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## **A STUDY ON ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (EWOM) DETERMINANTS INFLUENCING TOURIST PURCHASE DECISIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

In the digital era, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has become a critical factor influencing consumer behavior, especially in the tourism industry. This study explores the determinants of eWOM that affect tourist purchasing decisions, focusing on factors such as source credibility, valence, volume of information, and receiver characteristics. The findings suggest that eWOM significantly impacts consumer decisions, and its effectiveness is determined by the perceived credibility of the source, the relevance of the information, and the characteristics of the receiver.

### **INTRODUCTION**

**Overview of eWOM in Tourism:** The advent of the internet has revolutionized the way consumers gather information and make purchasing decisions, particularly in the tourism industry. eWOM refers to the online exchange of information, reviews, and recommendations about products and services. Unlike traditional word of mouth, eWOM has a broader reach and can influence a larger audience. In tourism, where the product is intangible and experiences vary widely, eWOM plays a vital role in shaping consumer perceptions and decisions.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

The primary objectives of this study are:

- To investigate how tourists use the internet in their decision-making processes.
- To understand tourists' attitudes towards user-generated content.
- To identify the key eWOM determinants that influence tourists' purchasing decisions.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:**

The study explores the relationship between various eWOM factors such as source expertise, trustworthiness, tie strength, homophily, and the influence of these factors on customer purchasing decisions. The framework also considers the role of receiver expertise and the nature of the product in moderating the impact of eWOM on consumer behavior.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Influence of eWOM on Consumer Behavior:**

Research has shown that eWOM is more influential than traditional advertising because it is perceived as more authentic and reliable. In the context of tourism, where the product is highly experiential, the opinions and reviews shared by other consumers carry significant weight. Studies indicate that consumers rely heavily on eWOM to reduce the perceived risk associated with purchasing tourism products and services.

### **Factors Affecting eWOM Influence:**

The effectiveness of eWOM is influenced by several factors, including the credibility of the source, the volume of information available, and the perceived relevance of the content. Source expertise and trustworthiness are particularly important, as consumers are more likely to be influenced by reviews from individuals they consider knowledgeable or reliable.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Research Design:** This study adopts a descriptive research design, using both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the impact of eWOM on tourist purchase decisions. The data was collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to 180 respondents who have experience in using eWOM for travel planning.

**Data Collection and Sampling:** Primary data was gathered using questionnaires, while secondary data was obtained from previous studies, articles, and reports on eWOM. A sample size of 180 respondents was chosen using convenience sampling, targeting individuals who frequently use the internet to plan their travel.

**Analytical Tools:** The data was analyzed using various statistical tools, including percentage analysis, ANOVA, chi-square tests, and correlation analysis, to identify significant relationships between the variables.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

**Demographics:** The demographic profile of the respondents shows a balanced representation of age groups, with the majority being between 20-35 years old. Most respondents were highly educated, with a significant proportion holding postgraduate degrees. The sample was also diverse in terms of occupation and income levels.

**Usage of eWOM in Travel Planning:** The analysis reveals that a majority of respondents frequently use the internet to gather information when planning their travels. Most respondents trust online reviews and consider them a crucial part of their decision-making process. eWOM sources like TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and social media platforms are highly valued by consumers for their perceived authenticity.

### Determinants of eWOM Influence:

- **Source Expertise:** Respondents indicated a strong preference for reviews from individuals who are perceived as experienced or knowledgeable about travel.
- **Source Trustworthiness:** The credibility of the source is a critical factor, with most respondents relying on reviews that are detailed and consistent across multiple sources.
- **Volume and Valence of eWOM:** The number of reviews and the overall tone (positive or negative) significantly influence purchasing decisions. Consumers are more likely to be influenced by products with a large volume of positive reviews.

**Consumer Attitudes Towards eWOM:** The study found that most respondents have a positive attitude towards eWOM, considering it a reliable source of information. However, they also expressed concerns about the potential bias in online reviews and the credibility of anonymous reviews.

## DISCUSSION

### Implications for Tourism Marketing:

The findings underscore the importance of eWOM in shaping tourist behavior. For tourism marketers, managing online reviews and encouraging satisfied customers to share their

experiences can be a powerful tool for influencing potential customers. The study suggests that businesses should actively engage with online communities and manage their online reputation to maximize the positive impact of eWOM.

**Challenges and Limitations:** One of the main challenges identified in the study is the potential for biased or fake reviews, which can undermine the credibility of eWOM. Additionally, the study was limited by its sample size and geographic focus, which may affect the generalizability of the findings.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Enhance Online Engagement:** Tourism businesses should focus on building strong online communities and encouraging user-generated content.
- **Improve Review Authenticity:** Implementing verification systems for reviews can help enhance the credibility of eWOM.
- **Leverage Influencers:** Collaborating with travel influencers who have high credibility can amplify the positive effects of eWOM.

### CONCLUSION:

The study concludes that eWOM plays a pivotal role in influencing tourist purchase decisions, with factors like source expertise, trustworthiness, and review volume being key determinants of its effectiveness. For tourism businesses, managing eWOM effectively can lead to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty.

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