H3B EM positively affects GPI.

Prestige Motivation (PM)

Prestige motivation (PM) is related to the desire for social differentiation, the expression of image and status through consumption. In gastronomic tourism, PM serves as a signal of symbolism that increases social capital and creates differentiation through experience (Galati et al., 2023). At the destination level, image frames and green branding increase the symbolic value of pro-environmental choices, making sustainable consumption a socially acceptable act (Chan & Marafa, 2014). Likewise, Kim et al. (2022) confirm that, for certain groups of tourists, prestige remains a determinant of the choice of destinations where authenticity and differentiation play an essential role. On the other hand, the willingness to be environmentally friendly is influenced by social norms and self-perception, suggesting that prestige operates as a driver for the adoption of green practices (Kim & Eves, 2012). In this context, PM is expected to increase both EC, through the need to maintain an ethical image, and GPI, through status signalling by means of sustainable choices (Galati et al., 2023). In this context, the study raises the fourth hypothesis:

H4A PM positively affects EC.

H4B PM positively affects GPI.

Sensory Appeal Motivation (SAM)

According to Kim and Eves (2012) and Kim et al. (2022), in gastronomic tourism, sensory appeal motivation (SAM) is related to the search for multisensory experiences such as taste, aroma, appearance and presentation, which form memories and destination differentiation. Sensory experience has been proven to be a determinant of satisfaction and loyalty towards green products and destinations (Haase et al., 2018). In gastronomic tourism, these experiences are often associated with the authenticity of local food and increase the emotional capital of the consumer (Galati et al., 2023). At the same time, Magnier and Crié (2015) note that visual and aesthetic elements, such as ecological packaging or eco-labels used in the communication of the marketing message, strengthen the connection between sensory experience and EC. Therefore, it can be said that SAM is not limited to personal satisfaction, but contributes to the increase of EC and GPI through aesthetic symbolism and emotional connection. In this context, the study raises the fifth hypothesis:

H5A SAM positively affects EC.

H5B SAM positively affects GPI.

Social Sustainability Motivation (SSM)

Social sustainability motivation (SSM) is related to sensitivity to social justice, equity and the impact of tourism on the community. In gastronomy, this motivation reflects the demand to support local producers, to preserve authenticity and to reinforce short supply chains (Galati et al., 2023; Cembalo et al., 2013). Studies show that consumers who display social values have a greater influence on sustainable consumption (Kim & Eves, 2012; Biswas & Roy, 2015). Sustainable choices influenced by altruism, moral responsibility and a sense of the role of prosociality, shows that social values can strengthen the translation of attitudes into sustainable behaviour (Chen et al., 2022). It is also evidenced that agritourism and rural activities strengthen the link between consumption and the socio-economic development of local areas (Ciolac et al., 2020). In this context, through social sensitivity, SSM contributes to the growth of both EC and GPI,

turning the sustainable choice into an act of solidarity and social justice (Chowdhury & Alamgir, 2021). In this context, the study raises the sixth hypothesis:

H6A SSM positively affects EC.

H6B SSM positively affects GPI.

Environmental Concern (EC)

Environmental Concern (EC) represents individuals' concern about environmental issues and is the main predictor of sustainable behaviours. Studies show that high levels of EC are associated with a stronger predisposition to green choices and directly affect GPI (Mohd Suki & Mohd Suki, 2015; Ali and Ahmad, 2016; Gulzar et al., 2024). In gastronomic tourism, EC is manifested through a preference for organic, local food and certified 'green' services, orienting consumers towards responsible practices (Galati et al., 2023). At a theoretical level, the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) and the Norm Activation Model (NAM) conceptualize EC as a mechanism that translates personal values and motivations into sustainable behaviour (Stern et al., 1999; Schwartz, 1977). This positions EC not only as a direct determinant of GPI, but also as a mediating variable, through which different personal motivations influence consumers' orientation towards sustainable choices (Galati et al., 2023). In this context, the study raises the seventh and eighth hypotheses:

H7 EC positively affects Green Purchase Intention (GPI).

H8 EC mediates the relationships between HM, CM, EM, PM, SAM, SSM and GPI.

Study Methodology

Research Approach

The study follows a quantitative, deductive and explanatory approach, focused on empirical testing of the conceptual model with latent and reflective constructs. For the analysis of the relationships between latent constructs and for the assessment of direct and indirect effects, the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) method is applied. This approach is selected according to the suggestions of Hair et al. (2022) as it is suitable for exploratory analyses with data that do not follow a normal distribution.

Henseler et al. (2017) note that SEM is a tool for testing theory and, if a variable is not part of the theoretical nomological network being examined, its inclusion in the model is methodologically questionable as it risks shifting the focus from 'exploration/confirmation' to 'data mining'; as such, there are no control variables included in the conceptual model. According to the suggestions of Hair et al. (2021), adding control variables increases the complexity of the structural model as it increases the number of links (paths), and if this happens, a much larger study sample is required to maintain statistical power, which may further cause problems in maintaining statistical power and parsimony. According to Shmueli et al. (2019), models that are overloaded with variables not predicted by the theory may exhibit an artificially high explanatory power, but their predictive validity (Q^2) has poor validity in reality and the inclusion of demographic variables would increase the R^2 of the GPI, and as a result, an 'over-fitting' condition would be created. Moreover, according to the suggestions of Hulland et al. (2018), in market research, demographic variables often exhibit low variances and for these reasons fail to produce statistically significant adjustments.

Conceptual Model and Measurement of Study Construct

The conceptual model of the study consists of seven latent constructs and 37 reflective indicators. The measurements of the model constructs were carried out with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). The conceptual model consists of 6 independent variables, which were borrowed from Galati et al. (2021): Health Motivation (HM), Cultural Motivation (CM), Environmental Motivation (EM), Prestige Motivation (PM), Sensory Appeal Motivation (SAM), Social Sustainability Motivation (SSM); a mediating variable: 'Environmental Concern (EC)', adopted from Chen et al. (2022) and based on the 'NEP Scale'; and a dependent variable: 'Green Purchase Intention (GPI)', borrowed from Gulzar et al. (2024) and modified to adapt to the context of Albanian gastronomic tourism. Initially, in this study, we argue that, in gastronomic tourism, the EC construct

functions as a mediating mechanism activated by hedonic motivations and needs as reflected in the theory that in gastronomy, decisions are mostly shaped by hedonic concerns. Additionally, tourists' search for naturalness increases their sensitivity to environmental concerns (Akandere & Gumrah, 2025), turning EC into a mediator that transforms personal motivations into GPI. At a theoretical level, the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) and Norm Activation Model (NAM) conceptualize EC as a mechanism that translates personal values and motivations into sustainable behaviour (Stern et al., 1999; Schwartz, 1977; Dunlap et al., 2000). This positions EC not only as a direct determinant of GPI, but also as a mediating variable, through which different personal motivations influence consumers' orientation towards sustainable choices (Irfan, 2019; Al-Adamat et al., 2020; Gaspar et al., 2022; Galati et al., 2023).

Unlike Galati et al. (2021), who used Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to classify constructs and reduce variables to a smaller number of constructs, in our study, we use the PLS-SEM approach, which is a powerful method and, in recent years, widely used for studies in the field of social sciences to evaluate complex causal models that aim to predict dependent variables (in our case GPI) (Ringle et al., 2020). So, as we described above, the difference is fundamental: Galati et al. (2021) conducted a classification study in an attempt to learn 'who are the groups of tourists and what motivates them'; the study adds value on how one variable influences another in a hierarchical manner.

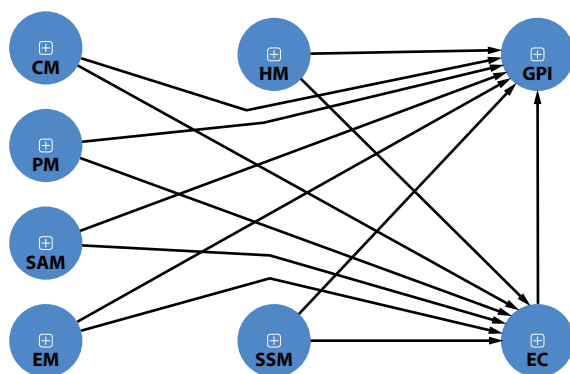


Figure 1 Study Conceptual Model

Additionally, it did not segment the study sample, but rather attempted to investigate a psychological mechanism. Referring to Shumeli et al. (2019), the methodological novelty consists in testing a new mediation mechanism. The introduction of EC as a mediator in the model completely changes the logical flow of our model and offers a completely new flow, not previously tested. Referring to the suggestions of Sarstedt et al. (2017), the use of known constructs in a new structural configuration (path configuration) constitutes an original and coherent contribution and legitimizes the use of the PLS-SEM approach. Although the study adapts the scales of Gallati et al. (2021) and integrated them into the extended structural model, their study aims at market segmentation, which makes demography essential and very meaningful, whereas our study is based on the psychological, mediated process; demographic factors remain 'distal' and do not change the structure of the tested mechanism.

Targeted Population, Sample and Sampling Method

The target population of this study is domestic tourists who frequent tourist destinations that offer sustainable and environmentally friendly products/services and operate in different typologies such as guest-houses, rural/mountain tourism resorts, agritourism farms, bio farms, ecotourism, etc. The questionnaire was distributed online through Google Forms during the period May–June 2025. For sampling, the study used the non-probabilistic convenience sampling approach, as it is considered acceptable in PLS-SEM research aimed at prediction (Hair et al., 2022) and does not rely on distributive assumptions. Although the sample does not meet the classic '10-times rule' ($37 \times 10 = 370$ participants), according to the suggestions of Kline (2017) and Hair et al. (2019), the sample exceeds the minimum threshold of 200 participants, considered sufficient for models of medium complexity, as it allows for stable estimates of the coefficients.

Study Instrumental Tools

The study followed the recommendations of Field (2024) for descriptive and frequency analyses and used the SPSS program, v.24, while, for the analysis

of the measurement model and structural model, it followed the recommendations of Ringle and Sarstedt (2015) and used SmartPLS, v. 4.1.1.4.

Study Procedures and Statistical Analysis

Since all the constructs of the study are reflective, the Consistent PLS (PLSC) algorithm is used to evaluate the measurement model and the structural model. For the respective evaluations of the measurement model, the suggestions of Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Hair et al. (2019) are followed, where, specifically, for construct reliability and validity, Outer Loadings (β), Significance (p value), Cronbach's Alpha (α), Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are analysed. For discriminant validity, the suggestions of Henseler et al. (2015) are followed, and the following measures are analysed: Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT), Fornell-Larcker Criterion, and Cross-Loadings. For model fit evaluation, the measures suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999) and Henseler et al. (2014) are used: Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), Squared Euclidean Distance (d_{ULS}), Geodesic Distance (d_G) and Normed Fit Index (NFI).

Regarding the structural model evaluation, the recommendations of Hair et al. (2022) are followed, in the following order: Path Coefficients (β), is utilized to analyse the direction and magnitude of direct and indirect effects between latent constructs, and statistical significance assessed through p value. To control inter-structural multicollinearity, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) measure (Hair et al., 2019) is applied. The Coefficient of Determination (R^2) is used to estimate the percentage of explained variance (Hair et al., 2022). The assessment of Predictive Relevance (Q^2) is carried out through the blindfolding procedure (Geisser, 1974), which gives importance to 'cross-validation' for predicting models. Also, for the 'statistical significance of the coefficients' and 'confidence intervals', 'Bootstrapping' with 5,000 subsamples is applied, while due to the non-normal distribution of the data, the 'Bias-Corrected and Accelerated (BCa)' method is used (Streukens & Leroi-Werelds, 2016). This approach is in line with the recommendations of Henseler et al. (2009).

Study Results

Frequency Analysis

Table 1 presents the demographic data of the 312 participants in the study. The gender distribution of the participants is 55.8% female and 44.2% male. The results show gender balance, which is important for the empirical analysis as it avoids the dominance of a specific group and ensures the necessary heterogeneity to ensure impartiality in the analysis.

Regarding the age of the participants, we note a concentration in the age group 25–34 years with 33.3%, followed by the age group 15–24 years with 27.9% and the age group 35–44 years with 27.6%. The study sample consists of young people; in other words, in an early stage of social life and career. Regarding the level of education, 55.8% of the participants have completed their studies at the master's level, 24% at the bachelor's level, 10.3% at the secondary level, 9% at the PhD level, and 0.9% at other levels.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 2 presents descriptive data for the study constructs. The calculated results show averages in the range of 3.67 for EC and 3.81 for HM, which indicate a moderately high trend. Similarly, the standard deviation results in the range of 0.76 for CM to 0.93 for SSM. The results provide a moderate variation within the construct, suggesting stability of perceptions among participants, and indicate sufficient difference between constructs.

Evaluation of Measurement Model

Construct Reliability and Validity Analysis

The measurement model is assessed using standard procedures suggested by Henseler et al. (2015) and Hair et al. (2022), for PLS-SEM models. To ensure reliability and convergent validity, first, Outer Loadings (β) values are analysed for each indicator, where all results are higher than 0.70, the minimum accepted limit (Hair et al., 2022). Indicator HM6, of the HM construct, results in a β loading lower than 0.60 and is eliminated from the model according to the recommendations of the existing literature. With its elimination, the model performed the highest values of suitability. Secondly, Cronbach's Alpha (α) and

Table 1. Demographic Data

		N	%
Gender	Female	174	55.8
	Male	138	44.2
	Total	312	100.0
Age	15–24	87	27.9
	25–34	104	33.3
	35–44	86	27.6
	45–54	28	9.0
	+55	7	2.2
	Total	312	100.0
Education Level	Secondary school	2	0.6
	High School	32	10.3
	Bachelor	75	24.0
	Master	174	55.8
	PhD	28	9.0
	Other	1	0.3
	Total	312	100.0
Monthly Incomes	To–49,999 ALL	78	25.0
	50,000–69,999 ALL	72	23.1
	70,000–99,999 ALL	61	19.6
	100,000–129,999 ALL	51	16.3
	130,000–159,999 ALL	28	9.0
	More 1600 160.000 ALL	22	7.1
	Total	312	100.0

Composite Reliability (CR-rho_c) values are analysed, where all results are above the suggested threshold (> 0.70) (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015). Thirdly, Average

Variance Extracted (AVE) values are analysed, where for all constructs, the results are above the minimum threshold (> 0.50) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The calculated results show that the criteria for ensuring convergent validity are met by meeting the methodological standards suggested for PLS-SEM models. The results provide the necessary basis for continuing further evaluation of the measurement model through discriminant validity analysis.

Discriminant Validity Analysis

Discriminant validity is assessed in accordance with the recommendations of Henseler et al. (2015) and Hair et al. (2022), using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criterion as the main measure and the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and Cross-loadings as additional measures to ensure a more complete and transparent analysis. First, the results of the HTMT values for all reported associations are all below the value 0.85 and are below the suggested threshold as acceptable (Henseler et al., 2015; Ringle et al., 2023), indicating a clear distinction between constructs. Since all values are below the accepted critical threshold, it is concluded that there is no concern for a lack of conceptual distinction between constructs.

As a second measure of discriminant validity, the Fornell-Larcker Criterion confirms these findings (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In all cases, the square roots of the AVE are larger than the corresponding correlations between the constructs with the exception of the GPI-EC relationship, which results in a square root of 0.824 and signals that the GPI shares more variance

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Study Construct

Construct	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
HM	312	1.00	5.00	3.81	0.78
CM	312	1.00	5.00	3.72	0.76
EM	312	1.00	5.00	3.71	0.87
PM	312	1.00	5.00	3.72	0.82
SAM	312	1.00	5.00	3.71	0.83
SSM	312	1.00	5.00	3.74	0.93
EC	312	1.00	5.00	3.67	0.78
GPI	312	1.00	5.00	3.76	0.81

Table 3 Measurement Model (Outer Loadings, S. Deviation, *t* Statistics, *p* value, Cronbach's Alpha, CR, AVE)

Path	β	S.DEV	<i>T</i>	<i>P</i>	α	CR	AVE
CM1 $\leftarrow$ CM	0.722	0.049	14.626	0.000	0.86	0.86	0.55
CM2 $\leftarrow$ CM	0.719	0.047	15.341	0.000			
CM3 $\leftarrow$ CM	0.717	0.054	13.303	0.000			
CM4 $\leftarrow$ CM	0.831	0.039	21.470	0.000			
CM5 $\leftarrow$ CM	0.718	0.057	12.495	0.000			
EC1 $\leftarrow$ EC	0.786	0.031	25.303	0.000	0.87	0.87	0.63
EC2 $\leftarrow$ EC	0.813	0.032	25.621	0.000			
EC3 $\leftarrow$ EC	0.797	0.031	25.397	0.000			
EC4 $\leftarrow$ EC	0.773	0.030	25.645	0.000			
EM1 $\leftarrow$ EM	0.801	0.072	11.139	0.000	0.91	0.91	0.66
EM2 $\leftarrow$ EM	0.839	0.051	16.564	0.000			
EM3 $\leftarrow$ EM	0.804	0.054	14.899	0.000			
EM4 $\leftarrow$ EM	0.801	0.050	15.930	0.000			
EM5 $\leftarrow$ EM	0.818	0.051	16.035	0.000			
GPI1 $\leftarrow$ GPI	0.832	0.025	33.095	0.000	0.91	0.91	0.68
GPI2 $\leftarrow$ GPI	0.816	0.028	29.348	0.000			
GPI3 $\leftarrow$ GPI	0.856	0.025	34.497	0.000			
GPI4 $\leftarrow$ GPI	0.809	0.028	29.287	0.000			
GPI5 $\leftarrow$ GPI	0.799	0.029	27.199	0.000			
HM1 $\leftarrow$ HM	0.802	0.036	22.158	0.000	0.88	0.88	0.61
HM2 $\leftarrow$ HM	0.802	0.034	23.713	0.000			
HM3 $\leftarrow$ HM	0.748	0.057	13.159	0.000			
HM4 $\leftarrow$ HM	0.737	0.046	15.937	0.000			
HM5 $\leftarrow$ HM	0.799	0.038	20.970	0.000			
PM1 $\leftarrow$ PM	0.780	0.061	12.830	0.000	0.88	0.88	0.65
PM2 $\leftarrow$ PM	0.702	0.060	11.746	0.000			
PM3 $\leftarrow$ PM	0.834	0.044	18.832	0.000			
PM4 $\leftarrow$ PM	0.903	0.032	28.631	0.000			
SAM1 $\leftarrow$ SAM	0.853	0.027	31.195	0.000	0.89	0.89	0.67
SAM2 $\leftarrow$ SAM	0.826	0.031	26.246	0.000			
SAM3 $\leftarrow$ SAM	0.803	0.028	28.768	0.000			
SAM4 $\leftarrow$ SAM	0.781	0.034	23.171	0.000			
SSM1 $\leftarrow$ SSM	0.929	0.062	14.902	0.000	0.92	0.92	0.74
SSM2 $\leftarrow$ SSM	0.840	0.071	11.810	0.000			
SSM3 $\leftarrow$ SSM	0.855	0.068	12.527	0.000			
SSM4 $\leftarrow$ SSM	0.809	0.073	11.123	0.000			

Note (β) = Outer Loading (O), STDEV= Standard Deviation, *T*= *t* Statistics, *P*= level of significance, α =Cronbach's alpha, CR= Composite Reliability (rho_c), AVE= Average Variance Extracted.

with the EC than the EC explains itself. However, this minimal excess of the correlation over the diagonal of the AVE is not considered problematic, because, especially when the construct has confirmed high reliability and convergent validity, these cases are interpreted as narrow conceptual divisions that are not problematic and are acceptable (Hair et al., 2022). In summary, the results of the Fornell-Larcker Criterion also meet the conditions for discriminant validity.

Lastly, as suggested by Chin (1998) and Hair et al. (2022), the results of Cross-loadings are analysed, and it turned out that all indicators loaded more on their respective construct than on other constructs. Although this measure is no longer used as a main test, but simply as an auxiliary instrument (Henseler et al., 2015), the results further support the discriminant validity confirmed by the HTMT analysis and the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

To summarize the discriminant analysis, although the HTMT analysis is considered the most reliable

test (Henseler et al., 2015), referring to the suggestions of Hair et al. (2022), the study also uses the additional measures of the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and Cross-loadings in a combined manner in order to increase transparency, providing a triple check of the constructs. The results of all three measures show that the model meets the basic criteria of discriminant validity and is fully suitable for continuing with the assessment of the structural model.

Structural Model Assessment

For the evaluation of the structural model, the recommendations and guidelines of Geisser (1974) and Hair et al. (2022) are followed. Specifically, Path Coefficients (β) and statistical significance levels (p value) are analysed for hypothesis testing (Hair et al., 2022). Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is used to assess multicollinearity between constructs and Hair et al.'s (2022) criterion of ($VIF < 5$) was applied. Variance explanation is assessed through the R^2 measure (Hair et

Table 4 Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Statistics

	CM	EC	EM	GPI	HM	PM	SAM	SSM
CM								
EC	0.652							
EM	0.544	0.517						
GPI	0.693	0.823	0.548					
HM	0.644	0.740	0.548	0.771				
PM	0.670	0.666	0.442	0.711	0.634			
SAM	0.662	0.734	0.595	0.749	0.680	0.654		
SSM	0.677	0.340	0.708	0.351	0.450	0.473	0.562	

Table 5 Fornell-Larcker Criterion Statistics

	CM	EC	EM	GPI	HM	PM	SAM	SSM
CM	0.742							
EC	0.653	0.792						
EM	0.538	0.518	0.813					
GPI	0.694	0.824	0.548	0.823				
HM	0.641	0.741	0.549	0.771	0.778			
PM	0.665	0.669	0.439	0.714	0.633	0.808		
SAM	0.661	0.735	0.595	0.750	0.681	0.649	0.816	
SSM	0.671	0.340	0.706	0.352	0.450	0.466	0.561	0.859

Table 6 Cross-Loadings Statistics

	CM	EC	EM	GPI	HM	PM	SAM	SSM
CM1	0.722	0.469	0.431	0.502	0.413	0.446	0.491	0.514
CM2	0.719	0.498	0.413	0.472	0.496	0.512	0.517	0.511
CM3	0.717	0.446	0.508	0.517	0.502	0.514	0.509	0.581
CM4	0.831	0.546	0.297	0.573	0.488	0.526	0.510	0.417
CM5	0.718	0.459	0.368	0.506	0.484	0.473	0.427	0.484
EC1	0.515	0.786	0.399	0.637	0.574	0.557	0.579	0.257
EC2	0.514	0.813	0.436	0.672	0.604	0.536	0.602	0.283
EC3	0.538	0.797	0.378	0.703	0.590	0.518	0.566	0.254
EC4	0.501	0.773	0.429	0.599	0.579	0.508	0.584	0.285
EM1	0.409	0.445	0.801	0.412	0.477	0.344	0.381	0.502
EM2	0.400	0.497	0.839	0.404	0.432	0.348	0.499	0.549
EM3	0.438	0.386	0.804	0.467	0.430	0.389	0.508	0.577
EM4	0.469	0.423	0.801	0.432	0.442	0.350	0.507	0.657
EM5	0.472	0.352	0.818	0.512	0.450	0.355	0.521	0.587
GPI1	0.562	0.636	0.465	0.832	0.660	0.627	0.634	0.294
GPI2	0.593	0.732	0.424	0.816	0.606	0.546	0.606	0.278
GPI3	0.584	0.695	0.448	0.856	0.676	0.636	0.634	0.304
GPI4	0.563	0.720	0.463	0.809	0.606	0.533	0.595	0.278
GPI5	0.550	0.608	0.454	0.799	0.623	0.591	0.613	0.292
HM1	0.506	0.583	0.393	0.628	0.802	0.519	0.586	0.371
HM2	0.482	0.583	0.454	0.628	0.802	0.507	0.541	0.327
HM3	0.501	0.559	0.309	0.573	0.748	0.489	0.504	0.333
HM4	0.505	0.545	0.464	0.568	0.737	0.479	0.489	0.364
HM5	0.502	0.610	0.512	0.601	0.799	0.467	0.526	0.358
PM1	0.580	0.517	0.472	0.561	0.520	0.780	0.593	0.499
PM2	0.542	0.465	0.313	0.506	0.481	0.702	0.555	0.393
PM3	0.505	0.558	0.308	0.595	0.515	0.834	0.469	0.325
PM4	0.536	0.612	0.335	0.637	0.531	0.903	0.499	0.313
SAM1	0.529	0.641	0.474	0.626	0.554	0.595	0.853	0.428
SAM2	0.572	0.598	0.470	0.628	0.568	0.497	0.826	0.458
SAM3	0.520	0.574	0.466	0.617	0.554	0.556	0.803	0.449
SAM4	0.537	0.585	0.535	0.576	0.547	0.466	0.781	0.499
SSM1	0.584	0.311	0.602	0.331	0.430	0.442	0.509	0.929
SSM2	0.570	0.295	0.618	0.287	0.398	0.365	0.470	0.840
SSM3	0.588	0.291	0.596	0.300	0.398	0.404	0.469	0.855
SSM4	0.564	0.271	0.617	0.288	0.317	0.390	0.479	0.809

al., 2019) and Effect size (f^2) is used to measure the strength of effects. Meanwhile, the Q^2 measure (with blindfolding procedure) is used to test the predictive relevance of the model (Geisser, 1974; Hair et al., 2019).

Hypothesis Testing

A The Influence of Independent Variables on the Mediator Environmental Concern (EC)

All six independent variables present statistically significant effects on the mediating variable EC ($p < 0.05$), confirming the respective hypotheses. SSM exhibits the largest impact ($\beta = 0.403$, $t = 4.461$, $p < 0.000$), with $f^2 = 0.23$ – ‘medium effect’. SAM ranks second ($\beta = 0.340$, $t = 3.239$, $p < 0.001$), with $f^2 = 0.17$ – ‘medium effect’. PM ($\beta = 0.174$, $t = 2.386$, $p < 0.017$) and EM ($\beta = 0.216$, $t = 2.483$, $p < 0.013$) present smaller effects ($f^2 = 0.05 / 0.07$) ‘small’. CM ($\beta = 0.290$, $t = 3.205$, $p < 0.001$) and HM ($\beta = 0.277$, $t = 2.730$, $p < 0.006$) show modest effects ($f^2 = 0.11$; $f^2 = 0.12$) – ‘small’. VIF values were found to be below the critical threshold (< 5) for all EC predictors, indicating a lack of multicollinearity. All six independent variables explain a very high percentage of the EC variance ($R^2 = 0.74$), which is interpreted as ‘average’ explainability. Meanwhile, the Q^2 value of

EC, calculated at 0.57, strongly supports predictive relevance.

B The Influence of Independent Variables on the Dependent Variable Green Purchase Intention (GPI)

All six independent variables present statistically significant effects on the dependent variable GPI ($p < 0.05$). The greatest impact is shown by SSM with the values ($\beta = 0.367$, $t = 3.777$, $p < 0.000$), and with a ‘medium effect’ ($f^2 = 0.23$). CM ranks second: ($\beta = 0.279$, $t = 3.236$, $p < 0.001$), with a ‘low effect’ ($f^2 = 0.13$). Also, the VIF values for all GPI predictors are calculated below the critical threshold (< 5) and do not present multicollinearity problems. The six independent variables of the model explain a very large part of the GPI variance ($R^2 = 0.82$), a value which represents ‘high’ explainability of the GPI variance. Also, the calculation of the Q^2 value in the measure (0.66) confirms very strong predictive relevance.

C Influence of Environmental Concern (EC) in Green Purchase Intention (GPI)

EC shows a positive and statistically significant effect on GPI ($\beta = 0.212$, $t = 2.095$, $p = 0.036$), with a ‘small effect’ size ($f^2 = 0.07$). This result means that the increase in EC is associated with a small but statisti-

Table 7 Structural Model (β , t Statistics, p Value, VIF, R^2 , f^2 , Q^2)

H	Pathway	β	STDEV	T	P	Decision	VIF	R^2	F^2	Eff.Size	Q^2
1.1	HM $\rightarrow$ EC	0.277	0.101	2.730	0.006	Accepted	2.40	0.74	0.12	Small	0.57
2.1	CM $\rightarrow$ EC	0.290	0.090	3.205	0.001	Accepted	2.92		0.11	Small	
3.1	EM $\rightarrow$ EC	0.216	0.087	2.483	0.013	Accepted	2.41		0.07	Small	
4.1	PM $\rightarrow$ EC	0.174	0.073	2.386	0.017	Accepted	2.21		0.05	Small	
5.1	SAM $\rightarrow$ EC	0.340	0.105	3.239	0.001	Accepted	2.59		0.17	Medium	
6.1	SSM $\rightarrow$ EC	0.403	0.090	4.461	0.000	Accepted	2.71		0.23	Medium	
1.2	HM $\rightarrow$ GPI	0.216	0.076	2.854	0.004	Accepted	2.69	0.82	0.10	Small	0.66
2.2	CM $\rightarrow$ GPI	0.279	0.086	3.236	0.001	Accepted	3.24		0.13	Small	
3.2	EM $\rightarrow$ GPI	0.218	0.085	2.555	0.011	Accepted	2.59		0.10	Small	
4.2	PM $\rightarrow$ GPI	0.182	0.085	2.135	0.033	Accepted	2.32		0.08	Small	
5.2	SAM $\rightarrow$ GPI	0.221	0.102	2.166	0.030	Accepted	3.03		0.09	Small	
6.2	SSM $\rightarrow$ GPI	0.367	0.097	3.777	0.000	Accepted	3.33		0.23	Medium	
7	EC $\rightarrow$ GPI	0.212	0.101	2.095	0.036	Accepted	3.78		0.07	Small	

Note (β) = Coeff. (O), STDEV = Standard Deviation, $T = t$ Statistics, $P =$ level of significance, VIF = Variance Inflation Factor, R^2 = Coefficient of Determination, F^2 = Effect Size, Q^2 = Predictive Relevance.

cally significant increase in GPI. The VIF value is also calculated ($= 3.78$), below the critical threshold (< 5), without multicollinearity problems. In summary, it is concluded that all hypotheses of the study analysed so far are confirmed.

Model Fit Evaluations

Model fit was analysed according to the recommendations of Bentler and Bonett (1980), Bollen and Stine (1992), Henseler et al. (2014), Henseler et al. (2015), Dijkstra and Henseler (2015), and Hair et al. (2022). SRMR was calculated at 0.054 for both models, significantly below the 0.08 threshold that represents a good fit. d_{ULS} with a value of $=1.976$ and $d_G = 1.550$, remained below the critical limits determined by bootstrapping, indicating acceptable fit. NFI is calculated at 0.77, a value lower than the acceptable threshold > 0.90 , but the literature emphasizes that NFI is less important in PLS models that aim to predict rather than confirm the theory. The Chi-square result was 2276.824, but this measure is reported only for transparency, as it is not considered absolute in PLS-SEM.

Analysis of the Mediating Effect of Environmental Concern (EC)

After reporting the structural model, the methodological guidelines of Nitzi et al. (2016) and Hair et al. (2022) are followed for testing and interpreting indirect effects. The mediation of Environmental Concern (EC) is tested using the bootstrapping method with 5,000 subsamples. For interpreting mediation, the study is based on the principle of Zhao et al.

(2010) that mediation is supported when the test is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) and the confidence interval of the indirect effect does not include 0. From the results presented in Table 9, it is concluded that only the SSM-EC-GPI relationship is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.085$; $t = 1.997$; $p = 0.046$; CI95% [0.016, 0.187]), suggesting that the increase in SSM promotes EC, which in turn promotes the increase in GPI. For other personal motivations – HM, CM, EM, PM, SAM – the indirect effects through EC were not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), the results indicating a lack of mediation. In summary, we conclude that the hypothesis of EC mediation is partially supported, i.e. only for the SSM-EC-GPI relationship.

Discussion of Results

The study sample consists of many young people in an early stage of social life and career. When combined with the results of the effects of personal motivations on EC and GPI, the young sample supports the previous findings of the literature, which states that young people are more sensitive to environmental ethics (Nguyen et al., 2022) and that green consumption among them is sensitive to social pressures (Lee, 2010). Therefore, they are considered the engine of social change and sustainable consumption and constitute a critical segment for the promotion of green products.

The level of education of the sample was extremely high. Also, combined with the results of the effects of personal motivations on EC and GPI, these can be related to the level of environmental awareness and predisposition to green purchases, because a profile

Tabela 8 Specific indirect effects and Confidence Intervals Bias Corrected (Bootstrapping, 5000)

Relationship	(β)	STDEV	T	P	CI95% (BCa)		Significance
					Lower	Upper	
CM -> EC -> GPI	0.061	0.034	1.796	0.073	0.009	0.147	No Sig.
EM -> EC -> GPI	0.046	0.026	1.760	0.079	0.008	0.118	No Sig.
HM -> EC -> GPI	0.059	0.038	1.551	0.121	0.005	0.173	No Sig.
PM -> EC -> GPI	0.037	0.024	1.516	0.129	0.003	0.109	No Sig.
SAM -> EC -> GPI	0.072	0.039	1.848	0.065	0.017	0.176	No Sig.
SSM -> EC -> GPI	0.085	0.043	1.997	0.046	0.016	0.187	Significant

Note (β) = Coeff. (O), STDEV = Standard Deviation, T = t Statistics, p = level of significance.

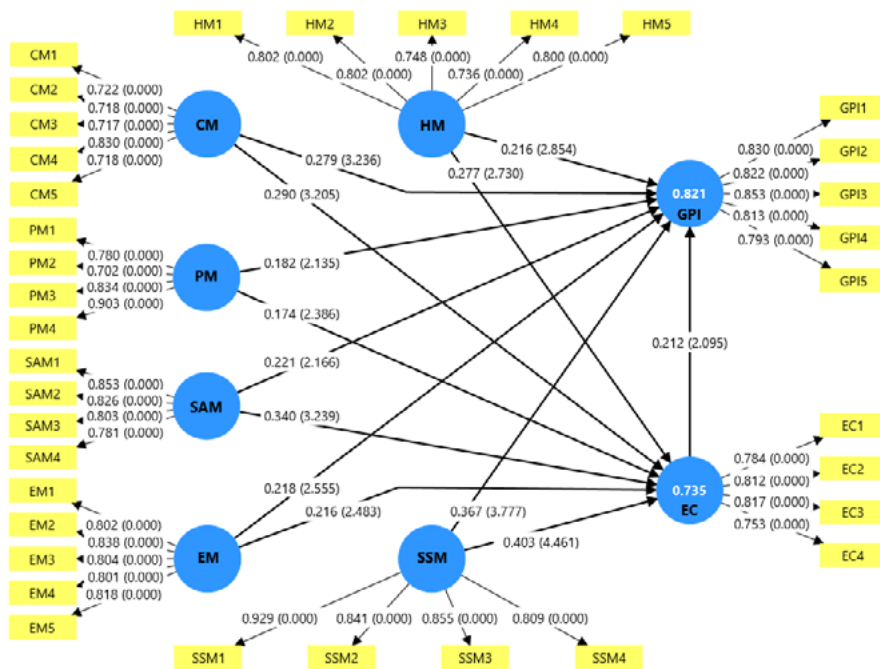


Figure 2 PLS SEM Structural Model Diagram

with a higher level of education is more likely to be concerned about the environment and, consequently, to adopt green consumption behaviours. This is because of a directly positive relationship between the level of education and the loyalty to green brands (Lin et al., 2019), as is important for promoting green consumption (Maziriri et al., 2024), since it increases GPI (Pinto-Coelho, 2018) and plays a determining role in sustainable behaviour (Rahnama, 2016; Nekomahmud et al., 2022).

Regarding the economic income of the participants, the study found that they show economic diversity. Combined with the results of the findings regarding the impact of motivations on EC and GPI, this is important for analysing sustainable behaviours, because economic factors can moderate consumers' perceptions and willingness to purchase green products. As it is found, income positively affects green consumption (Akbar et al., 2023); conversely, according to previous studies, in developing countries, low income has been found to be an obstacle to green consumption (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017).

Further to the descriptive results, the study confirms that personal motivations are significant pre-

dictors of Environmental Concern (EC) and Green Purchase Intention (GPI), even on gastronomic tourism, providing new insight into the psychological mechanisms that influence consumer behaviour in gastronomic tourism. The theoretical models, Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), Value-Belief-Norm Theory (VBN) (Stern et al., 1999), Norm Activation Model (NAM) (Schwartz, 1977) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000), serve as a strong basis for interpreting the study findings, showing that pro-environmental intentions are formed by a combination of multiple factors, including educational, socio-cultural, relaxational and symbolic factors.

First, the analysis of the direct effects of personal motivations on EC showed that SSM is the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.403$, $f^2 = 0.23$), supporting previous findings (Galati et al., 2021) which report the role of solidarity with local communities and their assistance as important factors in orienting consumers towards green behaviours. This result is consistent with previous findings by Amoako et al. (2022) reporting that consumers are often motivated by the desire to contribute to the social well-being of local communities

through their choices, adding, among other things, that motivation is related to the perception that companies that adopt green strategies are more likely to contribute to social and environmental well-being and that this perception serves to motivate consumers by promoting prosociality and increasing the desire to contribute to the social well-being of local communities through their choices.

Sensory appeal motivation (SAM) also had a strong influence on EC ($\beta = 0.340$, $f^2 = 0.17$). This result is consistent with previous studies showing that sensory experience and cultural authenticity drive appreciation for sustainably produced products. Haase et al. (2018) report that sensory experiences play a key role in the perception of quality, the creation of emotional connections with consumers, and the choice of destination.

Also, CM and HM resulted in more modest effects on EC ($\beta = 0.290$; $\beta = 0.277$), which are small effects, but theoretically significant and in line with previous findings by Akbar et al. (2023) which, in the context of consumer behaviour in relation to sustainable products, report that cultural and socio-economic barriers are encountered. However, the consumption of local food and local producer networks is related to the preservation of cultural heritage and the attitude towards green products is shaped by environmental awareness and the perception of health benefits (Asif et al., 2018). These findings carry a practical importance for local tourism actors in Albania, where organic products and traditional foods are gaining ground in tourism.

Meanwhile, EM and PM present even smaller effects on EC, respectively ($\beta = 0.216$ and $\beta = 0.174$). Referring to the existing literature, these results are somewhat expected, since environmental motivation, although logically linked to EC, is often combined with other social, psychological and economic factors, weakening its direct effect where, for example, high price is often an obstacle to green consumption (Ali & Ahmad, 2016). Meanwhile, prestige motivation such as social status is often weaker than intrinsic motivations such as social solidarity or sensory experience (Pontes et al., 2024; Chowdhury & Alamgir, 2021; Galati et al., 2023).

Second, the results of the effects of personal motivations on GPI again show that SSM was the main predictor ($\beta = 0.367$, $f^2 = 0.23$), reflecting the importance of social solidarity for the intention to purchase green products. Also, CM and SAM contributed significantly, reinforcing the previous findings of Wan et al. (2025) that cultural authenticity and sensory satisfaction are dimensions that make sustainable purchasing more attractive. While HM, EM and PM were assessed as factors with more limited influence, results that show that gastronomic tourists do not directly link green purchasing to social status or abstract environmental arguments but, rather, they link it to cultural and social values.

Third, the study results confirmed the mediation of EC only for the SSM-EC-GPI relationship: ($\beta = 0.085$; $p = 0.046$). This result is coherent with the suggestions of Zhao et al. (2010), who emphasize that mediation is not universal, since complex models often require testing multiple mediators. Also, according to Nitzl et al. (2016), mediation explains 'why' and 'how' the effects occur and, in this case, it is clear that social and civic motivation operates through environmental awareness, giving more weight to mechanisms related to the sense of social responsibility. As Chen et al. (2022) also emphasize, in the absence of other motivational factors, EC alone is not sufficient to promote sustainable behaviour. Although EC has a significant impact on sustainable purchasing behaviour, this relationship is strengthened by prosociality, and individuals with high prosociality are more likely to translate their concern into concrete action. In the Albanian context, where culinary tourism is often associated with hospitality and supporting local economies, this finding is particularly significant, while for other personal motivations (HM, CM, EM, PM, SAM), the lack of indirect effects through EC suggests that these variables may be directly related to GPI, as the results confirm that they have a direct impact on GPI, or, in different cases, are mediated by other factors, such as trust in food quality, attitudes, or subjective norms.

Fourth, from a technical perspective, the study results show high variance explainability, where the R^2 values for EC and GPI, respectively, were reported to be ($R^2 = 0.74$ and $R^2 = 0.82$), values which indicate 'medium' and 'high' explainability according to Hair

et al. (2022). Likewise, the Q^2 values were reported to be ($Q^2 = 0.57$) for EC and ($Q^2 = 0.66$) for GPI, values which, according to the suggestions of the literature in the field, confirmed 'strong' predictive relevance (Geisser, 1974).

Fifth, when analysed from the perspective of existing theories, the results reinforce the validity of the TPB by showing that (SAM), norms (SSM) and perceived values (CM, HM) shape behavioural intentions (Ajzen, 1991). At the same time, they support the VBN and NAM, showing that social values and a sense of moral obligation are more important than personal social status motives (PM) (Stern et al., 1999; Schwartz, 1977). Also, in line with SDT, intrinsic motivations (SAM, CM, SSM) were found to be stronger than extrinsic motivations (PM), reflecting the influence of intrinsic interests on GPI (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In summation of this section, it is concluded that the study makes its contribution by finding that in the context of gastronomic tourism, social motivations (SSM) and sensory motivations (SAM) are the main factors that drive green purchasing intention (GPI), while environmental concern (EC) acts as a mediating mechanism only in the case of social sustainability motivation (SSM). In the absence of empirical literature from Albania, these findings provide valuable foundations for researchers and practitioners, suggesting the need for policies that strengthen the connection between local communities and consumers through the promotion of traditional, organic and sustainable foods.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary of Findings

This study provides empirical evidence for the influence of six personal motivations: Health Motivation (HM), Cultural Motivation (CM), Environmental Motivation (EM), Prestige Motivation (PM), Sensory Appeal Motivation (SAM) and Social Sustainability Motivation (SSM), in the formation of Green Purchase Intention (GPI) in the context of gastronomic tourism in Albania, with Environmental Concern (EC) as a mediating variable. The results of the PLS-SEM analysis show that SSM and SAM are the strongest

predictors of GPI, while SSM is also the factor with the greatest impact on EC. As a mediator, EC statistically significantly mediates only the relationship between SSM and GPI, suggesting that environmental awareness is activated mainly through social and sustainability-based motivations. The high R^2 values for EC (0.74) and GPI (0.82) indicate a considerable explanatory capacity of the model.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

From a theoretical perspective, this study integrates different dimensions of personal motivations within a unified theoretical framework, combining TPB, VBN, NAM and SDT to explain the formation of GPI. It contributes by positioning SSM and SAM as important elements in gastronomic tourism, a context where social and sensory components often overlap with environmental factors. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that sustainable tourism marketing policies and strategies in Albania should emphasize and focus on the social dimension of sustainability and sensory experiences to promote sustainable purchases. Likewise, there should be an emphasis on programmes that demonstrate the positive impact of sustainable consumption on local communities and integrating them with the marketing mixes to meet quality expectations (Kukanja, 2022).

Limitations and Future Suggestions

The main limitations relate to the use of a sample of domestic tourists and visitors to gastronomic destinations in Albania. Furthermore, the measurement of variables is based on self-reporting, which may be subject to social desirability bias.

Future studies could use longitudinal designs to test changes in GPI and EC over time, as well as apply experimental methods to assess the impact of specific marketing and communication variables or any other system dynamic model based on the scenarios to formulate strategies (Štumpf et al., 2022). Examining moderators such as attitudes, subjective norms, emotional involvement, and level of environmental education could provide a more detailed understanding of the mechanisms linking personal motivations to

GPI. Also, expanding the context beyond gastronomic tourism, such as sustainable cultural event tourism, could help assess the generalizability of the model. Integrating measurable real-world behavioural data, such as purchase traces, could strengthen the validity of the findings.

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Digital Innovation in Sustainable Nature-Based Tourism: A Literature Review

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This study systematically reviews the application of geographic information systems, decision support systems, artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and virtual reality within the context of sustainable tourism in natural environments. The findings reveal that geographic information systems and decision support systems are fundamental for spatial decision-making and conservation planning. At the same time, artificial intelligence facilitates real-time visitor management, and augmented and virtual reality enrich educational and immersive experiences that foster environmental awareness. Nevertheless, challenges such as limited infrastructure, regulatory gaps, and barriers to technological accessibility remain, particularly in remote and developing regions. This review emphasises the need for integrated hybrid models, such as artificial intelligence-powered geographic information systems for predictive environmental assessments and virtual reality-enhanced decision support systems for simulating visitor flows in protected areas. Future research should focus on developing scalable and context-sensitive frameworks for technology adoption in nature-based destinations. Collaboration among policymakers, industry stakeholders, and researchers is essential to establish regulatory standards, promote digital inclusion, and foster interdisciplinary partnerships that ensure digital innovations effectively contribute to the sustainable development and stewardship of natural tourism sites.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, augmented reality, decision support systems, sustainable tourism, virtual reality

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Introduction

Sustainable nature-based tourism has become a global priority in the management of natural destinations, as it promotes biodiversity conservation, local economic development, and the well-being of host communities (Bahou et al., 2024; Costantino et al., 2024; Mandić, 2019). Although related, nature-based tourism, ecot-

ourism, and sustainable tourism are not interchangeable concepts. Nature-based tourism broadly refers to travel experiences in natural environments (Mandić, 2019), ecotourism places greater emphasis on environmental education and minimal impact (Costantino et al., 2024), and sustainable tourism provides an overarching framework that integrates environmen-

tal, social, and economic goals (Bahou et al., 2024). In this study, we focus specifically on sustainable nature-based tourism, understood as tourism activities in natural settings that are developed under sustainability principles.

The integration of digital technologies has reshaped how destinations are planned, managed, and experienced. Geographic information systems (GIS), decision support systems (DSS), artificial intelligence (AI), augmented and virtual reality (AR/VR), and blockchain are increasingly applied to monitor ecosystems, regulate visitor flows, and strengthen environmental awareness (Bahou et al., 2024; Lee & Jan, 2023; Pinho & Leal, 2024). These technologies show significant potential for aligning tourism development with conservation objectives while enhancing visitor engagement (Gong & Cao, 2024; Li & Jiang, 2023; Sgroi & Modica, 2024).

Nevertheless, challenges remain. The effectiveness of digital tools varies depending on geographical, infrastructural, and socioeconomic conditions. While some regions have successfully implemented GIS and AR for conservation planning and carrying capacity analysis, others face barriers such as limited internet access, insufficient digital infrastructure, and weak stakeholder collaboration (Aminu et al., 2013; Aminu et al., 2014; Zhao et al., 2020). Similarly, AI and AR/VR applications have been effective for visitor education and interpretation, yet concerns persist about their scalability, cost-effectiveness, and long-term sustainability outcomes (Baldeón et al., 2023, 2024; Chatzopoulou, 2024; Drouga & Sarantakou, 2024).

Despite these contributions, research in this area remains fragmented. Many studies explore individual technologies through isolated case studies without considering their integration, contextual constraints, or long-term impacts (Aminu et al., 2013; Aminu et al., 2014; Erfani et al., 2015; Tan et al., 2018; Sharma & Sehrawat, 2019). There is still limited synthesis explaining how digital innovations collectively advance sustainability objectives in nature-based destinations, or under what conditions they succeed and fail. However, recent research has begun to address this gap, including the work of Parra-Sanchez and Viviescas-Jaimes (2024), which

highlights the emergence of a growing line of inquiry into the role of digital technologies in nature-based tourism.

In response, this paper analyses the role of digital technologies in advancing sustainable nature-based tourism and identifies the key challenges and opportunities associated with their implementation. The central research questions guiding this study are: (1) How do digital technologies contribute to sustainable management and visitor engagement in nature-based tourism? (2) What are the limitations and future directions for their integration in ecologically sensitive destinations? To address these questions, we conduct a systematic literature review of empirical studies applying GIS, DSS, AI, AR/VR, and blockchain. The review highlights best practices, identifies critical gaps in current research, and proposes directions for future technological innovation aligned with environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

The remainder of the paper is organised into five sections: the second section presents the theoretical background, the third section outlines the methodology, the fourth section reports the results, the fifth section discusses key findings, and the sixth section concludes with limitations and directions for future research.

Theoretical Background

Digital transformation has reshaped multiple industries, including tourism, by integrating advanced technologies that optimise management processes, enhance visitor experiences, and contribute to sustainability. In nature-based tourism, digital tools have improved resource conservation, facilitated decision-making, and supported local communities through data-driven strategies. The adoption of technologies such as GIS, DSS, AI and AR/VR has proven to be particularly relevant in promoting sustainable practices in natural environments, while addressing environmental and socioeconomic challenges (Costantino et al., 2024; Sgroi & Modica, 2024). Although the contributions of these technologies are well documented, important questions remain underexplored, particularly regarding their scalability, governance, and long-term impact.

The role of GIS and DSS in sustainable nature-based tourism has been widely documented, particularly in their ability to support spatial planning and environmental monitoring. By analysing geospatial data, these tools assist in identifying suitable areas for tourism development while minimising ecological disruption. Studies conducted in protected areas and natural parks have demonstrated that GIS-based decision models enable authorities to regulate tourism flows, prevent overexploitation of sensitive ecosystems, and design conservation strategies tailored to specific environmental conditions (Aminu et al., 2013; Aminu et al., 2014). Likewise, DSS applications have been employed to integrate ecological, social, and economic factors into tourism planning, ensuring a balanced approach between growth and sustainability in nature-based destinations (Gong & Cao, 2024). Yet, much of this evidence is context-specific, focusing on local or regional applications without addressing questions of scalability or transferability across governance systems. Furthermore, the literature rarely engages with the institutional and political barriers that determine whether these tools are successfully implemented.

In addition to geospatial technologies, applications of AI range from automated visitor management systems in protected areas to predictive analytics for environmental impact assessment. By processing large volumes of data in real time, AI enables personalised recommendations, dynamic pricing strategies, and intelligent monitoring of tourist activities in ecologically sensitive settings (Bahou et al., 2024; Gong & Cao, 2024). However, despite these advantages, implementation of AI often faces challenges related to data availability, technical expertise, and ethical concerns regarding privacy and algorithmic transparency (Baldeón et al., 2023). Beyond these practical obstacles, there is no consensus in the literature about the long-term role of AI in sustainable tourism. While some studies emphasise its transformative potential, others highlight doubts about affordability and inclusivity in resource-constrained regions. This ongoing debate suggests that critical questions remain about AI's scalability and its alignment with sustainability goals.

Another significant strand of research addresses the use of AR/VR in nature-based tourism. These technologies have been leveraged to create immersive educational experiences that promote environmental awareness and cultural heritage preservation in natural settings. In practice, AR applications allow tourists to explore landscapes through interactive digital overlays, providing contextual information without physically altering the environment (Jomsri, 2019; Martínez-Graña et al., 2023; Sancho-Jiménez et al., 2024; Mohd Rafee et al., 2024; Methimakis et al., 2024). Virtual reality has also been used to develop remote tours of ecologically sensitive areas, enabling access while reducing human impact on fragile ecosystems (Chatzopoulou, 2024; Triviño-Tarradas et al., 2024). Despite these benefits, widespread adoption remains limited due to high implementation costs and infrastructure constraints, particularly in remote or underdeveloped natural areas (Baldeón et al., 2024). More importantly, the literature tends to emphasise experiential and educational benefits while overlooking critical issues such as accessibility, cultural sensitivity, and the risk of 'virtual overexposure' of fragile environments. This under-engagement with potential unintended consequences points to a gap in the theoretical discussion of AR/VR within sustainable tourism research.

While digital transformation presents numerous opportunities for sustainable nature-based tourism, it also raises significant challenges. Technological accessibility is a major barrier, as many destinations lack the infrastructure to support digital innovations. Limited internet connectivity, inadequate hardware, and high implementation costs hinder adoption in natural contexts, particularly in developing regions (Drouga & Sarantakou, 2024; Zhao et al., 2020). Additionally, rapid digitalisation raises ethical and social concerns, including digital exclusion and the commodification of cultural and ecological heritage. Without proper governance frameworks, there is a risk that digital initiatives may disproportionately benefit large corporations while marginalising local communities (Van et al., 2020).

A further challenge is the overexposure of natural destinations due to digital marketing and online platforms: increased visibility of remote and ecologi-

cally sensitive locations can drive unsustainable mass tourism, exceeding carrying capacity and threatening biodiversity (Li & Jiang, 2023). In some cases, AR applications and AI-driven recommendations have contributed to overcrowding in fragile ecosystems, underscoring the risk of unintended negative consequences (Mohd Rafee et al., 2024). Addressing these issues requires sustainable digital strategies that balance technological innovation with responsible practice; yet the literature seldom examines how governance frameworks, community participation, or regulatory mechanisms can mitigate these effects, leaving an important avenue for future research.

Despite these challenges, digital transformation remains a key driver of sustainability in nature-based tourism. The integration of technologies such as GIS, DSS, AI, and immersive tools like AR/VR provides valuable support for conservation efforts, visitor management, and community engagement in natural areas. The relationship between digital technologies, tourism management, and sustainability in nature-based contexts is inherently complex and interconnected. Digital technologies (GIS and DSS) play a crucial role in spatial planning and environmental monitoring, enabling authorities to identify suitable areas for tourism development while minimising ecological disruption. Artificial intelligence enhances real-time decision-making, predictive analysis, and personalised visitor experiences (Samala et al., 2022), while AR/VR facilitates immersive educational encounters that foster environmental awareness without physically altering natural environments (Han et al. 2019). The Internet of Things (IoT) also contributes by enabling real-time data collection on visitor behaviour and environmental conditions (Baldeón et al., 2024). These tools offer opportunities for proactive management, but studies have yet to explore how IoT can be effectively integrated with other technologies or what governance frameworks are needed to regulate data ownership, privacy, and interoperability; without this discussion, IoT remains under-theorised in the tourism literature.

Collectively, these technologies optimise resource allocation, improve operational efficiency, and support inclusive, data-driven strategies in nature-based

tourism. In turn, effective tourism management contributes to broader sustainability goals by promoting environmental protection, economic development, and social well-being. Yet the current literature often privileges technical descriptions over critical reflection. There is still limited engagement with questions of governance, power asymmetries, or the distributive impacts of digitalisation in natural destinations. Addressing these blind spots requires moving beyond cataloguing technologies to examine how they interact with institutional frameworks, cultural contexts, and ethical concerns. Future research should therefore not only explore hybrid models that integrate multiple technologies (Chatzopoulou, 2024; Sancho-Jiménez et al., 2024), but also engage with broader theoretical debates on equity, inclusion, and long-term sustainability in digital tourism.

Methodology

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) to evaluate the role of digital technologies in advancing sustainable nature-based tourism. The SLR method was selected because it ensures methodological transparency, reproducibility, and analytical depth while enabling a comprehensive synthesis of existing knowledge (Watson & Webster, 2020; Webster & Watson, 2002). Through the structured analysis of diverse case studies and regional experiences, this approach allows the identification of emerging patterns, theoretical contributions, and research gaps relevant to the digital transformation of tourism practices in natural environments such as national parks, protected areas, and ecotourism destinations (Gong & Cao, 2024; Neumann & Mason, 2023; Vasconez & Weber, 2023).

The review is grounded in the methodological principles proposed by Webster and Watson (2002), who advocate for a concept-centric rather than author-centric approach. Instead of merely summarising prior studies by author or chronology, the concept-centric method organises findings around key thematic constructs. In the context of nature-based tourism, this means identifying how specific digital technologies – such as GIS, AI, DSS, and AR/VR – contribute to functions like spatial zoning, biodiversity conservation, visitor education, and real-time envi-

ronmental monitoring. This orientation allows for a higher-level synthesis that reveals the relationships among core concepts, technologies, and sustainability outcomes – essential for understanding the complex and interdisciplinary nature of digital transformation in natural tourism contexts.

Moreover, the updated roadmap proposed by Watson and Webster (2020) reinforces the need for literature reviews to move beyond descriptive aggregation and toward the development of theoretical insights. They suggest that literature reviews should act as bridges between past research and future theorising, combining rigorous synthesis with conceptual modelling. By applying these methodological standards, this study ensures the inclusion of high-quality, peer-reviewed academic sources. The reviewed works were drawn from indexed journals and conference proceedings in fields such as tourism management, information systems, environmental studies, and sustainability science. Studies focused on cultural, urban, or non-nature-based tourism settings, grey literature, and non-peer-reviewed sources were excluded to ensure relevance and analytical rigour.

To ensure methodological coherence and analytical depth, the systematic literature review was carried out in three structured phases, presented in the following subsections:

1. The collection and selection of relevant academic articles.
2. The classification and detailed analysis of the extracted information.
3. The synthesis of findings with the identification of conceptual and technological trends related to sustainable nature-based tourism.

Data Collection and Article Selection

The literature search was conducted using a database containing 226 academic articles related to tourism, digitalisation, and sustainability. Following the structured approach recommended by Watson and Webster (2020), a systematic identification, classification, and synthesis process was applied to ensure rigour and replicability. A structured search strategy was implemented, using a combination of keywords

and Boolean operators to ensure precision and relevance. The search terms focused on two core dimensions: (1) nature-based tourism, and (2) digital technologies.

For the nature-based tourism dimension, the search included the following terms in titles, abstracts, and keywords: 'nature-based tourism', 'nature tourism', 'ecotourism', 'sustainable tourism', 'wildlife tourism', 'outdoor tourism', 'adventure tourism', and 'rural tourism'. These terms were selected to encompass the range of tourism activities associated with natural environments, biodiversity, and outdoor experiences.

For the digital technologies dimension, the search included: 'digital technology', 'artificial intelligence', 'augmented reality', 'geographic information systems', and 'decision support systems', with the aim of identifying studies that explore how these tools are applied in tourism planning, visitor experience design, and conservation strategies. Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to combine terms, ensuring that both thematic axes were captured in the review process.

To ensure the inclusion of high-quality and relevant studies, specific selection criteria were applied. Articles were considered for analysis if they presented empirical applications of digital technologies in nature-based tourism destinations – such as national parks, ecotourism sites, protected areas, or rural communities – and examined the role of technologies like artificial intelligence, augmented reality, geographic information systems, decision support systems, blockchain, and the Internet of Things. Preference was given to studies that included sustainability-related outcomes, such as environmental impact mitigation, resource optimisation, biodiversity protection, or community engagement.

In parallel, exclusion criteria were applied to maintain analytical rigour. Studies that were purely theoretical or lacked empirical evidence were excluded, as were those that did not address nature-based tourism contexts. Articles that focused exclusively on digital marketing without a clear sustainability or conservation component were also omitted. After applying these criteria, 50 articles were retained for full-text analysis, forming the basis for the systematic review. Although not all articles are explicitly cited

in the text, each contributed to the overall synthesis of findings and conceptual categorisation relevant to the digital transformation of sustainable nature-based tourism.

Classification and Analysis of Information

The selected articles were systematically reviewed and categorised to facilitate comparison. A structured classification system was used to organise the studies based on their objectives, methodologies, and key findings. Each article was analysed according to specific dimensions, including the nature-based tourism context, geographical scope, technological solutions implemented, research methodology, and findings.

The study context dimension focused on defining the research problem, objectives, and the relevance of each study within the field of sustainable nature-based tourism, emphasising challenges such as conservation, visitor pressure, or community inclusion in natural destinations. The geographical scope included information about the study location, its environmental characteristics (e.g. protected areas, national parks, coastal or mountainous ecosystems), and cultural or ecological factors influencing tourism in natural settings. The technological solutions dimension described the digital tools applied in each case – such as GIS, AI, AR, or the Internet of Things – and their functionalities in addressing key sustainability concerns in nature-based tourism. The research methodology dimension examined the approaches used for data collection, validation techniques, and analytical frameworks employed in assessing technological impacts. Lastly, the findings dimension summarised the key results and their implications for the sustainability of tourism in natural environments, including insights on environmental monitoring, visitor education, and ecosystem protection.

Synthesis of Findings and Identification of Trends

Following data classification, the extracted information was synthesised to identify patterns and insights. The synthesis process involved grouping studies according to the type of digital technology implemented and evaluating their impact on sustainable nature-based tourism. This thematic approach fo-

cused on the role of digital technologies in supporting conservation efforts, improving visitor experiences, and promoting responsible tourism in natural environments. It allowed for a structured presentation of findings, distinguishing between GIS-based spatial planning tools used in protected areas, AI-driven visitor management systems implemented in ecotourism sites, AR/VR applications designed to enhance environmental education, and IoT-based systems for real-time environmental monitoring in nature reserves.

The synthesis of findings is presented in Section 4, where the impact of each digital technology is analysed based on regional applications, case studies, and sustainability outcomes in nature-based tourism contexts. This includes evaluations of how digital tools contribute to biodiversity conservation, help mitigate overcrowding in ecologically fragile areas and support local communities through data-driven management strategies.

Results

This section presents the main findings of the systematic literature review, focusing on the application of digital technologies in sustainable nature-based tourism. The studies analysed reveal how tools such as GIS, DSS, AI, AR/VR, and predictive modelling are being implemented in diverse ecological contexts, including protected areas, coastal zones, wetlands, and national parks. Each subsection highlights the specific contributions of these technologies to improving environmental conservation, enhancing visitor management, and fostering educational and immersive experiences, while also addressing the challenges and limitations encountered in their application.

Geographic Information Systems and Decision Support Systems

GIS and DSS have played a crucial role in spatial decision-making for sustainable nature-based tourism planning, particularly in the management of protected areas, wetlands, and coastal ecosystems. In Malaysia, a GIS-based DSS was implemented to classify conservation zones while optimising tourism development. A study conducted in the Johor Ramsar sites applied Spatial Decision Support Systems (SDSS) to ensure that tourism activities did not disrupt ecologically sensi-

tive wetlands, resulting in improved conservation outcomes and regulated visitor access (Aminu et al., 2013).

Similarly, in Taiwan, an integrated coastal zone management model using GIS was employed to assess the impact of tourism on marine biodiversity in the Kaohsiung region. This system enabled local authorities to identify high-risk areas for pollution and overcrowding, which led to the implementation of new regulations that helped reduce environmental degradation in coastal nature-based tourism destinations (Aminu et al., 2013).

In Iran's Zabol region, the application of GIS-based multi-criteria analysis has also proven significant. Here, DSS tools were used to zone tourism areas according to ecological and socioeconomic indicators, ensuring a balance between tourism-driven economic growth and the conservation of natural landscapes (Gong & Cao, 2024). These case studies demonstrate the strategic value of GIS and DSS in advancing sustainable nature-based tourism by enabling informed spatial planning, environmental risk assessment, and visitor flow regulation.

Artificial Intelligence and Automation

Artificial Intelligence has increasingly transformed the management of nature-based tourism, particularly in visitor flow regulation, real-time monitoring, and personalised experiences in protected natural areas. In China, AI-powered models have been used to predict tourism demand trends, enabling authorities to regulate visitor flows in ecologically sensitive attractions. A notable example is the Jiuzhaigou Valley, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and national park, where machine learning algorithms were employed to optimise tourist distribution across the site, preventing overcrowding while enhancing visitor satisfaction and reducing pressure on fragile ecosystems (Bahou et al., 2024).

In Vietnam, AI-powered Human-Machine Interaction (HMI) devices have contributed to the recovery and regulation of nature tourism in the post-pandemic context. These systems provided real-time health and safety information and helped manage visitor density in popular natural destinations, ensuring a safe and personalised experience while minimising environmental impact (Van et al., 2020).

Additionally, in Saudi Arabia, although not exclusively focused on nature-based tourism, the integration of AI with blockchain technology has improved transaction transparency in tourism services. This development is particularly relevant for eco-lodges and rural tourism operators seeking to build trust with international visitors through secure and traceable systems (Gong & Cao, 2024). Overall, AI and automation have demonstrated strong potential for supporting the sustainable management of natural tourism areas. AI also enables smart decision-making in areas such as carrying capacity management, emergency response, and dynamic pricing strategies tailored to environmental conservation goals.

Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality

Augmented and Virtual Reality technologies have shown considerable potential in nature-based tourism, particularly by enhancing environmental education and reducing the physical impact of tourism infrastructure. In Peru, AR-based ecotourism trails have been developed in Amazonian reserves, where Bluetooth beacons and mobile AR applications deliver immersive storytelling experiences about local biodiversity and ecosystems. These solutions eliminate the need for intrusive signage or built structures, preserving the integrity of the natural environment while enriching the visitor experience (Baldeón et al., 2024).

In Greece, underwater AR solutions have transformed marine heritage tourism by enabling visitors to virtually explore submerged archaeological sites without disturbing delicate aquatic ecosystems. This approach not only fosters awareness of underwater cultural heritage but also promotes responsible tourism practices that reduce direct human interference in vulnerable environments (Chatzopoulou, 2024).

A comparable strategy has been implemented in Spain through AR and VR applications along geotourism routes in Monsagro, Salamanca. These digital tools provide real-time geological interpretation, allowing visitors to learn about the region's natural history without the need for physical installations that might affect the landscape (Liao et al., 2013).

In sum, AR and VR technologies are powerful tools for advancing sustainable nature-based tourism. By enabling immersive, low-impact, and accessible experiences, these technologies help reconcile environmental conservation with educational and interpretive goals. Their application contributes to the protection of natural and cultural heritage by minimising the physical footprint while deepening visitor engagement with the unique values of natural destinations.

Predictive Modelling for Nature-Based Tourism Management

The use of predictive modelling as a valuable tool for managing visitor flows and mitigating environmental impacts in nature-based tourism settings has been examined in the works of Baldeón et al. (2023) and Bahou et al. (2024). Although primarily applied in urban contexts, approaches like the dynamic system models used in Amsterdam also offer useful insights for natu-

ral destinations. These models simulate various tourism management scenarios and can be adapted to nature-based tourism areas to guide decision-makers in planning strategies that balance visitor demand with conservation priorities (Baldeón et al., 2023).

In China, machine learning models have been used to forecast visitor numbers at ecologically sensitive sites such as national parks and nature reserves. These models assist authorities in regulating carrying capacity and implementing crowd control measures, helping to prevent ecosystem degradation while maintaining quality visitor experiences (Bahou et al., 2024).

Predictive modelling, particularly when powered by AI and real-time data, represents a promising path for proactive planning in protected areas, enabling authorities to anticipate environmental pressures and design interventions that ensure the long-term sustainability of tourism in natural environments.

Table 1 Comparison of Digital Technologies in Sustainable Nature-Based Tourism

Technology	Main Benefits	Challenges	Key Applications
Artificial Intelligence	Personalised visitor experiences, predictive analytics for tourism flows.	Data privacy concerns, high implementation and maintenance costs.	Chatbots, smart recommendations, demand forecasting, congestion management.
Geographic Information Systems	Spatial planning, mapping of sensitive areas, environmental monitoring.	Requires high-quality and up-to-date geospatial data.	Zoning protected areas, analysing tourism impact, supporting conservation planning.
Decision Support Systems	Integrated decision-making, multi-criteria sustainability assessments.	Difficulty integrating diverse and complex datasets.	Tourism development planning, conservation trade-off modelling.
Augmented & Virtual Reality	Immersive environmental education, reduced physical impact on fragile sites.	High infrastructure and equipment costs, limited scalability.	Interactive nature trails, virtual exploration of remote or sensitive ecosystems.
Big Data	Trend identification, behaviour analysis, evidence-based tourism management.	Requires robust data processing and storage infrastructure.	Visitor behaviour analytics, sustainability performance tracking.
Internet of Things	Real-time monitoring of environmental conditions, automation of tourism services.	Dependence on connectivity, device maintenance and calibration.	Monitoring air and water quality, wildlife tracking, visitor density management.

Note Table 1 summarises digital technologies applied to sustainable nature-based tourism. Categories include main benefits, associated challenges, and key applications in tourism contexts. Technologies are organised by type and listed alphabetically. Abbreviations used are consistent with those in the main text. No numerical units are presented, as the content is qualitative.

Comparative Analysis of Digital Technologies in Sustainable Nature-Based Tourism

The comparative analysis of the literature reveals that the effectiveness of digital technologies in nature-based tourism depends greatly on their intended function and the ecological context in which they

are applied. Rather than offering a universal solution, each technological approach contributes in distinct ways to the planning, management, and sustainability of natural destinations.

Spatial technologies such as geographic information systems and decision support systems are par-

Table 2 Categorisation of Reviewed Studies by Technology Type

Technology Category	Description of Category	Citations
Extended Reality (XR)	VR, AR, 3D modelling, holograms.	Liao et al. (2013), Aminu et al. (2014), Nobnop et al. (2018), Baldeón et al. (2023), Baldeón et al. (2024), Costantino et al. (2024), Sgroi and Modica (2024), Wang and Zhang (2025), Baldeón et al. (2025), Nuraini et al. (2025)
Artificial Intelligence and Big Data	Machine Learning, AI for personalisation, trend prediction.	Wasserburger et al. (2017), Jomsri (2019), Wang (2020), Van et al. (2020), Vasconez and Weber (2023), Huang (2023), Mohd Rafee et al. (2024), Sancho-Jiménez et al. (2024), Louati et al. (2024), Bahou et al. (2024), Zhang and Cheng (2024), Noviarita et al. (2024), Methimakis et al. (2024), Triviño-Tarradas et al. (2024), Ma et al. (2024), Chengcai et al. (2024), Kusumastuti et al. (2024)
IoT and Sensors	Environmental sensors, smart navigation, wearable devices.	Aminu et al. (2013), Sharma and Sehrawat (2019), Şakar et al. (2020), Li and Jiang (2023), Kashem et al. (2023), Chatzopoulou (2024), Huang et al. (2024), Velasco et al. (2024), Cheng et al. (2024), Lu (2024), Baldeón et al. (2025)
Blockchain and Cyber-security	Cryptocurrency, tourism traceability, secure bookings.	Erfani et al. (2015), Tan et al. (2018), Lv et al. (2021), Drouga and Sarantakou (2024), Kim et al. (2024).
Digital Platforms and Mobile Apps	Tourism apps, chatbots, e-commerce.	Aminu et al. (2014), Erfani et al. (2015), Martínez-Graña et al. (2017), Tan et al. (2018), Van et al. (2020), Huang (2023), Baldeón et al. (2023), Martínez-Graña et al. (2023), Neumann and Mason (2023), Sancho-Jiménez et al. (2024), Chiwaridzo and Chiwaridzo (2024), Bahou et al. (2024), Pinho and Leal (2024), Kusumastuti et al. (2024), Nuraini et al. (2025), Baldeón et al. (2025)
Geolocation and Digital Mapping	Interactive maps, geo-routes, GPS in tourism.	Sharma and Sehrawat (2019), Chatzopoulou (2024), Zhang and Cheng (2024), Huang et al. (2024), Liu et al. (2024), Cheng et al. (2024)
Management Systems and Smart Cities	Impact analysis, tourist flow monitoring.	Li and Jiang (2023), Neumann and Mason (2023), Bahou et al. (2024)
Interactive Experiences and Gamification	Digital games, immersive tourism, metaverse.	Liao et al. (2013), Aminu et al. (2014), Martínez-Graña et al. (2017), Nobnop et al. (2018), Zhao et al. (2020), Baldeón et al. (2023), Martínez-Graña et al. (2023), Gong and Cao (2024), Huang et al. (2024), Cheng et al. (2024)
Accessible Tourism and Inclusive Technologies	Voice recognition apps, digital adaptations.	Aminu et al. (2014), Martínez-Graña et al. (2017), Nobnop et al. (2018), Zhao et al. (2020), Van et al. (2020), Baldeón et al. (2023)

Note Table 2 categorises the reviewed studies based on the type of digital technology applied in tourism contexts. Each category includes a description of the technologies involved and corresponding citations. The technologies are listed by thematic relevance rather than alphabetically. Abbreviations and terminology are consistent with those used in the main text. Citations reflect the body of literature analysed in the review.

ticularly valuable for informing land-use planning, conservation zoning, and biodiversity monitoring in protected areas, wetlands, and coastal zones. Their strength lies in enabling data-driven decisions that align tourism development with environmental thresholds and conservation objectives.

Meanwhile, augmented reality and virtual reality technologies have demonstrated considerable potential in delivering immersive, low-impact educational experiences. By offering interpretive content through digital overlays or virtual simulations, these tools foster environmental awareness without the need for intrusive infrastructure, making them especially suitable for ecotourism, geotourism, and marine heritage sites.

As summarised in Table 1, each digital technology presents specific advantages, limitations, and areas of application within sustainable nature-based tourism. The table provides a comparative overview that facilitates a better understanding of how these technologies support diverse aspects of destination management – from spatial analysis and predictive planning to visitor education and environmental protection. Aligning technological choices with site-specific conservation and community priorities emerges as a critical factor for achieving long-term sustainability outcomes.

This study incorporates a complementary classification that maps all 50 reviewed articles according to the primary categories of digital technologies they address. Table 2 presents this categorisation, grouping the sources into nine key technological domains identified throughout the systematic review: extended reality; artificial intelligence and big data; IoT and sensors; blockchain and cybersecurity; digital platforms and mobile applications; geolocation and digital mapping; management systems and smart cities; interactive experiences and gamification; and accessible tourism and inclusive technologies.

The table serves a dual purpose: first, to offer a clearer visual representation of the distribution and diversity of digital innovations applied in sustainable nature-based tourism; and second, to ensure proper attribution of all studies included in the analytical process – even those not explicitly cited in the main text – thus reinforcing the methodological rigour and transparency of the review.

As Table 2 illustrates, artificial intelligence and big data emerge as the most widely represented technological category among the reviewed studies, reflecting their growing influence in predictive analytics, personalised tourism services, and visitor flow management. Extended reality technologies, including augmented and virtual reality, also show a significant presence, particularly in applications related to environmental education and immersive heritage experiences.

Categories such as IoT and sensors, and digital platforms and mobile apps demonstrate the increasing integration of real-time monitoring tools and user-centric applications in nature-based destinations. Meanwhile, areas like blockchain and accessible tourism appear less frequently in the literature, suggesting promising but underexplored fields for future research.

Overall, this classification not only highlights the technological breadth of the field but also identifies areas with concentrated scholarly interest and potential research gaps. It contributes to a deeper understanding of how digital innovation is currently shaping – and could further enhance – the sustainable development of tourism in natural environments.

Discussion

Emerging Trends and Persistent Challenges in Nature-Based Tourism

Despite the growing potential of digital technologies to support sustainability in nature-based tourism, several barriers continue to hinder their large-scale and equitable adoption. These challenges go beyond technological limitations and encompass economic, social, and political dimensions that are particularly pronounced in ecologically sensitive and remote destinations.

Economic barriers are among the most pressing. Many nature-dependent tourism regions – especially in the Global South – lack the financial resources to invest in robust digital infrastructures, such as 5G networks, AI-powered data systems, and AR/VR equipment. For example, a study on rural tourism in Malaysia revealed that high initial investment costs discouraged local businesses from adopting smart

solutions, despite recognizing their long-term benefits (Mohd Rafee et al., 2024). Similar patterns are observed in Africa and Latin America, where the high cost of GIS-based has restricted their deployment in conservation areas (Aminu et al., 2013).

Social barriers also limit digital transformation. In several cases, resistance from traditional tourism actors – such as local guides or small-scale operators – has emerged due to concerns over job displacement and loss of cultural authenticity. In Vietnam, tour guides feared that AI-based assistants might replace human interaction, even though these tools improved visitor personalisation (Van et al., 2020). Likewise, in Saudi Arabia, blockchain-based transaction systems faced scepticism and low adoption rates due to a lack of awareness and regulatory clarity (Gong & Cao, 2024).

Political and regulatory barriers further complicate the integration of digital tools in protected and rural tourism destinations. In China, while AI-driven models significantly reduced congestion in major tourist attractions, the absence of unified national regulations for AI has limited the scalability of these initiatives (Bahou et al., 2024). In Europe, concerns related to data protection laws (e.g. General Data Protection Regulation) have slowed the implementation of AI-driven visitor tracking systems, which could otherwise optimise flows in ecologically sensitive zones (Aminu et al., 2013).

Technological barriers are also notable. The rapid pace of innovation often renders tools obsolete within a few years, posing long-term sustainability challenges. For instance, a case study in Spain found that AR applications implemented in a nature-based tourism project became outdated within five years due to hardware and software incompatibilities, leading to costly upgrades (Liao et al., 2013).

Lessons from Failed or Limited Implementation Cases

Analysing unsuccessful or limited-impact implementations provides critical insights for designing future digital strategies in nature-based tourism. In Taiwan, a GIS-supported coastal tourism management initiative failed to achieve its goals due to insufficient stake-

holder engagement. This highlighted the importance of coupling technological interventions with inclusive governance and participatory planning processes (Aminu et al., 2014). In Amsterdam, a system dynamics model aimed at forecasting visitor behaviour in urban parks was unsuccessful in accurately capturing real-time tourist dynamics, revealing the limitations of static computational models without adaptive mechanisms (Baldeón et al., 2023). Similarly, in Iran, a DSS-based tourism zoning project failed to reconcile ecological priorities with economic development because it lacked meaningful community consultation, leading to local resistance and implementation gaps (Gong & Cao, 2024).

Practical and Theoretical Implications

From a practical perspective, this review emphasises the need to align digital innovation with the local realities of nature-based tourism destinations. Technological solutions must be supported by adequate infrastructure, institutional capacity, and participatory governance. The success of hybrid models that integrate GIS, AI, AR/VR, and DSS depends not only on technical design but also on the involvement of local communities, especially in biodiversity-rich areas where livelihoods are closely tied to natural resources.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings contribute to advancing the conceptual framework of smart sustainable tourism by demonstrating that digital transformation in nature-based tourism cannot be divorced from context. The evidence suggests that integrated models are more effective when embedded in place-based approaches that recognise ecological vulnerability, cultural values, and governance complexity. Future research should explore context-sensitive frameworks that evaluate digital innovation not just by efficiency gains, but by their contributions to ecological resilience, equity, and cultural preservation.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that digital technologies play a pivotal role in enhancing the sustainability of nature-based tourism, particularly by supporting resource management, improving visitor experienc-

es, and contributing to environmental conservation. Tools such as GIS, DSS, AI, AR/VR, and predictive modelling have enabled more informed decision-making in the planning and management of protected areas, ecotourism sites, and biodiversity-rich landscapes. Their implementation facilitates spatial zoning, visitor flow regulation, immersive education, and early detection of environmental pressures – functions that are essential in ecologically sensitive contexts.

However, despite these promising contributions, significant challenges remain. Infrastructure limitations, lack of digital literacy, regulatory gaps, and socio-cultural resistance to technological change continue to hinder the widespread adoption of digital tools, especially in developing regions. Overcoming these barriers requires strategic investment in digital infrastructure, the formulation of clear regulatory frameworks that ensure ethical data governance and equitable access, and the active involvement of local communities in the design and implementation of technological solutions.

For policymakers, these findings underscore the importance of integrating digital innovation into sustainable development agendas. Public-private partnerships should be promoted to deploy AI-driven analytics, GIS-based conservation planning, and immersive AR/VR tools tailored to natural destinations. Regulatory frameworks must also adapt to address the risks and opportunities of rapidly evolving technologies, ensuring that innovation aligns with ecological sustainability and social inclusion.

From an industry perspective, the next phase involves scaling successful hybrid technology models and fostering cross-sector collaboration. Tourism operators in nature-based destinations should focus on implementing intelligent visitor management systems, developing interpretive AR/VR experiences that minimise the ecological footprint, and exploring secure technologies such as blockchain to enhance transparency and trust in eco-tourism transactions. Workforce development through targeted training is also essential to build the technical capacity required to operate and maintain these tools effectively.

Theoretically, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how digital transformation

interacts with the unique dynamics of nature-based tourism. It highlights the need to move beyond isolated technological interventions and toward integrative frameworks that combine spatial, predictive, and immersive technologies within governance systems that respect ecological limits and local knowledge.

Future research should investigate the long-term impacts of digital technologies on sustainability outcomes, particularly in relation to biodiversity conservation, carbon reduction, and community resilience. More empirical studies are needed to assess how regulatory interventions influence the effectiveness of digital solutions in rural and protected areas. In addition, the potential of hybrid models – combining GIS, AI, AR/VR, and IoT – remains underexplored and offers a rich avenue for investigation, especially in data-scarce and infrastructure-limited regions across Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia.

Lastly, as digitalisation in tourism accelerates, ethical considerations must be placed at the centre of innovation. Issues such as data privacy, algorithmic transparency, and digital inclusion require robust governance mechanisms to ensure that digital transformation in nature-based tourism is not only efficient, but also equitable and responsible.

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The Role of Customer Involvement in Coffee Shop Brand Loyalty

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This study aims to examine the mediating role of customer involvement between brand identification, self-congruity, and service value on brand loyalty among coffee shop customers. Additionally, the study also extends to how male and female customers differ in terms of the proposed model. Data was obtained through a questionnaire of 151 respondents in the context of Indonesia, who had experience visiting coffee shop premises onsite, and was analysed using PLS-based SEM. The findings show that brand identification, self-congruity, and service value have a significant and positive influence on customer involvement. Further, customer involvement also has a significant and positive influence on brand loyalty. While all the established relationships for female customers were found to be both positive and significant, the involvement of male customers, conversely, was not significantly affected by service value, nor did it play a mediating role in enhancing brand loyalty for male customers. However, service value has a surprisingly minimal impact on customer involvement. This implies the customer's interest in the coffee shop is not significantly influenced by the value it offers. Consequently, even if a coffee shop provides excellent value for money, this does not necessarily translate into increased customer engagement. The findings suggest that coffee shops focus on integrating both online and in-store experiences, managing customer ratings and reviews across various platforms, and pricing strategy, to better enhance customer engagement. Finally, this study offers valuable insights for the hospitality industry on strategies to improve customer brand loyalty, taking into account the differences across gender markets.

Keywords: brand loyalty, coffee shop, customer involvement, self-congruity, service value



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Introduction

Coffee is highly important to the economies and cultures of major coffee-producing countries like Indonesia. It is not only a large crop but also a big part of daily life (Oktafarel et al., 2021; Purnomo et al., 2021). Coffee consumption has recently changed from its original purpose to a modern lifestyle trend. This has contributed to the expansion of speciality coffee shops in cities and rural areas (Nisa et al., 2022). Coffee shops are often 'third places', or social spaces outside homes and workplaces, where people gather, talk, and connect. This is especially true for millennials and Muslim tourists, whose numbers have risen in Indonesia's tourism industry (Lestari et al., 2020; Nadizti et al., 2022; Setyaningsih et al., 2024).

In addition, Indonesia provides a particularly relevant context for examining coffee shop consumer behaviour because it is one of the world's largest coffee producers and an expanding domestic market. As the fourth-largest global coffee producer, the sector plays a substantial role in the national economy and supports millions involved in cultivation and trade (Dirgandana & Tamara, 2025). Furthermore, Indonesia's rapidly growing coffee shop industry reflects strong urban consumption trends, where coffee is widely enjoyed across age groups and embedded in social interactions and workspaces, reinforcing the sector's strategic relevance as a research setting (Sitalahi & Novenson, 2024). Importantly, studying Indonesia enables the examination of consumer-brand relationship constructs within an emerging market characterised by rapid lifestyle transformation and evolving service expectations. This context provides a meaningful setting to validate and extend theories of self-congruity and service value, which have been predominantly tested in developed economies.

As digitisation and changing consumer tastes change the food and drink industry, coffee shop owners must use new technologies and offer personalised experiences to keep customers returning (Nugroho et al., 2023; Wiastuti et al., 2024). To avoid business failures and stay competitive, businesses need to have a deep understanding of how customers act and the ability to build emotional connections via branding (Gumilang et al., 2021). Brand identification is im-

portant because consumers are more likely to support and maintain relationships with brands that reflect their values and self-concept, which in turn significantly influences purchase intentions and brand advocacy (Agyei et al., 2021).

Besides brand identification, self-congruity significantly influences customer involvement with a brand (Anjani & Dewi, 2021). Self-congruity denotes the degree to which customers feel alignment between their self-concept and a brand's image (Hondo, 2024). Brand identification and self-congruity are conceptually related yet distinct constructs within consumer brand relationship research, where brand identification reflects a consumer's psychological attachment and sense of belonging to a brand. Consumers' emotional connection and preference intensify when they recognise a substantial congruence between their identity and a brand's persona (Paul et al., 2019; Sop & Kozak, 2019). This phenomenon is especially pertinent in coffee shops, as customers frequently choose establishments that embody their lifestyle or social identity (Ahn et al., 2020). A study by Liu et al. (2025) supports this, indicating that self-congruity enhances brand connections and encourages recurrent patronage in service contexts. Therefore, coffee shops must emphasise connecting their brand image with the psychological characteristics of their target market to enhance client perceptions and loyalty (Šegota et al., 2022).

Moreover, service value is defined as the consumer's overall evaluation of benefits relative to costs (Yesitadewi & Widodo, 2024). Elevated service value improves customer experience and fortifies emotional and behavioural loyalty, particularly in competitive industries such as food and beverage (Nobar & Ros-tamzadeh, 2018). Consequently, integrating a knowledge of self-congruity with an emphasis on providing exceptional service value is crucial for coffee businesses seeking to maintain loyal and pleased customers.

Furthermore, customer involvement – a personal and subjective psychological state wherein the significance and relevance of a product or service hold importance to an individual customer – is another way to review brand loyalty to a company's brand (Cheung & To, 2021). Customer loyalty to a brand is essential

in the face of commercial rivalry. Brand loyalty signifies the connection between a consumer and a brand (Coelho et al., 2018). This construct delineates consumers' propensity to remain loyal to a single brand (Atulkar, 2020). Brand loyalty facilitates client acquisition and positively influences sales (Indrasari et al., 2019). In conclusion, a brand is not only an essential but also a catalyst for growth, with the capacity to expand the business and significantly affect customer purchasing behaviour (Zhao et al., 2022). Therefore, this study investigates the mediating function of customer involvement in the relationship between brand identity, self-congruity, service value, and brand loyalty, particularly in the context of coffee shops.

Literature Review

Brands are one of the significant components of an individual's social identity and represent valid targets for identification among relevant customers because of their role in self-definition and self-referral (Kim et al., 2018). Drawing on social identity theory, individuals tend to define themselves through their affiliations with socially meaningful entities, including brands, which provides the theoretical basis for understanding brand identification in consumer research (Acar et al., 2024). Through brand identification, individuals associate themselves with brands that reflect their values, lifestyles, or aspirations (Osmanova et al., 2023). Strong brand identification fosters a deeper psychological connection between consumers and a brand, motivating them to align with the company's values, advocate for its reputation, make repeat purchases, and maintain long-term loyalty (Tahir et al., 2024). When consumers perceive a brand as reflective of their personal or social identity, they are more likely to engage in behaviours that support the brand's success, ranging from positive word-of-mouth to brand evangelism and resistance to competitor offerings (Nobar & Rostamzadeh, 2018). Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H1 Brand identification has a direct positive effect on customer involvement.*

Service value represents a customer's overall assessment of the usefulness and benefits of a service,

shaped by their perception of what they gain relative to what they contribute in the exchange process (Chi et al., 2022). From the perspective of service value theory, consumers evaluate services based on a trade-off between perceived benefits and sacrifices, which shapes their attitudes, engagement, and subsequent behavioural intentions (Medberg & Grönroos, 2020). It encompasses the customer's experience, whether assisted by full-service personnel or through self-service mechanisms, resulting in increased satisfaction and perceived value (Doeim et al., 2022). As a perceived trade-off between received benefits and sacrificed resources (e.g. time, money, effort), service value plays a pivotal role in shaping customer decisions and attitudes (Gulam et al., 2023). Empirical studies consistently highlight the positive influence of service value on brand loyalty. For instance, Devi and Yasa (2021) found that greater service value directly enhances consumers' loyalty toward a brand. In the hospitality industry, service value is not only a determinant of satisfaction but also a crucial antecedent to brand identification and customer involvement, contributing significantly to long-term brand loyalty (Rather & Camilleri, 2019).

In the context of coffee shops, frequent customers often evaluate their consumption based on the fulfilment of material, social, and functional values, demonstrating that service value extends beyond simple satisfaction to include lifestyle and identity reinforcement (Kim & Jang, 2017). Further, extensive research across service-based organisations supports the notion that high service value is a key driver of customer satisfaction, repeat patronage, and sustained brand loyalty (Alzoubi et al., 2020; Mariana et al. 2022). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H2 Service value has a direct positive effect on customer involvement.*

Grounded in self-congruity theory, consumer behaviour is influenced by the degree to which a brand's image aligns with an individual's self-concept, shaping emotional and behavioural responses toward the brand (Cifci, 2022). The theoretical framework of self-congruity refers to the psychological mechanism through which consumers evaluate the alignment

between their self-concept and the perceived image of a brand (Sirgy et al., 2018). This theoretical framework offers valuable insight into consumer behaviour by highlighting how identity and self-perception influence brand preferences and purchasing decisions (Sop & Kozak, 2019). Within the hospitality industry, self-congruity has significantly influenced customer attitudes toward hotel brands (Cifci, 2022). For instance, Su and Reynolds (2017) demonstrated that guests are more likely to develop favourable attitudes toward hotel brands when perceived congruence exists between the brand's personality and self-image. Recent research further supports these findings, emphasising that self-congruity predicts brand preference and satisfaction and is a key driver of emotional attachment and loyalty, particularly in experience-driven sectors such as tourism and hospitality (Liu et al., 2025). As such, hospitality brands aiming to enhance guest engagement should strategically design brand communications and experiences that reflect the values and lifestyles of their target audiences. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3 Self-congruity has a direct positive effect on customer involvement.

Involvement theory is an effective framework for forecasting the degree of engagement elicited by advertising media since it highlights the impact of media involvement on consumer experiences and service processes (Aureliano-Silva et al., 2021). This theory gives insights into the extent of engagement and its influence on the interactions of consumers and the total consuming journey by analysing the media used in advertising a product from the individual's perspective (Majeed et al., 2022). Previous research in the restaurant sector indicates that, irrespective of the restaurant or menu type, clients with a high level of engagement in the dining experience exhibit markedly more favourable attitudes and increased purchase intentions (Triandewo & Ra'idah, 2020).

Empirical research has repeatedly demonstrated a favourable correlation between heightened consumer participation and the likelihood of participating in collaborative activities with service providers (Dewarani & Alversia, 2023). Moreover, customer partic-

ipation is a psychological construct linked to quantifiable strategic objectives (e.g. brand affection) and anticipated post-consumer actions (e.g. brand loyalty) (Altarifi, 2021). Research indicates that consumer participation, congruence of self-brand perception, and brand familiarity contribute to heightened customer brand engagement (Khan et al., 2023; Liayanti et al., 2022). Nonetheless, prior research indicates that the relationship between product involvement and brand loyalty is constrained and variable (Albert et al., 2022). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4 Customer involvement has a direct positive effect on brand loyalty.

Customer involvement plays a pivotal mediating role by translating consumers' cognitive evaluations and psychological connections into enduring loyalty behaviours, as involvement reflects a motivational state that links consumer experiences with behavioural outcomes (Altarifi, 2021; Aureliano-Silva et al., 2021). When consumers identify with a brand, perceive strong alignment between their self-concept and the brand image, and recognise high service value, these perceptions enhance their level of personal relevance and engagement with the brand (Rather & Camilleri, 2019; Sirgy et al., 2018; Tahir et al., 2024). Increased involvement strengthens emotional attachment and reinforces behavioural intentions, ultimately leading to sustained brand loyalty (Liu et al., 2025; Majeed et al., 2022). Thus, customer involvement serves as an underlying mechanism through which brand identification, self-congruity, and service value influence loyalty outcomes in service settings such as coffee shops.

H5 Customer involvement significantly mediates the relationship between brand identification and brand loyalty.

H6 Customer involvement significantly mediates the relationship between service value and brand loyalty.

H7 Customer involvement significantly mediates the relationship between self-congruity and brand loyalty.

Methodology

This research employs quantitative methods as the approach for investigation. The criteria for respondents for this study are: (1) coffee shop customers who have visited coffee shops in person, meaning that they go to the store by themselves, order, and spend some time inside the coffee shop (i.e. in-store experience), and (2) Indonesian citizens, due to the nature of the questionnaire that is provided in Bahasa Indonesia (the official language of Indonesia). Excluding criteria are coffee shop customers who only used online delivery services or takeaway options without an in-store experience.

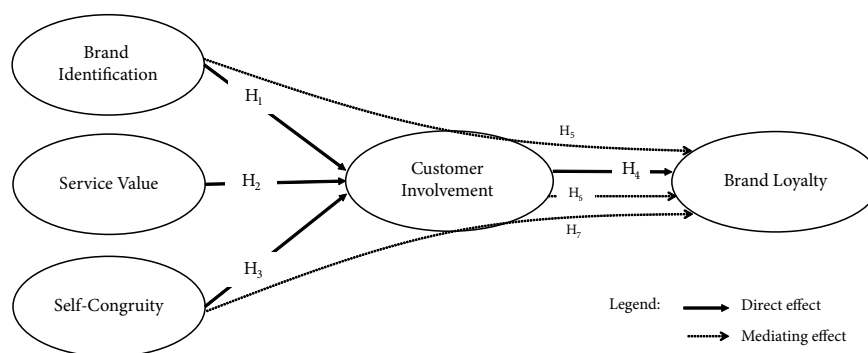
Data were collected via a survey conducted through an online questionnaire and distributed through various platforms and networks from May to July 2022. An online survey was chosen due to the COVID-19 conditions at that time, which restricted social contact in public spaces. We employed a non-probability sampling method using a convenience and snowball sampling approach. When analysing the data using SEM, Hair et al. (2014, 573) suggest several considerations that must be considered when deciding on sample size. To minimise the normality deviation problem, a minimum 15 ratio-to-parameter, resulting in 75 samples. More specifically, based on the model complexity, in which this study adopts the SEM model with five constructs (each containing more than three items), Hair et al. (2014, 574) suggest a minimum sample size of 100. This echoes the recommendation from Memon et al. (2020) to have a minimum of 100 samples when analysing the data using SEM. In addition, Teeroovengadum and Nunkoo (2018) reported that the majority of tourism hospitality studies with SEM analysis use a sample size of 151 to 400 with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 3% to 5%. This study gathered 151 samples, in line with the above sample size recommendation.

Data was further analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-based SEM) with SmartPLS software. Accordingly, PLS-based SEM is more suitable (compared with Covariance-based SEM) for studies with a small sample size, as in this study (Hair & Alamer, 2022; Memon et al., 2017, 2020). Also, PLS-based SEM includes non-normal

data prediction, which often happens in social science studies, including those related to customer behaviour (Hair et al., 2014). There are three sections in the questionnaire. The first section requires respondents' demographic information. The second section gathers information on coffee shop consumption behaviours and characteristics. The third section collects responses on measurement items related to five latent variables: brand identification, service value, self-congruity, customer involvement, and brand loyalty. The first four variables were adopted from Kim and Lee (2017), measured by four items, three items, four items and two items, respectively. The last variable, brand loyalty, was adopted from Kim et al. (2021) and Fetais et al. (2022), measured by eight items. In total, there were 21 items, all measured with a five-point Likert scale with 1 being strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neutral, 4 – agree, and 5 – strongly agree.

The initial measurement items to be included in the questionnaire were originally in English since they were obtained from English publications. However, since the respondents' native language is Indonesian, we translated all measurement items into Indonesian. First, we collectively translated English into Indonesian manually, without any language software assistance. We discussed the process extensively to reach a mutually agreed translation. The native language of all authors is Indonesian, with four being proficient in English academic writing. Afterwards, we involved two academics to provide feedback on the questionnaire. These are faculty members from hospitality programmes from two different institutions, who are currently active in academic writing, and have substantial Scopus publication records (proven ability in English and Indonesian). We printed both questionnaire versions (English and Indonesian) and handed them directly to the reviewers, so that they could assess them conveniently. Following this, we undertook several revisions on the Indonesian version based on their feedback, for example, making it consist of shorter sentences, avoiding literally translating 'word-of-mouth' (BL6) – instead, using the common vocabulary in Indonesia, and providing clarity on 'partner' (B14), 'like' (BL7), and 'reasonable' (SV1). Thus, the final questionnaire version incorporates peer review and an iterative

Figure 1 Research Framework



process to ensure the quality translation procedure meets [missing words?] (Harkness et al., 2004). Figure 1 illustrates this study framework, which encompasses five variables: brand identification (BI), service value (SV), self-congruity (SC), customer involvement (CI), and brand loyalty (BL), with 2 hypotheses.

Findings

Respondents' Characteristics

The participants in this research are all Indonesian citizens, with 41.7 % identifying as male and 58.3 % as female, primarily residing in the capital city of Jakarta (50.3%), and 84.8 % were under 42 years old in 2022. Based on respondent occupation, the majority of 41 % are college students and 32.5 % are employees, followed by 16.6 % of business owners/ entrepreneurs and 9.9 % of housewives.

To understand the respondents' coffee consumption habits, several questions were asked. The first question inquired about which coffee shop brand they frequented the most over the past two years, allowing respondents to select multiple brands. The findings indicated that the three most popular coffee shops are Starbucks, Janji Jiwa, and Kopi Kenangan, with proportions of 24.3%, 18.3%, and 17.9%, respectively, followed by Arabica (7.4%), Djournal Coffee (6.4%), Tanamera Coffee (4.9%), Kopi Tuku (4.7%), Filosofi Kopi (2.7%), and other local brands (13.7%). Respondents were also asked to list their favourite coffee shop, which turned out to be Starbucks ($n = 52$), followed by Kopi Kenangan ($n = 16$), Janji Jiwa ($n = 11$), and Kopi Tuku ($n = 10$). This finding echoes those of Wiastuti et al.'s (2024) study, who also found Kopi Kenangan and

Starbucks to be the most popular coffee shop brands in Indonesia in terms of mobile apps.

The second question asked when they typically visited coffee shops. The results showed that weekends (Saturday to Sunday) and weekdays (Monday to Friday) had nearly equal responses, with 50.3% for weekends and 49.7% for weekdays. Nonetheless, respondents preferred to visit coffee shops during the hours of 15:00 to 19:00 hrs (39.7%), followed by 12:00 to 15:00 hrs (33.8%), and 19:00 to 21:00 hrs (21.9%), the least popular time being between 07:00 to 10:00 hrs (4.6%). Here, fewer respondents chose to visit coffee shops during breakfast hours, likely due to operational hours, as many independent branches open after 9 AM, and those within shopping malls typically open after 10 AM. In the same context in Indonesia, Wiastuti et al. (2024) found that customers predominantly order from coffee shops via mobile apps during dinner time. Thus, we can imply that visiting coffee shops occurred mostly during the evening, while ordering online took place frequently at night.

The third question inquired about the average amount of money they typically spend at the coffee shop. Nearly half of the participants reported spending between 1.6 and 3.3 USD (49.7%, $n = 75$) during a single visit to the coffee establishment. This is followed by 27.2 % ($n = 41$) willing to spend between 3.3 and 5 USD, while only 7.9 % ($n = 12$) were inclined to spend over 5 USD, with 15.2 % ($n = 23$) preferring to spend less than 1.6 USD. To provide context on prices in Indonesia, as of July 2022, based on the currency of 1USD = IDR14,815, an iced cappuccino at Starbucks is priced at 3.2 USD (small), 3.5 USD (medium), and 3.6 USD (large).

The fourth question asked who they usually visit the coffee shop with. Most of the participants said they were primarily accompanied by friends (53.6%), followed by couples (16.6%), family members (9.9%), colleagues (3.3%), and the remainder visited alone. The final question asked participants to name their favourite coffee shop brand. The results were similar to the first question but differed in ranking. Starbucks was the most popular choice at 56.3%, followed by Kopi Kenangan in second place (19.8%), and Janji Jiwa in third (11.9%). The later questions in the third section of the questionnaire asked respondents to answer based on their favourite coffee shop brand.

Measurement Model

The initial phase of SEM analysis using SmartPLS involves evaluating the measurement model to assess the validity and reliability of the items (Table 1). The Composite Reliability (CR) values for all constructs meet the recommended threshold of at least 0.7 (Hair & Alamer, 2022): 0.902 for Brand Identification (BI), 0.917 for Self-Congruity (SC), 0.943 for Service Value (SV), 0.920 for Customer Involvement (CI), and 0.619 for Brand Loyalty (BL). Further, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs also adhere to the minimum guideline of 0.5 (Hair & Alamer, 2022), with values

Table 1 Measurement Items, Convergent Validity and Reliability

Measurement Items		LF	CA	CR	AVE
Brand Identification (BI)			0.855	0.902	0.697
BI1	I feel proud when others compliment this coffee shop	0.820			
BI2	I would be sad if I had to stop going to this coffee shop	0.838			
BI3	I receive appreciation due to my choice of this coffee shop	0.853			
BI4	I am a good partner with this coffee shop	0.827			
Self-Congruity (SC)			0.879	0.917	0.734
SC1	I see similarities in values between myself and other customers at this coffee shop	0.868			
SC2	The atmosphere of this coffee shop reflects who I am	0.865			
SC3	I see similarities in taste according to what people see from me and other customers at this coffee shop	0.857			
SC4	I feel like I share a similar taste with other customers at this coffee shop	0.836			
Service Value (SV)			0.880	0.943	0.893
SV1	This coffee shop offers a very reasonable price for its beverage products	0.942			
SV2	This coffee shop gives good value for money	0.948			
Customer Involvement (CI)			0.826	0.920	0.852
CI1	I have a great interest in this coffee shop	0.924			
CI2	This coffee shop is very important to me	0.922			
CI3*	This is my favourite coffee shop*	–			
Brand Loyalty (BL)			0.897	0.919	0.619
BL1	This coffee shop is my first choice and priority in terms of a similar concept	0.804			
BL2	I will choose this coffee shop if I want to have a coffee	0.765			
BL3	I am willing to try the new menu that this coffee shop offers	–			
BL4	I am willing to pay more in this coffee shop compared to other places	0.786			
BL5	I will recommend this coffee shop to others who need advice or suggestions	0.753			
BL6	I will give positive word-of-mouth about this coffee shop	0.839			
BL7	I know this coffee shop well	0.767			
BL8	Overall, I like this coffee shop	0.789			

Table 2 Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

	Brand Identification	Customer Involvement	Brand Loyalty	Self-Congruity	Service Value
Brand Identification	0.835				
Customer Involvement	0.719	0.923			
Brand Loyalty	0.694	0.749	0.786		
Self-Congruity	0.684	0.747	0.701	0.857	
Service Value	0.480	0.568	0.695	0.535	0.945

of 0.697 for BI, 0.734 for SC, 0.893 for SV, 0.852 for CI, and 0.619 for BL.

However, two items, CI3 (0.014) and BL3 (0.7), were identified to have loading values below the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.7 and were subsequently removed from the model and excluded from further analysis. According to Hair et al. (2014), removing certain items is acceptable only if increasing construct reliability of CR or AVE before and after removal, which was met in this study (AVE CI 0.568 to 0.852, AVE BL 0.589 to 0.619). Also, the deletion of items must not exceed 20 % (Memon et al., 2017). In this study, we adhered to that guideline by deleting 2 out of 21 items, which equals 9.5%. Consequently, the CI construct was reduced from three to two items, and the BL construct from eight to seven items, leaving 19 items in total.

Further, Table 2 presents discriminant validity using Fornell-Larcker, which shows the value of the AVE square root of each construct on the diagonal is greater than the value for inter-construct correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In addition, the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) of correlation is also assessed, with all the values less than 0.90 as the liberal cut-off (Hair & Alamer, 2022), justifying acceptable discriminant validity. In summary, the outcomes of this initial step in the SEM analysis affirmed that the data are both valid and reliable, allowing progress to the next step of structural model evaluation and analysis.

Structural Model

To examine the direct effect relationships from the model, the guideline used is a p -value < 0.05 along with a t -value > 1.96 (Hair et al., 2017). As shown in Table 3, all direct relationships meet the established

guideline. The first direct effect related to H1 is validated with a value of $\beta = 0.353$; p -value = 0.000; t -value = 4.566, confirming that brand identification positively influences customer involvement. The second direct effect, H2, is affirmed with a value of $\beta = 0.179$; p -value = 0.007; t -value = 2.724, indicating that service value has a positive impact on customer involvement. These echo Kim and Lee's (2017) study among coffee shop customers in South Korea.

The third direct effect linked to H3 is supported by a value of $\beta = 0.410$; p -value = 0.000; t -value = 5.149, confirming that self-congruity positively affects customer involvement. Hence, higher self-congruity results in higher customer involvement. Su and Reynolds's (2017) study in the hotel industry in the United States supports this notion, stating that self-congruity has an important role in determining customer attitude toward brand. Liu et al. (2025) also posit how international tourists' self-congruity impacts their positive word of mouth towards five culinary cities in China.

The fourth direct effect, H4 is substantiated with a value of $\beta = 0.749$; p -value = 0.000; t -value = 19.160, demonstrating that customer involvement has a positive effect on brand loyalty. Thus, higher customer involvement results in higher loyalty to the coffee shop brand, aligning with the study of Kim and Lee (2017). The same notion has also been empirically tested in diverse industries, resulting in the same results, such as among the packaged goods industry in Jordan (Altarifi, 2021), baby milk products in Indonesia (Albert et al., 2022) and manufacturing products in Turkey (Khan et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, all indirect effects (see Table 3) presented a t -value greater than 1.96 and a p -value less than

Table 3 Hypotheses Results

Hypotheses	B	t- Value	p- Value	Result
Direct effects				
H1 Brand Identification → Customer Involvement	0.353	0.000	4.566	Supported
H2 Service Value → Customer Involvement	0.179	0.007	2.724	Supported
H3 Self-Congruity → Customer Involvement	0.410	0.000	5.149	Supported
H4 Customer Involvement → Brand Loyalty	0.749	0.000	19.160	Supported
Indirect effects				
H5 Brand Identification → Customer Involvement → Brand Loyalty	0.264	0.000	4.370	Supported
H6 Service Value → Customer Involvement → Brand Loyalty	0.134	0.008	2.670	Supported
H7 Self-Congruity → Customer Involvement → Brand Loyalty	0.307	0.000	4.804	Supported

0.05. This indicates that customer involvement serves as a significant mediator between brand identification, service value, self-congruity, and brand loyalty. The first indirect effect related to H5 is validated with a value of $\beta = 0.264$; p -value = 0.000; t -value = 4.370. This posits that customer involvement significantly mediates the relationship between brand identification and brand loyalty. The second indirect effect corresponding to H6 is confirmed with a value of $\beta = 0.134$; p -value = 0.009; t -value = 2.670. This indicates that customer involvement plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between service value and brand loyalty. The third indirect effect associated with H7 is affirmed with a value of $\beta = 0.307$; p -value = 0.009; t -value = 4.804. This confirms that customer involvement serves as a significant mediator in the relationship between self-congruity and brand loyalty. To sum, H5 to H7 are accepted, suggesting customer involvement has been shown to provide partial mediation within the model, echoing Rather and Camilleri (2019) among hotel customers in India.

In addition, according to Hair et al. (2014) the coefficient of determination of R-squared (R^2) in SEM analysis indicates the extent to which the variation in the dependent variable can be accounted for by all independent variables, with the rule of thumb being 0.75 (substantial), 0.50 (moderate), and 0.25 (weak). The R^2 value for customer involvement is 0.662 (mod-

erate-to-high explanatory power), suggesting that customer involvement could be influenced by 66.2 % from brand identification, self-congruity, and service value collectively. The R^2 value for brand loyalty is slightly different at 0.561 (moderate explanatory power), indicating that brand loyalty could be influenced by 56.1 % from customer involvement, brand identification, self-congruity, and service value when considered together.

Further, the f-squared effect size (f^2) in SEM analysis measures the impact of the predictor variable on the dependent variable, with commonly accepted thresholds of > 0.02 (small), > 0.15 (medium), and > 0.35 (large) (Hair et al., 2014). The f^2 values for brand identification and self-congruity are 0.189 and 0.237, respectively, which demonstrate a medium effect on customer involvement. Conversely, the f^2 value for service value is 0.065, indicating that service value has a small effect on customer involvement. Additionally, customer involvement has an exceptionally large effect on brand loyalty, evidenced by a value of 1.279.

Table 4 presents the results of the path relationships based on gender: male and female. In doing so, we conducted a separate analysis by splitting the data (Hair et al., 2014, 22; Keil et al., 2000) into two datasets: one for males ($n = 63$) and one for females ($n = 88$). The objective is not to test statistical implications of whether the parameter differs from zero (Hair et

Table 4 Hypotheses Result Based on Gender

Relationship		Male			Female		
		β	<i>p-value</i>	<i>t-value</i>	β	<i>p-value</i>	<i>t-value</i>
Direct Effects							
H1	Brand Identification → Customer Involvement	0.380	3.235	0.001	0.346	3.275	0.001
H2	Service Value → Customer Involvement	0.177	1.743	0.082	0.177	2.166	0.031
H3	Self-Congruity → Customer Involvement	0.359	2.498	0.013	0.436	5.058	0.000
H4	Customer Involvement → Brand Loyalty	0.680	8.806	0.000	0.799	20.942	0.000
Indirect Effects							
H5	Brand Identification → Customer Involvement → Brand Loyalty	0.258	3.119	0.002	0.277	3.120	0.002
H6	Service Value → Customer Involvement → Brand Loyalty	0.120	1.661	0.097	0.141	2.144	0.033
H7	Self-Congruity → Customer Involvement → Brand Loyalty	0.244	2.145	0.032	0.349	4.976	0.000

al., 2014, 22), but instead, to assess the value that is specific to only males or females. The results indicate that all path relationships for females are significant. In contrast, two relationships for males ($SV \rightarrow CI$; $SV \rightarrow CI \rightarrow BL$) were found to be non-significant, as suggested by the *p*-value exceeding the threshold of < 0.05 . This indicates that customer involvement does not serve as a significant mediator between service value and brand loyalty for male customers, and service value does not significantly affect customer involvement. In short, all paths are significant for females, whereas service value towards involvement (and its indirect path to loyalty) is not significant for males.

In addition, the R^2 value of customer involvement for males is 0.589 (moderate explanatory power), while for females it is 0.714 (high explanatory power). This suggests customer involvement could be 58.9 % (male) or 71.4 % (female) influenced simultaneously by brand identification, self-congruity, and service value. Meanwhile, the R^2 value of brand loyalty for males is 0.462 (moderate) and for females is 0.636 (moderate). Thus, brand loyalty could be 46.2 % (male) or 63.6 % (female) influenced simultaneously by customer involvement, brand identification, self-congruity, and service value. Further, the f^2 values

of BI, SC, and SV for male customers are 0.198 (medium), 0.160 (medium), and 0.060 (small), respectively, while for female customers, f^2 values of BI, SC, and SV are 0.199 (medium), 0.301 (medium), and 0.065 (small), which demonstrate a small to medium effect on customer involvement. Further, customer involvement has an exceptionally large effect on brand loyalty for both male (0.859) and female customers (1.764).

Apart from the path relationship, our study found that male and female customers show different responses to the measurement items. For instance, male customers know their favourite coffee shop better than female customers, despite the latter showing a higher interest in the coffee shop business. However, female customers show slightly higher loyalty to their coffee shop brand through positive word-of-mouth, compared with their male counterparts. Also, the tendency for female customers to visit their favourite coffee shop when they want to have a coffee is higher than that of male customers. Moreover, female customers feel more proud than male customers when others give compliments to their favourite coffee shop. Male customers also feel that coffee shops provide less value for money and less reasonable prices than female customers. In essence, these item-level differences

between male and female customers on coffee shops may lead to practical implications (e.g. segmentation and communication strategy) that are elaborated further in the next section.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study explores the mediating role of customer involvement between brand identification, self-congruity, and service value on the brand loyalty of coffee shops in an Indonesian setting. Self-congruity turns out to have the most effect on customer involvement, followed by brand identification and service value. This suggests that when customers have a positive psychological connection to their favourite coffee shop brand, they are more inclined to engage deeply with the brand. While self-congruity is closely linked to an individual self-concept (Sirgy et al., 2018), coffee shops are seen as embodying brand concepts that resonate with them. Ultimately, customers may perceive their values as aligned with those of their favourite coffee shop, which later influences their loyalty to the brand (Kim & Lee, 2017). Conversely, it is noteworthy that the service value has a surprisingly minimal effect on customer involvement. This suggests that a customer's interest in the coffee shop is not significantly influenced by the value it offers. Consequently, even if a coffee shop provides excellent value for money, this does not necessarily translate into increased customer engagement.

Relatedly, this study found that brand identification can serve as a predictor of customer involvement, albeit with a medium effect size. This suggests that the more customers align with the coffee shop's brand image and view it as a partner, the more likely they are to put their interest in and recognise the significance of that brand. However, it is important to note that this study requires respondents to link their answers to a specific coffee shop brand they favour the most. For example, when customers in this study express positive involvement due to their identification with Starbucks, their level of involvement may differ if they were to write for another coffee shop brand. Customer behaviour toward Brand A may differ (or possibly be similar) when they are exposed to Brand B. In other words, if a different brand is chosen, the results may

perhaps vary. In short, different brands may lead to different impacts. This variation occurs because brand identification is intrinsic to each specific brand (Tahir et al., 2024). Whilst the constructs in this study are strongly related to the specific brands customers have mentioned, the results related to brand identification should be interpreted with caution. Unlike Osmano-va et al.'s (2023) study, which focuses on one specific coffee brand (Starbucks, in the setting of Turkey), this present study covers more than 10 coffee shop brands, with Starbucks, Janji Jiwa, and Kopi Kenangan being the top three most frequently mentioned. This suggests that customer identification with these brands is unique and should not be generalised.

Likewise, increased customer involvement correlates with enhanced coffee shop brand loyalty. This implies that the more interest customers exhibit in a coffee shop, the greater their likelihood of recommending the brand and sharing positive word-of-mouth with others (Fetais et al., 2022). The more customers feel that the brand is important to them, the more they are willing to pay, visit again in the future, and make the brand a top priority. In essence, the customer will likely be loyal to the brand if they are inherently involved. In today's market, the competition among coffee shop businesses in Indonesia is fierce (Wiastuti et al., 2024), and customer loyalty has become increasingly important. Younger customers, for instance, are more inclined to switch brands with ease. This trend is further reinforced by the rapid advancement of technology and social media, which enables customers to conduct prior research Nayak and Bhinder (2024) before deciding which coffee shop to go to. Customers can easily explore promotions and discounts at the outset, including reading reviews from diverse coffee shop brands, allowing for effective comparisons.

This research offers several theoretical contributions. First, the survey design effectively captured respondents' favourite coffee shop brands, unlike other studies that do not link respondents' brand preferences. Therefore, the findings reflect actual behaviour related to specific brands. Second, the study confirms that brand identification, self-congruity, and service value positively influence customer involvement,

which, in turn, enhances brand loyalty. However, it also reveals that service value has the least effect on customer involvement, a finding that may be particularly unique in the context of coffee shops and in-store experiences. Lastly, we extend the framework by examining male and female customers. Consequently, this study has identified important areas for further exploration and contributed to the body of knowledge in hospitality marketing. Consequently, this current study has recognised understudied areas while making a minor contribution to the understanding of marketing in the hospitality sector.

Practical Implications

This research offers several recommendations for food and beverage establishments, particularly those operating under a coffee shop concept, whether they are international or local brands, but specifically those that offer dining space. To enhance customer involvement, a strategic programme should be implemented that provides various perks and benefits for customers who interact with the brand on social media. While younger generations such as Gen Z and Millennials are generally familiar with social media, older generations like Gen X and Baby Boomers may find it challenging. Therefore, it is essential to create a balanced approach that integrates both online and in-store experiences, catering to those customers who prefer in-person interactions.

Additionally, to foster brand loyalty, coffee shops must prioritise their pricing strategies, as customers are often reluctant to make purchases when prices are increased. Nonetheless, many customers remain willing to recommend the brand to others. Given the intense competition within the coffee shop sector, in Indonesia, for instance, coffee shops need to cultivate a competitive advantage to distinguish their brand from others. This requires a commitment to innovation across various dimensions, including product, service, technology, and promotional strategies, as well as overall brand innovation.

Lastly, coffee shop customer vary based on gender. Male customers typically recommend the brand primarily to individuals who seek advice, while female customers tend to engage in more positive word-of-

mouth than their male counterparts. Furthermore, female customers are often more attuned to how the coffee shop's atmosphere reflects their personal identity. As a result, coffee shops should prioritise creating a welcoming and comfortable environment, one that fosters feelings of safety and security, to attract more female customers. Coffee shops must look for innovative approaches and strategy in managing ratings and reviews across various online platforms, including social media and food review sites. This approach is expected to enhance brand awareness and generate positive feedback, which in turn may influence prospective customers.

Limitations and Future Research

This study does have certain limitations. Firstly, it examines a coffee shop from a general perspective without delving into specific business characteristics. These characteristics should be taken into account in future research, as they would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of customer behaviour across different types of establishments. For example, there are both national and international coffee brands in Indonesia, and it would be insightful to determine whether the country of origin of a coffee shop yields varying results. Furthermore, some coffee shops offer spacious and comfortable seating areas, while others have limited options, which can be attributed to differing business models focused on delivery, takeout, or the dining experience. Many local coffee shops in Indonesia often operate from smaller spaces, primarily facilitating takeaway or delivery through various food delivery applications. This presents an opportunity for further investigation into whether distinct coffee shop business models lead to different customer outcomes. Consequently, several research questions arise: Do customers demonstrate greater loyalty to coffee shops with inviting atmospheres compared to those with limited seating? Additionally, is there a positive and significant correlation between the perceived service value of coffee shops and customer involvement across both business models?

Second, this research applies only to online surveys as a data collection method. The data was distributed in the second quarter of 2022, meaning that the

COVID-19 protocol and social distancing throughout Indonesia, especially in Jakarta as the capital city, was still applied. Thus, conducting on-site or face-to-face surveys became the main obstacle, not to mention that people were still avoiding holding pens or paper given by others, to prevent cross-contamination of a virus. The findings of this study should not be generalised, as the sample is non-probabilistic and not gender representative. Only in mid-2023 did the Indonesian government start to ease the COVID-19 rules by eliminating social distancing in most restaurant premises, including coffee shops. Therefore, further research should consider surveying the coffee shop premises on a face-to-face basis to obtain respondents according to the sampling criteria.

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Factors Influencing Electronic Word of Mouth from Generation Z Tourists at The Pandawa Beach Kecak Dance Attraction

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Generation Z, known for active use of smartphones to document and share travel experiences, is the primary focus of this research. This study aimed to analyse the influence of destination perceived quality on electronic word of mouth (ewom) in the Kecak Dance attraction at Pandawa Beach, considering the role of tourist involvement and memorable tourism experiences (MTE). This study employed a quantitative survey involving 133 respondents. Data analysis used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to examine the relationships between variables, including destination perceived quality, tourist involvement, MTE, and ewom. The results indicated that destination perceived quality significantly influenced tourist involvement and ewom positively, but did not directly impact MTE. Tourist involvement was found to significantly influence both MTE and ewom. Furthermore, tourist involvement demonstrated a mediating role in the relationship between destination perceived quality and ewom, while the mediating role involving MTE was not supported. In addition, MTE did not have a significant effect on ewom. This study offers novel insights into Generation Z tourists by examining the interplay between destination quality, tourist involvement, and ewom. It highlights the pivotal mediating role of involvement and provides practical implications for enhancing digital engagement through memorable and participatory tourism experiences.

Keywords: destination perceived quality, tourist involvement, memorable tourism experiences, electronic word of mouth, Generation Z



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Introduction

Tourism is a continuously evolving sector, driven by advancements in digital technology that enable travellers to share their experiences online through various social media platforms. One phenomenon that has significantly shaped the image of tourist destinations is electronic word of mouth (ewom). It refers to information dissemination or reviews from tourists to

potential travellers in digital form, including reviews, social media posts, and other experience-sharing platforms (Laksmi et al. 2024). The factors influencing ewom in the tourism context remain a compelling research subject, particularly in understanding the role of tourist involvement and memorable tourism experiences in shaping the intensity of digital information-sharing.

As digital natives, Generation Z tends to prioritize documenting and sharing their travel experiences. They are not only consumers of information but also active content creators on various digital platforms (Shekhar & Valeri, 2024). One form of cultural tourism that captures their interest is the Kecak Dance attraction at Pandawa Beach, which offers an interactive experience where tourists can actively participate in the performance. However, how such experiences contribute to the intensity of ewom remains an important question that requires deeper investigation.

Several studies have highlighted the role of ewom in the tourism industry. Trends in ewom in tourism have increased over the past five years, particularly in experience-based destinations such as glamping and cultural attractions, according to a study by Pratiwi et al. (2025). Other research has emphasized that tourists' emotional involvement in a travel experience significantly enhances their likelihood of sharing their experiences through ewom (Nanggong & Mohammad, 2020). Additionally, a study identified that destination perceived quality plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' decisions to recommend a destination via digital platforms (Wang et al., 2017).

Furthermore, ewom significantly impacts tourists' purchase intentions, particularly in developing tourism industries (Jyoti et al., 2026). Torres-Pruñonosa et al. (2024) also underscored the importance of destination images shaped by user-generated content (UGC) shared by tourists on social media, demonstrating that UGC plays a crucial role in enhancing a destination's attractiveness. Moreover, Ghonim and Awad (2024) highlighted how digital marketing strategies can increase tourist engagement and optimize ewom. Their findings align with Sartika et al. (2025), who demonstrated that tourist engagement in social media has a strong correlation with memorable tourism experiences. Additionally, Tripathy et al. (2024) found that tourist satisfaction with a destination depends on perceived quality and the extent to which they can share their experiences with others.

Despite these advancements, only a limited number of studies have directly examined which factor, between tourist involvement and memorable tourism experiences (MTE), plays a more dominant role

in driving ewom, particularly among Generation Z, who exhibit distinct digital-sharing behaviours. Existing research often treats involvement and MTE as parallel predictors without critically testing their relative importance, leaving a theoretical gap in understanding which construct more strongly motivates ewom among digital natives. Given Gen Z's identity as experience-seeking and highly expressive travelers, clarifying whether involvement or MTE serves as the stronger driver of ewom becomes essential for advancing theory and informing practice.

Considering these findings, this study aims to analyse how destination perceived quality contributes to ewom through tourist involvement and memorable tourism experiences. Using a quantitative approach with Structural Equation Modelling, this research seeks to provide deeper insights into the factors that encourage tourists to share their experiences digitally. By explicitly positioning the study as a comparative test of the strength of involvement versus MTE in predicting Gen Z ewom, this research sharpens the theoretical contribution and addresses a key gap in the current literature. The study's results will contribute theoretically to understanding the relationship between tourism experiences and ewom and offer practical insights for destination managers in designing experience-based marketing strategies. Hence, this research can support the development of a more experience-driven and digital-oriented tourism industry, attracting more visitors and enhancing the competitiveness of destinations in the digital age.

Literature Review

The Construct of Destination Perceived Quality (DPQ)

DPQ refers to how tourists evaluate a destination based on key elements such as natural attractions, infrastructure, cleanliness, facilities, and cultural experiences (Tripathy et al., 2024). Indicators of DPQ (4 items) were adapted from (Parasuraman et al., 1988): Natural Attraction Quality, Cultural Attractions Quality, Tourism Facilities Quality and Cleanliness, and Environmental Sustainability. Natural environment quality refers to tourists' evaluations of the destination's natural beauty, authenticity, and overall

comfort. Cultural attraction quality reflects tourists' evaluations of the richness, authenticity, and overall appeal of the artistic elements presented at the destination. Tourism facilities quality reflects tourists' assessments of the completeness, convenience, and comfort of the services and infrastructure provided at the destination. Cleanliness and environmental sustainability describe tourists' perceptions of the destination's cleanliness and the visible efforts taken to protect and sustain the environment.

- H1 *Destination Perceived Quality positively influences Tourist Involvement.*
- H2 *Destination Perceived Quality positively influences Memorable Tourism Experiences.*
- H3 *Destination Perceived Quality positively influences Electronic Word of Mouth.*
- H7 *Destination Perceived Quality positively influences ewom through Tourist Involvement.*
- H8 *Destination Perceived Quality positively influences MTE through Tourist Involvement.*

Tourist Involvement

Tourist involvement refers to the active participation of tourists in their travel experiences, including emotional engagement and decision-making during their journey (Li et al., 2024). Indicators of Tourist Involvement were adapted from (Zaichkowsky, 1985) (5 items): Personal Relevance, Interest and Enthusiasm, Emotional Involvement, Willingness to Participate, and Decision-Making Involvement. Personal relevance reflects the extent to which the destination or its activities are meaningful to the tourist; interest and enthusiasm capture the tourist's curiosity, excitement, and motivation during the experience; emotional involvement refers to the depth of feelings or emotional engagement experienced throughout the visit; willingness to participate indicates the tourist's readiness to engage in the activities offered; and decision-making involvement represents the extent to which tourists actively contribute to choices and decisions made during the visit.

- H4 *Tourist Involvement positively influences Memorable Tourism Experiences.*

- H5 *Tourist Involvement positively influences Electronic Word of Mouth.*

- H9 *Tourist Involvement positively influences EWOM through MTE.*

Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE)

MTE refers to unique and profound experiences that leave a lasting impression on tourists and increase their likelihood of revisiting or sharing their experiences (Torres-Pruñonosa et al., 2024). Indicators of MTE (7 items) were adapted from (Nanggong & Mohammad, 2020) – hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge acquisition – as core components that shape memorability. Hedonism reflects the extent to which tourists experience pleasure, enjoyment, and sensory gratification during their visit. Novelty captures feelings of encountering something new, unique, or different from everyday life. Local culture refers to tourists' perceptions of authentic cultural encounters, including traditions, customs, and interactions with local communities. Refreshment represents the sense of psychological renewal, relaxation, or escape from routine that the destination provides. Meaningfulness denotes the degree to which the experience feels personally valuable, purposeful, or reflective. Involvement indicates the level of cognitive and emotional engagement a tourist has during activities at the destination. Lastly, knowledge acquisition measures the extent to which tourists feel they have learned new information, insights, or skills as a result of their visit.

- H6 *Memorable Tourism Experiences positively influence Electronic Word of Mouth.*

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

ewom is a form of digital communication where tourists share their experiences through social media, online reviews, or community forums (Li et al., 2024). Indicators of ewom (3 items) were measured based on (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004): the amount of shared information, intention to share experiences, and quality of shared information. The quantity of shared information refers to how much content tourists shared about their visit, including posts, photos, videos, or

Table 1 Measurement Items Used in the Study

Construct	Code	Dimension/ Indicator	Measurement Item	Validity and Reliability Result
Destination Perceived Quality (DPQ)	DPQ1	Natural Attrac- tion Quality	The natural scenery at Pandawa Beach is beautiful and visually appealing.	The instrument is both valid and reliable (Cronbach's alpha: 0.815).
	DPQ2	Cultural Attrac- tion Quality	The Kecak dance performance at Pandawa Beach is capti- vating and enjoyable to watch.	
	DPQ3	Tourism Facili- ties Quality	In my opinion, the quality of tourism facilities at the Kecak Dance performance site at Pandawa Beach is com- plete and very good.	
	DPQ4	Cleanliness and Environmental Sustainability	I feel that the natural environment at this destination is well preserved and reflects the principles of sustainable tourism.	
Tourist Involvement (TI)	TI1	Personal Rele- vance	The Kecak dance performance at Pandawa Beach meets my personal travel needs.	The instrument is both valid and reliable (Cronbach's alpha: 0.788).
	TI2	Interest and Enthusiasm	I was highly interested and enthusiastic to follow the Ke- cak dance performance at Pandawa Beach until the end.	
	TI3	Emotional Involvement	I experienced a distinct sense of enjoyment while watch- ing the Kecak dance performance at Pandawa Beach.	
	TI4	Willingness to Participate	I participated in the invitation to dance together in the Kecak performance at Pandawa Beach.	
	TI5	Decision-Mak- ing Involvement	My involvement in dancing with the performers at Pan- dawa Beach enhanced my personal satisfaction.	
Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE)	MTE1	Hedonism	I was highly impressed by the Kecak Dance performance at Pandawa Beach.	The instrument is both valid and reliable (Cronbach's alpha: 0.777).
	MTE2	Novelty	The Kecak dance performance at Pandawa Beach offered a unique experience compared to similar performances elsewhere.	
	MTE3	Local Culture	I was able to perceive the uniqueness of local culture through the Kecak dance performance at Pandawa Beach.	
	MTE4	Refreshment	I felt mentally refreshed after attending the Kecak dance performance at Pandawa Beach.	
	MTE5	Meaningfulness	The Kecak dance performance at Pandawa Beach provided me with a meaningful and distinctive travel experience.	
	MTE6	Involvement	I was actively engaged throughout the entire Kecak dance performance at Pandawa Beach.	
	MTE7	Knowledge Acquisition	I gained new knowledge during my visit to the Kecak dance performance at Pandawa Beach.	
Electronic Word of Mouth (ewom)	EWOM1	Quantity of Information	Many internet users share their experiences related to the Kecak dance performance at Pandawa Beach.	The instrument is both valid and reliable (Cronbach's alpha: 0.836).
	EWOM2	Intention to Share	I shared my experience watching the Kecak Dance attrac- tion on social media.	
	EWOM3	Quality of Information	Online reviews provide an accurate representation of the appealing experiences associated with the Kecak dance performance at Pandawa Beach.	

comments. Intention to share captures the tourists' motivation and willingness to continue sharing their experiences with others in the future. Perceived information quality reflects tourists' judgments of how useful, clear, accurate, and trustworthy the content they shared was.

Methods

Study Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using a survey method. Data was collected through questionnaires distributed to tourists who attended the Kecak Dance performance at Pandawa Beach to measure the relationships between Destination Perceived Quality, Tourist Involvement, MTE, and ewom.

Sample and Sampling Technique

This study was conducted at Pandawa Beach, Bali, one of the most popular tourist destinations, with its main attraction being the Kecak Dance performance. The researchers selected Pandawa Beach for its rich cultural interactions and memorable tourism experiences, especially appealing to Generation Z tourists who actively share their travel moments on social media. Additionally, the interactive nature of the performance, where audiences were involved in the show, made it an interesting subject for research about tourist involvement and Electronic Word of Mouth (ewom).

Since the exact number of Gen Z visitors during the study period is not officially recorded, purposive sampling was employed with three mandatory criteria: (a) Generation Z tourists who attended the Kecak Dance performance at Pandawa Beach, (b) tourists who used smartphones to document and share their experiences on social media, and (c) tourists who were willing to complete the questionnaire in full. The data were collected from visitors between August 2024 and March 2025, resulting in a final sample of 133 Generation Z tourists who met all eligibility criteria. Based on the 19 indicators used in the study, the minimum required sample size ($5 \times$ number of indicators) was 95 respondents. Thus, the 133 respondents met the sample adequacy standards for further analysis.

Instruments and Variable Measurement

The research instrument was a closed-ended questionnaire using a five-point Likert-type agreement scale to measure all constructs (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). This agreement-based response format was employed to capture respondents' self-reported perceptions, evaluations, and self-assessed involvement in their tourism experiences, rather than direct measures of behavioural frequency or intensity. Although some statements refer to participation or experiential intensity (e.g. being impressed or participating in a dance invitation), the measurement approach was designed to reflect perceived engagement rather than objectively verified behaviour or precise frequency of participation. The complete set of measurement items used in this study is presented in Table 1.

Construct validity and reliability were assessed using standardized factor loadings, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Factor loadings above 0.50 indicate acceptable item reliability, while CR values exceeding 0.70 suggest good internal consistency. Convergent validity is generally supported when AVE values are above 0.50.

Data Analysis

Data analysis used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with AMOS software. This study utilized SEM to test causal relationships between variables and to measure the extent to which independent variables influence dependent variables. The data analysis involved the following steps:

- Goodness of Fit Test: To assess whether the research model fits the collected data.
- Validity and Reliability Testing: Factor loading values were analysed to ensure that all questionnaire indicators were valid and reliable.
- Hypothesis Testing with SEM: Relationships between variables were tested based on Standardized Regression Weights, Critical Ratios (C.R.), and p-values.
- Mediation testing (Sobel test) was used to determine tourist involvement and memorable tourism

Table 2 Goodness of Fit Test Results

Goodness of Fit Index	Cut of Value	Result	Evaluation
χ^2 Chi-Square	χ^2 dengan df;146; p:5%= 181.344	182,447	Marginal
Significance probability	≥ 0.05	0.022	Marginal
CMIN/DF	≤ 2.00	1.250	Good
RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.043	Good
TLI	≥ 0.90	0.966	Good
NFI	≥ 0.90	0.873	Marginal
PNFI	$0.60 \leq \text{PNFI} \leq 0.90$	0.745	Good

experiences that acted as mediating variables between Destination Perceived Quality and ewom.

The Sobel test was deemed appropriate because the sample size ($n = 133$) falls within the moderate category, in which the assumptions of normality for path coefficients are generally achieved. Given the linear and non-complex structure of the mediation model, the Sobel test provides an adequate estimation of the indirect effect, as supported by classical mediation literature (MacKinnon et al. 2002).

Based on the Goodness of Fit test, several indicators, such as Chi-square Minimum Discrepancy (CMIN)/degree of freedom (DF), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), and Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI), met acceptable thresholds. Chi-Square, Significance Probability, and NFI fell into the marginal category.

Additionally, the validity and reliability test results confirmed that all indicators had factor loading values above 0.500, signifying that the research instrument was reliable and valid.

Results

The findings reported in this study are based on respondents' self-reported agreement with the survey statements. Accordingly, the results reflect Destination Perceived Quality, Tourist Involvement, Memorable Tourism Experiences, and Electronic Word of Mouth intentions, rather than direct measurements of behavioural frequency, intensity, or objectively observed actions.

Goodness of Fit Test

Table 2 presents the Goodness of Fit test results, which evaluate the compatibility of the research model with the collected data. The study showed that several indicators, such as CMIN/DF, RMSEA, TLI, and PNFI, demonstrated a well-fitting model, while Chi-Square, Significance Probability, and Normed Fit Index (NFI) remain in the marginal category. Although three indices (Chi-Square, Significance Probability, and NFI) fell within the marginal category, the overall model fit remains acceptable given SEM's sensitivity to sample size and model complexity. Fit indices such as CMIN/DF (1.250) and RMSEA (0.043) are considered more robust indicators and fall well within recommended thresholds. Therefore, the combination of strong absolute and incremental indices supports the adequacy of the proposed model.

Indicator Validity and Reliability Test Results

Convergent Validity and Reliability

Convergent validity was evaluated using standardized factor loadings, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Factor loadings were used to assess the quality of each indicator in measuring its corresponding latent construct. In reflective measurement models, indicators do not exert a causal influence on the construct; rather, they serve as observable manifestations of the underlying latent variable. Therefore, higher loading values indicate that an indicator more reliably reflects the construct, demonstrating stronger shared variance. In this study, all loading values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating that each indicator adequately rep-

Table 3 Factor Loading of the Variable

Indicator	Factor Loading
Destination Perceived Quality	
Natural Attraction Quality	0.985
Cultural Attractions Quality	0.515
Tourism Facilities Quality	0.526
Cleanliness and Environmental Sustainability	0.971
Tourist Involvement	
Personal Relevance	0.768
Interest and Enthusiasm	0.575
Emotional Involvement	0.595
Willingness to Participate	0.712
Decision-Making Involvement	0.595
Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE)	
Hedonism	0.585
Novelty	0.754
Local Culture	0.683
Refreshment	0.585
Meaningfulness	0.788
Involvement	0.559
Knowledge	0.641
Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM)	
Quantity	0.817
Intention to Share	0.675
Quality of Information	0.704

resents its respective latent construct. Table 3 presents the Factor Loading values for each research variable indicator.

a. Destination Perceived Quality

Destination perceived quality reflects tourists' overall assessment of a destination. The highest loading appears in Natural Attraction Quality (0.985), followed by Cleanliness and Environmental Sustainability (0.971), indicating that these two indicators best represent the construct. In contrast, Cultural Attractions Quality (0.515) and Tourism Facilities Quality (0.526) show weaker contributions, although they remain valid indicators within the model.

Taken together, these results reveal a clear disparity among indicators of Destination Perceived

Quality (DPQ). They suggest that Gen Z tourists place a stronger emphasis on natural scenery and environmental cleanliness when evaluating the site, while cultural and functional aspects are considered less central. This pattern implies that DPQ may consist of two underlying dimensions: a dominant natural–environmental dimension and a secondary cultural–functional dimension. Such tendencies are consistent with contemporary findings that Gen Z travellers prioritize visually appealing natural settings and sustainability, which closely align with social media–driven travel motivations.

b. Tourist Involvement

Tourist involvement reflects the degree to which tourists engage with and participate in destina-

Table 4 Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Construct	CR	AVE	Evaluation
Destination Perceived Quality	0.853	0.542	Acceptable
Tourist Involvement	0.781	0.408	CR is acceptable, while AVE is below the recommended threshold
Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE)	0.843	0.440	CR is acceptable, while AVE is below the recommended threshold
Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM)	0.777	0.552	Acceptable

tion activities. Personal Relevance shows the strongest loading (0.768), indicating that it is the most representative indicator of the latent construct. Willingness to Participate (0.712) also demonstrates strong alignment with the construct. Interest and Enthusiasm (0.575), Emotional Involvement (0.595), and Decision-Making Involvement (0.595) have moderate loadings, showing that they still contribute meaningfully as indicators but with relatively weaker reflection compared to other items. Together, these indicators collectively capture key dimensions of tourist involvement.

c. Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE)

Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE) reflect the extent to which tourism experiences leave a lasting impression on tourists. Meaningfulness demonstrates the highest loading (0.788), indicating that it is the strongest indicator representing the construct. Novelty (0.754) and Local Culture (0.683) also show strong reflections of the underlying construct. Hedonism (0.585), Refreshment (0.585), Involvement (0.559), and Knowledge (0.641) have moderate loading values, which indicates that they remain valid indicators but are less strongly aligned with the construct compared to the top-loading items. These results collectively show that meaningful, novel, and culturally infused experiences most strongly represent MTE.

d. Electronic Word of Mouth (ewom)

Electronic Word of Mouth (ewom) refers to tourists' online sharing of their experiences through

social media, blogs, and review platforms. Quantity has the highest loading (0.817), indicating that it is the strongest indicator reflecting ewom. Quality of Information (0.704) also shows a strong loading, meaning it reliably represents the construct. Intention to Share (0.675) has a slightly lower but still acceptable loading, indicating that although it contributes meaningfully, it is comparatively less representative of the construct. Collectively, these indicators provide a valid and reliable measure of ewom.

The Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (Table 4). The results indicate satisfactory internal consistency, with all CR values exceeding 0.70. However, two constructs showed AVE values below the recommended threshold of 0.50. According to previous methodological literature (Yalın-Uçar et al. 2024), convergent validity can still be considered adequate when CR values are above 0.60 despite AVE values below 0.50. These constructs were retained with caution.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity that was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion was generally acceptable (Table 5). The square roots of AVE for Destination Perceived Quality (0.736) and Electronic Word of Mouth

Table 5 Discriminant Validity (FornellLarcker Criterion)

Construct	DPQ	TI	MTE	EWOM
DPQ	0.736	0.593	0.619	0.709
TI	0.593	0.639	0.685	0.668
MTE	0.619	0.685	0.663	0.690
EWOM	0.709	0.668	0.690	0.743

Table 6 Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis		Standardized Regression Weight	C.R.	P	Result
Destination Perceived Quality	→ Tourist Involvement	0.602	6.241	0.000	Supported
Destination Perceived Quality	→ Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE)	0.156	1.652	0.098	Not Supported
Destination Perceived Quality	→ Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM)	0.265	3.187	0.001	Supported
Tourist Involvement	→ Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE)	0.750	5.275	0.000	Supported
Tourist Involvement	→ Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM)	0.439	2.413	0.016	Supported
Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE)	→ Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM)	0.323	1.864	0.062	Not Supported

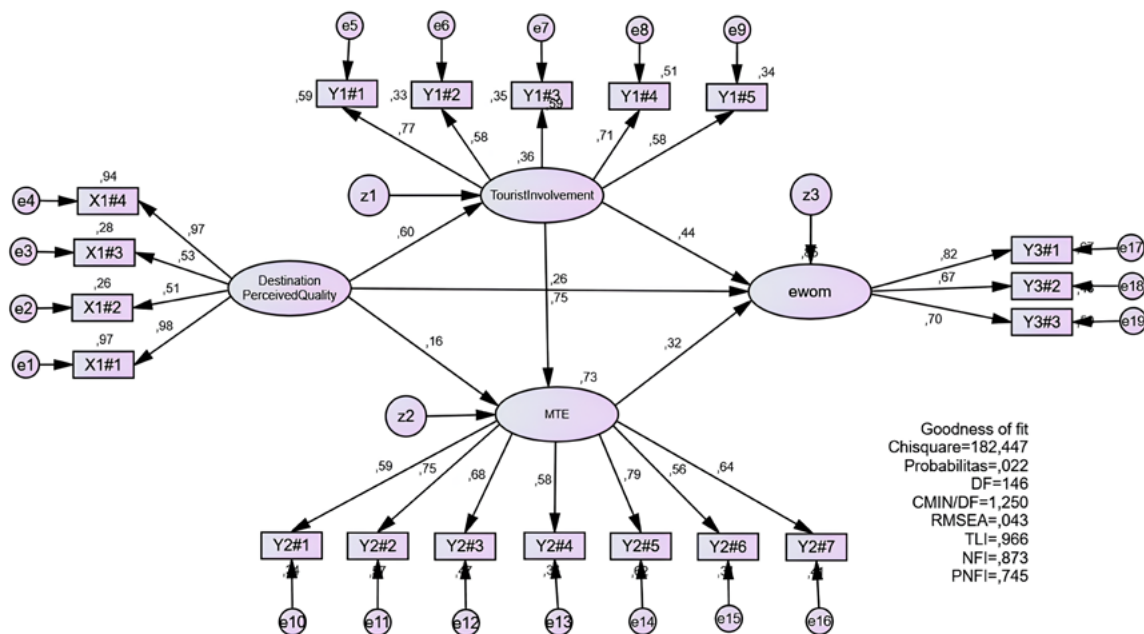


Figure 1 Structural Equation Model (SEM)

(0.743) exceeded their respective inter-construct correlations, indicating adequate discriminant validity. However, the square roots of AVE for Tourist Involvement (0.639) and Memorable Tourism Experiences (0.663) were lower than their correlation (0.685), suggesting partial conceptual overlap.

Hypothesis Testing Results Using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

The Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) results for hypothesis testing in this study are presented in Table 6 and Figure 1. From these results, the hypotheses supporting the relationship between Destination

Perceived Quality and Tourist Involvement, Tourist Involvement and Memorable Tourism Experiences, as well as ewom, were statistically supported. However, the relationship between Destination Perceived Quality and Memorable Tourism Experiences, as well as Memorable Tourism Experiences and ewom, was insignificant.

Mediation Test Results (Sobel Test)

The mediation test aimed to examine whether the mediating variable significantly influenced the relationship between the main variables. The Sobel test results (Table 7) showed that Tourist Involvement significantly mediated the effect of Destination Perceived Quality on Electronic Word of Mouth, with a t -value of 4.830 ($p = 0.000$), indicating a supported mediation. However, the mediation of Tourist Involvement in the relationship between Destination Perceived Quality and Memorable Tourism Experiences was not significant, as reflected by a t -value of 1.600 ($p = 0.1095$). Furthermore, the indirect effect of Tourist Involvement on Electronic Word of Mouth through Memorable Tourism Experiences yielded a t -value of 1.237 ($p = 0.215$), indicating that this mediation was not supported.

The Sobel test was used to assess mediation because the sample size of 133 meets the criteria for large-sample conditions under which the Sobel method performs reliably. Prior methodological literature (MacKinnon et al., 2002) indicates that Sobel's normality-based approximation is appropriate when sample sizes exceed 100, the measurement model is stable, and construct reliability is adequate. In this study, all constructs demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.77$ – 0.83), the SEM model exhibited good fit

(RMSEA = 0.043, CMIN/DF = 1.250), and no substantial deviations from normality were detected. These conditions collectively support the use of the Sobel test as a theoretically and statistically justified approach in this context. Although bootstrapping is generally preferred in contemporary research, the assumptions required for Sobel were adequately met in this dataset.

Hypothesis Testing Results

The structural model assessment showed mixed results across the proposed hypotheses. Destination Perceived Quality had a significant positive effect on Tourist Involvement ($\beta = 0.602$, C.R. = 6.241, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher destination quality substantially increases tourists' engagement during the visit. Destination Perceived Quality also demonstrated a significant direct effect on Electronic Word of Mouth (ewom) ($\beta = 0.265$, C.R. = 3.187, $p = 0.001$), suggesting that well-perceived destination attributes encourage tourists to share their experiences online. However, its effect on Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE) was not significant ($\beta = 0.156$, C.R. = 1.652, $p = 0.098$), showing that destination quality alone did not strongly shape memorable experiences among visitors.

Tourist Involvement exhibited a strong and significant influence on MTE ($\beta = 0.750$, C.R. = 5.275, $p < 0.001$), confirming that higher involvement enhances the memorability of the tourism experience. Tourist Involvement also significantly predicted ewom ($\beta = 0.439$, C.R. = 2.413, $p = 0.016$), indicating that actively engaged tourists are more inclined to disseminate information digitally. In contrast, MTE did not significantly affect ewom ($\beta = 0.323$, C.R. = 1.864, $p = 0.062$), suggesting that memorable experiences alone were in-

Table 7 Sobel Test Results

Hypothesis	Sobel Test		Result
	t -statistic	p -value	
Destination Perceived Quality on Electronic Word of Mouth (ewom) through Tourist Involvement	4.830	0.000	Supported
Destination Perceived Quality on Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE) through Tourist Involvement	1.600	0.109	Not Supported
Tourist Involvement in Electronic Word of Mouth (ewom) through Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE)	1.237	0.215	Not Supported

sufficient to directly motivate online sharing among Generation Z tourists.

Discussion

A key theoretical contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that tourist involvement, rather than memorable tourism experiences, is a significant predictor of ewom in this model. This distinction is particularly important because Gen Z places greater emphasis on shareable engagement, such as active participation, co-creation, and real-time interaction, rather than deeply personal experiences that may not always translate into public digital expression. This finding refines current ewom theory by highlighting that for digital natives, involvement serves as the more 'socially transmissible' driver of sharing behaviour.

The Effect of Destination Perceived Quality on Tourist Involvement

The study results indicate that Destination Perceived Quality has a positive and significant effect on Tourist Involvement. It means that tourists who perceived a destination as having high quality were more engaged in tourism activities, and this engagement increases the likelihood of them sharing their experiences through ewom. ewom has become a powerful marketing tool in the tourism industry because peer-generated information is perceived as more credible than traditional advertisements (Jyoti et al., 2026). Valeri (2024) highlighted that tourists' engagement in sharing experiences is influenced by their satisfaction with a destination. Destination perceived quality is crucial in increasing tourist engagement in tourism activities (Guleria et al., 2024). In this study, the Kecak Dance attraction at Pandawa Beach offers cultural beauty and engages tourists in the performance, such as dancing with the performers and directly interacting with the Ketek Anoman (Hanuman character). These factors increase both emotional and physical involvement among tourists.

The Effect of Destination Perceived Quality on Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE)

The influence of Destination Perceived Quality on MTE was not supported. This finding suggests that

destination quality alone is insufficient to create a memorable tourism experience, as supported by Torres-Pruñonosa et al. (2024), who emphasized that subjective elements such as emotions, tourist engagement, and interaction with local traditions play a more decisive role in shaping memorable experiences. Tourists may engage in an activity, but their experience does not always result in something considered 'memorable' unless there is a truly unique or meaningful element for them.

Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE) are formed through deep interactions between tourists and their surroundings, traditions, and activities. Destination Perceived Quality plays a crucial role in shaping memorable tourism experiences. Research by Tripathy et al. (2024) indicates that cultural attractions, tourism facilities, and environmental sustainability contribute to creating profound tourist experiences. Similarly, Torres-Pruñonosa et al. (2024) found that the higher the quality of destination services, the greater the likelihood of tourists having meaningful experiences. Furthermore, Ghonim and Awad (2024) emphasized that experience-based marketing strategies can enhance tourists' perception of a destination and have a long-term impact on their travel memories. Additionally, a study by Jyoti and Kumar (2024) found that tourism facilities and environmental sustainability directly impact memorable tourism experiences and digital interactions among tourists.

In this study's context, the non-significant effect may also be interpreted through the disparity in factor loadings for Destination Quality. Natural Attraction and Cleanliness scored extremely high, while Cultural Attractions Quality and Facilities were much lower. This suggests that Gen Z perceives destination quality in two separate dimensions: (1) natural/physical environment, and (2) cultural/facility components. Because MTE is more strongly shaped by unique cultural interaction and novelty, the lower performance of cultural and facility indicators likely weakened the pathway from overall DPQ to MTE. Thus, strong environmental quality alone is insufficient to create memorability unless accompanied by deeper cultural engagement.

The Effect of Destination Perceived Quality on Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

The Destination Perceived Quality significantly affects eWOM. This finding supports Pratiwi et al. (2025), who found that destinations with adequate facilities, high-quality attractions, and a comfortable environment enhance tourists' willingness to share their experiences digitally. The Gen Z tourists in this study tend to record and upload their experiences to social media when visiting high-quality destinations.

eWOM is a digital communication channel through which tourists share their experiences via social media, online reviews, and travel forums. When tourists visit high-quality destinations, they are more likely to share their experiences online. According to the literature, high-quality destinations tend to attract more tourists, enhance satisfaction, and encourage tourists to share their experiences through eWOM (Pratiwi et al., 2025). Similarly, Jyoti and Kumar (2024) emphasize that tourists satisfied with a destination are more likely to recommend it to others via digital platforms. Valeri (2024) further asserts that destinations offering rich cultural interactions increase tourists' likelihood of sharing their experiences online.

The Effect of Tourist Involvement on Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE)

The higher the tourist involvement level in tourism activities, the greater the likelihood of their having memorable experiences. Active tourist engagement in tourism activities contributes to robust memory formation. The literature indicates that tourists who actively participate in the Kecak Dance performance tend to experience greater engagement and are more likely to perceive the experience as memorable (Sartika et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, Torres-Pruñonosa et al. (2024) found that memorable tourism experiences increase the likelihood of tourists sharing information online. Valeri (2024) found that tourist involvement significantly influences the formation of memorable tourism experiences and strengthens their connection to a destination. Similarly, Sartika et al. (2025) revealed that social media usage enhances tourist involvement by providing opportunities for real-time experience

sharing during travel. Active tourist involvement in travel activities enhances the likelihood of memorable experiences. Research by Li et al. (2024) reveals that tourists who actively participate in travel experiences have higher emotional satisfaction. Sartika et al. (2025) further note that tourists engaging in local cultural activities, such as traditional performances and culinary experiences, form deeper and more meaningful memories. Additionally, tourists who feel personally involved in an experience are more likely to recall their journey positively (De Canio & Endri-ghi, 2024).

The Effect of Tourist Involvement on Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

The relationship between Tourist Involvement and eWOM is significant. A previous study stated that tourist engagement in a travel experience increases their likelihood of sharing it digitally (Jyoti & Kumar, 2024). In this study's context, tourists who authentically feel involved in the Kecak Dance performance are more encouraged to share their experiences as videos, photos, or reviews on social media. Tourists who engage deeply in travel activities are more likely to share their experiences online. Previous research discovered that highly involved tourists frequently post reviews, photos, and videos on social media (Vo et al., 2024). Meanwhile, Nanggong and Mohammad (2020) highlighted that emotional engagement with a destination significantly increases the intention to share experiences online. Additionally, Li et al. (2024) demonstrated that active participation in tourism activities raises the likelihood of tourists leaving positive testimonials on digital platforms.

The Effect of Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE) on Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

Interestingly, the study results indicate that the MTE effect is insignificant on eWOM. However, this study's findings show that not all memorable experiences are automatically shared through eWOM. One possible reason is that some tourists may consider their experiences too personal or insufficiently relevant to share with the public. This finding can be theoretically explained by revisiting the nature of

MTE. High-meaningfulness and novelty (the two strongest MTE indicators) are cognitively rich yet often personal experiences. Gen Z's ewom behaviour, however, is driven more strongly by experiences that are participatory, visually appealing, and socially shareable. As reflected in the involvement indicators (e.g. Personal Relevance, Willingness to Participate), active engagement creates real-time, shareable moments that are more compatible with the logic of digital broadcasting. Therefore, while MTE contributes to internal satisfaction, tourist involvement provides the actionable triggers for on-line sharing.

Previous research by Li et al. (2024) suggested that memorable tourism experiences could increase tourists' tendency to share their experiences. A study by Guleria et al. (2024) found that memorable tourism experiences contribute to a positive destination image and increase its attractiveness through ewom. Additionally, Jyoti et al. (2026) discovered that tourists who engage in meaningful interactions with the local tradition are more likely to recommend the destination through social media.

When tourists have unique and profound travel experiences, they are more inclined to share them with others. Jyoti et al. (2026) found that memorable tourism experiences increase ewom intensity because tourists naturally want to share their stories. Similarly, Ortiz et al. (2024) reported that immersive tourism experiences significantly raise the likelihood of tourists posting positive reviews about destinations. Sartika et al. (2025) also noted that emotionally meaningful and unique experiences are easier to recall and share on social media.

The Mediating Role of Tourist Involvement and MTE

The Sobel test results reveal several interesting findings: (1) tourist involvement plays a crucial role in linking destination quality to the intention to share experiences digitally; (2) tourist involvement does not always make tourism experiences more memorable; (3) even if tourists feel engaged in an experience, this does not necessarily increase their intention to share it on social media.

Destination Perceived Quality Influences ewom through Tourist Involvement

The study results showed that destination perceived quality plays a key role in enhancing tourist engagement, which affects the intensity of Electronic Word of Mouth (ewom). When tourists visit a high-quality destination, characterized by well-maintained facilities, natural beauty, and rich cultural experiences, they become more engaged and actively share their experiences online. Higher-quality destinations lead to increased tourist engagement and more frequent sharing of digital experiences, particularly in cultural tourism settings (Orts-Cardador et al., 2024). Similarly, De Canio and Endrighi (2024) demonstrated that tourist expectations and engagement levels were mediators between destination quality and ewom behaviours. Pratiwi et al. (2025) emphasized that customer satisfaction, perceived quality, and perceived value play essential roles in determining the intensity of ewom.

Destination Perceived Quality Influences MTE through Tourist Involvement

Destination perceived quality enhances tourist satisfaction and contributes to MTE through active tourist involvement. The higher the destination quality, the greater the likelihood that tourists will engage in various activities, ultimately enriching their experiences. For instance, tourists visiting interactive cultural sites are more likely to build emotional connections, increasing their likelihood of remembering and sharing those experiences. However, what is interesting is that tourist involvement has a more significant influence on ewom than memorable tourism experiences. It suggests that the more actively tourists participate and interact during their travels, the greater the likelihood they will share their experiences. Conversely, Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE) do not always directly impact ewom. For some tourists, memorable experiences may be highly personal and not always intended to be shared with the public.

The destination quality and tourist involvement significantly impact experiences before, during, and after travel (Ortiz et al., 2024). Memorable tourism experiences mediate between destination quality and

tourist satisfaction, ultimately enhancing engagement (Juliana et al., 2025). Furthermore, Valeri (2024) noted that engagement with high-quality destinations tends to foster deeper tourist involvement, which in turn enhances the overall travel experience.

Tourist Involvement Influences eWOM through MTE

The results showed that the higher the tourists' involvement in tourism activities, the greater the likelihood of their experiencing memorable moments that can stimulate them to share these experiences online. However, since the *t*-statistic value is relatively low, it suggests that other factors might play a significant role in influencing tourist involvement in eWOM. For example, tourists may share their experiences digitally not only because they find them memorable but also due to social media trends, social pressure, or satisfaction with the services received.

Tourist involvement in travel activities significantly affects how they remember and share their tourism experiences. Tourists who actively participate in cultural activities, nature exploration, or adventure experiences tend to create more meaningful memories, which increases the likelihood of sharing their experiences through eWOM. Torres-Pruñonosa et al. (2024) revealed that User-Generated Content (UGC) and eWOM play a crucial role in shaping destination images through memorable experiences. Their study demonstrated that tourists who experience unique and emotional moments tend to share their stories on social media, thus strengthening the spot's digital presence. Additionally, Jyoti et al. (2026) found that the uniqueness and depth of a travel experience influence tourists' willingness to share their experiences via eWOM. Moreover, Li et al. (2024) asserted that active participation in travel experiences enhances tourists' enthusiasm to share their stories online, further promoting the venue.

Therefore, destination marketing strategies should focus more on increasing tourist involvement. Destination managers can create more interactive and participatory experiences, such as allowing tourists to participate in cultural attractions, creating moments that can be recorded and shared, or encouraging tour-

ists to share their stories in various engaging ways. Tourism destinations can provide enjoyable experiences and enhance their attractiveness through tourist recommendations widely spread in the digital world.

Conclusion

This study examined how Destination Perceived Quality, Tourist Involvement, and Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE) shape Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) among Generation Z tourists attending the Kecak Dance performance at Pandawa Beach. The findings show that destination quality enhances tourist involvement, and that involvement is the strongest predictor of eWOM, exceeding the influence of memorable experiences. This suggests that active participation motivates Gen Z travellers to share their experiences more than emotional or reflective memories.

Theoretically, the study contributes by clarifying tourist involvement as a key antecedent of eWOM for digital-native tourists, integrating destination quality, involvement, and MTE within a single explanatory model, and demonstrating that shareability and participatory value outweigh emotional memorability in driving Gen Z's online sharing behaviour. Practically, the results offer guidance for destination managers to increase eWOM by enhancing visually appealing and interactive spaces, incorporating participatory elements into performances, improving cultural interpretation and supporting facilities, and providing digital sharing incentives.

Limitations

This study observed tourist behaviour only within a specific timeframe, without assessing the long-term effects of tourism experiences on future intentions to share information. Focusing on a single destination also limits the generalizability of the findings to other types of cultural tourism. The use of a quantitative approach with closed-ended questionnaires may not fully capture the emotional or subjective aspects of tourists' experiences of sharing. Furthermore, the reliance on agreement-based items to measure experiential intensity and participation reflects perceived evaluation rather than direct behavioural extent. Al-

though the Sobel test was applied under appropriate assumptions, it still has limitations in estimating indirect effects. Because the data were collected cross-sectionally, any causal interpretations from the SEM results should be viewed with caution.

Although the Fornell-Larcker criterion generally supports discriminant validity, several constructs, particularly Tourist Involvement and Memorable Tourism Experiences, exhibited relatively high inter-construct correlations. This suggests a potential conceptual overlap inherent in experiential tourism research, where emotional engagement and memorability are naturally interconnected. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted with due caution.

Future research should adopt multi-destination and longitudinal designs to compare engagement patterns across attraction types and capture behavioural changes over time. Research may employ frequency- or intensity-based measures to enhance construct alignment. Qualitative approaches may further deepen understanding of tourists' digital sharing motivations, while examining social media trends can help align destination marketing strategies with evolving online practices. In addition, refining measurement instruments and employing alternative scale formats would enhance construct clarity and discriminant validity.

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From Screens to Suitcases: e-WOM, Trust, and Destination Image Influencing Travel Intentions in Morocco

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This study examines the effects of electronic word-of-mouth (e-wom), trust, destination image, and perceived value on visit intention. Structural equation modelling was employed to test the proposed relationships using data from 523 respondents. The findings indicate that e-wom significantly predicts trust and destination image, while trust, destination image, and perceived value significantly influence visit intention. Mediation analysis using bootstrap confidence intervals was conducted to assess the indirect effects of e-wom on visit intention. The results reveal that the direct effect of e-wom on visit intention becomes non-significant once the mediators are incorporated into the model. Bootstrap estimates further demonstrate that trust significantly mediates the relationship between e-wom and visit intention. In contrast, the indirect effect through destination image is not statistically significant. These findings identify trust as the principal mechanism linking e-wom to visit intention and provide implications for tourism marketing research and practice.

Keywords: online WOM, e-WOM, trust, destination image, perceived value, travel intentions



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Introduction

The digitalization of travel decision-making has moved the tourism industry into a new informational paradigm, where choices are shaped less by official marketing narratives and more by the voices of real travellers (Tung & My, 2023; Erkan & Evans, 2016). Today, electronic word-of-mouth (e-wom) – reviews, testimonials, informal recommendations, experiential storytelling – has become one of the most influential forces determining destination attractiveness and competitiveness (Nilashi et al., 2022). On platforms such as TripAdvisor and Booking.com, tourists do not merely ‘consult information’; they actively con-

struct their expectations of an experience through the perceptions crafted by other travellers (Tung & My, 2023).

Positive peer evaluations generate assurance, reduce uncertainty, and strengthen travellers’ willingness to commit to a destination (Lujun et al., 2021; Zelenka et al., 2021). Even a single compelling narrative – relaying how a visitor felt welcomed, safe, delighted, or emotionally enriched – can transform a hesitant potential tourist into a convinced traveller. Conversely, negative reviews often dismantle interest and disqualify destinations instantly, regardless of conventional promotional efforts (Pee, 2016).

Destination managers, aware of this shift in informational power, increasingly acknowledge e-WOM not as a supplementary element but as a core strategic determinant of tourism success (Cheng et al., 2023; Madzík et al., 2023). Destinations with vibrant online reputations, sustained by authentic and credible online endorsements, consistently outperform those with weaker digital reputations (Baber et al., 2022; Golmohammadi et al., 2020). Importantly, qualitative richness – vivid descriptions of atmosphere, culture, hospitality, and emotional resonance – enables consumers to vicariously ‘live the experience’ well before arrival (Chen & Funk, 2010; Verma et al., 2023).

Purpose of the Study

Despite extensive research on e-WOM in tourism (e.g. Mohammed Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Bai et al., 2022; Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Kusumawati et al., 2019; Martini et al., 2022; Prayogo et al., 2016), prior scholarship on electronic word-of-mouth in tourism has predominantly analysed trust, destination image, and perceived value as separate determinants, thereby overlooking their collective function as an integrated mechanism that shapes visit intention. In addition, the existing literature lacks an empirically substantiated mediation framework that simultaneously captures the mediating roles of destination image and trust in the relationship between e-WOM and visit intention. This conceptual gap leaves unresolved the underlying processes through which digital peer communication is internalized and successfully translated into actual travel motivation. The present study addresses this theoretical gap by demonstrating that trust operates as a pivotal mediating driver of behavioural intention, whereas destination image alone is insufficient to convert favourable perceptions into action. By performing this multi-mediator analysis within the Moroccan tourism context, the research enhances theoretical insight and broadens the cultural and regional relevance of (e-WOM) scholarship beyond predominantly Western study environments.

Accordingly, this research proposes and validates an integrated Structural Equation Model (SEM) that conceptualizes how e-WOM shapes visit intention. This robust framework offers a more comprehensive

understanding of the psychological conversion process linking digital information exposure to travel intention. This methodological and empirical contribution is significant for advancing tourism behavioural theory in digitally evolving and emerging-market contexts.

Literature Review

Electronic Word-Of-Mouth (e-WOM) and Trust

In the contemporary digital landscape, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) emerges as a key factor in consumer decision-making. It is a gathering of commentary, reviews, recommendations, and experiential narratives disseminated through online platforms. Compared to traditional word-of-mouth, e-WOM extends beyond personal networks and sometimes involves anonymous contributors and a variety of multimedia, resulting in greater reach and expansion capacity (Mohammed Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016). It is fundamentally rooted in perceptions of authenticity and trustworthiness, which help reduce consumers' uncertainty. This is particularly relevant in high-risk contexts of important decisions, such as tourism and commerce online (Marinao Artigas et al., 2017; Mehyar et al., 2020). The theoretical foundations of e-WOM rest on the information acceptance model (IAM) and the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), which explain how people process and accept information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Further, several studies (e.g. Al-Haddad et al., 2022; Erkan & Evans, 2016) used these models to illustrate how these dimensions of trustworthiness, quality, and perceived usefulness can increase enthusiasm for e-WOM in boosting trust.

Trust has become a crucial construct in consumer behaviour. It serves as a medium of credibility verification of e-WOM and strengthens the impact. Research (e.g. Hong & Cho, 2011; Sleiman et al., 2021; Yum & Kim, 2024; Zhao et al., 2019) has shown the value of trust for key outcomes, such as purchase intention, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. Moreover, e-WOM reduces the risk of decision-making in high-involvement situations with the need for reliable information or trust by leveraging its pre-existing credibility (Zainal et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the anonymity associated

with many e-WOM contributors often creates ambiguity, making cues such as content quality, source expertise, and credibility essential for ensuring the persuasiveness of e-WOM (Ismagilova et al., 2020).

Empirical studies have demonstrated the wealth of literature regarding the role of e-WOM in building trust. For instance, consistent exposure to credible e-WOM mitigates perceived uncertainties and reinforces customer expectations, thereby enhancing trust (Matute et al., 2016; Wibawa & Setiawan, 2021). Moreover, perceived trustworthiness and expertise significantly enhance the credibility and adoption of e-WOM content. This effect is particularly pronounced when the information is transparent and aligns with recognized high-quality standards (Bulut & Karabulut, 2018). When reinforced by positive past experience, positive e-WOM starts an honest cycle of trust leading to repeat visits and enthusiastic advocacy (Serra-Cantalops et al., 2018; Wang & McCarthy, 2023). The opposite may also be the case, with demoralizing or inconsistent e-WOM weakening trust and underscoring the delicate nature of this relationship (Velnadar et al., 2024). For the purpose of this study, trust refers to tourists' belief that the destination will reliably deliver safe, authentic, and expected travel experiences, based on the credibility of information and prior user evaluations. Based on these findings, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H1 Higher levels of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) exposure will significantly increase tourists' trust in a destination.*

E-WOM and Destination Image

E-WOM has emerged as a critical determinant of how tourists perceive and communicate a destination image. According to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004, p.39), E-WOM refers to "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet." Its influence surpasses traditional advertising among customers since it has become their primary source of information (Hung & Li, 2007; Mayzlin, 2006). Moreover, the tourism sector demonstrates specific openness to e-WOM since the intangible nature of service

increases the need for consumer trust in their peers' recommendations (Casaló et al., 2015).

Several works of research have demonstrated the ability of e-WOM to change how people perceive a travel destination. According to the studies of Reza Jalilvand and Samiei (2012), Setiawan (2014), and Mohammed Abubakar and Ilkan (2016), e-WOM has a significant impact on the destination image. In the same vein, research has demonstrated that positive e-WOM increases the attractiveness of a destination, resulting in positive attitudes and perceptions (Choirisa et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2013; Torlak et al., 2014), whereas negative e-WOM reduces its attractiveness (Morgan et al., 2003).

Destination image plays a transforming role in the tourism business since it encapsulates the collective knowledge, perception, and emotions of potential tourists. Gartner (1994) described destination image as a three-dimensional framework of cognitive, affective, and conative components, including knowledge and beliefs, emotional responses, and behavioural intentions. This broad framework gives destinations a strategic advantage in segmenting their tourist identification into several traveller groups (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). According to some studies (e.g. Çoban, 2012; Hung et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2016), positive destination image fosters satisfaction and loyalty among tourists, encouraging repeat visits and promoting positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

The relationship between e-WOM and destination image is reciprocal. E-WOM has a shaping and enhancing power on destination image and a positive image influences the credibility of e-WOM. These constructs affect consumer behaviour and promote competitive excellence and long-term destination success. As digital communication technologies have risen, including e-WOM strategies within marketing frameworks is crucial to destination branding promotion. Based on these findings, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H2 Higher levels of e-WOM will significantly enhance the perceived destination image.*

Destination Image and Trust

In tourism research, the relationship between trust and destination image has been an important scholar-

ly interest, as it can influence visitor perceptions and confidence when selecting a destination. Destination image generally affects how travellers form attitudes toward destinations and decision-making concerning travel activities (Al-Kwafi, 2015; Yuan & Vui, 2023). A positive destination image can foster trust in order that the visitor potentially believes that the destination will provide or exceed their expectations. This relationship demonstrates how a destination is seen and the psychological trust that tourists have in a destination (Setiawan et al., 2021). Effective communication about unique functions such as safety and service quality increases tourist confidence, strengthening reliability and trustworthiness (Gavurova et al., 2023; Seger-Guttmann & Gilboa, 2023). A reliable destination promotes positive word-of-mouth, especially when the marketing picture matches real experience.

Empirically, different studies have shown that destination image directly influences trust (Jebbouri et al., 2022; Setiawan et al., 2021). A strong, positive image promotes a feeling of confidence in tourists concerning their selection of destination, thereby enhancing their psychological link. This trust is constructed through consistent messaging, real experiences, and the alignment between promotional efforts and reality. When travellers perceive a destination as secure, authentic, and delivering magnificent offers, their self-belief in its reliability strengthens. Consequently, this not only fosters repeat visits but also fosters high-quality word-of-mouth, in addition to reinforcing the destination's reputation for the long term. Based on these findings, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H3 *A more favourable destination image will significantly increase tourists' trust in the destination.*

Trust and Perceived Value

Perceived value and trust has obtained a substantial amount of attention in the context of consumer behaviour and tourism, and these literature review studies placed them at the centre of decision-making and customer satisfaction. The concept of trust represents the quality, credibility, and genuineness of a service or a destination. It helps as a factor that reduces vul-

nerabilities and risks that consumers or travellers may encounter, ensuring that they get what they want or expect (Curras-Perez et al., 2017; Elshaer et al., 2024; Yoo & Choi, 2022). In several sectors, such as tourism and e-commerce, trust promotes proper consumer behaviours such as loyalty, recommending other people to use the service, and frequent visits, driving long-term engagement and fulfilment (Guenzi et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2012).

Tourism is inherently a high-involvement activity, requiring substantial time, financial, and emotional investment from travellers, which makes them particularly sensitive to the value they receive. In this context, the perceived value of tourism can be understood as the quality and content of services, programmes, and experiences offered during a trip (Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020). Petrick and Backman (2002) classified tourism value into five key dimensions and emphasized that emotional value – the affective satisfaction and enjoyment derived from the experience – exerts the strongest influence on tourist behaviour. Consequently, perceived value is a pivotal factor in motivating tourists' continued participation, loyalty, and advocacy, reinforcing the central role of trust and perceived value in shaping tourism engagement.

Trust and perceived value are dynamic factors that shape tourists' or consumers' experiences. Trust often precedes perceived value by reducing perceived risks associated with a destination or product, thereby enhancing overall value perception (Bonsón et al., 2015). Consequently, the perception of value for money is influenced not only by the destination's attributes but also by its broader social impact. This suggests that trust and perceived value are not merely determined by transactional or experiential quality but are also shaped by cultural and social considerations that define the tourism experience (Yao et al., 2020).

Trust and perceived value are two essential concepts of consumer behaviour in the digital realm, and they are closely related. In the context of e-commerce and, more generally, digital tourism, trust has a paramount impact on perceived value due to its function to ease 'costs' associated with perceptions and time in

high-risk environments such as online travel (Bonsón et al., 2015). In reducing risks, trust enhances the perceived benefits of products and services and creates a culture for repeated transactions (Beneke et al., 2013). This interplay between trust and perceived value influences consumer behaviour and buying decisions, leading to satisfaction and loyalty. Based on these findings, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H4 Higher levels of destination-based trust will significantly increase tourists' perceived value of the travel experience.*

Destination Image and Perceived Value

Destination image is widely recognized as a crucial factor influencing satisfaction and tourist behaviours, such as intentions to visit (Chaulagain et al., 2019) and willingness to recommend (Pektaş et al., 2019). This image is also shaped by information sources, personal factors (Beerli & Martín, 2004), and prior experience (Atmari & Putri, 2021).

Destination image remains a key determinant in tourism, and when considered in conjunction with perceived value, it significantly affects tourist experiences. Empirical evidence suggests that a positive destination image can enhance perceived value, as tourists' expectations regarding the benefits of visiting the destination are effectively fulfilled by what the destination offers (Libre et al., 2022; Suhud et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2016). This, in turn, leads to higher satisfaction and stronger loyalty intentions (Jeong & Kim, 2019; Loi et al., 2017). Moreover, according to Caber et al. (2020), a favourable destination image not only elevates perceived value but also reinforces the overall positive image of the destination itself.

Although both destination image and perceived value may involve economic considerations, they represent conceptually distinct constructs. Destination image reflects attribute-based perceptions of the destination, including economic attractiveness as a component of its cognitive dimension (e.g. Reza Jalilvand et al., 2012). In contrast, perceived value captures a holistic evaluative judgment of the overall travel experience relative to its cost. Thus, the two constructs operate at different conceptual levels – attribute perception versus overall trade-

off evaluation. This distinction supports modelling destination image as an antecedent of perceived value, rather than treating the two constructs as overlapping.

In practical terms, these findings imply that enhancing a destination's image can simultaneously increase perceived value and encourage stronger post-visit behaviours, such as intentions to revisit and recommend. Such strategies are critical for building long-term customer relationships in competitive tourism markets (Zhang & Niyomsilp, 2024). Based on these findings, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H5 A stronger destination image will significantly enhance tourists' perceived value of the destination.*

Trust and Visit Intention

The tourism field encounters high uncertainty because its services are difficult to separate from their intangible nature (Ding & Keh, 2017). Visitors and tourists tend to prefer destinations that appear reliable and trustworthy (Roodurmun & Devi, 2010). The work of Han and Hyun (2015) emphasized that individuals travel to places they believe are honest and offer what they promise. According to Mohammed Abubakar and Ilkan (2016) and Mohammed Abubakar et al.'s (2017) research, medical tourists seek destinations with high-quality, affordable, and reliable health services with minimal risks; to achieve this they often count on word-of-mouth and online reviews to make their decisions.

Tourists rely heavily on trust to foster confidence in their travel decisions. When the information provided about a destination aligns with their expectations, this significantly relieves concerns about service malpractice and the risk of unsatisfactory experiences (Han & Hyun, 2015).

Empirical research (e.g. Mohammed Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Han & Hyun, 2015; Mohammed Abubakar, 2016; Setiawan et al., 2021) showed tourists will choose destinations that they feel they can trust. When tourists trust a destination, they believe it will deliver what it has promised, which builds stronger motivation to visit. In cases where tourists see a destination as unreliable and the service quality is poor, their interest

falls since they worry about receiving poor treatment (Mohammed Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016). Based on these findings, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H6 Higher destination-based trust will significantly increase tourists' intention to visit.*

Destination Image and Intention to Visit

Destination image strongly impacts visit intention, comprising tourists' perception and motivation about visiting a destination. According to Marques et al. (2021), the destination image is formed of cognitive (perceived beliefs), affective (emotions), and unique (differentiation characteristics) elements. Generally, these elements define how people see a place under consideration and, thus, their willingness to travel there.

Empirical evidence suggests a strong, direct relationship between destination image and visit intention. For example, Chaulagain et al. (2019) indicated a positive correlation between favourable destination image and the intention to visit. This relationship functions circularly in that positive perceptions influence visit intentions and travellers' behaviour to act on their intentions, thereby strengthening the destination image through words and revisit behaviour (Assaker & Hallak, 2013).

Moreover, external stimuli such as social media (Kim et al., 2017) and personal experiences (Atmari & Putri, 2021; Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2021) improve the destination image, which increases the tourist's desire to travel. Similarly, the quality of the information, especially online reviews, plays an important role in shaping the destination image and influencing the intentions of travelling, forming a strong relationship between the constructs (Reza Jalilvand et al., 2012; Setiawan et al., 2021). Based on these findings, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H7 A more positive destination image will significantly increase tourists' intention to visit.*

Perceived Value and Intention to Visit

Tourists' perceived value is a critical factor in determining their intention to visit a destination. This concept represents a consideration involving several economic, emotional, functional, and social components,

resulting in a full view of how travellers judge destinations. A destination's perceived value is a major driver of the decisions to travel and the fostering of positive behaviour results, such as satisfaction and loyalty (Liu et al., 2023; Nergui et al., 2023).

Empirical research has consistently demonstrated the impact of perceived value on tourists' intention to visit a destination. Some examples of such studies include that of Caber et al. (2020), which demonstrated how perceived value directly impacts behavioural intentions, such as revisits and positive WOM recommendations. Moreover, in the context of a volcanic destination in Indonesia Mount Ijen, Suhud and Allan (2024) provided a direct link between perceived value and visitor intention, which shows the importance of perceived value on visitors' decisions.

Furthermore, perceived value also increases overall tourist satisfaction as more value leads to more satisfaction, more repeat visits (Allameh et al., 2014), and recommendations to others (Perera & Vlosky, 2013). These findings highlight the dual impact of perceived value, shaping both immediate visit intentions and long-term tourist loyalty. Based on these findings, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H8 Higher perceived value of the destination will significantly increase tourists' intention to visit.*

Mediation Effect

The Mediating Role of Trust in the Relationship Between Electronic Word-Of-Mouth and Intention to Visit.

Within a broader context of online interactions, trust becomes a crucial mediating construct between e-WOM and the intention to visit (Mohammed Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Setiawan et al., 2021; Su et al., 2022). When e-WOM becomes trusted by tourists, a higher sense of assurance is generated and tourists will feel comfortable with e-WOM as a trustworthy source when making travel decisions. To illustrate, Mohammed Abubakar and Ilkan (2016) demonstrated that in the context of medical tourism, e-WOM has a significant impact on trust, which, in turn, plays a crucial role in influencing visitors' intention to visit. Additionally, e-WOM directly and significantly affects the intention to visit, highlighting its pivotal role in

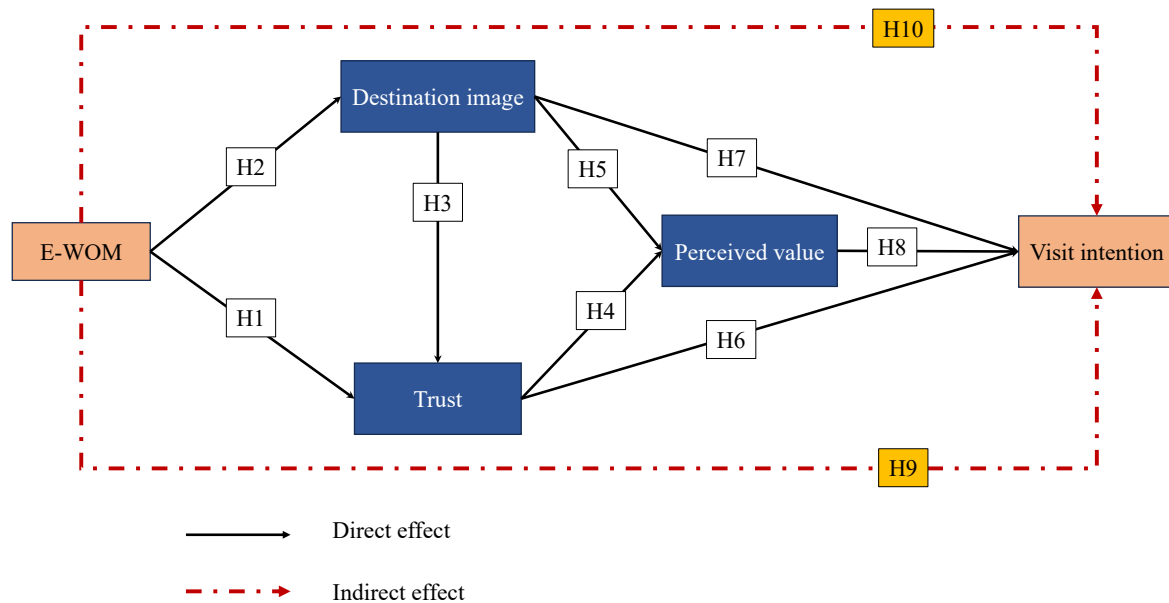


Figure 1 Theoretical Model of the Study

shaping consumer decisions (Mohammed Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Mohammed Abubakar, 2016). In a similar vein, Van Huy et al. (2019) expanded on this point by showing that trust closes the gap between a website's information quality and the purchase intention of travel products, thereby making shared information credible and actionable. Accordingly, this study proposes:

H9 The relationship between e-wom and intention to visit is mediated by trust.

The Mediating Role of Destination Image in the relationship Between Electronic Word-Of-Mouth and Intention to Visit.

The role of destination image as a mediating factor between e-wom and intention to visit has been identified and has gained the attention of many scholars (Aditya & Piartrini, 2023; Kusumawati et al., 2019; Rahjasa et al., 2022). Destination image critically impacts tourists' perceptions as a construct, bridging e-wom's impact on their decision-making processes. For example, in their study on Indonesian tourism, Kusumawati et al. (2019) indicated that the destination image mediates between e-wom and visit intention. Correspondingly, the study of Rah-

jasa et al. (2022) about the analysis of the perception of Bali involving foreign tourists, other than those in Denpasar, found that destination image mediated the relationship between e-wom and tourists' intention to travel to Denpasar. This enhanced destination image was a crucial factor in the increase in visit intentions. This study established that e-wom had an indirect effect on visit intentions through the destination image. This implies that destination image plays a mediator role in bridging the gap between marketing communication and real tourist behaviour. Based on these discussions, this study hypothesizes:

H10 The relationship between e-wom and visit intention is mediated by destination image.

The theoretical model illustrated in Figure 1 represents the ten research hypotheses. This figure shows the proposed structure of how e-wom affects trust and destination image, which in turn impacts perceived value and ultimately shapes the intention to travel. Additionally, the figure illustrates the mediation role of trust and destination image in the relationship between e-wom and visit intention.

Methodology

Data Collection and Sampling Methodology

The target population consisted of active or potential tourists who used online platforms to search for or plan trips to Morocco. Due to the absence of a sampling frame for this population, a non-probabilistic approach was required. We therefore selected participants using convenience sampling, drawing respondents from users present on travel discussion forums, review platforms, and social media groups related to Moroccan tourism (Sekran & Bougie, 2011). This approach is consistent with sampling strategies used in previous e-wom tourism studies (e.g. Mohammed Abubakar, 2016; Nilashi et al., 2022), where population parameters are not directly observable. Data collection was collected via a self-administered online questionnaire (Appendix 1), meticulously designed to optimize readability and minimize linguistic ambiguity for participants representing diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. To ensure accuracy and contextual relevance, the instrument underwent a rigorous translation protocol facilitated by language specialists, with lexical simplification, logical sequencing, and intuitive formatting implemented to enhance accessibility.

The questionnaire was structured into three distinct segments. The introductory section delineated the research objectives and scope. The subsequent segment operationalized five constructs through five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), adapted from validated instruments in extant literature: electronic word-of-mouth (Mohammed Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016), trust (Marchiori et al., 2013), destination image (Reza Jalilvand et al., 2012), perceived value (Ryu et al., 2008), and visit intention (Mohammed Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016). The concluding segment captured demographic and travel-related characteristics. Prior to dissemination, the instrument was subjected to a sequential pretesting: an initial qualitative phase, wherein a purposive sample of students provided feedback on linguistic clarity and usability, followed by a quantitative phase involving 70 participants and iterative reviews by tourism scholars and academic experts to verify reliability, validity, and functional coherence.

Respondent eligibility was conditioned upon active engagement with electronic word-of-mouth (e-wom) platforms related to tourism. This criterion ensured that participants were sufficiently exposed to online travel information environments, allowing them to meaningfully evaluate constructs such as destination image, perceived value, trust, and visit intention.

Participants failing to meet these thresholds were systematically excluded. Following data collection between June and September 2025, 523 respondents constituted the final analytic sample after the removal of 123 incomplete or non-conforming responses. Rigorous quality assurance protocols were applied, including evaluations of missing data patterns, and normality distribution assessed via skewness and kurtosis indices, with marginal deviations deemed statistically permissible under established conventions (Hair et al., 2010). The adoption of five-point Likert scales was justified by their demonstrated capacity to enhance data quality relative to alternatives and to facilitate comparative analysis with seminal works in the domain (e.g. Mohammed Abubakar et al., 2017; Mohammed Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016).

Data Analyses

To evaluate the scale reliability and validity, several measures were analysed, including internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability), convergent validity (average variance extracted, AVE), and discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker criterion). Reliability research shows Cronbach's alpha scores above 0.70 represent sufficient quality for testing internal consistency, as established by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). An AVE value greater than 0.50 is considered satisfactory (Hair et al., 2006), while Composite Reliability above 0.70 is considered acceptable (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). According to Kline (2005), valid discrimination exists when factor interrelations maintain values under 0.85. Moreover, Fornell and Larcker (1981) indicated that construct discriminant validity exists when the squared correlations between measures fall below the AVE thresholds of individual constructs.

The analysis started with an assessment of measurement scale descriptive statistics as well as its psy-

Table 1 Demographic Data of the Sample

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender			Occupation		
Male	285	54.5%	Employee	220	42.0%
Female	238	45.5%	Entrepreneur	30	5.7%
Age			Official	115	22.0%
18–24	115	22.0%	Retired	30	5.7%
25–34	165	31.5%	Student	115	22.0%
35–44	110	21.0%	Travel Frequency		
45–54	70	13.4%	Rarely	110	21.0%
55–65	45	8.6%	Occasionally	200	38.2%
Over 65	18	3.5%	Frequently	183	35.0%
Marital Status			Very frequently	30	5.8%
Single	340	65.0%	Main Motivation for the Trip		
Married	183	35.0%	Tourism	230	44.0%
Nationality			Business	37	7.1%
Moroccan	497	95.0%	Meeting relatives/friends	165	31.5%
Not Moroccan	26	5.0%	Other	91	17.4%
Education			Duration of Trip		
Some college	50	9.6%	Same-day visitor	65	12.4%
University degree	250	47.8%	1–2 nights	95	18.2%
Master's	203	38.8%	3–4 nights	210	40.1%
PhD degree	20	3.8%	5–6 nights	85	16.3%
			7–9 nights	45	8.6%
			10 or more nights	23	4.4%

chometric properties prior to studying demographic characteristics and predictor variables. The research variables were assessed through maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS 25.0 during a structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis. The model fit was verified using multiple goodness-of-fit indices such as the chi-square test (χ^2) and normed chi-square (χ^2/df) along with standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), and comparative fit index (CFI). SEM research reveals an acceptable model fit exists when χ^2/df is below 3.0 (Hu & Bentler, 1999) and SRMR falls below 0.05 (Kline, 2016). A fit assessment using RMSEA

measures is considered excellent when values fall under 0.05, according to Hu and Bentler (1999). The GFI is an absolute measure reflecting the proportion of variance and covariance explained by the model (Byrne, 1998). The CFI, which adjusts for sample size, is recommended as a key index, with values equal to or exceeding 0.95 suggesting a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

To test the mediation effect, we used the statistical bootstrap technique with the recommended 5,000 sample size (Ringle & Sarstedt, 2015). The model was analysed using a bootstrap approach, 5,000 resamples, and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (Byrne, 2016).

Results

The demographic data of the sample is presented in Table 1. The survey shows a gender balance among participants, with males constituting 54.5% and females representing 45.5% of the total sample. The population data reveal that young adults, making up 31.5% of the participants, belong to the 25 to 34 age group, followed by 22% and 21% representing the 18–24 and 35–44 groups, respectively. Older populations show decreasing representation in the sample, with 13.4% aged 45–54, 8.6% aged 55–65, and 3.5% over 65 years old. The majority of survey participants (65.0%) are single, while married participants constitute 35.0% of the sample, indicating that the independent traveller segment predominates.

The survey participants demonstrate a high level of academic achievement, as 47.8% hold a university degree, 38.8% have a master's degree, and 3.8% have attained a PhD. Additionally, 9.6% of participants reported having attended some college courses. Employees constitute 42.0% of the total sample population, while students and officials each represent 22.0%. Entrepreneurs constitute 5.7%, while retirees constitute an equal share of 5.7%. Occasional travellers form the largest segment of respondents engaged in travel at 38.2%, followed by frequent travellers at 35.0%, rarely travelling participants at 21.0%, and very frequent travellers representing only 5.8% of survey respondents. The primary motive for travel is tourism, accounting for 44.0% of the total, while visiting relatives and friends stands at 31.5%, and business-related travel comprises only 7.1%. The majority of travellers spend between 3 and 4 nights on their trips, with 40.2% opting for this duration, 18.2% choosing 1 to 2 nights, and 16.2% selecting a 5 to 6 night stay. Extended stays of 7–9 nights (8.6%) and 10 or more nights (4.4%) are less frequent, indicating a preference for brief but repeated trips.

To evaluate the measurement model and the proposed relationships, data analysis began with exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using SPSS 27, followed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The research hypotheses were subsequently tested using IBM SPSS Amos software version 25. EFA was employed to confirm the constructs' uni-dimensionality and internal

consistency, particularly as the items were adapted from prior literature to align with the study's specific context. Five constructs were validated through EFA. CFA was then utilized to test the theoretical assumptions concerning the relationships between observed indicators and latent constructs and to refine the model for achieving acceptable goodness-of-fit indices.

The study proceeded with an assessment of reliability, validity, and model fit. Table 3 indicates that all constructs demonstrated high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.749 or higher. Based on Hair et al. (2019), a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 or above signifies acceptable reliability of the measurement scale. In addition, composite reliability was then assessed for the latent constructs and indicated good reliability, as it was greater than the average variance extracted (AVE) values. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) showed that all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating satisfactory convergent validity across constructs. Furthermore, discriminant validity assessment followed the Fornell-Larcker criterion where researchers examined the square root of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values against entire correlations between constructs. Discriminant validity exists when the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value for a construct is higher than its correlations with each of the other constructs. For example, the analysis confirmed the strong discriminant validity of e-WOM by showing that its square root of AVE (0.844) was higher than the correlations with other constructs, such as trust (0.665), destination image (0.701), perceived value (0.470), and visit intention (0.376) (see Table 3). This result was consistent across all other constructs as well. This provides strong evidence for the Fornell-Larcker criterion, highlighting the independence of each construct from the others and supporting the overall robustness of their discriminant validity.

Structural equation modelling analysis occurred subsequently. The maximum likelihood estimation outcomes indicated a strong model fit for the dataset, as evidenced by the following indices: the structural equation modelling analysis revealed evidence of a strong model fit with values of $\chi^2 = 364.976$, normed

Table 2 Mean, Standard Deviation, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted

	Mean	SD	A	CR	AVE	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$
E-WOM	4.001	0.862	0.938	0.937	0.712	0.844
I often read online reviews written by other travellers about destinations.	4.096	0.974				
I read online travel reviews to help me choose the right destination.	3.933	0.908				
I use online travel reviews from other travellers to compare destination options.	3.966	1.061				
Before deciding where to travel, I usually look for information in online travel reviews.	4.038	1.026				
When I do not read online travel reviews, I feel less confident about my travel decisions.	3.920	0.906				
Online travel reviews make me feel more sure about choosing a destination.	4.054	1.034				
Trust	4.008	0.788	0.866	0.911	0.721	0.849
I trust online comments and reviews posted by other travellers.	4.109	0.942				
I believe most travellers share their reviews with honest intentions.	4.040	0.805				
I find online reviews from travellers to be a reliable source of travel information.	4.055	0.894				
I trust travellers' reviews more than official travel guides or promotional articles.	3.826	1.068				
Destination Image	4.103	0.769	0.907	0.897	0.636	0.797
I think the destination seems safe for visitors.	4.105	0.905				
I think the destination offers interesting places to visit.	4.111	0.881				
I believe the destination has attractive natural scenery.	4.107	0.895				
I think that the destination has a pleasant climate.	4.042	0.942				
I feel that visiting this destination offers good value for money.	4.151	0.883				
Perceived Value	3.987	0.750	0.749	0.799	0.571	0.756
I think this destination gives good value for the money I would spend.	4.008	0.867				
I think the overall value of visiting this destination is high.	3.925	0.880				
I feel that the travel experience at this destination is worth its cost.	4.027	1.005				
Visit Intention	4.110	0.773	0.833	0.833	0.626	0.791
I intend to visit this destination in the future.	4.107	0.910				
I prefer this destination over other destinations I could visit.	4.107	0.867				
I plan to visit this destination when I have the opportunity.	4.117	0.903				

Table 3 Discriminant Validity

	EWOM	Trust	Destination image	Perceived value	Visit intention
EWOM	0.844				
Trust	0.665	0.849			
Destination image	0.701	0.703	0.797		
Perceived value	0.470	0.516	0.519	0.756	
Visit intention	0.376	0.465	0.446	0.455	0.791

Table 4 Model Fit Measures

χ^2	364.976
χ^2/DF	2.074
GFI	0.938
AGFI	0.919
CFI	0.975
TLI	0.970
SRMR	0.034
RMSEA	0.045

chi-square = 2.074, $p < 0.001$, RMSEA = 0.045, CFI = 0.975, GFI = 0.938, and SRMR = 0.034 (Table 4).

The final phase involved hypothesis testing using SPSS and Amos (see Table 5). Regression analysis confirmed that 'e-wom' significantly and positively influenced 'trust' (t -value = 10.570), supporting H1. Similarly, 'e-wom' had a significant positive impact on 'destination image' (t -value = 18.539), supporting H2. Additionally, 'destination image' was found to have a significant positive effect on 'trust' (t -value = 10.850),

supporting H3. 'Trust' was also shown to have a significant positive impact on 'perceived value' (t -value = 5.656), supporting H4.

Further analysis demonstrated that 'destination image' significantly and positively impacted 'perceived value' (t -value = 5.352), supporting H5. 'Trust' significantly and positively influenced 'visit intention' (t -value = 4.215), supporting H6. Moreover, the significant positive influence of 'destination image' on 'visit intention' was validated (t -value = 2.358), supporting H7. Finally, 'perceived value' was found to significantly and positively impact 'visit intention' (t -value = 4.994), supporting H8.

Table 6 presents the results of the mediation analysis conducted using bootstrap confidence intervals. In line with established methodological recommendations for mediation testing, the significance of indirect effects was evaluated by examining whether zero was contained within the 95% bootstrap confidence intervals.

The direct effect of e-wom on visit intention was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.017$), indicating that e-wom does not exert a direct influence on visit in-

Table 5 Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesized paths		B	Standard Error	t -value	Results
E-WOM	→ Trust	0.368***	0.035	10.570	supported
E-WOM	→ Destination image	0.562***	0.030	18.539	supported
Destination image	→ Trust	0.423***	0.039	10.850	supported
Trust	→ Perceived value	0.273***	0.048	5.656	supported
Destination image	→ Perceived value	0.264***	0.049	5.352	supported
Trust	→ Visit intention	0.220***	0.052	4.215	supported
Destination image	→ Visit intention	0.126*	0.053	2.358	supported
Perceived value	→ Visit intention	0.230***	0.046	4.994	supported

*** $p < 0.001$, * $p < 0.05$

Table 6 Mediation Effect

	Direct effect				Indirect effect			Result
	β	β	SD	t-value	Confidence Interval (95%)		p-value	
					lower bound	upper bound		
E-WOM $\rightarrow$ TR $\rightarrow$ VI	0.017 <i>P</i> (0.729)	0.078	0.023	3.391	0.037	0.126	0.000	Significant indirect effect
E-WOM $\rightarrow$ DI $\rightarrow$ VI	0.017 <i>P</i> (0.729)	0.067	0.035	1.914	-0.004	0.134	0.068	Insignificant indirect effect

E-WOM= Electronic word-of-mouth; TR= Trust; VI= Visit intention

tention once the mediating variables are incorporated into the structural model.

Regarding the indirect effects, the mediating role of trust in the association between e-WOM and visit intention was empirically supported. The estimated indirect effect ($\beta = 0.078$) was accompanied by a 95% bootstrap confidence interval ranging from 0.037 to 0.126. Since zero was not encompassed within this interval, the indirect effect is statistically significant, thereby providing support for H₉. These findings indicate that the relationship between e-WOM and visit intention operates indirectly through trust, suggesting that trust represents the primary mediating mechanism linking e-WOM to visit intention.

In contrast, the mediating role of destination image was not substantiated. The estimated indirect effect ($\beta = 0.067$) was accompanied by a 95% bootstrap confidence interval ranging from -0.004 to 0.134, which includes zero. Consequently, the indirect effect is not statistically significant, leading to the rejection of H₁₀ and indicating that destination image does not constitute a significant mediating pathway between e-WOM and visit intention in the present model.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study aimed to examine the direct and mediating effects of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on visit intention (VI) in the Moroccan tourism context, focusing on the roles of destination image (DI), trust (TR), and perceived value (PV). The findings provide meaningful theoretical clarification on how digital communication shapes tourist decision-making, and highlight key managerial actions for tourism stakeholders in Morocco.

Theoretical Implications

This study advances tourism theory by clarifying the psychological mechanisms through which e-WOM influences visit intention. The findings confirm that e-WOM significantly predicts both trust (Mohammed Abubakar et al., 2017; Mohammed Abubakar, 2016) and destination image (Reza Jalilvand et al., 2012; Setiawan et al., 2021), reinforcing the role of peer-generated communication in shaping tourists' cognitive and evaluative perceptions of destinations.

Importantly, the results demonstrate that trust serves as the primary mediating mechanism linking e-WOM to visit intention. Bootstrap confidence interval analysis indicates that trust significantly transmits the effect of e-WOM to behavioural intention, underscoring its role as a critical behavioural enabler. These findings highlight that beyond informational exposure, tourists' decisions are contingent upon perceptions of credibility, reliability, and psychological assurance (Pujiastuti et al., 2017; Setiawan et al., 2021). Trust thus functions as the key conduit transforming digital communication into actionable travel intention.

Although e-WOM significantly influences destination image, the mediation analysis reveals that destination image does not significantly transmit the effect of e-WOM to visit intention. The indirect effect through destination image was not statistically significant based on bootstrap confidence intervals. This finding refines prevailing assumptions in tourism research that improved image necessarily translates into behavioural intention. Instead, the results suggest that while image formation remains perceptually important, it does not independently function as a decisive behavioural mechanism in this model. Rather, trust

and perceived value appear to play more immediate roles in converting perceptions into intention (López & Parra, 2016; Verma et al., 2023).

The study's contribution further lies in its integrated mediation framework, simultaneously examining trust, destination image, and perceived value within a unified structural model. By distinguishing supported from unsupported mediation pathways, the findings provide a more precise understanding of how digital communication operates through differentiated psychological routes rather than through uniform perceptual effects.

Finally, testing the proposed model within the Moroccan context – an emerging tourism market – extends its contextual applicability by providing empirical evidence from a non-Western setting. However, given the predominance of domestic respondents, the findings should be interpreted within this specific cultural context, and future cross-cultural investigations are required to strengthen the model's broader generalizability.

Practical Implications

The findings generate several implications for tourism marketers and policymakers. Given the significant influence of e-WOM on trust and destination image, destination managers should prioritize strategic digital reputation management. Encouraging authentic user-generated content, facilitating transparent peer feedback, and maintaining responsive online communication can strengthen trust formation, which emerged as the central pathway to visit intention.

Because trust and perceived value directly influence visit intention, tourism stakeholders should emphasize credibility, service reliability, safety assurances, and clear value propositions in their communications. Active engagement with online reviews and transparent handling of traveller concerns can reinforce confidence and reduce perceived risk (Helal et al., 2023; Sobaih et al., 2025).

Although destination image remains important for shaping perceptions, the findings suggest that image enhancement alone may not be sufficient to stimulate visit intention. Marketing strategies should therefore move beyond aesthetic or symbolic positioning and

focus on building verifiable credibility and delivering tangible value.

Integrated digital and experiential strategies may further strengthen conversion from interest to intention. Collaborations with credible influencers, narrative-driven promotional content, and immersive digital tools such as virtual tours can help reduce uncertainty and enhance trust, particularly for first-time visitors (Anaya-Sánchez et al., 2024; Istiqlal et al., 2024).

Collectively, these insights provide a strategic foundation for leveraging e-WOM not merely to shape destination perceptions, but to cultivate trust and value perceptions that ultimately drive behavioural intention in emerging tourism markets.

Limitations

The study offers valuable insights into the influence of e-WOM on visit intention through mediators such as destination image, trust, and perceived value. Nevertheless, the study includes various limitations that need to be recognized. First, the research employed convenience sampling as a method. This approach decreases the potential for the general applicability of its results. The sample may not fully represent the diversity of tourists' perceptions regarding e-WOM and its influence on visit intention. Future research could benefit from employing probability sampling techniques to ensure broader representation and stronger external validity.

Second, while this research provides interesting results by examining both the direct and moderation effects of e-WOM on visit intention, it focused primarily on these relationships without considering other potential variables. For example, different elements such as cultural background, past experiences, and individual motivations might influence the way people interpret and react to e-WOM messages. These additional variables could further moderate the relationship of e-WOM, offering a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of its role in shaping visit intention. Future research could further enrich the understanding of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) in tourism by incorporating qualitative methodologies, such as content analysis or thematic analysis of online reviews, similar to the studies

of Banyai & Glover (2012), Gerdt et al. (2019), and Marine-Roig and Anton Clavé (2015), particularly within the Moroccan tourism context. Morocco is a culturally diverse tourist destination, where symbolic meaning, perception of authenticity, perception of hospitality, and emotional discourse are the key elements of defining the experiences and expectations of tourists. The qualitative analysis of the user-generated content on travel platforms may help to identify the interpretation of international and domestic tourists regarding trust and how they make sense of the destination image, assigning value to it using culturally oriented narratives, emotions, and experience. These methods would particularly be helpful in the discovery of context-specific psychological mechanisms, including perceptions of cultural authenticity, interpersonal warmth, and safety, which may not be well covered using survey tools. By analysing tourists' narratives across different languages and cultural backgrounds, future qualitative or mixed-methods studies could provide deeper, context-sensitive insights into how e-WOM operates in Morocco, thereby complementing and extending the findings of the present quantitative model.

Moreover, the research focuses only on the Moroccan tourism context, which exhibits distinctive cultural, economic, and technological conditions. In addition, contextual factors, such as differing levels of digital literacy among tourists, may significantly shape the interpretation of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and thereby influence visit intention. The study findings may exclusively reflect the Moroccan tourism context since e-WOM effectiveness depends strongly on a region's digital proficiency levels and technological accessibility. Future investigation using different geographic areas will support the model's widespread applicability and help validate its refined version.

Finally, this research study's cross-sectional design only presents tourist perceptions at one specific time, restricting knowledge about how e-WOM impacts visit intent development over time. Therefore, longitudinal research would be more effective in studying tourists' online word-of-mouth reaction phases throughout their decision-making journey, from uncovering e-WOM to making travel choices.

Despite its limitations, this study offers significant insights into the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on visit intention in the Moroccan context. It establishes a strong foundation for future research to address these limitations and expand upon the current model.

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Appendix

Survey Questionnaire: The Impact of Online Reviews (e-WOM) on Visit Intention

Introduction

Dear participant,
Thank you for taking part in this survey. The purpose of this questionnaire is to understand how online reviews and comments from other travellers (e-wom) influence people's intention to visit a destination.

There are two sections:

1. Demographic Information
2. Statements about online reviews and travel intention

There are no right or wrong answers. Please choose the option that best represents your opinion.

Your answers are anonymous, and the survey takes about 5 minutes.

Thank you for your time and valuable contribution!

Section 1: Demographic Information

Please select the option that describes you.

1. Gender

- Male
- Female

2. Age

- 18–24
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45–54
- 55–65
- Over 65

3. Marital Status

- Single
- Married

4. Nationality

- Moroccan
- Not Moroccan

5. Education Level

- Some college
- University degree
- Master's degree
- PhD

6. Occupation

- Employee
- Entrepreneur
- Official
- Retired
- Student

7. Travel Frequency

- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently
- Very frequently

8. Main Motivation for Travel

- Tourism
- Business
- Meeting relatives/friends
- Other

9. Usual Duration of Trip

- Same-day visit
- 1–2 nights
- 3–4 nights
- 5–6 nights
- 7–9 nights
- 10+ nights

Section 2: Statements About Online Reviews

Please show your level of agreement with each statement.

Scale:

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly agree

A. Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)

1. I often read online reviews written by other travellers about destinations.
2. I read online travel reviews to help me choose the right destination.
3. I use online travel reviews from other travellers to compare destination options.
4. Before deciding where to travel, I usually look for information in online travel reviews.

5. When I do not read online travel reviews, I feel less confident about my travel decisions.
6. Online travel reviews make me feel more sure about choosing a destination.

B. Trust in Online Reviews

1. I trust online comments and reviews posted by other travellers.
2. I believe most travellers share their reviews with honest intentions.
3. I find online reviews from travellers to be a reliable source of travel information.
4. I trust travellers' reviews more than official travel guides or promotional articles.

C. Destination Image

1. I think the destination seems safe for visitors.
2. I think the destination offers interesting places to visit.
3. I believe the destination has attractive natural scenery.
4. I think the destination has a pleasant climate.
5. I feel that visiting this destination offers good value for money.

D. Perceived Value

1. I think this destination gives good value for the money I would spend.
2. I think the overall value of visiting this destination is high.
3. I feel that the travel experience at this destination is worth its cost.

E. Visit Intention

1. I intend to visit this destination in the future.
2. I prefer this destination over other destinations I could visit.
3. I plan to visit this destination when I have the opportunity.

Thank you for your participation!

Your responses are very important for this research. They will help us better understand how online reviews (e-wom) influence people's intention to visit places. Your answers are anonymous and will be used only for academic purposes.

Constructing Heritage at the Intersection of Family Business and Place: Heritage Branding in Tourism Family Firms

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Tourism family firms often possess rich historical and place-based resources, yet it remains unclear how these resources are translated into coherent heritage branding and guest-facing communication. This study examines how family-run tourism businesses in less-visited regions construct family- and place-based heritage and how they communicate it to guests. Drawing on a secondary qualitative analysis of open-ended questionnaire responses collected within the Hosted by Family (HbF) Interreg Slovenia–Austria project, the study analyses narratives from 51 owners of family-run hospitality businesses in Slovenia (Gorenjska, Podravje) and Austria (Styria).

Findings indicate that owners most frequently locate their ‘special heritage’ in five domains: gastronomy, seasonal customs, traditional knowledge, family personalities, and built heritage. These domains reflect a layered heritage identity emerging from the interplay of family, place, and business. Heritage is communicated through a diverse but uneven mix of channels, dominated by websites, on-premise signage and blackboards, and personal interaction, while social media use remains limited. Overall, the study reveals a recurring tension between heritage identity and heritage communication: although substantial heritage resources exist, they are often only partially activated through structured, scalable, pre-visit brand touchpoints. The study contributes an empirically grounded account of family–place heritage dynamics in tourism family firms and offers practical insights for aligning heritage resources with brand touchpoints and experience design.

Keywords: tourism family firms, heritage branding, heritage identity, place-based embeddedness, brand communication



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Introduction

At the core of family businesses lies a unique hybrid identity arising from the overlap of family and business domains (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2013). Drawing on the resource-based view (RBV), scholars high-

light the unique, incomparable resources embedded in family firms that can foster sustainable competitive advantage (Astrachan et al., 2018; Galvagno et al., 2022; Spielmann et al., 2022). From a corporate marketing standpoint, these distinct attributes serve as

valuable assets for shaping communication strategies and understanding how corporate identity and brand meaning are formed and conveyed. In this context, scholars are paying increasing attention toward gaining a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of marketing practices in the context of family businesses (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2009, 2013, 2016; Spielmann et al., 2022).

Among the distinctive features of family businesses, the use of history has received growing attention (Bövers & Hoon, 2021). Historical references in family firms are not merely passive reflections of the past; they function as strategic assets that inform a company's identity, influence product development, and enhance customer engagement (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2013, 2016; Ge et al., 2022). Scholars argue that communicating a firm's historical character and social memory can be a powerful means of differentiation in competitive markets (Astrachan et al., 2018; Ge et al., 2022; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2024). However, research has yet to fully explain how these elements can be strategically leveraged in branding. Only a limited number of studies have explored how family firms construct and communicate their history to their customers (Fox et al., 2024; Hammond et al., 2016). Previous research has predominantly focused on 'legacy' (a synonym for tradition, heritage, etc.) receivers such as the next generation (e.g. Lumpkin et al., 2008; Rondi et al., 2019), successors (e.g. Barbera et al., 2018; Pauceanu et al., 2025), organisations and employees, leaving customers as an under-researched group (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2024). This gap becomes even more pronounced in tourism, where family firms are highly prevalent but research on their specific characteristics and branding practices remains relatively limited (Forés et al., 2021; Kallmuenzer & López-Chávez, 2023). In this context, work on the creation and development of family corporate brands in tourism family firms remains scarce (Presas et al., 2010).

Marketing and organisational literature often examine history through the lens of corporate identity and branding (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2009, 2013). The management of both involves reflective processes through which the firm's core essence and unique

distinctiveness are articulated and defined (Balmer, 2008). In this process, history is among the various identity dimensions that can be chosen as a basis for conveying messages and shaping positioning (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2013). Building on the work of Balmer and Greyser (2006), Urde et al. (2007) introduced the concept of brand heritage, arguing that a heritage brand derives its market positioning and value proposition from its historical foundation – evident in its track record, longevity, core values, symbolic elements, and, most notably, the organisation's belief in the significance of its history. Importantly, the authors distinguish between history – understood as past events – and heritage, which encompasses the ongoing relevance and future-oriented meaning of those events. It could thus be said that history captures what happened, while heritage interprets why it matters and how it should inform the brand's future. In marketing, this shows when history becomes a key component of brand identity and positioning (Hudson, 2011).

Spielmann et al. (2021) extend this discussion by emphasising the role of contextual and place-based associations in corporate heritage branding. They argue that heritage identities are closely tied to geographic origin, community connections, and regional symbolism – factors that enhance the authenticity and symbolic resonance of family firm brands. For instance: 'It's nearly impossible to think of California wine without the Mondavi family coming to mind – and vice versa' (Spielmann et al., 2022, 36).

This intersection of family history, heritage branding, and place-based embeddedness becomes particularly salient in tourism, where heritage tourism has become an important source of value creation and differentiation and one of the most prevalent forms of tourism (Chi et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2025). More broadly, heritage tourism reflects social and economic transformations associated with postmodernity, in which the pursuit of authentic experience has become a defining feature of contemporary culture (Presas et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2019). For family-run tourism businesses, this suggests that both family-based and place-based heritage may serve not only as internal identity resources, but also as externally meaningful

assets through which firms shape guest perceptions, experiences, and brand value.

Building on the above discussion, this paper focuses on brand heritage and heritage branding from the perspective of tourism family businesses. It seeks to explore how tourism family businesses being characterised as hybrid identities draw on both intrinsic and place-based heritage – rooted in regional traditions and historical continuity – as a resource for constructing their brand heritage identity. This interconnection appears to offer a distinct foundation for firms to identify, activate, and cultivate heritage-based brands (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2013). To address this inquiry, the study integrates insights from family business and marketing literature, investigating how heritage is internally perceived and externally communicated.

This study is deliberately exploratory and qualitative. It aims to illuminate how family-run tourism businesses in less-visited regions construct family- and place-based heritage and translate it into communication with guests, identifying patterns that can inform future research.

The research is guided by the following questions:

- RQ1 *How do tourism family firms being characterised as hybrid identities leverage both intrinsic and place-based heritage as strategic resources in the development of their heritage branding?*
- RQ2 *What types of heritage content and transmission mechanisms do tourism family firms employ to communicate their heritage brand to customers?*

This paper is structured as follows. First, we review the theoretical foundations related to family business identity and branding. Following this, we outline the methodological approach and describe the case context. The subsequent section presents our empirical findings, which inform the development of a conceptual framework. We conclude by discussing the theoretical and practical implications of our study, acknowledging its limitations, and suggesting directions for future research.

Theoretical background

Family firms represent a cornerstone of the global economy (Bird et al., 2002), accounting for nearly 60% of enterprises within the European Union, contributing an estimated 70 to 90% to the world's GDP and more than 40–50% of all jobs in the EU (Birdthistle & Hales, 2023). This significance is particularly pronounced in the tourism and hospitality industry, where firms are predominantly small-scale and family-owned (Altın et al., 2021; Memili et al., 2020). Examining aspects of such businesses is therefore essential to better understand the distinctive dynamics of this service sector and to contribute to both theoretical advancement and practical insights.

Despite their ubiquity, there is no single definition for a family business. Distinguishing between family and non-family firms is inherently complex. Researchers have attempted to make this distinction by applying threshold criteria for family involvement – consequently, multiple definitions of a family business have emerged, each emphasising different dimensions. All in all, a family business is typically characterised by significant family involvement in ownership and/or management, shared control by multiple family members across generations, and a commitment to sustaining the business over time. Definitions vary in emphasis but commonly include criteria such as equity ownership, managerial roles, shared vision, and generational continuity (Abeysekera, 2023; Fernandez, 2023).

The concept of identity has been employed in two distinct theoretical contexts, referring respectively to organisational identity and corporate identity as separate yet related constructs (Galvagno et al., 2022). Organisational identity represents a characterising aspect of the firms – a perception of ‘who we are as a firm’ that reflects enduring values, distinctiveness and a sense of continuity over time (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Organisations leverage their identity to construct a distinctive image that sets them apart from competitors in the perception of both internal and external stakeholders (Zellweger et al., 2012). On the other side, corporate identity represents a set of elements that managers intentionally communicate to external stakeholders, encompassing strategic de-

cisions such as mission, vision, values, and goals, as well as their outward expression through visual identity, brand messaging, brand personality, and overall brand communication (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012). In recent scholarship, the concept of corporate identity has evolved beyond its traditional interpretation as merely the outward visual representation of a company. It is now increasingly understood to encompass intrinsic characteristics that are closely connected to the organisation's internal sense of identity (Balmer & Greyser, 2002; Cornelissen et al., 2007). According to Cornelissen et al. (2007), corporate identity can be thus viewed as an external projection of organisational identity, strategically designed to shape a specific and favourable image in the minds of external stakeholders. Specifically, scholars have identified strategy, organisational structure, culture, and company history as some of the most significant intrinsic characteristics that contribute to the formation of corporate identity (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2013; Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2006). This shift in thinking has prompted business scholars to increasingly acknowledge the potential for interdisciplinary integration between organisational theory (Kieser, 1994), marketing (Urde et al., 2007), and historical analysis (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2013). While organisational identity and branding are important for all firms, they are particularly salient in family businesses, which can leverage their 'idiosyncratic nature' to strengthen brand meaning (Galvagno et al., 2022). In this context, exploring the role of history and its application in communication by organisational members has emerged as a compelling area of study within management and marketing research (e.g. Balmer, 2011; Blombäck & Brunninge, 2009, 2016).

In bridging internal and external perspectives on family firm branding and adopting multiple perspectives, Astrachan et al. (2018, 5) proposed an all-encompassing definition of a family business brand 'as the formal and informal communication (image) of the family element of firm essence (identity), which includes the family's involvement in a firm, and which leads to associations and expectations in the mind of stakeholders (reputation) that help differentiate these firms from others in the marketplace and other ven-

ues', a definition that will serve as the conceptual baseline for our study.

Within marketing scholarship, history frequently emerges as an important theme in discussions of corporate identity and branding (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2009). Delahaye et al. (2009) highlight the pivotal role of such historical narratives in shaping corporate identity and guiding communication strategies. Building on the work of Balmer and Greyser (2006), Urde et al. (2007) introduced the concept of heritage brand, arguing that a heritage brand derives its market positioning and value proposition from its historical foundation – evident in five core elements that help determine the presence and extent of heritage within a brand. These elements reflect the diverse mechanisms through which family businesses can reference their history and actively engage in uncovering and shaping heritage-based identities and branding (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2013). A stronger manifestation of these elements increases the likelihood that a heritage brand will be formed and acknowledged by both internal and external stakeholders (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2016).

1. Longevity: A sustained history of ownership across generations serves as evidence of reliability and product quality. The consistent delivery of value over time reinforces customer trust and signals proven performance, thereby supporting the firm's reputation and legitimacy. (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2013; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2006).

2. Track record: Survival across generations serves as evidence of consistent quality and customer appreciation, reinforcing credibility (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2013).

3. Core values: Family-rooted values become embedded in the business, shaping culture, guiding behaviour, and enhancing reputational integrity (Koironen, 2002).

4. History important to identity: Founders significantly influence corporate identity, with their values and legacy persisting through generations and shaping how the firm connects its past to its present (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2013).

5. Symbolic elements: Family names, crests, and generational imagery serve as symbolic markers of

authenticity and continuity, supporting brand meaning (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2013).

When a family firm incorporates heritage into its branding, it signals a brand heritage identity, defined as the expression of the firm's heritage identity in its branding activities (Macdonald, 2006). The concept of heritage has a dual nature. On one hand, it serves as an anchor that conveys stability and continuity amidst a constantly changing world, offering a sense of consistency and clarity (Spielmann et al., 2022). On the other hand, heritage encompasses tangible artefacts and practices that can be materialised and made observable (Macdonald, 2006). Macdonald (2006) and Radu-Lefebvre et al. (2024) link heritage to legacy – something that endures and can be deliberately carried forward over time. Building on this notion, Radu-Lefebvre et al. (2024) conceptualise legacy as a fundamentally transactional phenomenon, co-created through interactions between senders and receivers, who collectively construct, interpret, and enact it through both family and business mechanisms. These processes typically rely on artefacts as vehicles for transmitting and activating legacy. Their systematic literature review identified four principal categories of such artefacts: verbal artefacts (e.g. stories, conversations, written records), symbolic artefacts (e.g. names, rules, rituals), physical artefacts (e.g. buildings, land), and visual artefacts (e.g. photos, films, etc.). Heritage communication practices thus encompass a range of activities, including the explicit communication of founding dates and company histories, the commemoration of anniversaries, the display of iconic artefacts, and the contextualisation of the firm within its historical milieu. Such practices may further involve the (re)design of products and offerings that integrate visual cues from earlier versions or evoke idealised representations of the firm's past (Hudson, 2015).

Spielmann et al. (2021) highlights the importance of contextual and place-based associations in the construction of corporate heritage brands, thereby extending earlier identity- and history-focused perspectives by situating heritage within a broader socio-spatial context. This perspective aligns with Balmer's (2011, 827) assertion that 'heritage identities are an accretion of various identities, which are var-

iously linked to institutions, places, cultures, and to time frames'.

In this view, heritage emerges not only from what firms have been over time, but also from where they are embedded – how their histories intersect with regional traditions, landscapes, and social practices (Balmer, 2011; Spielmann et al., 2021). Such place-based associations provide an additional layer of meaning that reinforces authenticity and deepens the symbolic resonance of heritage brands, particularly in family firms whose histories are often inseparable from local contexts.

All these heritage dimensions become especially relevant in tourism, where they are not only symbolic resources for organisational identity and branding, but also a lived and interpreted component of the guest experience (Zhu et al., 2025). Heritage tourism research emphasises that visitors encounter heritage through a combination of material settings, interpretive narratives, local practices, and host-guest interaction (Wang, 1999). From this perspective, family and place-based heritage become meaningful not simply because they exist, but because they are staged, mediated, and experienced across multiple touchpoints before, during, and after the visit. This experiential dimension also connects to broader authenticity debates that are central in heritage tourism scholarship. Tourism offerings are often judged as authentic or inauthentic according to whether they are produced or performed by local people in line with established customs or traditions. In this sense, authenticity is associated with traditional culture and origin and conveys a sense of something genuine, real, or distinctive (Moore et al., 2021; Wang, 1999).

Accordingly, in tourism family firms, heritage branding can be seen as both a communication process and an experience-design process through which family and place-based heritage are made visible, credible, and experientially authentic to guests (Tussyadiah, 2014).

Methodology

Considering the limited prior research on how (tourism) family firms construct and communicate their history to customers, an exploratory research design

was deemed appropriate. Exploratory research is particularly suitable for under-researched phenomena and for generating new conceptual insights and theoretical extensions (Stebbins, 2001). It allows for methodological flexibility and inductive reasoning, enabling the identification of patterns and themes that are not yet well established in the literature.

In this article, we conduct a secondary qualitative analysis of open-ended questionnaire responses that were originally collected within the Hosted by Family (HbF) Interreg Slovenia–Austria project, focused on supporting family-run tourism businesses in less-visited regions. The questionnaire was designed and administered by the project team for diagnostic and development purposes, rather than being constructed by the authors around the specific research questions of this study. As the questionnaire was not originally designed for this study, we ensured analytical relevance by focusing only on two open-ended questions that directly address family history, place-based heritage, and communication practices. While this approach provides empirically grounded material aligned with our research questions, some contextual aspects such as strategic intent or customer perception may not be fully captured due to the secondary nature of the data.

Methodologically, the study relies on open-ended, self-administered questionnaires as a qualitative data collection tool. This format is appropriate because it enables the exploration of complex phenomena through participants' own unprompted accounts, supports the identification of recurring analytical themes, and reduces interviewer-related bias and power dynamics (Albudaiwi, 2017; Bernard, 2013; Reja et al., 2003). It also allows respondents to reflect and answer at their own pace, which is particularly relevant when engaging busy family business owners.

Sample and data collection

A purposive sampling approach was employed, involving 51 owners of family-run hospitality businesses across the Slovenian regions of Gorenjska and Podravje, as well as the Austrian region of Styria (Figure 1). Participants were recruited through their involvement in the Hosted by Family (HbF) Interreg Slovenia–Austria project, which applied formal eligibility criteria grounded in widely accepted definitions of family businesses. Specifically, to be admitted into the project, businesses were required to demonstrate family ownership and management involvement across generations, thereby ensuring that all respond-



Figure 1 Location of the study areas in Slovenia and Austria

ents represented authentic cases of family-run firms. Data were collected between March and July 2024 through an open-ended questionnaire administered in an asynchronous, self-completed format. A total of 51 fully completed responses were obtained. The questionnaire was provided in the respondents' native language (Slovene or German). Responses were submitted in written form directly by participants and subsequently translated into English for the purpose of analysis.

The sample included 13 businesses from the Gorenjska region and 7 from the Podravje region in Slovenia, and 31 from the Styria region in Austria. The majority operated as accommodation providers (47), most of them combined with food and beverage services, while 4 ran restaurants only. Most were small, family-managed establishments located in towns of 1,000–50,000 inhabitants, typically within 5 km of community centres, underscoring their embeddedness in regional and rural settings. Generational continuity was a defining feature: 16 firms were in the first generation, while 31 traced their origins to parents, grandparents, or earlier ancestors, including 12 that had been in the same family for five generations or more; 4 businesses did not disclose this information.

Data analysis

The open-ended survey responses were analysed using a hybrid qualitative coding approach combining inductive category development with deductive theoretical positioning (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Swain, 2018). First, all responses were read repeatedly, and inductive codes were assigned to segments of text capturing recurring heritage-related elements and modes of heritage communication. At this stage, codes were assigned to explicitly stated practices, objects, and forms of communication described in the written responses, without introducing higher-level theoretical interpretation.

In a second step, the inductively derived categories were compared with established conceptual frameworks in family business and heritage branding research, including Blombäck and Brunninge's (2013) heritage typology, Spielmann et al.'s (2021) place-based heritage, Radu-Lefebvre et al.'s (2024) legacy vehicles,

and Urde et al.'s (2007) heritage brand elements. The deductive step was used to interpret and contextualise the empirically identified practices in relation to existing theoretical frameworks, rather than to code responses directly into predefined theoretical categories.

The coding process was conducted by one researcher using an inductive thematic approach. Codes were developed and refined iteratively through repeated readings of the data and constant comparison across responses to ensure consistency in interpretation. The analysis was conducted manually using Google Sheets, as the dataset was of manageable size.

The following section presents the findings in relation to the two core research questions: RQ1, how family and place-based heritage serve as resources for constructing corporate heritage identity, and RQ2, what forms and channels family businesses use to communicate this heritage to their guests.

Results

The findings are presented using inductively derived categories that reflect recurring heritage-related elements identified across the open-ended survey responses. In response to the question 'In a family business and in the surrounding region, a rich heritage develops over time that is passed on from generation to generation. In which areas is there a special heritage in your business that you are continuing or have revived?', participants most frequently referred to gastronomy, seasonal customs, traditional knowledge, family personalities, and built heritage.

Gastronomy

Culinary heritage emerged as the most salient domain of identity construction. Owners often emphasised that they 'always have [their] ancestors in mind' or that they 'cook according to old family recipes and still do everything ourselves.' These accounts illustrate how gastronomy operates simultaneously as a transmitter of family values and as a lived practice of continuity across generations. Emotional expressions such as 'gastronomy with heart and passion' further reinforced this link between food, family, and authenticity. Two subthemes stood out. First, special prod-

ucts functioned as markers of differentiation, either through family-linked branding (e.g. Firbasova Wiliamovka) or through regionally protected foods such as Prekmurska gibanica, which reflect place-based heritage. Second, special recipes served as key vehicles of legacy, often explicitly linked to ancestors (e.g. 'grandma's roast pork' or 'recipes from the previous generation') or preserved in material forms such as a 100-year-old handwritten cookbook. These examples highlight how gastronomy serves as a verbal and physical artefact (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2024), transmitting heritage identity through both storytelling and tangible culinary practices.

Seasonal customs

Owners also emphasised customs and celebrations tied to the agricultural and religious calendar. Examples included community events such as the *Jakobi-wanderung village hike with the setting up of Klapotzen (traditional wind rattles)*, as well as *bonfires, erecting the maypole, and slaughter days according to old tradition*. Food-related rituals were especially prominent, such as the use of a *special smoking mixture for Easter meat* or festive meals during *St. Martin's Day*. Other recurring practices mentioned were *harvest celebrations* and *carnival*. These customs represent a form of place-based heritage, embedding family businesses in the seasonal rhythms and communal life of their regions. They also operate as symbolic and physical artefacts (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2024), where material practices are imbued with cultural meaning and transmitted as shared traditions. Seasonal customs are not unique to individual families but are rooted in the shared heritage of the wider community. Preserving and revitalising these traditions allows family businesses to reinforce authenticity and highlight their strong ties to the local cultural context (Spielmann et al., 2021). At the same time, these practices embody continuity and stewardship, marking family firms as distinct from non-family competitors and resonating with guests who value authentic cultural experiences.

Traditional Knowledge

Another important expression of heritage identity concerned intergenerational know-how, especially

in agriculture and winemaking. Owners referred to practices such as *preparation and pruning according to lunar and peasant calendars*, as well as skills in *wine-making, viticulture, and cellaring*. Broader aspects of *farm life as it used to be* were also emphasised, with some businesses noting that tourists are welcome to observe or occasionally help with daily tasks. Such practices represent intangible heritage, transmitted through family mechanisms such as role modelling and direct teaching. They illustrate how agricultural knowledge, accumulated over generations, remains integral to the family business identity. However, these practices were usually described as part of everyday life rather than as structured guest experiences. In this sense, traditional knowledge currently functions more as a background signal of authenticity than as a deliberate branding strategy.

Family Personalities

Narratives about family members, both past and present, played a crucial role in constructing heritage identity. Grandparents were frequently invoked as symbolic carriers of tradition and authenticity, for example through references to '*grandma's cooking*' or '*recipes from great-grandmother and her story to the dishes*'. In some businesses, grandparents were remembered by guests themselves, reinforcing continuity and creating a sense of personal connection across generations. Everyday images such as '*grandma sitting in the dining room peeling potatoes*' conveyed intimacy and authenticity, presenting the family not only as historical figures but as living participants in the guest experience. In some cases, the distinctive achievements or backgrounds of family members were also emphasised, for instance, mentioning family members with professional or sporting careers as elements that add individuality and narrative richness to the business. These stories about family personalities function as verbal and symbolic artefacts (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2024), anchoring values such as resilience, hospitality, and continuity in concrete individuals. From a branding perspective, they serve as strong signals of longevity and track record (Urde et al., 2007), making the family's presence visible and credible to guests.

Built Heritage

Material traces of the past featured prominently in owners' accounts of heritage identity. Many highlighted historic houses, inns, and farm buildings, often more than 100 or even 200 years old, that had been renovated in their original style. In some cases, individual features, such as *a tram ceiling from 1754* or *a doorframe from 1878*, were emphasised as tangible links to the past. Several businesses also referenced the cultural or symbolic significance of their sites, such as *the former Kurtheater from 1870*. These material settings function as physical artefacts (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2024), providing visible, enduring cues of authenticity. By foregrounding architectural continuity, family businesses communicate both longevity

and embeddedness in place, two central dimensions of heritage branding (Urde et al., 2007). At the same time, some owners acknowledged that even newer buildings can embody heritage when built in traditional styles or with distinctive materials, suggesting that the meaning of built heritage is not restricted to age alone but to the ways in which structures embody and transmit identity over time.

Taken together, these findings illustrate how family businesses construct a hybrid heritage identity by combining family, place, and business dimensions. In this way, verbal, symbolic, physical, and visual artefacts converge to communicate both family heritage and place-based heritage. This interplay reflects what Blombäck and Brunninge (2013) describe as the en-

Table 1 Synthesis of Heritage Domains, Corresponding Artefacts, and Communication Mechanisms in Tourism Family Firms

Heritage domain	Typical heritage content/examples	Corresponding artefacts ('legacy vehicles')	Main communication mechanisms / touchpoints
Gastronomy	Old family recipes, ancestor-linked dishes, regionally protected foods, family-named products, historic cookbooks	Verbal (stories about dishes, ancestral recipes); Physical (food itself, cookbook, ingredients/practices); occasionally Symbolic (family name embedded in product identity)	Personal storytelling with guests; menus referencing family or regional dishes; websites; marketing materials; multimedia presentations
Seasonal customs	Agricultural and religious calendar events, harvest celebrations, carnival, St. Martin's Day meals, Easter rituals, maypole, bonfires, slaughter days, Klapotzen-related traditions	Symbolic (rituals, customary meanings); Physical (material enactment of celebrations, festive foods, objects used in rituals)	On-site enactment and observation; personal explanation/storytelling; websites and promotional materials when these customs are described in advance; occasional signage/blackboards
Traditional knowledge	Lunar and peasant calendars, pruning, winemaking, viticulture, cellaring, everyday farm know-how, traditional work practices	Primarily Verbal (explanations, teaching, stories) and Physical/embodied (demonstrated skills, tools, practices, work environments)	Personal interaction with guests; guest observation or occasional participation in daily tasks; on-site demonstration; only limited formalisation in digital or printed communication
Family personalities	Grandparents and ancestors, 'grandma's cooking', family members remembered by guests, distinctive careers/achievements, everyday family scenes	Verbal (family stories, anecdotes); Symbolic (named references, generational continuity, family identity markers)	Personal interaction and storytelling; menus or texts referencing family members; websites; company booklets/books; multimedia presentations
Built heritage	Historic houses, inns, barns, black kitchens, listed buildings, farm-houses, old wine cellars, preserved materials, dated architectural elements, culturally recognised sites	Predominantly Physical (buildings, spaces, décor, preserved features); also Visual when represented through images or digital media	On-site cues and material environment; signs/blackboards; websites; photographs; multimedia presentations; printed materials

twinement of family and business histories, and resonates with Spielmann et al.'s (2022) argument that brand heritage identity is strengthened by contextual and geographic associations. The result is a layered identity that is at once familial and territorial, past-oriented yet framed as meaningful for present and future guest experiences.

In response to the question 'Do you present the special history of your family business to your guests? If so, in what form?', participants described a variety of ways in which heritage was communicated. The frequencies reported below refer to the number of respondents mentioning each communication form, not to the number of coded references. As individual responses could mention more than one form, the total exceeds the number of participants. The most frequently mentioned forms were websites (36 mentions), business premises such as signs or blackboards (23 mentions), and personal interaction with guests (20 mentions). Other vehicles included multimedia presentations (19 mentions), marketing materials (13 mentions), menus that referenced family history or regional dishes (10 mentions), and, less commonly, books about the company (5 mentions) or social media (1 mention).

When mapped against the framework of legacy vehicles (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2024), these practices can be classified as verbal artefacts (personal storytelling, narrative descriptions in menus), symbolic artefacts (logos, company books, branding elements referencing generational continuity), physical artefacts (historic premises, décor, blackboards), and visual artefacts (websites, photographs, multimedia shows). These forms represent a diverse repertoire of heritage communication practices through which businesses express and materialise their heritage identity.

To enhance analytical transparency, Table 1 synthesises the five heritage domains identified in the data, the corresponding artefacts through which they are materialised, and the communication mechanisms through which they are conveyed to guests.

At the same time, the data reveal important gaps. While websites were the most frequently mentioned channel, this reliance on a single digital touchpoint suggests that many businesses may not be fully acti-

vating the broader opportunities offered by contemporary heritage branding. In today's tourism environment, visibility and differentiation are increasingly shaped by a wider ecosystem of communication channels – including social media, booking platforms, and traditional or influencer media – yet only one participant reported using social media for heritage communication. This matters because social media lets businesses share their heritage creatively and expand their branding into new formats that reach guests ahead of their visit.

This gap is even more pronounced when considered alongside the findings from the previous section, where gastronomy and special recipes emerged as the most prominent expressions of heritage. Although these elements frequently appear in direct guest interaction, they are not consistently translated into written menus, promotional materials, or digital media. As a result, much of the brand's heritage remains embedded in face-to-face storytelling, rather than being strategically incorporated into communication materials that could enhance recognition, appeal, and brand coherence across guest touchpoints.

Findings show that tourism family firms construct rich heritage identities through layered family, place-based, and material practices, yet rely predominantly on traditional, interpersonal modes of communication to convey these identities to guests. Gastronomy, seasonal customs, traditional knowledge, family personalities, and built heritage provide a substantial reservoir for shaping brand heritage identity, but these elements are rarely activated through scalable communication channels capable of reaching audiences before arrival. This creates a tension between the abundance of heritage resources and the limited scope of their communication, suggesting that many family firms possess strong heritage assets but have yet to fully translate them into a cohesive and outward-facing heritage branding strategy.

We synthesised these findings into a conceptual framework (Figure 2) that illustrates how heritage branding functions in tourism family firms and where it most commonly fails. Figure 2 highlights the central identity–communication tension identified in the data: although many firms have rich heritage re-

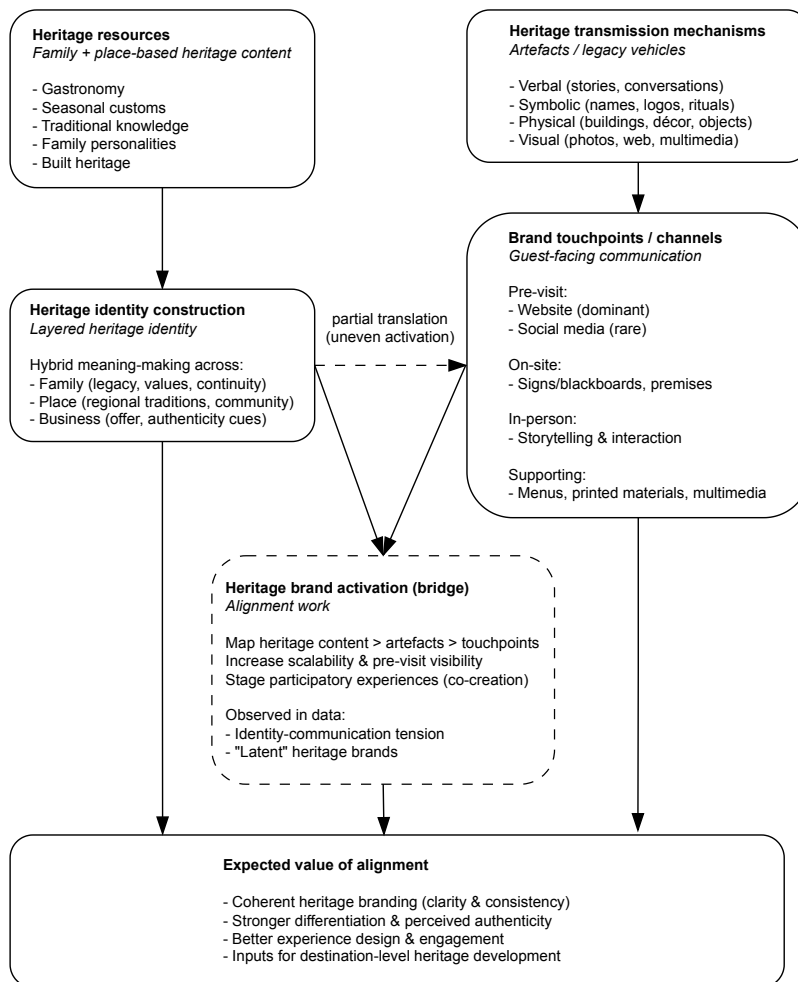
Conceptual framework: Heritage branding in tourism family firms

Figure 2 Conceptual Framework

sources and express strong heritage identities, these meanings are often only partially conveyed through structured, scalable, and pre-visit communication. It therefore emphasises the alignment of resources, heritage identity, artefacts, and touchpoints as the key mechanism by which firms can enhance coherence, differentiation, and experience design.

The conceptual framework is grounded in four complementary strands of literature discussed in this paper. First, family business identity and branding research explains how family involvement, continuity, history, and values become part of firm identity

and are projected into external communication (As-trachan et al., 2018; Blombäck & Brunninge, 2013; Cornelissen et al., 2007). Second, heritage branding literature explains how historical resources become present- and future-relevant sources of brand meaning through elements such as longevity, track record, core values, symbolic elements, and the perceived importance of history to identity (Urde et al., 2007; Hudson, 2011). Third, place-based heritage research shows that heritage in family firms is not only familial but also territorially embedded, shaped by regional traditions, landscapes, and community associations

(Balmer, 2011; Spielmann et al., 2021). Fourth, legacy and tourism experience research explains how these meanings are externalised through artefacts or legacy vehicles and encountered by guests across multiple touchpoints before, during, and after the visit (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2024; Wang, 1999; Tusseyadi, 2014). In this sense, Figure 2 is not proposed as a wholly new theory, but as an empirically grounded integration of these established perspectives in the specific context of tourism family firms.

More specifically, the framework can be read as a four-step process. First, firms draw on heritage resources rooted in both family history and place-based embeddedness. Second, these resources are interpreted into a heritage identity that defines what the firm sees as distinctive, meaningful, and worth carrying forward. Third, this identity is externalised through heritage transmission mechanisms or legacy vehicles, such as stories, symbols, physical spaces, objects, and visual representations. Fourth, these artefacts are communicated through brand touchpoints across the guest journey, including pre-visit, on-site, and interpersonal encounters. The framework therefore links existing literature to the empirical findings by showing that heritage branding depends not only on the presence of heritage resources, but on the alignment between resources, identity construction, artefacts, and communication. When this alignment is strong, heritage becomes a coherent branding and experience resource; when it is weak, an identity-communication tension emerges.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine how tourism family firms draw on family- and place-based heritage in shaping their heritage branding, and how these meanings are communicated to guests. Rather than treating heritage as a static collection of historical facts, the findings show that heritage functions as an active identity resource, continuously interpreted through family narratives, regional embeddedness, and everyday business practice. In this sense, the study extends existing work on family business branding by demonstrating that, in tourism, heritage is something firms possess and also something they enact and make available for experience.

A first contribution concerns the nature of heritage identity in tourism family firms. Prior research has emphasised the hybrid character of family firms, usually describing this hybridity as the overlap of family and business systems (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2013; Krappe et al., 2011; Pieper & Klein, 2007). The findings suggest that, in tourism, this view is too narrow unless place is treated as a constitutive dimension of identity rather than merely a contextual backdrop. The heritage described by owners is not confined to family lineage or internal organisational memory. It is equally rooted in regional customs, local gastronomy, agricultural rhythms, vernacular architecture, and culturally meaningful landscapes. The result is a family-place heritage nexus in which family continuity and territorial embeddedness reinforce each other. This aligns with Spielmann et al.'s (2021) emphasis on place as a key source of corporate heritage identity and with Balmer's (2011) argument that heritage identities are layered accretions of temporal, cultural, and spatial meanings. For tourism family firms, heritage branding therefore appears to rest on a triadic intersection of family, business, and place.

A second contribution lies in clarifying what counts as heritage resources in these firms. The findings indicate that gastronomy, seasonal customs, traditional knowledge, family personalities, and built heritage are mutually reinforcing forms through which heritage becomes tangible and credible. Gastronomy, for example, does more than preserve recipes: it materialises continuity, values, and affective memory. Seasonal customs connect the business to wider communal rhythms and local tradition. Traditional agricultural and craft knowledge signals embody continuity across generations. Stories about family members personalise the business and attach heritage to recognisable human figures. Built heritage, in turn, anchors these meanings materially by offering visible evidence of longevity and embeddedness. Taken together, these elements support the view that heritage branding in family firms is not limited to symbolic claims about the past, but emerges through a combination of verbal, symbolic, physical, and visual artefacts (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2024). In this respect, the findings give empirical depth to Urde et al.'s

(2007) heritage brand elements by showing how they are instantiated in small tourism businesses through mundane but meaningful practices.

At the same time, the study shows that the mere presence of heritage resources does not automatically result in strong heritage branding. The central analytical insight is the persistent misalignment between heritage identity and heritage communication. Owners describe rich reservoirs of heritage meaning, yet these are only partially translated into structured, outward-facing communication. Heritage is most often conveyed through websites, on-site cues, and interpersonal interaction, while broader pre-visit and scalable channels remain underused. This is significant because, in tourism, brand meaning is formed not only on site but across a sequence of touchpoints before, during, and after the visit. When heritage remains embedded mainly in face-to-face storytelling or tacit everyday practice, much of its branding potential remains latent. The concept of latent heritage brands is useful here: many firms appear to possess the core ingredients of a heritage brand but lack the communicative alignment needed to project these meanings consistently into the market. This sharpens existing discussions of corporate identity by showing that the issue is not only whether heritage exists, but whether it is sufficiently externalised through coherent brand touchpoints (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012; Cornelissen et al., 2007; Blombäck & Brunninge, 2016).

This misalignment also helps explain an important paradox in the findings. The firms often appear highly authentic, yet this authenticity is communicated mainly as background atmosphere rather than as a consciously designed heritage proposition. Guests may encounter old buildings, traditional dishes, family stories, and traces of local customs, but these elements are not always curated into a clear pre-visit narrative or a coherent cross-touchpoint experience. In tourism terms, heritage is therefore often present as a lived environment but not fully activated as an experience design resource. This point links the findings to work on authenticity and the experience economy (Wang, 1999; Tussyadiah, 2014; Zhu et al., 2025). Authenticity in these settings does not stem from theatrical staging alone, but from the perceived continuity

between the family, the place, and the offer. However, the findings suggest that authenticity becomes strategically valuable only when it is translated into forms that guests can recognise, anticipate, and engage with across the customer journey.

Relatedly, the data indicate that most firms position guests more as witnesses to heritage than as participants in it. Traditional knowledge, seasonal rituals, and gastronomy are often present, but only loosely structured as interactive or bookable experiences. This points to a second gap: not only between identity and communication, but also between heritage as a lived practice and heritage as a co-created experience. Following Radu-Lefebvre et al. (2024), legacy is interpreted and enacted through interaction between senders and receivers. From this perspective, heritage branding in tourism family firms may be strengthened when guests are invited to move beyond passive observation towards forms of participation, interpretation, and emotional engagement. The contribution here is not to argue that all firms should commercialise heritage intensively, but to highlight that even modest forms of guided participation may help convert tacit authenticity into more legible and memorable brand meaning.

This identity–communication tension appears to arise for three interrelated reasons. First, much of the heritage described by owners is tacit, embodied, and relational rather than already formatted for communication: recipes, agricultural know-how, seasonal rituals, and family stories exist in practice but are not always translated into menus, websites, or bookable experiences. Second, small family firms often rely on channels that are immediate and authentic but difficult to scale, especially interpersonal storytelling and on-site material cues. Third, heritage communication seems to remain fragmented across touchpoints, so what guests encounter on site is richer than what they can recognise before arrival. The empirical material illustrates this clearly: gastronomy and special recipes emerged as prominent expressions of heritage, yet they were often communicated directly to guests rather than consistently formalised in written menus, promotional materials, or digital media; similarly, old buildings, blackboards, and preserved premises con-

veyed strong authenticity on site, but their branding value remained partly dependent on physical presence. Firms can begin to overcome this tension not by inventing new heritage claims, but by converting existing heritage resources into a small number of repeatable communication formats across the guest journey, for example by translating family recipes into short menu narratives, turning seasonal customs into pre-visit storytelling content, and presenting traditional knowledge through guided demonstrations or light-touch participatory experiences.

These findings also relate more explicitly to previous empirical research. They are consistent with studies showing that family firms derive branding strength from continuity, tradition, and the symbolic value of family identity, but they extend this work by demonstrating that, in tourism, such meanings are inseparable from place-based heritage and the experiential settings in which they are encountered. They also support earlier research suggesting that authenticity acquires value through narrative and sensory enactment rather than through abstract historical claims alone. At the same time, our findings complicate prior work that tends to treat heritage identity as a relatively coherent resource once it exists. In this study, heritage resources were often abundant, but their communication remained partial, uneven, and highly dependent on interpersonal interaction. The conceptual contribution, therefore, lies in identifying heritage branding in tourism family firms not simply as a matter of possessing heritage, but as a question of alignment between family-place resources, heritage identity construction, artefacts, and touchpoints. This is where the idea of latent heritage brands becomes analytically important: firms may have a strong heritage base without yet converting it into a fully legible, market-facing brand.

The findings also have practical implications. For tourism family firms, the main managerial challenge is not to discover heritage from scratch, but to make existing heritage strategically visible. A useful starting point is to map heritage resources against guest touchpoints: which elements of family and place are communicated before arrival, on site, and after the stay? Which meanings remain implicit? Such map-

ping can help firms identify underused assets and areas of inconsistency. In particular, the results highlight the need for stronger pre-visit communication. Websites are already widely used, but they often function as static information channels rather than as active heritage storytelling platforms. Similarly, the near absence of social media in the findings suggests missed opportunities to extend family storytelling, local customs, and everyday heritage practices into the digital sphere. For small firms with limited resources, this does not require sophisticated branding campaigns. Rather, it calls for a more deliberate translation of existing practices into concise, repeated, and recognisable narratives across a limited number of channels.

The study should be interpreted in light of several limitations, which also suggest directions for future research. The analysis is based on owner narratives collected through open-ended questionnaires originally developed for project purposes rather than for this specific study. While this provides rich comparative material, it offers limited opportunities for probing and follow-up. The findings are owner-centred and therefore reveal more about heritage identity construction than about how such meanings are received by guests, employees, or local communities. Additionally, translating responses from Slovene and German into English may have reduced some nuances of expression, and the context-specific sample of small family tourism firms in cross-border regions of Slovenia and Austria limits broader generalisation.

Future research could use multi-stakeholder designs to compare owner intentions with guest and community interpretations, combine interviews with systematic analysis of touchpoints such as websites, menus, booking platforms, and on-site environments, and examine whether the family-place heritage nexus identified here also appears in urban hospitality or non-tourism family firms. Longitudinal research could further explore how heritage branding evolves through succession, digitalisation, and changing tourism demand.

Overall, the discussion suggests that tourism family firms possess a distinctive heritage advantage, but that this advantage becomes strategically meaningful only when family history, place-based embeddedness,

and guest-facing communication are more tightly aligned. The main contribution of the study is therefore to explain how heritage matters: as a layered identity resource whose branding value depends on its translation into coherent, credible, and experientially accessible forms.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine how tourism family firms in less-visited regions construct family- and place-based heritage and how they translate this heritage into guest-facing communication. Drawing on open-ended responses from 51 family-run tourism businesses in the Slovenia-Austria cross-border context, the analysis shows that owners frequently understand heritage as a hybrid resource: it is simultaneously rooted in family history, values, and continuity, and embedded in place through local traditions, gastronomy, customs, and tangible elements of the built environment. In this sense, heritage is not treated merely as 'the past', but as an active, meaning-laden foundation for identity and differentiation.

A central insight is the recurring tension between heritage identity and heritage communication. While owners often articulate rich heritage narratives internally (who they are, what they stand for, and how family and place shape the offer), these meanings are not always consistently translated into explicit communication through channels and touchpoints that guests can readily access. Communication tends to rely heavily on interpersonal storytelling and on-site cues, whereas digital and structured brand narratives are more unevenly developed. This points to a gap between the depth of heritage resources available to the firm and the extent to which these resources are strategically activated as coherent heritage branding.

The study contributes to research on family business branding and heritage tourism by empirically illustrating how heritage identity in tourism family firms emerges from the intersection of family and place, and by clarifying the mechanisms through which owners attempt to transmit heritage meanings to guests. Practically, the findings suggest that small family-run tourism businesses can strengthen their market positioning by deliberately mapping heritage

content to guest touchpoints (such as digital storytelling, curated artefacts, experience design, and consistent narrative cues across channels), thereby making heritage more visible and easier for guests to perceive and engage with. At the destination and policy level, initiatives such as mentoring, toolkits, and collaborative heritage-themed product development can help smaller firms translate embedded, experience-based heritage knowledge into communicable and market-relevant forms.

At the same time, the conclusions should be interpreted in light of the study's constraints, including its reliance on self-reported owner narratives and the absence of interactive probing or triangulation with additional sources (such as guest perspectives or systematic analyses of communication materials). The study should therefore be read as an exploratory qualitative contribution that opens up directions for more extensive and triangulated research. Future work could build on these insights through dedicated interview-based designs, guest-side studies, direct observation of service encounters, and longitudinal approaches that trace how heritage branding evolves through succession, market shifts, and digital transformation.

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Osebnе motivacije, ki vplivajo na namero za okolju prijazno nakupovanje v gastronomskem turizmu, ter vloga skrbi za okolje

Servet Gura, Kriselda Sulcaj Gura, Suman Lodh in Monomita Nandy

Trajnostni turizem si prizadeva zagotoviti dolgoročni razvoj z gospodarskim ravnotežjem, ohranjanjem virov in varovanjem kulturne dediščine, saj globalne strategije pogosto podcenjujejo psihološke, družbene in kulturne vidike, kar ustvarja vrzeli med znanstvenimi razpravami in praktično uporabo. Gastronomski turizem velja za sestavni del razvoja trajnostnega turizma, saj prispeva k diferenciaciji destinacij, ohranjanju kulturne dediščine, zmanjševanju negativnih vplivov na okolje ter rasti lokalnega gospodarstva z vključevanjem lokalnih proizvajalcev in spodbujanjem kratkih dobavnih verig, pri čemer pomembno vlogo igrajo motivacije, ki usmerjajo odločitve turistov. Na podlagi teh ugotovitev si naša raziskava prizadeva preizkusiti konceptualni model, ki združuje osebne motive in okoljsko zaskrbljenost kot napovednika namere za zeleno nakupovanje v albarskem gastronomskem turizmu. Analiza uporablja model delnih najmanjših kvadratov za strukturno modeliranje enačb (PLS-SEM). Glavna ugotovitev je, da so v kontekstu gastronomskega turizma socialni motivi (SSM) in senzorični motivi (SAM) ključni dejavniki, ki spodbujajo zeleno nakupovanje (GPI), medtem ko okoljska zaskrbljenost (EC) deluje kot posredniški mehanizem le v primeru socialnih motivov trajnosti (SSM). Z vidika teorije raziskava združuje različne dimenzije osebnih motivacij v enoten teoretični okvir ter povezuje pristope TPB, VBN, NAM in SDT za razlago oblikovanja GPI. Prispeva k literaturi z umestitvijo SSM in SAM kot pomembnih elementov v gastronomskem turizmu. Prihodnje raziskave bi lahko uporabile longitudinalne pristope za preučevanje sprememb GPI in EC skozi čas ter eksperimentalne metode za oceno vpliva specifičnih marketinških in komunikacijskih spremenljivk.

Ključne besede: trajnostni turizem, gastronomski turizem, osebni motivi, okoljska zaskrbljenost, namera za zeleno nakupovanje

Academica Turistica, 19(2), 119–139

Digitalne inovacije v trajnostnem turizmu v naravnem okolju: pregled literature

Paula Andrea Viviescas-Jaimes, Diana Teresa Parra-Sánchez, Liliana Calderón-Benavides in Juan Carlos Rodríguez Marín

Pričujoča raziskava sistematično pregleduje uporabo geografskih informacijskih sistemov, sistemov za podporo odločanju, umetne inteligence, obogatene resničnosti in navidezne resničnosti v kontekstu trajnostnega turizma v naravnih okoljih. Ugotovitve kažejo, da so geografski informacijski sistemi in sistemi za podporo odločanju temeljni za prostorsko odločanje in načrtovanje varstva narave. Hkrati umetna inteligenca omogoča upravljanje obiskovalcev v realnem času, obogatena in navidezna resničnost pa bogatita izobraževalne ter poglobljene izkušnje, ki spodbujajo okoljsko ozaveščenost. Kljub temu ostajajo izzivi, kot so omejena infrastruktura, regulativne vrzeli in ovire pri dostopnosti tehnologij, zlasti v oddaljenih in razvijajočih se regijah. Pregled poudarja potrebo po integriranih hibridnih modelih, kot so

geografski informacijski sistemi, podprti z umetno inteligenco za napovedne okoljske analize, ter sistemi za podporo odločanju, nadgrajeni z navidezno resničnostjo za simulacijo tokov obiskovalcev na zavarovanih območjih. Nadaljnje raziskave bi se morale osredotočiti na razvoj razširljivih in kontekstno prilagojenih okvirov za uvajanje tehnologij v destinacijah, ki temeljijo na naravi. Sodelovanje med oblikovalci politik, deležniki v industriji in raziskovalci je ključno za vzpostavitev regulativnih standardov, spodbujanje digitalne vključenosti ter krepitev interdisciplinarnih partnerstev, ki zagotavljajo, da digitalne inovacije učinkovito prispevajo k trajnostnemu razvoju in upravljanju naravnih turističnih območij.

Ključne besede: umetna inteligenca, obogatena resničnost, sistemi za podporo odločanju, trajnostni turizem, navidezna resničnost

Academica Turistica, 19(2), 141–155

Vloga vključenosti strank pri zvestobi blagovni znamki kavarne

Rachel Dyah Wiastuti, Nurul Sukma Lestari, Irena Joe Florencia, Vany Octaviany in Diena Mutiara Lemy

Raziskava preučuje posredniško vlogo vključenosti kupcev med identifikacijo z blagovno znamko, skladnostjo samopodobe (angl. *self-congruity*) in vrednostjo storitve ter zvestobo blagovni znamki med obiskovalci kavarn. Raziskava prav tako analizira razlike med moškimi in ženskimi potrošniki glede na predlagani model. Podatki so bili zbrani z anketnim vprašalnikom na vzorcu 151 respondentov v Indoneziji, ki so že obiskali kavarno na lokaciji. Podatki so bili analizirani z uporabo na PLS temelječem modeliranju strukturnih enačb (PLS-SEM). Rezultati kažejo, da imajo identifikacija z blagovno znamko, skladnost samopodobe in vrednost storitve pomemben ter pozitiven vpliv na vključenost kupcev, ta pa posledično pomembno in pozitivno vpliva na zvestobo blagovni znamki. Analiza po spolu razkriva, da so bili vsi potrjeni odnosi pri ženskih kupcih pozitivni in statistično značilni. Pri moških kupcih pa vključenost ni bila pomembno pogojena z vrednostjo storitve, prav tako ni imela posredniške vloge pri krepitevi zvestobe blagovni znamki. Poleg tega se je pokazalo, da ima vrednost storitve razmeroma majhen vpliv na vključenost kupcev, kar kaže, da zanimanje kupcev za kavarno ni nujno odvisno od zaznane vrednosti ponudbe. Tudi visoka vrednost za denar zato ne pomeni nujno večje vključenosti kupcev. Ugotovitve nakazujejo, da bi morale kavarne več pozornosti nameniti integraciji spletnih in fizičnih izkušenj, upravljanju ocen in mnenj strank na digitalnih platformah ter ustreznim cenovnim strategijam, da bi povečale vključenost kupcev. Raziskava ponuja pomembne vpogleda za gostinsko industrijo pri razvoju strategij za izboljšanje zvestobe blagovni znamki ob upoštevanju razlik med spoloma.

Ključne besede: zvestoba blagovni znamki, kavarna, vključenost kupcev, skladnost samopodobe, vrednost storitve

Academica Turistica, 19(2), 157–172

Dejavniki, ki vplivajo na elektronsko ustno priporočanje med turisti generacije Z pri atrakciji plesa kecak na plaži Pandawa

Heri Prabowo, Mohamad Rizan, Farah Chalida Hanoum in Henry Casandra Gultom

V središču naše raziskave je generacija Z, znana po aktivni uporabi pametnih telefonov za beleženje in deljenje potovalnih izkušenj. Namen raziskave je bil analizirati vpliv zaznane kakovosti destinacije na elektronsko ustno izročilo (angl. *electronic word of mouth* – ewom) pri atrakciji plesa kecak na plaži Pandawa, pri čemer smo upoštevali vlogo vključenosti turistov in nepozabnih turističnih izkušenj (angl. *memorable tourism experiences* – mte). Raziskava je temeljila na kvantitativnem anketnem pristopu, v katerem je sodelovalo 133 respondentov. Analiza podatkov je bila izvedena z uporabo modeliranja strukturnih enačb (sem) za preučevanje odnosov med spremenljivkami, vključno z zaznano kakovostjo destinacije, vključenostjo turistov, mte in ewom. Rezultati so pokazali, da zaznana kakovost destinacije pomembno in pozitivno vpliva na vključenost turistov ter ewom, vendar nima neposrednega vpliva na mte. Ugotovljeno je bilo tudi, da vključenost turistov pomembno vpliva tako na mte kot na ewom. Poleg tega ima vključenost turistov posredniško (mediacijsko) vlogo v odnosu med zaznano kakovostjo destinacije in ewom, medtem ko mediacijska vloga mte ni bila potrjena. Prav tako mte ni imel statistično pomembnega vpliva na ewom. Raziskava prinaša nova spoznanja o turistih generacije Z z analizo prepletanja zaznane kakovosti destinacije, vključenosti turistov in ewom. Poudarja ključno mediacijsko vlogo vključenosti ter ponuja praktične implikacije za izboljšanje digitalne angažiranosti skozi nepozabne in participativne turistične izkušnje.

Ključne besede zaznana kakovost destinacije, vključenost turistov, nepozabne turistične izkušnje, ewom, generacija Z

Academica Turistica, 19(2), 173–188

Od zaslonov do kovčkov: e-govornice, zaupanje in podoba destinacije kot dejavniki, ki vplivajo na potovalne namere v Maroku

Anas Moukrim, Majdouline Attaoui, Hajar Rbiaa in Hasnaa Gaber

Pričujoča raziskava preučuje vplive elektronskega ustnega izročila (angl. *electronic word of mouth* – e-wom), zaupanja, podobe destinacije in zaznane vrednosti na namero obiska. Za preverjanje odnosov, ki nas zanimajo, je bilo uporabljeno modeliranje strukturnih enačb, pri čemer so bili analizirani podatki 523 anketirancev. Rezultati kažejo, da e-wom pomembno napoveduje zaupanje in podobo destinacije, medtem ko zaupanje, podoba destinacije in zaznana vrednost pomembno vplivajo na namero obiska. Za oceno posrednih učinkov e-wom na namero obiska je bila izvedena mediacijska analiza z uporabo bootstrap intervalov zaupanja. Rezultati razkrivajo, da neposredni vpliv e-wom na namero obiska postane statistično neznačilen, ko so v model vključeni mediatorji. Ocene na podlagi ponovnega vzorčenja dodatno kažejo, da zaupanje pomembno uravnava odnos med e-wom in namero obiska. Nasprotno pa posredni učinek preko podobe destinacije ni statis-

tično značilen. Ugotovitve tako zaupanje prepoznavajo kot ključni mehanizem, ki povezuje e-wom z namero obiska, ter ponujajo pomembne implikacije za raziskave in prakso turističnega marketinga.

Ključne besede: spletno ustno izročilo (online wom), elektronsko ustno izročilo (e-wom), zaupanje, podoba destinacije, zaznana vrednost, namera potovanja
Academica Turistica, 19(2), 189–210

Oblikovanje dediščine na stičišču družinskega podjetja in kraja: oblikovanje blagovne znamke na podlagi dediščine v turističnih družinskih podjetjih

Tadej Rogelja, Jaka Godejša in Dejan Križa

Družinska turistična podjetja pogosto razpolagajo z bogatimi zgodovinskimi in prostorsko pogojenimi viri, vendar ostaja nejasno, kako se ti viri prevajajo v koherentno dediščinsko blagovno znamko in komunikacijo, usmerjeno k gostom. Namen pričujoče raziskave je preučiti, kako družinsko vodena turistična podjetja v manj obiskanih regijah konstruirajo družinsko in geografsko utemeljeno dediščino ter kako jo komunicirajo svojim gostom. Raziskava temelji na sekundarni kvalitativni analizi odgovorov na odprta vprašanja, zbranih v okviru projekta Hosted by Family (HbF) Interreg Slovenija–Avstrija. Analizirane so pripovedi 51 lastnikov družinsko vodenih gostinsko-turističnih podjetij v Sloveniji (Gorenjska, Podravje) in Avstriji (Štajerska).

Rezultati kažejo, da lastniki svojo »posebno dediščino« najpogosteje umeščajo v pet vsebinskih področij: gastronomijo, sezonske običaje, tradicionalna znanja, družinske osebnosti ter grajeno dediščino. To kaže na večplastno dediščinsko identiteto, ki nastaja v prepletu družine, prostora in podjetja. Dediščina se komunicira prek raznolike, vendar neenakomerno uporabljene kombinacije komunikacijskih kanalov, pri čemer prevladujejo spletne strani, komunikacija na lokaciji (npr. table ali napisi) ter osebni stik, ob zelo omejeni rabi družbenih omrežij. Raziskava v celoti razkriva ponavljajoče se napetosti med dediščinsko identiteto in dediščinsko komunikacijo: kljub obstoju obsežnih dediščinskih virov so ti pogosto le delno aktivirani preko strukturiranih, razširljivih in predhodnih (pred obiskom) stičnih točk z blagovno znamko. Raziskava ponuja empirično utemeljen vpogled v preplet družinske in prostorske dediščine v družinskih turističnih podjetjih ter podaja praktične usmeritve za usklajevanje dediščinskih virov s stičnimi točkami blagovne znamke in oblikovanjem izkušnje.

Ključne besede: družinska turistična podjetja, dediščinska blagovna znamka, identiteta dediščine, krajevna umeščenost, komuniciranje blagovne znamke
Academica Turistica, 19(2), 211–228

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