

Shaping tourism service perceptions through electronic word-of-mouth (e-wom) and online reviews: Insights from Gen Z

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Abstract

The digitalization of traveler interactions across social media platforms has made electronic word-of-mouth (e-wom) become a major influence on Gen Z traveler decision-making processes. The Gen Z generation will dominate the travel industry because of its increasing demographic size, digital fluency and purchasing power. While there is a substantial amount of research on e-wom, few studies focus on how Gen Z travelers from developing countries, particularly those using Facebook for social networking, are influenced by e-wom in their travel choices on social media platforms. This study explores how key e-wom components influence the perception of travel services and travel choices among young Bangladeshi consumers. The research collected survey responses from 400 participants before performing PLS-SEM hypothesis testing. Credibility ($\beta = 0.221$) and information quality ($\beta = 0.386$) significantly enhance perceived image, which strongly influences travel decisions ($\beta = 0.600$) among Bangladeshi Gen Z travelers. Information availability ($\beta = 0.121$) and e-WOM quantity ($\beta = 0.150$) also have positive effects. PLS-SEM was used to analyze these relationships. This research contributes a new understanding about how social media-based e-wom influences young consumer decisions in digital marketing tourism contexts. This investigation also suggests that the hospitality industry should prioritize e-wom management because it creates positive consumer perceptions, which helps tourism businesses gain a competitive advantage in the market by co-creating value in both digital marketing and tourism services.

Keywords

Keywords: Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), Perceived Image, Tourist Decision-making, Gen Z, Facebook, Bangladesh, Structural Equation Modeling

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Ethics & Conflict of Interest

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethics Approval

Not required for this study.

Justification

This type of article does not require Ethics Committee Approval at Noakhali Science and Technology University.

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Artificial Intelligence Usage Statement

Generative artificial intelligence tools, specifically ChatGPT (OpenAI) and QuillBot, were used solely for language polishing and to enhance the readability of the manuscript during its preparation. These tools were not used for idea development, data generation, data analysis, interpretation of results, or reference creation. All content was critically reviewed and revised by the authors, who assume full academic, ethical, and legal responsibility for the manuscript.



1. Introduction

Today, Internet reviews and electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) are two of the main means of influencing consumer behavior and choices (Khalid et al., 2020). Compared to other digital platforms, Facebook's large user base and interactive features make it a prime channel for disseminating E-WOM (Abir et al., 2020). The field of tourism is a great example of this change. The intangible tourism service experience and recommendations shared by clients on the Internet make others have an impression of those services (Kakirala & Singh, 2020). The user-generated content (UGC) on social media is shaping consumer behavioral intentions (Batra & Keller, 2016; Kwark et al., 2018). Recent trends show that traditional marketing methods are losing their effectiveness day by day and one of the reasons is the "F-Factor" (friends, family, Facebook fans and followers). Facebook connects these factors strongly, ultimately influencing the purchasing decisions of consumers (Anastasiei et al., 2023; Li et al., 2021). The study by Han and Anderson (2020) identified some key reasons behind the effect of online reviews, which provide valuable insights into consumer behavior. These are altruism, social ownership, and the desire to improve service quality. e-WOM significantly influences young males' motivation to travel to a destination (Hung et al., 2023). Despite the growing influence of e-WOM, limited research explores its impact on Bangladeshi youth, especially on tourism decisions via Facebook (Acharjee & Ahmed, 2023).

Current research exhibits a notable deficiency in understanding how young users in Bangladesh engage with and respond to electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), indicating the importance of effective management of e-WOM (Shuvo & Islam, 2024). Review sites have a significant influence on how people regard themselves in a destination, especially among young tourists. Knowing about their interaction patterns and feedback mechanisms is a major concern. The social media evaluations' perceived value, usability, reliability, and information quality influence attitudes and visiting intentions in Bangladesh (Roy et al. 2021; Ahmed & Shuvo, 2024). Marketing portal Baer's (n.d.) article stated that 50% of customers are likely to make a transaction decision after engaging in face-to-face conversations, while 43% are similarly influenced by online discussions.

The majority of academic publications concentrate on electronic word-of-mouth and its impact on consumers' travel decisions through extensive frameworks. However, there is a lack of research on how the perceived images from electronic word-of-mouth influence specific aspects of tourism perception, such as destination choices and travel activities, and the decision-making process of young Bangladeshi travelers (Ahmed, Acharjee, & Nidhi, 2023). These studies do not explore the particular behavioral patterns and Facebook usage of Generation Z travelers who primarily use Facebook as their social media platform. This study sheds light on how important Facebook e-WOM is in influencing travel decisions among this group by looking at how people interact on social media and how much weight they give to peer opinions (Belarmino & Koh 2018). Negative reviews can deter visits, underscoring the importance of positive E-WOM and strategic engagement with influential bloggers (Popy & Bappy, 2022). The influence of review sentiment and emotional tone on consumer perceptions significantly shapes tourists' perceptions (Arıca et al. 2022). The role of reviewing authenticity and verification, which shapes tourism decisions, is addressed in the study by investigating how young users in Bangladesh make travel decisions about social media and the influence of peer ratings on the platform. The study provides essential insights for a comprehensive understanding of e-WOM's impact on image formulation and tourism decision-making in Bangladesh.

Beyond conventional considerations, this study investigates how electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) affects the travel preferences and decision-making of young visitors in Bangladesh, therefore addressing the function of source trust. It looks at how e-WOM elements, including quantity, information availability, credibility, and information quality, shape Gen Z visitors' impressions of tourism products. By combining these elements, the study investigates how perceived image affects tourist decision-making in the digital era, therefore shedding light on how Generation Z travelers create opinions and make wise decisions depending on online reviews. The findings of this research will provide valuable insights for travel companies looking to cater to this emerging market segment.

The study aims to minimize knowledge gaps by analyzing the complete connection between e-WOM features and perceived image in decision-making processes of Bangladeshi youth because it helps understand digital communication's impact on travel decisions. This study improves our comprehension of digital elements that affect travel behavior perceptions among people. The research delivers important findings about how e-WOM affects the perception and decision-making patterns of Bangladeshi youth travelers by providing details about digital word-of-mouth's effects on their travel choices. The research examines these connections to deliver researchers better comprehension about digital factors impacting travel decisions of Bangladeshi youth, which generates knowledge that helps marketing plans and tourism growth initiatives.

2. Literature Review

E-WOM and Online Reviews

Goldsmith, (2008) stated that WOM, or word-of-mouth, has been a fundamental form of opinion sharing for centuries, but the internet has evolved into electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). Jan and Bhat (2021) focused on the power of e-WOM which has surged with technological advancements and the proliferation of social media, in reshaping influencer partnerships and brief, impactful reviews. e-WOM significantly influences brand image and purchase intentions, indicating the crucial role of effective communication in boosting brand awareness and guiding consumer decisions (Nuseir (2019). A consumer writes reviews to share experiences, aid others, and gain social recognition, underscoring the importance of addressing diverse consumer motivations in review management (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008). Reyes-Menendez et al. (2019) pointed out that factors such as the quantity of e-WOM, the reliability of the source, customer engagement, and perceived trustworthiness play a significant role in its adoption, with trustworthy comments being crucial. Similarly, Yaylı and Bayram (2012) agreed that consumer reviews strongly influence purchasing decisions, with website reliability, global reach, and popularity being key determinants.

Moreover, the citizenship of customers' behaviour and unfavourable e-WOM have value co-destruction impacts highlighting the necessity for tourism enterprises to manage these dynamics to enhance client experiences (Arica et al., 2022). Cheng et al.'s (2024) research underscores the need of media literacy education by showing that although moderate social media use fosters critical thinking, excessive dependency does the opposite. Cheng et al.'s (2024) research underscores the need for media literacy education by showing that although moderate social media use fosters critical thinking, excessive dependency does the opposite. Novera et al., (2024) mentioned the lack of comprehensive analyses that consider the various factors influencing mentality regarding social media use.

Quantity of e-WOM

Electronic word-of-mouth, or e-WOM, is a significant influence in the travel industry, as it profoundly affects consumer perceptions and decisions (Abir et al., 2020). The quantity of online views is a crucial component of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) communication (Abir et al., 2020). Consumers see review sites as more insightful and knowledgeable when there are numerous of them, according to Chakraborty (2019). Mainolfi and Vergura (2022) expressed the same and stated that Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) communication relies heavily on the number of website views. Hung et al (2023), found that various studies have shown that e-WOM volume increases product sales, popularity, and recognition. The amount of e-WOM and its influence on consumer behaviour is strongly correlated in earlier research by Filieri et al., (2014) as e-WOM plays a major role in shaping customer decisions and attitudes in the tourist sector. Thorough information drives decision confidence, and a significant number of positive e-WoM builds a favourable reputation that enhances the way a tourist destination or service is seen (Bruwer & Lesschaeve, 2012). Bruwer and Lesschaeve (2012) figured out that a high volume of positive electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) enhances the perceived image of a tourism site or service by creating a favourable reputation, and precise information increases decision-making confidence. Therefore, we hypothesize that the amount of information in e-WOM significantly affects how people see tourism services.

H1: The quantity of e-WOM positively influences the perceived image of tourism services.

Information Availability

Information availability (IA) is the state of information accessibility and ready anytime and anywhere required for operations or decision-making. For making good decisions, improving operations, and staying competitive in business and IT, Information availability should be easy, accurate, timely, and relevant so that it can be accessed (Qadir & Quadri, 2016). Information quality, a reliable technological framework, and an optimistic company culture are important variables that affect information availability, according to Wathen and Burkell (2002). Rahmiati et al. (2020) stated that effective information availability facilitates informed decision-making, enhances customer satisfaction, and boosts operational efficiency. Similarly, Eichhorn et al. (2008) emphasized that in the travel and tourism field, reliable access to comprehensive travel information enables businesses to meet the diverse needs of their clientele and adapt swiftly to market changes, thus remaining competitive (Ahmed et al., 2025). Consequently, it can be hypothesized that users who access and share detailed information about tourism services are likely to form a well-defined image of those services.

H2: Information availability positively influences the perceived image of tourism services.

Credibility

The concept of credibility is multifaceted and has important implications in information systems, marketing, and communication. Trustworthiness means how honest and reliable a source seems, while expertise refers to the source's

knowledge and skill in a specific area (Dedeoglu, 2019). Reyes-Menendez et al. (2019) noted that although several factors affect people's adoption of e-WOM, information and credibility are the most important aspects in assisting customers in efficiently evaluating online data. It influences the reliability and efficacy of communications that are supplied (Zahratu & Hurriyati, 2020). According to Wathen and Burkell (2002), credibility directly impacts the way people and organisations receive, recognise, and use information. Rieh and Danielson (2007) point out that knowledge and trustworthiness are the two main factors that affect credibility. Consequently, Dedeoglu (2019) emphasized Credibility as it is important in electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), especially in the travel and tourism field. The credibility of an information source can be determined by its reliability, as mentioned by Zahratu & Hurriyati (2020). Based on the studies, it can be hypothesized that the legitimacy of information on e-WOM greatly impacts the image of tourist services.

H3: The credibility of e-WOM information positively influences the perceived image of tourism services.

Information Quality

Information quality (IQ) is the accuracy, completeness, relevance, and dependability of information to sufficiently assist decision-making. The benchmark for review content that piques customers' real interest is information quality (Guo et al., 2020). Reviews reflect how effectively or adversely prior customers perceived certain businesses, services, or goods. The review with quality feedback lures new customers and motivates existing ones to return or leave advice (Xiang et al., 2018). Wong et al. (2020) gave importance to quality negative reviews, which results in the loss of both potential and existing customers. Making decisions in the Tourism industry is generally challenging due to the variety of factors involved, including accommodations, transportation, attractions, and rental cars information quality makes it easy (Mosalev, 2020). At the same time, making decisions becomes complex when there is no quality information available and customers are confused with overloaded information (Wong & Yeh, 2009). There should be available quality information for tourists while every visitor has different needs and preferences when they are conducting a transaction. No and Kim (2015) assert that tourists' choice of destinations and level of satisfaction is highly influenced by the accuracy of information. False or deceptive information causes complaints, negative publicity and a decline in confidence in travel businesses. Although technology has made information more accessible, Battisti et al. (2022) argue that maintaining high standards for information quality is crucial to preventing the spread of bogus information and problematic experiences. It can be hypothesized that:

H4: The quality of e-WOM information positively influences the perceived image of tourism services.

Tourist Decision-Making Based on Perceived Image

Tourist Decision-Making Based on Perceived Image is the way that marketing, experiences, and word-of-mouth build a traveler's mental impression of a destination, therefore guiding their choices. Raguseo and Vitari (2017) explain that the perception of a place is influenced by tourists' experiences, marketing, most importantly word-of-mouth and media, which plays a key role in their decision-making. This image, according to Echtner and Ritchie (1991), encompasses perceptions, thoughts, and beliefs about a destination and Aksoy and Kiyici (2011) made a distinction between psychological (intangible) and functional (tangible) qualities. Garg (2015) points out that tourists' travel decisions are mainly based on the risk they feel and it emphasizes the need for better safety in tourism. The way a location is seen is determined by multiple sources, marketing, and real-life experiences are common among them (Beerli & Martín, 2004). MacKay and Fesenmaier (1997) illustrate the substantial impact of travel advertising materials, commercials and instructions, while Beerli and Martín (2004) stress the significance of individual characteristics such as age, educational attainment, and economic status. Perceived image sets expectations, regulates emotions, and lowers ambiguity about a site, therefore improving tourist decision-making (Zahratu & Hurriyati, 2020). Positive images created by marketing, internet reviews, and word of mouth enhance the appeal of a destination, thereby drawing more visitors. Higher confidence in decision-making results from changes in views of safety, quality, and general experience (Shuvo & Islam, 2024). Consequently, it can be hypothesized that a favourable image of tourism services will result in a favourable purchase decision for these services.

H5: A favourable perceived image of tourism services positively influences tourist purchase decisions.

Theoretical Foundation

Three main factors influence individual behavior, according to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991): attitudes toward the conduct, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Subjective norms are influenced by peer opinions shared through social media reviews, perceived behavioral control reflects travelers' confidence in making well-informed decisions based on available online information, and attitudes are shaped by travelers' assessments of the quality and credibility of online information in the context of tourism and e-WOM. The integration of TPB with e-WOM demonstrates how behavioral intentions toward choosing particular tourism services are strengthened by normative social pressure from online communities and favorable sentiments regarding reliable and high-quality e-WOM. By connecting

e-WOM qualities (quantity, availability, credibility, and information quality) to perceived image and, eventually, to decision-making, this theoretical framework bolsters the study's hypotheses and aligns behavioral goals with actual travel behavior.

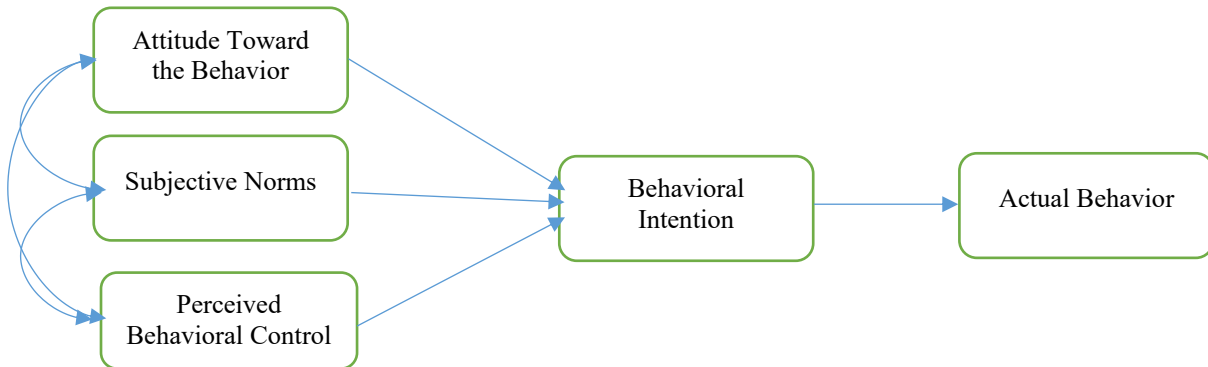


Figure 1: Theory of Planned Behavior

Source: Ajzen, (1991)

OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED MODEL

A conceptual framework is used for integrating elements in a study. This framework was created inspired by the work of Popy and Bappy, (2022) and Roy et al., (2021) with some modifications according to the study purpose in Figure 2. This framework intends to look at how electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and online reviews on tourism services' image formation. The influence of different independent factors on the dependent variable is described in the conceptual model. Specifically, it was developed to justify causal relationships among factors such as the quantity of e-WOM, information availability, credibility, and information quality and how these elements shape the perceived image and influence the decision-making of young tourists in Bangladesh.

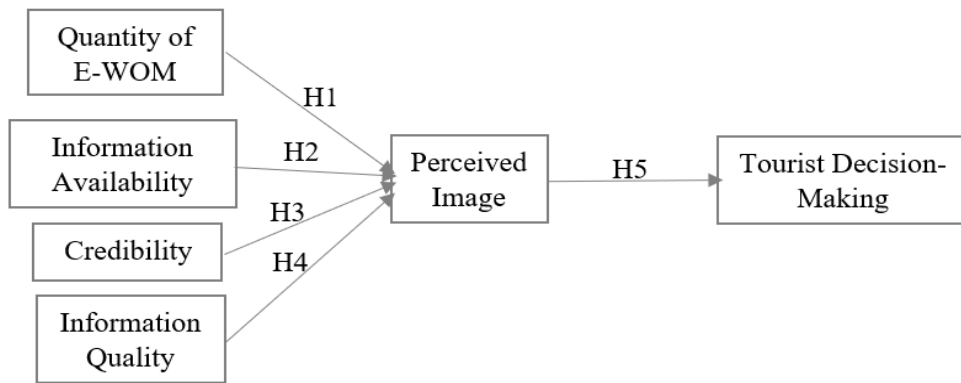


Figure 2: Proposed model

Source: Inspired by the works of Roy et al. (2021) and Popy and Bappy (2022).

3. Methodology

Research design

The study used a quantitative methodology, and data was collected through a structured survey administered both online and offline, targeting a sample of 450; among them, 400 were found to be valid. According to Coherent frames and irregular sampling formula 384 response is considered to be valid for unknown population size and more would be better (Feichtinger, 1990).

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1 - p)}{e^2}$$

Figure 3: Coherent Formula, here, n = Required sample size, Z = Z-score (confidence level, e.g., 1.96 for 95% confidence), p = Estimated proportion of the population (default 0.5 if unknown), e= Margin of error (e.g., 0.05 for 5% error)

Respondents were selected through systematic random sampling. Since this study is exploratory and aims to investigate the link among the latent variable, first Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to test how well measured variables represent the number of constructs (latent variables) in the study, then PLS-SEM was used for factor analysis and multiple regression analysis to examine complex relationships between observed and latent variables. Since this study is exploratory and aims to investigate the link between e-WOM and tourism image, PLS-SEM was used. Furthermore, PLS-SEM has advantages over CB-SEM for confirmatory research with bigger datasets, and the study's comparatively modest sample size supports this (Rigdon et al., 2017). The core purpose of this study is to analyse the relationship among key constructs, the quantity, availability, credibility, e-word-of-mouth (E-WOM) quality, and their influence on the perceived image of tourism services and decision-making. SEM, or structural equation modelling, was employed to test the theories and explore how these factors shape tourists' perceptions and purchase intentions (Ahmad et al., 2016).

Data Collection Process

The data was collected from university students in the Chittagong region of Bangladesh. A combination of online Google Forms and offline paper-based surveys was used to increase respondent representation and lessen sample bias. With previous administrative consent, offline surveys were carried out on college campuses, and institutional email lists and social media groups were used to distribute the survey link. Information about the voluntary nature of participation and the use of consent forms to protect respondents' privacy helped to assure ethics compliance. After data was cleaned up, including by removing surveys with missing answers and those that failed attention-check questions, 400 out of the 450 distributed surveys were judged legitimate. In line with the suggested procedures for survey-based tourism research, this hybrid data gathering method enhances external validity and reduces coverage error (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008).

Measurement and Scaling

Scale reliability and content validity were ensured by adapting the constructs and measurement items from previously validated instruments for this study. Information quality and perceived image measures were modified from Castañeda et al. (2020) and Raguseo and Vitari (2017), while the quantity of e-WOM, information availability, and credibility items were taken from Sutanto and Aprianingsih (2016) and Bataineh (2015). Items used by tourists to make decisions were extracted from Bataineh (2015). These sources have been extensively used in e-WOM and tourism research, and prior studies have shown that they satisfy reliability thresholds with Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values above 0.70 (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008).

The final questionnaire consists of eighteen items designed to measure travellers' engagement in e-WOM, or electronic word-of-mouth and their ambitions to purchase tourist services. They cover the constructs such as the amount of e-WOM, availability of information, its credibility, quality, the image it forms, and how it affects tourist decisions. To fit the parameters of this study, the questions have been slightly modified and taken from the research of Bataineh (2015), Zarifah Dhabitah Mahat and Hafiz Hanafiah (2020), and Sutanto and Aprianingsih (2016). The responses are measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where 5 means "strongly disagree," 4 means "disagree," 3 means "neutral," 2 means "agree," and 1 means "strongly agree."

Table 1: Sources of items

Variable	Source	Items	Measurement Items
Quantity of E-WOM (QEW)	Sutanto and Aprianingsih, (2016); Bataineh, (2015)	QEW1	A large number of reviews and comments indicate a significant trend in tourism.
		QEW2	Many reviews on indicate that a particular tourism service is popular.
		QEW3	Many reviews are sufficient to satisfy my need for information.
Information Availability (IA)	Sutanto and Aprianingsih, (2016); Bataineh, (2015)	IA1	There is a large number of Reviews and information about tourism services.
		IA2	On social media, a lot of individuals share information regarding travel services.
		IA3	Tourism service media shares a wealth of information on online.
Credibility (CRD)	Sutanto and Aprianingsih, (2016); Seo & Park, (2018).	CRD1	I think online reviews of specific travel providers are reliable.
		CRD2	I think online users with written evaluations of specific travel providers are trustworthy.
		CRD3	Information from tourism-related media, in my opinion, has a significant impact on Facebook.
Information Quality (IQ)	Sutanto and Aprianingsih, (2016)	IQ1	Review about particular tourism services is clear on online.
		IQ2	The reviewers give detailed information about particular tourism products.
		IQ3	The information on online about particular tourism services is relevant to my search.
Tourist Decision-Making (TDM)	Bataineh, (2015).	TDM1	I'm tempted to employ that tourist service after reading user-generated evaluations and comments on online media.
		TDM2	My top pick going forward will be the travel services covered in Facebook reviews and comments.
		TDM3	Based on the Facebook reviews, I'll tell my friends and family about the tourism services.

Source: Authors' Own

Sources of Data

Primary and secondary sources were used to gather data for the study, with a focus on respondents from the Chittagong division, a major tourist hub in Bangladesh (Roy & Roy, 2015). Given that the majority of social media users in Bangladesh are college and university students aged 18–24, who make up a significant portion of the country’s social media users (Sayeed et al., 2020), university students were selected as the primary respondents. This demographic was chosen because of their high engagement with social media and their relevance to the study's focus on electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM)'s impact on tourism-related decision-making.

Statistical Tools

To properly accumulate, organise, and analyse the data, multiple types of statistical software and methods were used. Purwanto *et al.*, (2021) suggested SmartPLS 4 to test Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). It was employed to analyze complex relationships among the construct quantity, credibility, availability, and quality of e-WOM, and how they impact tourism decisions. According to Hinton et al., (2014), SPSS 27 is used for descriptive and preliminary data analysis. It was used to analyze descriptive statistics. As suggested by Berk and Carey, (1998) Microsoft Excel to organize, clean and perform basic calculations on the raw data, it was used for those purposes. Google Forms is a widely used tool for distributing survey data. To generate responses online, it was used (Chaiyo & Nokham, 2017). These resources contributed in the development of a comprehensive approach for data analysis and hypothesis testing in the study.

4. Analysis And Result

Demography

Table 2 demonstrates the demographic features of a sample of 400 respondents, including distributions of gender, age, marital status, and education level. The gender distribution is about equal, with 49.0% male (204) and 51.0% female (196). Regarding age distribution, 40.0% are within the 17-20 range, 35.0% are aged 21-23, and 25.0% fall into the 24-26 category, signifying a very youthful sample. The majority of individuals are single (70.5%), whereas 29.5% are married. In terms of education, 42.3% possess an A Level qualification, 21.0% are undergraduates, 13.5% are graduates, and 23.3% hold a postgraduate degree, indicating a varied educational background among respondents.

Table 2. Demography of the respondents

Characteristics	N=400	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	204	49.0
Female	196	51.0
<i>Age</i>		
17-20	160	40.0
21-23	140	35.0
24-26	100	25.0
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Married	118	29.5
Unmarried	282	70.5
<i>Education Level of the respondent</i>		
A Level	169	42.3
Undergraduate	84	21.0
Graduate	54	13.5
Postgraduate	93	23.3

Validity and Reliability

The constructs utilized in the study in Table 3 show good reliability and validity, as shown by the validity metrics shown in the table. Bacon *et al.*, (1995) state that the appropriate value of composite reliability is 0.70 or greater which indicates good internal consistency among the items measuring a construct. Most items have factor loadings of more than 0.7, which suggests a significant correlation with the corresponding variable. Additionally, the composite reliability values are greater than the suggested criterion of 0.7, showing the constructs' internal consistency. Another validity measuring tool is the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). An AVE value of 0.50 or higher is considered acceptable, indicating good convergent validity (Alarcón *et al.*, 2015). All of the constructs' Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values are greater than 0.5, indicating good convergent validity that is, a significant amount of the indicators' volatility can be accounted for by the components. The robustness of the model of measurement is supported by the fact that the constructs, including Quantity of e-WOM, Information Availability, Credibility, Information Quality, Perceived Image, and Tourist Decision-Making, are thus well-measured by their respective items. The general reliability and validity of the constructs are

sufficient for investigating the influence of e-WOM, information quality, credibility, and perceived image on tourist decision-making, despite a few lower factor loadings.

Table 3: Validity Measures

Variables	Items	Loadings	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Quantity of E-WOM (QEW)	QEW1	0.777	0.832	0.623
	QEW2	0.787		
	QEW3	0.791		
Information Availability (IA)	IA1	0.795	0.769	0.534
	IA2	0.827		
	IA3	0.902		
Credibility (CRD)	CRD1	0.831	0.841	0.644
	CRD2	0.773		
	CRD3	0.762		
Information Quality (IQ)	IQ1	0.902	0.821	0.615
	IQ2	0.859		
	IQ3	0.691		
Perceived Image (PI)	PI1	0.698	0.828	0.620
	PI2	0.831		
	PI3	0.805		
Tourist Decision-Making (TDM)	TDM1	0.833	0.869	0.688
	TDM2	0.819		
	TDM3	0.838		

Source: Survey data

Item IQ3 (0.691) and PI1 (0.698) reported slightly lower loadings than the suggested 0.708 threshold (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008), but they were kept because they capture special aspects of information sufficiency and decision recommendation behaviour that are important to the context of this study and their removal did not significantly improve composite reliability or AVE. It is allowed to keep such slightly lower loading items when total construct reliability surpasses acceptable levels and theoretical significance is strong (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008).

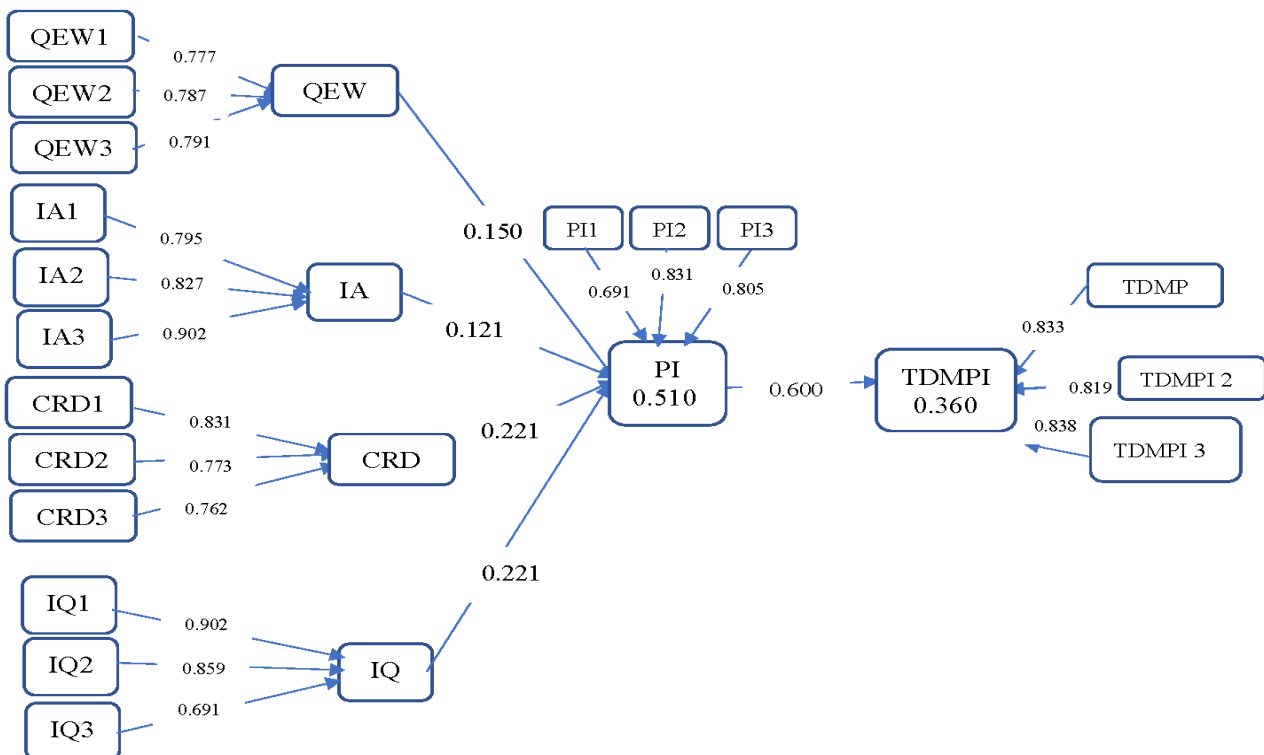


Figure 4: Measurement model

Source: Authors' Creation

Measurement Model

The measurement model in Figure 4 demonstrates the relationships among the constructs. The Quantity of E-WOM (QEW) (path coefficient: 0.150) influences the Perceived Image (PI) by signalling social proof, while Information

Availability (IA) (0.121) indicates the ease with which tourists can access information. The Credibility (CRD) of the information (0.221) plays an important role in shaping the perceived trustworthiness of e-WOM. However, Information Quality (IQ) (0.386) has the strongest effect on Perceived Image (PI), enhancing tourists' confidence in the information they receive. The model shows that these factors contribute to forming a positive Perceived Image (PI) ($R^2 = 0.510$), which is the central determinant of Tourist Decision-Making (TDM) (path coefficient: 0.600). This suggests that higher quality, credible, and easily accessible e-WOM leads to a stronger perceived image of the destination, which in turn heavily influences tourist decisions. Researchers can investigate how these relationships hold across different tourism markets, demographic groups, or types of destinations.

Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity is demonstrated in Table 4, which attests to the uniqueness of each research construct. The square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (diagonal values) larger than the correlations between the constructs (off-diagonal values) is a sign of discriminant validity (Rönkkö & Cho, 2022). The constructions' AVEs are as follows: Information Availability (IA) = 0.534, Credibility (CRD) = 0.644, Information Quality (IQ) = 0.607, Perceived Image (PI) = 0.617, Tourist Decision-Making (TDMPI) = 0.688, and Quantity of e-WOM (QEW) = 0.623. These AVEs' square roots 0.892 for PI, 0.886 for CRD and IA, and 0.824 for TDMPI are all greater than the corresponding correlations with other constructs. This suggests that the variance shared by each construct with its items is greater than that of other constructs, hence verifying the constructs' empirical distinction. Furthermore, convergent validity is supported by all AVE values being higher than the acceptable cutoff of 0.5, which indicates that the constructs account for more than 50% of the variation in the items (Hulland, 1999). The measuring approach demonstrates good validity, guaranteeing that every construct adds in a distinct way to the study's framework.

Table 4: Discriminant validity

	CRD	IA	IQ	PI	QEW
CRD					
IA	0.892				
IQ	0.864	0.587			
PI	0.892	0.749	0.886		
QEW	0.670	1.050	0.506	0.674	
TDMPI	0.656	0.691	0.711	0.824	0.713

Source: Survey data

Source: Authors' Creation

Structural model

The PLS predict analysis was performed using 10-fold cross-validation to evaluate out-of-sample predictive capability. For endogenous constructs, the results show that the Q2 predict values were positive (Tourist Decision-Making = 0.423, Perceived Image = 0.371), validating the predictive relevance of the model (Bentler, 1990). Additionally, the PLS-SEM predictions' RMSE values were lower than the benchmarks for linear models, indicating that the suggested model performed better in terms of prediction.

The bootstrap resampling approach is used to assess the proposed relationships among the components. Bootstrap resampling is a statistical technique used to estimate a statistic's distribution by continually taking a replacement sample from the original data. This technique helps determine bias, variability, and confidence intervals; it is particularly helpful in cases when the theoretical distribution is unknown or the sample size is limited (Gomes & Neves, 2015). The results demonstrated the path coefficients' importance in the structural model. Figure 5 illustrates this paper's structural model.

Hypotheses result

The results of the structural equation model's hypothesis testing prove that all hypotheses (H1 through H5) presented in Table 5 are statistically accepted and the null hypotheses are rejected. There is substantial statistical evidence showing that ($t = 3.571, p = 0.000$) Credibility (CRD) strongly affects Perceived Image (PI) (H1). Perceived Image (PI) (H2) is impacted by Information Availability (IA) with a smaller t-statistic ($t = 1.972, p = 0.049$). Perceived Image (PI) (H3) is significantly impacted by Information Quality (IQ) by a high t-statistic ($t = 7.006, p = 0.000$). The result also reveals that Perceived Image (PI) has a substantial influence on Tourist Decision-Making (TDM) (H4), with a t-value ($t = 15.643, p = 0.000$). The Quantity of E-WOM (QEW) has a favourable impact on Perceived Image (PI) (H5), and this effect is substantiated by statistical significance ($t = 3.096, p = 0.002$). All model pathways are statistically significant suggesting that a positive Perceived Image (PI) promotes Tourist Decision-Making (TDM) and that Credibility (CRD), Information Availability (IA), Information Quality (IQ), and Quantity of E-WOM (QEW) all contribute to this.

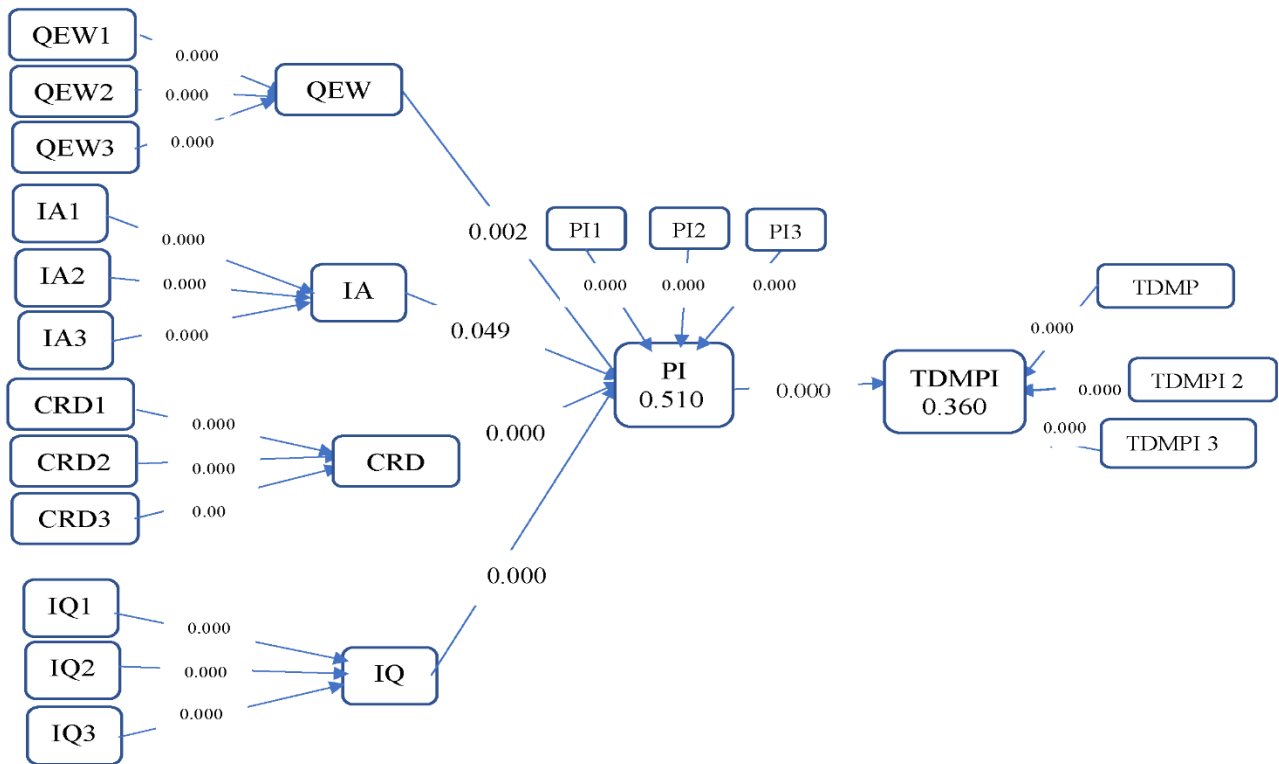


Figure 5: Structural Model

Source: Authors' Creation

Table 5: Hypotheses result

Path	Hypotheses	T statistics	P values	Result
Credibility → Perceived Image	H1	3.571	0.000	Accepted
Information Availability → Perceived Image	H2	1.972	0.049	Accepted
Information Quality → Perceived Image	H3	7.006	0.000	Accepted
Perceived Image → Tourist Decision-Making	H4	15.643	0.000	Accepted
Quantity of E-WOM → Perceived Image	H5	3.096	0.002	Accepted

Source: Survey data

5. Discussion

The Central Role of Perceived Image in Digital Tourism Decisions

The study unequivocally shows that the key connection between e-WOM characteristics and actual traveller decision-making for Bangladeshi Gen Z tourists is perceived image. The degree to which decision-making and perceived image are strongly correlated supports the idea that travellers' mental images created through online interactions play a critical role in determining their behavioural intentions. This result supports the notion that perception management is equally as crucial as service delivery in a digital-first marketplace, which is consistent with destination image theory (Beerli & Martin, 2004). Excellent, reliable, and widely available internet evaluations are not merely add-ons; they actively shape a visitor's perception of a place, which influences their purchasing decisions.

Quality and Credibility as the Cornerstones of Influence

The perceived image was significantly impacted by all four e-WOM qualities, but the best predictors were information quality and credibility. Clear, comprehensive, and pertinent information of the highest calibre minimises ambiguity and offers travellers confidence in their decisions (Guo et al., 2020). Credibility also gives travellers peace of mind regarding the content's dependability, which is crucial in situations where false information is prevalent. These characteristics work together as the "trust and assurance" pillars in the e-WOM process, impacting not only the opinions of Gen Z travellers about a place but also their level of commitment to visiting there.

Volume and Accessibility as Social Proof and Enablers

Information availability and the volume of e-WOM play more supportive but still significant functions. A tourism service's perceived legitimacy is increased and its popularity is enhanced by a significant number of reviews, which act as social evidence (Hung et al., 2023). Information accessibility ensures that potential travellers can find relevant content at any time, reducing search costs and enabling quick decision-making (Wöber, 2003). However, without quality and dependability, these components lose their impact; quantity without content or accessibility without trust are unlikely to create a strong positive image.

Strategic Implications for Tourism Marketing

There are obvious managerial ramifications to the findings. A comprehensive e-WOM management approach that incorporates quality control, credibility assurance, and constant content flow is necessary for tourist businesses looking to attract Gen Z travellers. Maintaining an active, open presence on social media sites like Facebook, collaborating with reliable influencers, and promoting thorough, educational evaluations are all part of this. A balanced combination of quantity, accessibility, and significant value to the reader should be the goal of content strategy rather than just volume.

Theoretical Implantation

Theoretically and pragmatically, this research adds to our knowledge of e-WOM in the travel industry. The research adds to the body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence that four factors reliability, information quality, quantity, and availability substantially impact perceived image and, by extension, travel decision-making. Using data from a developing-world environment and a Gen Z sample, this adds weight to previous models that linked e-WOM to consumer behavior. Consistent with and building upon previous theories of tourist communication, it emphasizes the mediating function of perceived image. The findings contradict several previous studies that reported weaker effects for information availability, implying that in high-social media engagement environments, even moderate access to information can influence perception.

Practical Implantation

Practically speaking, tourism businesses should prioritise the quality and credibility of their internet reviews, as these have the greatest impact on perception. Stronger brand image and trust can be achieved through strategic management of e-WOM. Encouraging delighted consumers to share their positive experiences can increase social proof and attract new visitors. Simultaneously, it is essential to actively address negative criticism to minimise harm to one's reputation. With these findings in hand, destination managers and policymakers may craft digital communication strategies that prioritize easily available, relevant, and trustworthy information.

6. Conclusion

This study emphasises the critical role that electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) plays in influencing travel decisions and how Bangladeshi Generation Z travellers, especially those who use Facebook, perceive tourism services. The results show that perceived image is primarily determined by the quality and credibility of the information, with the amount of e-WOM and the availability of information having important auxiliary impacts. The study demonstrates that tourists' decisions are significantly influenced by their perceptions, which emphasises the significance of carefully controlling web content. From a pragmatic perspective, tourism stakeholders should concentrate on providing reliable, pertinent, and accurate information while encouraging a consistent flow of genuine reviews to establish social proof and credibility. By confirming the mediating function of perceived image in the Theory of Planned Behaviour framework in a developing-country setting, the findings add to the body of literature and have theoretical and managerial ramifications. Even if the study's focus is restricted to young Chittagong Facebook users, it establishes the framework for more extensive research across a range of platforms, demographics, and geographical areas, which advances our knowledge of the role that digital influence plays in contemporary travel decision-making.

Limitation

The study focuses only on young Facebook users from the Chittagong region, which limits the generalizability to other groups and regions in Bangladesh. It also excludes other popular social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube and X. Future research should be on the impact of e-WOM on various social media networks and demographic groups to have a deeper insight into consumer conduct in the tourism sector in this digital era.

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