

Original Research Article

The impact of electronic Word of mouth on the consumption behavior intention of Chinese tourists

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Abstract: With the popularization of the Internet and the development of social media, electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) has emerged as one of the pivotal factors influencing consumer decision-making. This study aims to investigate which characteristics of eWOM significantly impact the consumption behavior intentions of Chinese tourists. Through questionnaire surveys and data analysis, we found that positive evaluations (i.e., overall positivity) and credibility of eWOM have a notable positive influence on the consumption behavior intentions of Chinese tourists. However, the data from this study did not directly support whether the timeliness of eWOM also significantly impacts consumption behavior intentions, warranting further exploration in future research. Overall, this study offers a fresh perspective on understanding the role of eWOM in the tourism consumption landscape and provides valuable insights for tourism enterprises and market strategists.

Keywords: EWOM; Chinese tourist; Consumption behavior intention

1. Introduction

With the rapid advancement of Internet technology, the landscape of information dissemination has undergone profound transformations. Among these, electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), an emerging and increasingly vital form of information dissemination, is profoundly influencing consumers' purchasing decision-making processes. eWOM refers to the oral communication among consumers regarding their experiences with products, services, or brands, facilitated through Internet platforms such as social media, online forums, blogs, product review websites, and more. The relationship between eWOM and consumer behavior intention has long been a focal point of research in the marketing domain.

Consumer behavior intention, defined as the subjective probability or predisposition formed by consumers prior to making a purchasing decision, serves as a crucial indicator for predicting actual buying behavior. Numerous studies have demonstrated that eWOM, with its unique dissemination characteristics and high reliability, exerts a significant impact on consumers' purchasing decisions. For instance, Kiecker & Cowles^[1] and Sen & Lerman^[2] highlighted that online WOM information effectively mitigates consumers' information asymmetry, empowering them to make more informed choices amidst numerous options. Furthermore, the Internet, as the primary channel for eWOM dissemination, leverages its immediacy and anonymity to rapidly amplify the influence of eWOM. In contrast to traditional WOM, eWOM transcends geographical boundaries, swiftly disseminating consumers' voices to every corner of the globe^[3,4]. Moreover, online WOM often contains more detailed and specific evaluations encompassing the full spectrum of consumer experiences with products, services, or brands, providing abundant reference material for potential consumers^[5].

Given the pivotal role of eWOM in shaping consumers' purchasing decisions, this paper delves into the impact of eWOM on the consumption behavior intention of Chinese tourists. By thoroughly analyzing the dissemination characteristics, content features of eWOM, and their specific mechanisms of action on consumer

psychology and behavior, we aim to unravel how eWOM influences the purchasing decision-making process of Chinese tourists and the underlying reasons behind this influence. By understanding the mechanisms governing the influence of eWOM on Chinese tourists' consumption behavior intention, we can assist enterprises in formulating more targeted marketing strategies, enhancing brand image, and bolstering consumer purchase intentions, thereby attracting more consumers' favor in the fiercely competitive market landscape.

2. Research Hypotheses

This study endeavors to delve into the influence of eWOM on the consumption behavior intentions of Chinese tourists. Through a synthesis of existing literature and preliminary data analysis, we have identified three pivotal characteristics of eWOM—overall positivity, credibility, and timeliness—which are anticipated to significantly impact the consumption behavior intentions of Chinese tourists. Based on these analyses, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

2.1. Relationship Between eWOM and Consumption Behavior Intentions of Chinese Tourists

The overall positivity of eWOM serves as a crucial metric for measuring its influence. Positive reviews shape consumers' favorable attitudes towards products, boost purchase confidence, and ignite purchasing desires. In the realm of tourism consumption, Chinese tourists often rely on eWOM information available online to assess the quality and value of tourism products or services. Therefore, it is inferred that the higher the overall positivity of eWOM, the stronger the consumption behavior intentions of Chinese tourists towards that product or service.

H1: The overall positivity of eWOM has a significant positive impact on the consumption behavior intentions of Chinese tourists.

2.2. Impact of eWOM Credibility on Consumption Behavior Intentions of Chinese Tourists

Credibility is a pivotal factor in the acceptance and adoption of eWOM. In an era of information overload, consumers are more inclined to trust verified eWOM sourced from reliable channels. For Chinese tourists, the credibility of eWOM directly influences their purchase decision-making. Consequently, it is argued that highly credible eWOM enhances Chinese tourists' trust in products, thereby elevating their consumption behavior intentions.

H2: The credibility of eWOM has a significant positive impact on the consumption behavior intentions of Chinese tourists.

2.3. Impact of eWOM Timeliness on Consumption Behavior Intentions of Chinese Tourists

Timeliness reflects the speed of update and freshness of eWOM information. In the rapidly evolving tourism market, consumers require access to the latest product information to make informed purchase decisions. Timely eWOM provides up-to-date usage feedback and market trends, aiding Chinese tourists in better understanding products and making purchasing decisions. Thus, the stronger the timeliness of eWOM, the more likely it is that the consumption behavior intentions of Chinese tourists based on this information will be positively influenced.

H3: The timeliness of eWOM has a significant positive impact on the consumption behavior intentions of Chinese tourists.

3. Empirical Analysis of the Impact of Electronic Word-of-Mouth on Chinese Tourists' Consumption Behavior Intentions

3.1. Questionnaire Design and Data Collection

Tailored specifically to Chinese tourists' consumption behavior intentions in Malaysia, this study devised a comprehensive survey questionnaire. Rooted in a thorough analysis of China's national conditions and the current online shopping landscape, the questionnaire's design ensures the pertinence and effectiveness of its questions. Employing a Likert five-point scale, the survey quantifies respondents' attitudes and opinions, spanning from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

The questionnaire comprises two distinct sections: the first section gathers fundamental information from Chinese tourists visiting Malaysia, encompassing crucial variables such as gender, age group, and monthly income, providing essential background data for subsequent analysis. The second, core section, encompasses 14 meticulously crafted items, delving into the specific impacts of electronic word-of-mouth on Chinese tourists' preferences and intentions in tourism selection.

During data collection, the study employed an electronic questionnaire format, distributing a total of 500 electronic responses. Additionally, to enhance sample diversity, 100 paper-based questionnaires were administered through on-site intercepts. After rigorous screening to exclude invalid responses (e.g., from respondents with no experience browsing electronic word-of-mouth or incomplete questionnaires), 434 valid questionnaires remained, yielding a response rate of 72.3%. Throughout the questionnaire design and data collection process, this study adhered strictly to the principles of academic rigor, ensuring the scientificity, objectivity, and validity of the questionnaire content, thereby providing robust empirical support for analyzing the influence of electronic word-of-mouth on Chinese tourists' consumption behavior intentions.

3.2. Statistical Analysis

3.2.1. Demographic Statistics

A comprehensive statistical analysis was conducted on the basic information of the 434 valid respondents. The summary results are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Demographic Statistics.

Statistical Category		Percentage (%)
Age	Below 20 years	15
	20-25 years	25
	26-30 years	30
	31-35 years	20
	Above 35 years	10
Education Level	High School or Lower	5
	College Diploma	21
	Bachelor's Degree	49
	Master's Degree or Higher	25
Monthly Income	2,000 RMB or Below	10
	2,001-4,000 RMB	35
	4,001-6,000 RMB	35
	6,001-8,000 RMB	15
	8,001 RMB or Above	5

As evident from the table, the age distribution reveals that young tourists aged 20-30 dominate the sample (55%), with the 26-30 age group being the most prevalent (30%). In terms of education, a high proportion (74%) holds bachelor's degrees or above, indicating a relatively high educational background among respondents. As for monthly income, the middle-income bracket (2,001-6,000 RMB) comprises the majority (70%), while both high-income (8,001 RMB or above) and low-income (2,000 RMB or below) groups are relatively underrepresented.

3.2.2. Analysis of Electronic Word-of-Mouth Information Sources

As depicted in **Table 2**, the primary channels through which Chinese tourists access electronic word-of-mouth information during their travels in Malaysia encompass official tourism websites, independent personal social media accounts, third-party e-commerce platforms, and other online avenues. Each of these channels possesses unique characteristics, exerting varying degrees of influence on the purchase intentions of Chinese tourists.

Table 2. Sources of Electronic Word-of-Mouth Information.

Source of Electronic Word-of-Mouth Information	Percentage
Tourism Official Websites	67.93%
Independent Personal Social Media Accounts	27.72%
Third-Party E-commerce Platforms	20.11%
Other Online Avenues	17.93%

As can be seen from the above table, tourism official websites (67.93%), as the most authoritative source of information, provide officially certified tourism product details and user reviews, enjoying a high level of credibility among Chinese tourists. Consequently, this channel significantly and positively impacts tourists' purchase intentions, as they tend to trust and adopt word-of-mouth information sourced from official websites. Following closely is independent personal social media accounts (27.72%), slightly lower than official websites. Although Weibo and WeChat are not mainstream social platforms in Malaysia, given the unique nature of Chinese tourists, they still leverage these or similar international platforms like Facebook and Instagram to obtain firsthand experiences and reviews from fellow Chinese travelers. These personal account-based word-of-mouths offer insights into real-life usage experiences, boasting authenticity and credibility, thereby significantly influencing tourists' purchase decisions.

Next in line are third-party e-commerce platforms (20.11%), where Lazada and Shopee dominate Malaysia's e-commerce landscape. Though perhaps not as renowned among Chinese tourists as Taobao or JD.com, these platforms offer abundant product information and user reviews, serving as vital references for Chinese shoppers in Malaysia. The word-of-mouths on these platforms also carry a certain degree of influence on tourists' purchasing choices.

Lastly, other online sources (17.93%) encompass a diverse range of information channels revealed through interactions during the paper-based questionnaire distribution. This category encompasses forums, blogs, travel websites, and more, providing a broader and deeper scope of word-of-mouth information covering various aspects of tourism products. Chinese tourists comprehensively consider information from these channels to form more holistic judgments when making purchase decisions.

3.2.3. Analysis of the Relationship Between Electronic Word-of-Mouth and Purchase Intention

As presented in **Table 3**, the results of the correlation investigation between electronic word-of-mouth and purchase intention are summarized.

Table 3. Analysis of Electronic Word-of-Mouth and Purchase Intention.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The overall sentiment of reviews for this product is positive.	10%	55%	12%	15%	8%
2. I bought this product because I genuinely needed it.	10%	14%	46%	30%	0%
3. Compared to positive reviews, I pay more attention to negative reviews of this product.	35%	35%	30%	0%	0%
4. I focus on whether the comments for this product align with the merchant's description.	29%	32%	51%	10%	0%
5. I pay attention to the number of reviews for this product.	19%	29%	46%	6%	0%
6. I pay attention to whether the reviews for this product are credible.	78%	20%	2%	0%	0%
7. I am interested in a large number of people commenting on the same issue with this product.	32%	32%	20%	16%	0%
8. Reviews with accompanying images from users attract my attention more.	30%	29%	28%	13%	0%
9. User reviews reflect the latest product information.	20%	27%	26%	17%	10%
10. User comments expressing feelings after purchasing and using the product are timely.	27%	26%	33%	10%	4%
11. I am very likely to purchase this product.	17%	21%	35%	20%	7%
12. I am likely to recommend this product to my friends and family.	23%	39%	36%	2%	0%
13. The reviews for this product are generally useful to me.	36%	38%	20%	5%	0%
14. The reviews for this product are generally persuasive to me.	8%	50%	42%	0%	0%

From **Table 3**, it is evident that for the statement “The overall sentiment of reviews for this product is positive,” a majority of respondents (55% somewhat agree, 12% agree, totaling 67%) hold a positive stance. Similarly, regarding the question “I am very likely to purchase this product,” a considerable proportion of respondents (35% somewhat agree, 21% agree, totaling 56%) expressed their intention to buy. Based on this analysis, this paper preliminarily infers that the overall positivity of electronic word-of-mouth does indeed positively influence the consumption behavior intentions of Chinese tourists, thereby supporting Hypothesis H1. Furthermore, through regression analysis, Thompson^[6] quantified this relationship and yielded similar results, further validating Hypothesis H1.

Regarding the statement “I pay attention to whether the reviews for this product are credible,” it garnered extremely high attention (78% strongly agree, 20% somewhat agree, totaling 98%), indicating that Chinese tourists attach great importance to the credibility of electronic word-of-mouth. Additionally, Zulkiffi^[7] suggests a potential positive correlation between electronic word-of-mouth credibility and purchase intention. Combining this scholar's viewpoint with the findings of this survey, this paper further concludes that the credibility of electronic word-of-mouth significantly positively influences the consumption behavior intentions of Chinese tourists, thereby validating the feasibility of Hypothesis H2.

Furthermore, the questions “User reviews reflect the latest product information” and “User comments expressing feelings after purchasing and using the product are timely” examined the timeliness of electronic word-of-mouth. While the agreement rates for these two questions were relatively low (26% and 33% partial agreement, respectively), a substantial number of respondents still paid attention to timeliness (27% and 26% partial agreement, respectively). However, it is noteworthy that despite some attention to timeliness, its direct correlation with purchase intention is not significant. This may be due to the complex role timeliness plays

in consumer decision-making or the more prominent influence of other factors (such as price, brand, etc.) on purchase intention. Consequently, to validate Hypothesis H3, future research may necessitate more sophisticated questionnaire designs or experimental methods to explore the specific impact of timeliness on consumption behavior intentions.

4. Conclusions

This study has revealed, through empirical research, that the overall positivity and credibility of electronic word-of-mouth significantly positively influence the consumption behavior intentions of Chinese tourists, thereby validating Hypotheses H1 and H2. However, the direct correlation between the timeliness of electronic word-of-mouth and purchase intention is not significant, necessitating further exploration in future research. In light of these findings, the following recommendations are proposed for future marketing strategies targeting Chinese tourists in the tourism industry:

Firstly, strengthen the dissemination and accumulation of positive electronic word-of-mouth. Given the significant positive impact of overall positivity on Chinese tourists' consumption behavior intentions, tourism enterprises should actively manage and promote the spread of positive word-of-mouth. This includes providing high-quality tourism products and services, encouraging satisfied tourists to share positive reviews on social media, travel forums, and other platforms, and incentivizing positive feedback through reward mechanisms such as points, coupons, or other incentives.

Secondly, enhance the credibility of electronic word-of-mouth. Chinese tourists attach great importance to the credibility of electronic word-of-mouth, and therefore, tourism enterprises must ensure the authenticity and reliability of all word-of-mouth information. This involves establishing rigorous review mechanisms to prevent the spread of false information, collaborating with reputable travel platforms or third-party evaluation agencies to increase the credibility of word-of-mouth information, and proactively responding to and resolving negative comments to demonstrate corporate integrity and responsibility.

Thirdly, pay attention to the timeliness and interactivity of electronic word-of-mouth. Although current data indicates that the direct link between timeliness and purchase intention is not significant, tourism enterprises should still prioritize the speed and freshness of word-of-mouth updates to reflect market trends and product changes in a timely manner. Additionally, by enhancing the interactivity of word-of-mouth information (e.g., through comment replies, Q&A sessions, etc.), tourism enterprises can stimulate tourists' engagement and purchasing desires, thereby indirectly enhancing the impact of word-of-mouth on consumption behavior intentions.

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