



UNIVERSITY OF NOVI SAD | FACULTY OF SCIENCES | DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY, TOURISM & HOTEL MANAGEMENT

TURIZAM

INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL

VOLUME 30, ISSUE 1, 2026

ISSN 1821-1127 (Online) | UDC: 338.48

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Tatjana Pivac, PhD,
full professor

TECHNICAL EDITORS

Ivana Blešić, PhD,
full professor

Bojana Kalenjuk, PhD,
full professor

Miroslav Vujičić, PhD
full professor

Milosava Matejević, PhD
associate professor

Sanja Kovačić, PhD
associate professor

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Faculty of Sciences,
Department of Geography,
Tourism and Hotel Management

Trg Dositeja Obradovića 3,
21000 Novi Sad, Serbia,
tel. +381 21 450-105;
fax +381 21 459-696

turizam@dgt.uns.ac.rs,

[http://www.dgt.uns.ac.rs/turizam/
engindex.htm](http://www.dgt.uns.ac.rs/turizam/engindex.htm)

LIST OF EDITORS

García Henche Blanca Ph.D.
Department of Economics and Business Administration,
Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism
University of Alcalá, Spain

Kennell James
University of Greenwich, Faculty of Business, Department of Marketing, Events and
Tourism,
Old Royal Naval College, London, United Kingdom

Klodiana Gorica
University of Tirana
Faculty of Economy
Tirana, Albania

Matei Elena
Bucharest University
Faculty of Geography
Human and Economic Geography Dept.

Morar Cezar
Department of Geography, Tourism and Territorial Planning
University of Oradea

Nedelcu Adrian
Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti
Faculty of Economic Sciences
Ploiesti, Romania

Aleksa Vučetić
University of Montenegro,
Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management,
Kotor, Montenegro

Vasiļevska Daina
Turība University
Latvia

Content

<i>Wanpynsuk Makri, Dr. Sharad Kumar Kulshreshtha</i> Integrating Traditional Handloom Practices with Tourism Development: A Case Study of Weaver's Community Perception	4
DOI: 10.5937/turizam30-62854	
<i>Dr. Bhutia Jigmie Wanchuk, Lepcha Sonam Dorjee, Dr. Bhutia Ruth Marie</i> Promoting Rural Tourism through Social-Media and Digital Entrepreneurship: Insights from Homestay Operators of Sikkim	30
DOI: 10.5937/turizam30-61867	
<i>Syed Arif Hussain Shah</i> Sentiment Analysis of Social Media Data in Tourism Destination Studies: A Systematic Literature Review.	48
DOI: 10.5937/turizam30-61068	
<i>Krishnaveni K., Johny Johnson</i> Exploring the Link between Transcendent Tourist Experience, Destination Brand Love, and eWOM Intention in Wellness Tourism in Kerala.	59
DOI: 10.5937/turizam30-61718	

Integrating Traditional Handloom Practices with Tourism Development: A Case Study of Weaver's Community Perception

Wanpynsuk Makri^{A*}, Dr. Sharad Kumar Kulshreshtha^A

Received: November 2025 | Accepted: February 2026

DOI: 10.5937/turizam30-62854

Abstract

In Meghalaya, 80% of the population lives in rural areas, and many residents are involved in various economic activities essential to improving their quality of life. Apart from agricultural activities, the handloom sector is considered important by many rural communities. The purpose of the study is to assess the current scenario of traditional handloom practices and to examine the perception of weavers' communities of Umnden-Diwon Village, Ri Bhoi District, Meghalaya, India, on integrating traditional handloom practices as a tourism development tool. The study adopted a mixed-method approach, using a structured questionnaire (n=130) and semi-structured interviews (n=91). The concept of the study draws upon the context of the theoretical framework based on empowerment theory and stakeholder theory. Major key findings reveal that most of the weavers' communities perceive tourism as a development tool, with high mean scores for community participation in tourism planning (M=4.88), support for traditional practices as cultural attractions (M=4.83), and belief in tourism's role in economic growth (M=4.78). The 9-item perception scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha=0.928$). However, significant challenges persist, including limited awareness among the weavers' community and tourists (86.15%), inadequate marketing strategies (74.62%), and a deficit in infrastructure development (58.46%). Despite earning below Rs. 10,000 monthly from traditional handloom practices (57.69%), weavers demonstrate a positive optimism to participate in tourism initiatives. The study also proposes recommendations like infrastructure enhancement, strengthened marketing strategies, capacity-building programmes, and policy frameworks that support integration of traditional handloom practices into a sustainable community-based tourism resource, which fosters cultural preservation and weavers' community empowerment.

Keywords: Traditional weaving, Handloom Practices, Tourism Development, Community Empowerment, Community-based tourism, cultural heritage tourism, Handicraft Tourism

A* Assistant Professor, Department of Tourism and Travel Management, Lady Keane College, Shillong, Meghalaya, India, & Research Scholar, Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya, India. Orcid Id: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6363-6261>, Corresponding author: shambh17@gmail.com

A Assistant Professor, Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya, India. Orcid Id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7324-8013>, Email: sharad_mta@yahoo.com

Introduction

Tourism has played a big role in uplifting societies in urban and rural areas. As a service sector, tourism acts as one of the important sources of income growth, livelihood activities and lifestyle of the communities at large brought about by its development (Chi et al, 2017). The socio-cultural and economic influences of tourism initiatives are discussed normally in rural areas, particularly in the presence of ethnic minority groups (Deery et al, 2012; Sangchumnon and Kozak, 2018; Faulkenberry et al, 2000). Tourism expansion can bring about the integration and strengthening of the cultural identity, living standards, and changing economic environment. Many communities accepted innovative resource management models because of the perceived social and economic aids of tourism development (Mbaiwa, 2011; Abrahams, 2015). The growth of touristic activities and handloom practices combine to offer great potential for community empowerment, especially in areas where traditional crafts are an essential part of cultural heritage (Cohen, 2001; Richards, 2005). At the same time, tourism has become a potent instrument for economic growth, opening doors for regional businesses and producing employment opportunities. (Rout *et al*, 2017; Alcalá-Ordóñez et al, 2023; Shukla and Shamu-railatpam, 2024).

Handloom weaving is one of the important sectors in the state of Meghalaya, most of the weavers are women folks who practice these traditional practices of weaving (Mishra et al, 2021). There are varieties of handloom products woven by various communities, such as *Dukmanda* (Garo Lungi), *Pathin* (Hajong Lungi), *Jainsem and Dhara* (Khasi women dress), *Lushai loom cloth* and other items like *Bedsheets, Towels, Debra, Bedcovers, Mosquitos Nets, Shirting, Shawls, Bags, Daksari, Thoh Saru* (Jaintia women dress), *Gumcha* etc (Diengdoh, 2017). According to the Textiles Department (2024), the handloom and sericulture sectors are the two most significant cottage-based, eco-friendly sectors in rural areas of Meghalaya. Both these sectors signify the cultural identity and rich heritage of the rural communities. Where the nonappearance of the textiles industry, sericulture and the handloom sector is believed to play an important part in the production of silk fabrics and hand-woven fabrics of traditional designs. There are 15,900 families engaged in the handloom sector and 16,000 families in sericulture farming.

The rural communities in Ri Bhoi have embraced these traditional practices as an essential part of their culture and standard of living (Bareh, 1991; Meynell, 2021; Baruah, 2016). Handloom weaving differs from industrial production as it is highly time-consuming and requires competent human resources. For this reason, the handmade quality is considered of high value (Soundarapandian, 2002). The small production scale has limited access to bigger markets and competition from cheaper machine-made textiles. The demand for traditional handloom goods is declining and are more drawn to contemporary factory-made clothing and many weavers in Ri Bhoi are finding it difficult to make a living (Meynell, 2022).

Tourism can support the conservation of traditional handloom practices by bringing a wide range of audiences (Hani and Barua, 2015). Incorporating tourism with handloom practices can ultimately bring several benefits to the communities especially the younger generation of the society (Parida and Tada, 2018). Tourism-derived exposure can contribute towards the sustainability of handloom practices by establishing their economic significance and cultural identities of the communities (Pradhan and Khandual, 2020).

The proposed study tries to fill the research gaps by discussing the weavers' community perception of combining either the traditional handloom practices and tourism as a development tool. Engaging in an in-depth study of the community perceptions, the research provides a

subtle insight into the traditional weaving and handloom practices with regard to tourism integration as a tool for development.

The study was being conducted with the following objectives: -

1. To assess the current scenario of the traditional handloom practices of the study area.
2. To study the local communities' perception of integrating traditional handloom practices as a tourism development tool.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted a community-based tourism development model, giving importance to the weavers' community ownership. The framework is based on two major approaches, i.e., empowerment theory and stakeholder theory.

A) Community Empowerment through Tourism Development

Empowerment theory was first proposed by Julian Rappaport, an American psychologist in 1981. Where he defines "Empowerment as a construct that links individual strength and competencies, natural helping systems and proactive behaviour to social policy and social change" (Craig and Mayo, 1995). According to David Werner (1988), "Community empowerment is a process by which disadvantaged people work together to increase control over events that influence their lives". Empowering communities is to develop an atmosphere, conditions or climate that allows them to be actively involved and part of tourism development (Adebayo and Butcher, 2022). The development of tourism initiatives in rural communities depends on the goodwill and cooperation by them. Joo et al. (2019) tested the theory of empowerment in the tourism context, on residents' pervaded knowledge, psychological perception, social, political and economic empowerment through tourism development by using Rocha's (1997) theory of empowerment. Thus, motivating communities to take part in touristic activities and management can ultimately enhance the sustainability of rural economic growth and cultural sustainability (Esichaikul and Chansawang, 2022).

The conceptual framework for this study can be derived by using the empowerment level of analysis as proposed by Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) as follows:

Table I: Empowerment Level of Analysis

Level of analysis	Process (Empowering)	Outcome (Empowered)
Individual	Learning decision-making skills Managing resources Working with others	Sense of control Critical awareness Participatory behaviour
Organisational	Opportunities to participate in decision-making Shared responsibility Shared leadership	Effectively compete for resources Networking with another organisation Policy influence
Communities	Access to resources Open government structure Tolerance for diversity	Organisational coalition Pluralistic leadership Resident participatory

Source: Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995

B) Stakeholder Theories for Empowering Communities with Tourism

R. Edward Freeman proposed the stakeholder theory in his award-winning book “Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach” in 1984. Since then, the stakeholder approach has been used in different fields of study, such as management, social science, and humanities. Khazaei et al. (2015) attempted to advance tourism development by empowering local communities by drawing on progressive approaches to stakeholder theories in management and exploring the dynamic future of empowering local communities with tourism development, which involved stakeholders and representatives towards tourism planning and approaches. Rachmawati and Fountain, (2020) explored the role of external stakeholders in empowering local communities where tourism was developed, with a good start for community empowerment. Shafieisabet and Haratifard (2020) presented a study to measure the involvement of tourism stakeholders in communities’ empowerment through tourism development by using indicators such as economic, social-environmental impact and perceived in terms of rural destinations in Iran. In the field of the tourism sector, the study concerning instrumental stakeholder theory has been used by many researchers and is capable and likely to provide a competitive range of advantages for empowering communities through integrated tourism development (Mondoñedo, 2021; Pribadi and Nastiti, 2023; Eki et al., 2024).

The incorporation of empowerment theory and stakeholder theory in the study provides a robust analytical lens for examining how traditional handloom practices can be leveraged as a tourism development tool. At the individual level, weavers’ decision-making skills and resource management capabilities are essential for participating in tourism activities. At the organisational level, collective structures such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and cooperative societies facilitate shared responsibility and networking opportunities. At the community level, access to resources and participatory governance structures determine the extent to which tourism benefits are equitably distributed among the community members. Stakeholder theory complements this framework by emphasising the importance of engaging multiple actors, including government, related tourism agencies, private enterprises, and non-governmental organisations, in tourism planning processes. This study applies these theoretical constructs to analyse weavers’ perceptions, examining how empowerment processes at various levels influence their attitudes toward tourism integration and identifying the stakeholder dynamics that shape community-based tourism development in the study area.

Literature Review

Economic Sustainability of Tourism and Handloom

Noonan and Rizzo (2017) examine the financial effects of cultural tourism. The study draws attention to the difficulties in identifying and quantifying the benefits of cultural tourism is constantly changing. They call on cultural economists to concentrate on this field of study, emphasising the need for more investigation to fully grasp the economic complications and developing trends for cultural tourism. Zadel and Bogdan (2013) concentrated on the financial implications of cultural tourism in Croatia, pointing out that insufficient statistical systems make it difficult to evaluate the impact of this industry. They stress the significance of turning cultural assets into tourism offerings to optimise positive effects and minimise negative ones. Johnson (2010) highlights the contributions of social economy enterprises to the role of community-based tourism (CBT) development in rural areas. These locally owned businesses con-

tributed to community-based tourism (CBT) by offering distinctive tourism experiences and necessary infrastructure, which boosts the social, economic and cultural advantages of rural communities.

Roy (2021) discussed that the tourism and handloom sector in India is one of the major contributors to the economic significance of various regions in the country, and these industries can enhance the livelihood of the local communities and living cultural heritages. The study also discussed the importance of the handloom sectors, which can generate employment opportunities for weavers and associated workers that play an exceptional role in the Indian economy. According to the Textiles Department (2024), the handloom sectors in Meghalaya constitute one of the major exciting aspects of the cultural heritage of the state, which constitutes an integral part of the rural and semi-rural setting livelihood for economic activities. As per the Fourth All India Handloom Census (2019-2020), there is an increased number of weavers in the state, i.e., 42,000 marked the total number of weavers, and the number of active looms as per the record were 43,220 numbers. This shows that many weavers in the state depend merely on the handloom sector to sustain their livelihood.

Tourism Development and Community Empowerment

Tourism is gradually seen as a development tool by many countries, in the context of income generation, employment opportunities, economic diversification, empowering communities and cultural preservation (Rahmawati et al., 2021). Saad (2021) investigated the relationship between the growth of the handloom industry and domestic tourism in India by evaluating the government's effort and support for handloom weavers. In his study, he found that tourism can significantly support local handloom industries. The study also recommended that local initiatives for the sustainable growth of the handloom sector are important, and to strengthen the foundations of tourism initiatives at the ground level.

Ara et al. (2022) examine how handicrafts fit into ethnic tourism. The findings of the study show that handicrafts can influence interactions and foster collaboration between tourists and host communities within their networks. But the study also points out problems that could risk the sustainability of tourism centred around handicrafts, like a conflict of interests and viewpoints between the tourist and host communities. Ahmed et al. (2021) investigated the Manipuri handloom sector in Bangladesh, paying particular attention to its difficulties and opportunities for societal advancement. The study revealed that low-profit margins, competition and a lack of capital are the main problems faced by the sector. Despite these obstacles, the Manipuri handloom sector is vital to the community's development for social capital building and empowerment of women entrepreneurs

Challenges Between Handloom and Tourism

According to Ray (2014), tourism in Kamarpukur, West Bengal has improved in terms of basic amenities such as transportation, communication and sanitary conditions. He also emphasises how crucial it is to examine visitors' requirements and communities' viewpoints on the levels of satisfaction to optimise tourism's potential in rural areas. Choudhury et al. (2018) examine how rural tourism contributes to sustainable livelihoods in Northeastern India, emphasising both the social and economic advantages. And suggested that by promoting social interactions and economic development between visitors and locals, rural tourism—which includes ideas like homestays— can directly benefit local communities.

Devi (2014) stated that, since cloth mills and a large number of power looms are not available within the Northeast region, weavers put their effort into working manually in the process to sustain their livelihood. The contribution of income from handlooms is very low compared with other Indian states. The conditions of the handloom sector encounter various challenges, such as skills, technology and the main market structure. Sharma et al. (2021) found that imported silk is less expensive and poses a threat to Sualkuchi, Assam, a city known for its golden Muga silk. The authors contended that promoting travel can aid in educating tourists about the complex and time-consuming nature of handloom weaving, thus expanding the market for genuine silk goods. Stakeholder opinions on this strategy are presented along with the Assam government's support for rural tourism development.

Methodology

The study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative survey methods with qualitative interview techniques to provide comprehensive insights into the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development.

Study Area

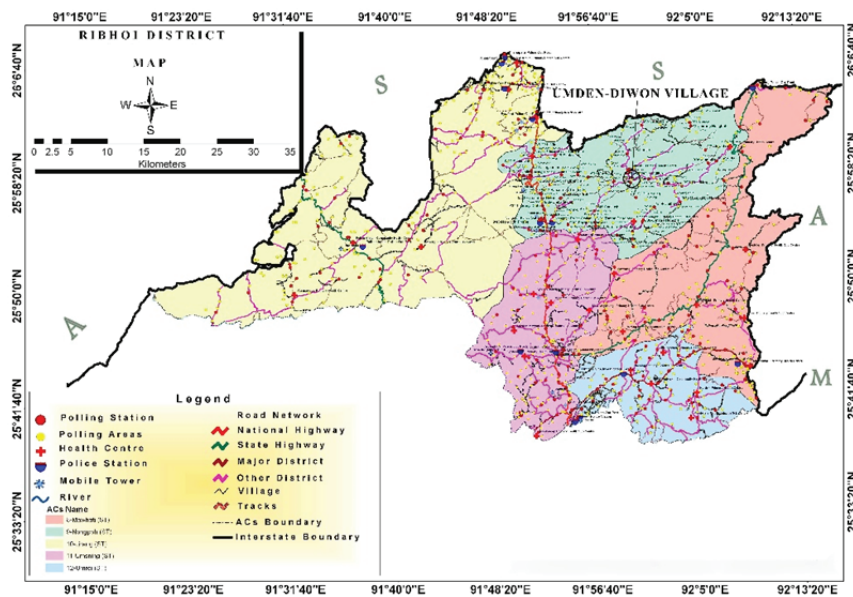


Figure 1: Map of study area, Ri Bhoi District
Sources: The Official Web Portal, Government of Meghalaya

Umden-Diwon village, located in Ri Bhoi District, Meghalaya, was purposively selected for this study based on several criteria: (a) the presence of an active weaving population engaged in traditional Eri silk production, (b) the village's designation as the first Eri Silk village of Meghalaya, (c) recent recognition through the Geographical Indication (GI) tag for its traditional handloom Eri-Silk products (registered on 7th April 2025), and (d) the potential for developing

the area as a cultural tourism destination. The village is situated approximately 28 km from the district headquarters, Nongpoh, Ri Bhoi District, Meghalaya, India.

Sampling Strategy and Sample Size

The target samples comprised the weavers' community that is engaged in traditional handloom practices of Umden-Diwon village. A census-based sampling approach was employed, attempting to include the active weavers' community of the village. The final sample consisted of 130 respondents, representing women weavers of the village. Since the majority of the weaving and handloom practices in the village are being performed by women only. This sample size certifies statistical adequacy for the descriptive analyses conducted (Cochran, 1977) and provides sufficient representation of the weavers' community's perspectives.

A structured questionnaire was developed based on the theoretical framework of empowerment theory (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995) and stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), as well as relevant literature on community-based tourism and the handloom and handicraft sectors. The questionnaire comprised three sections:

Section 1: Socio-demographic Profile – Five items capturing age, marital status, educational qualification, occupation, and annual income from all sources.

Section 2: Current Scenario of Traditional Handloom Practices – Four items examining years of experience in weaving, type of proprietorship, membership in organisations, and monthly income from handloom practices.

Section 3: Community Perception of Tourism Integration – Ten statements measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree), designed to assess perceptions across three dimensions aligned with empowerment and stakeholder theory:

- Economic empowerment (items on job creation and local economic growth)
- Socio-cultural empowerment (items on cultural preservation, appreciation, and authenticity)
- Participatory empowerment (items on community involvement, willingness to support initiatives)

Furthermore, a dichotomous (Yes/No) questionnaire was added to capture perceived challenges, and open-ended questions were elicited on the perceptions for steps, benefits and suggestions for integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development.

Instrument Validation and Reliability

The questionnaire was pre-tested with 15 weavers to assess clarity and comprehension, resulting in minor modifications to question wording. Reliability of the perception scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Initial analysis of all 10 items yielded $\alpha = 0.774$. However, one item ("Integrating traditional weaving and handloom practices with tourism is very challenging") demonstrated a negative item-rest correlation ($r = -0.266$), indicating that this item measured a distinct construct, perceived challenges, rather than positive perceptions toward tourism integration. This item was therefore analysed separately as a challenge indicator rather than as part of the perception scale.

The refined 9-item perception scale (excluding the challenge item) demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.928$), substantially exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Item-rest correlations for the 9-item scale ranged from 0.615 to 0.908, indicating that all items contributed strongly to the construct.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through face-to-face interviews during February-March 2025. Interviews were conducted in the native Khasi language to ensure accurate comprehension and responses. Each interview lasted approximately 20-35 minutes. Out of 130 respondents who completed the structured questionnaire survey, 91 (70%) respondents provided detailed responses to the open-ended questions, which formed the basis for qualitative analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26.0. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed for all variables. For the Likert-scale items, except for the first statement of the Community Perception of Tourism Integration, were analysed separately due to a negative item-rest correlation ($r = -0.266$), the other 9 items of the statement, the weighted average of the mean score for the 9 statements was interpreted as follows: Weighted average (9-item scale) = $42.24/9 = 4.69$. (i.e., ≥ 4.69 =High Perception, 4.17-4.68= Moderate Perception, and 3.65-4.67=Low Perception). The same analysis applied to a dichotomous (Yes/No) questionnaire on challenges perception as, Weighted average= $7.9/5=1.58$, (i.e., ≥ 1.58 =High Perception, 1.21-1.57=Moderate Perception, 0.90-1.20= Low Perception) (Wilcox, 2003).

Qualitative data from open-ended responses were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach: familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Themes were identified inductively from the data and subsequently mapped to the theoretical framework according to the respondents' observations.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time was clearly communicated.

Result and Analysis

This section of the study represents the findings of the collected data and is analysed into seven sub-sections. The analysis begins with the socio-economic profile of respondents, followed by an examination of the current scenario of traditional handloom practices. Subsequent sections present community perceptions regarding tourism integration, perceived challenges, suggested steps for integration, expected benefits, and additional comments and suggestions from the weavers' community. The results of the analysis are constructed in the context of empowerment and stakeholder theory to provide a theoretical understanding of the empirical observations.

Socio-economic Profile of the Respondent

Understanding the socio-economic characteristics of the weavers' community is essential for contextualising their perceptions and identifying factors that may influence tourism integration outcomes. The demographic profile of the 130 respondents is presented in Table II below.

Table II. Socio-economic profile of the respondents (n=130)

Category	Sub-Category	f	%	Mean
Age	18 to 25	34	26.15%	2.68
	26 to 35	28	21.54%	
	36 to 45	29	22.31%	
	46 to 55	24	18.46%	
	56 and above	15	11.54%	
Marital status	Married	44	33.85%	1.66
	Unmarried	86	66.15%	
	Illiterate	21	16.15%	
Qualification	Primary level	38	29.23%	2.98
	Secondary level	24	18.46%	
	Higher secondary level	24	18.46%	
	Graduate	15	11.54%	
	Postgraduate and above	8	6.15%	
Occupation	Farmer	44	33.85%	2.31
	Labourer	38	29.23%	
	Self employed	28	21.54%	
	Government employee	6	4.62%	
	Business	12	9.23%	
	Others	2	1.54%	
	Less than 100000	94	72.31%	
Annual income	100001-200000	30	23.08%	1.32
	200001-300000	6	4.62%	
	Above 300001	0	0.00%	

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

The demographic analysis reveals the important aspects that have implications for the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development initiatives. The age distribution indicates that the weavers' community are relatively very young, with 47.69% of the women weavers' community aged 35 years or below ($M=2.68$). This indicates the potential engagement with tourism initiatives and digital marketing platforms for the long term. The highest number of unmarried women weavers (66.15%) suggests that many weavers have flexible time allocation. This could facilitate the weavers' community participation in tourism development initiatives and ventures.

The educational profile of the weavers' community indicates a concerning pattern, with 45.38% of the weavers having only primary-level education or below. According to empowerment theory, building individual competencies through education and training is fundamental to achieving empowerment outcomes (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995).

Occupational analysis indicates that traditional handloom practice is not the primary livelihood for most weavers, but largely depends on farming (33.85%) and labour-based (29.23%) livelihoods. This diversified livelihood strategy reflects the economic vulnerability of the traditional handloom practices, while also indicating opportunities for integrated tourism models that combine weaving with agricultural experiences. The annual income distribution analysis, such as 72.31% earning below Rs. 100,000 annually from all sources, emphasises the marginalised economic status of the weaver's community and indicates the potential transformative implications that successful tourism integration could achieve.

Current Scenario of the Traditional Handloom Practices of the Area

This section of analysis examines the current state of traditional handloom practices of the study area, focusing on experience levels, business structures, organisational affiliations, and income generation. These aspects provide insight into the sector's dimensions for tourism integration. As presented in Table III.

Table III. Current Scenario of the traditional handloom practices (n=130)

Category	Sub-category	f	%	Mean
Years of Experience	No experiences	0	0.00%	2.25
	1 to 5 years	36	27.69%	
	6 to 10 years	48	36.92%	
	11 to 20 years	27	20.77%	
	21 to 30 years	15	11.54%	
	40 Years and Above	4	3.08%	
Type of Proprietorship	Other	4	3.08%	1.32
	Sole proprietor	80	61.54%	
	Partnership	46	35.38%	
Member of Organisation	Not a member of any	8	6.15%	2.88
	SHGs	69	53.08%	
	NGOs	10	7.69%	
	Society	16	12.31%	
	Co-Operative Society	27	20.77%	
Monthly Income from Traditional Weaving and Handloom Practices	No Income	0	0.00%	1.56
	Below 10000	75	57.69%	
	10001 to 20000	42	32.31%	
	20001 to 30000	8	6.15%	
	30000 and above	5	3.85%	

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

The experience distribution analysis indicates that the weaver's community encounter a transitional change in the traditional handloom practices. The highest number of weavers in the 6-10 years of experiences (36.92%) signify moderate expertise, while the lowest number of veteran weavers with 40+ years of experience (3.08%) shows a significant loss of deep-rooted traditional weaving knowledge. Particularly, the lack of complete beginners' weavers (0%) indicates that new entrants to the practices are not being concerned, which might be alarming about the intergenerational knowledge transfer from the older generation to the younger generations. A key component of cultural preservation which could be addressed by the prospec-

tives of tourism development. The highest number of sole proprietorship individuals (61.54%) indicates that the nature of traditional handloom practices offers weavers autonomy, but restricted collective bargaining power and the reach to potential market. From a stakeholder theory perspective, this concern and may creates challenges for coordinated tourism development, but also opportunities for building a collaborative network.

Organisational affiliation patterns are encouraging from the perspective of an empowerment viewpoint. The majority of the weavers' community are in membership with Self-Help Groups (SHGs) (53.08%), and cooperative societies (20.77%). This implies that collective institutional frameworks exist and could serve as platforms for tourism initiatives. These institutional organisations can ease the collective decision-making, shared responsibility, and access to resources, which are in line with the key component of organisational empowerment (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995). The analysis of monthly income from the traditional handloom practices shows a precarious economic situation, with 57.69% of weavers earning below Rs. 10,000 monthly from weaving and traditional handloom practices. However, the absence of "no-income" responses indicates that these practices provide a supplementary income for all weavers. This paradox of high optimism toward tourism integrations despite low-income earnings can be understood through empowerment theory: the community recognises tourism as a potential tool for enhancing their economic status while maintaining their cultural identity. The low base of income earning also means that even modest improvements by tourism development could yield proportionally significant benefits to the weavers' community at large.

Communities' Perception of Integrating Traditional Handloom Practices as a Tourism Development Tool

Community perceptions regarding tourism integration were assessed through ten statements. Nine statements measured positive perceptions toward tourism integration across economic, socio-cultural, and participatory dimensions, demonstrating excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.928$). The first statement specifically captured perceived challenges in integration and was analysed separately due to its distinct construct nature. Table IV present the distribution of responses and mean scores for all ten statements with regard to the weavers' community perception of tourism integration.

Table IV. Communities' perception of Tourism Integration (n=130)

Criteria		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Remark/Level of Agreement
Integrating traditional weaving and handloom practices with tourism is very challenging	f	24	0	6	72	28	3.62	Community's acknowledgement
	%	18.46	0.00	4.62	55.38	21.54		
Tourism can create job opportunities among the local weavers in the community	f	0	0	0	44	86	4.66	Moderate Perception
	%	0.00	0.00	0.00	33.85	66.15		
Handloom tourism can contribute to the growth of the local economy	f	0	0	0	28	102	4.78	High Perception
	%	0.00	0.00	0.00	21.54	78.46		
Handloom tourism increases cultural appreciation and visibility to the tourist	f	0	0	16	28	86	4.54	Moderate Perception
	%	0.00	0.00	12.31	21.54	66.15		
Local community and weavers should actively participate in community-based tourism planning	f	0	0	0	16	114	4.88	High Perception
	%	0.00	0.00	0.00	12.31	87.69		
Traditional handloom practices should be supported as cultural tourism attractions	f	0	0	0	22	108	4.83	High Perception
	%	0.00	0.00	0.00	16.92	83.08		

I believe tourism development can support the preservation of the traditional weaving knowledge.	f	0	0	0	32	98	4.75	High Perception
	%	0.00	0.00	0.00	24.62	75.38		
Tourist shows a strong interest in the live weaving demonstration by the weavers of the local community	f	0	16	0	38	76	4.34	Moderate Perception
	%	0.00	12.31	0.00	29.23	58.46		
I believed traditional weaving could be integrated into a tourism development tool without compromising the indigenous tradition	f	0	0	16	16	98	4.63	Moderate Perception
	%	0.00	0.00	12.31	12.31	75.38		
I am willing to support any initiatives through tourism that promote and preserve the traditional knowledge of weaving and handloom	f	0	0	0	22	108	4.83	High Perception
	%	0.00	0.00	0.00	16.92	83.08		

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

Note: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, N=Neutral, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree. The first item (challenges) was analysed separately; the remaining 9 items demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.928$). Weighted average (9-item scale) = $42.24/9 = 4.69$. (i.e., ≥ 4.69 =High Perception, 4.17-4.68= Moderate perception, 3.65-4.67=Low Perception)

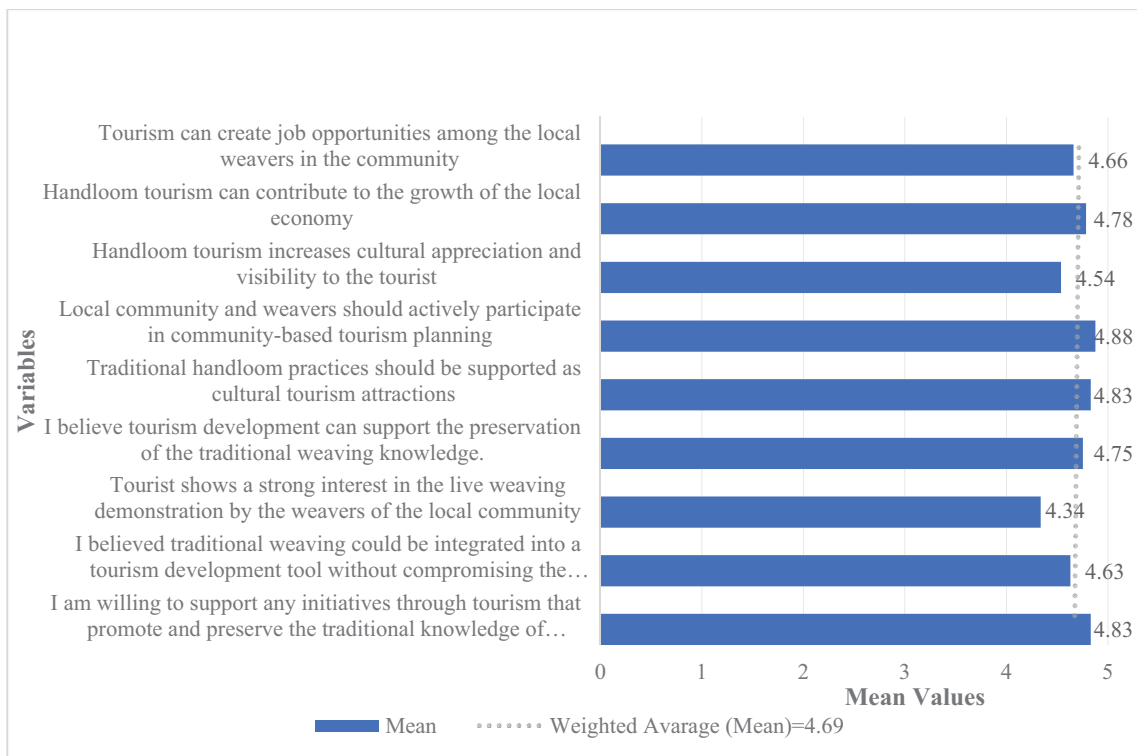


Figure 2: Mean scores of 9-items on Communities' perception of Tourism Integration (n=130)
Source: Primary Survey, 2025

The perception analysis shows the overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward tourism integration, with an overall weighted average mean score of 4.69 for the 9-item perception scale, indicating a positive agreement across all dimensions. The separate analysis of the challenge item (M=3.62) corresponded to the community's acknowledgement of the integration challenges, with the remaining optimism statements regarding the potential of tourism. The finding can

be interpreted in terms of empowerment and stakeholder theory, which reflects that communities will accept development initiatives only when they have opportunities and gain better control over any situation.

Economic Empowerment Perceptions: The highest mean score for local economic growth (M=4.78) and the moderate mean scores for job creation (M=4.66) reflect the community's recognition of the prospects of tourism in economic growth. Importantly, 100 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements, indicating unanimous consensus. This strong economic orientation aligns with stakeholder theory's emphasis on balancing diverse interests, and the community anticipates that tourism can serve their economic needs while also preserving cultural values.

Socio-cultural Empowerment Perceptions: Traditional handloom practices as cultural tourism attractions (M=4.83), preservation of traditional knowledge (M=4.75) received strong endorsement, and moderate responses on cultural appreciation (M=4.54). This reflects the important role that tourism can play in economic development and the conservation of the cultural heritage. Notably, most of the weavers' community's belief that tourism development can occur without compromising indigenous traditions (M=4.63), as it suggests the community has a strong confidence in their ability to control the tourism narrative and maintain cultural authenticity. As a key concern in cultural tourism literature regarding commodification risks (Cohen, 2001).

Participatory Empowerment Perceptions: Weavers' community is willing to participate in tourism planning and support any initiatives through tourism that promote and preserve traditional knowledge, which has the highest mean score (M=4.88, with 87.69% strongly agreeing and M=4.83, with 83.08% strongly agreeing). This finding aligns with empowerment theory's emphasis on the community's participatory behaviour as both a process and outcome of empowerment. The insistence of the weaver's community on active participation indicates the awareness of risks associated with external domination of tourism ventures and embodies the concept of community-based tourism, which stresses on local ownership and control systems.

Challenges and Concerns: The moderate mean of integration is challenging (M=3.62), and needs to be acknowledged. This statements exhibit variation with unanimous positive responses, such that 18.46 per cent of the respondents strongly disagreed. Such a distribution shows that even though the weavers' community is conscious about the challenges, they do not perceive them as unachievable, but instead as an attitude with a promising future for implementation efforts on the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development.

The reason for the slightly lower score of tourist interest in live demonstrations (M=4.34) and the fact that there are some responses of disagreement (12.31%) could also be related to previous limited exposure to tourism or the logistics of the demonstrations. These facts imply that there is a need for awareness creation of the potential of tourism for the weavers' community and physical infrastructure development to enable tourist interaction within the locality.

Challenges in Integrating Traditional Weaving and Handloom with Tourism

While the community is highly optimistic about the process of tourism integration, it is important to identify the perceived challenges to formulate specific targeted interventions. Table V presents the distribution of responses regarding specific challenges identified in the literature and through preliminary consultations.

Table V. Perceived Challenges in Tourism Integration (n=130)

Criteria	NO		YES		Mean	Std. Deviation	Level of Agreement
	f	%	f	%			
Infrastructure development and raw materials	54	41.54%	76	58.46%	1.58	.49	High Perception
Awareness of tourism and tourists	18	13.85%	112	86.15%	1.86	.35	High Perception
Lack of funding, government financial aid, and support	73	56.15%	57	43.85%	1.44	.49	Moderate Perception
Inadequate Promotion and a lack of marketing for handloom products	33	25.38%	97	74.62%	1.75	.44	High Perception
Lack of community participation in tourism development	95	73.08%	35	26.92%	1.27	.45	Moderate Perception

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

Note: Weighted average = $7.9/5 = 1.58$, (i.e., $\geq 1.58 = \text{High Perception}$, $1.21 - 1.57 = \text{Moderate Perception}$, $0.90 - 1.20 = \text{Low Perception}$)

The challenge analysis indicates a hierarchy of concerns that should be reflected in priorities of interventions. Awareness of tourism and tourists came out as the most noticeable challenges (86.15%, $M = 1.86$), implying that there is a major gap in information between the weaver's community and the prospective of tourist markets. This observation aligns with stakeholder theory, which stresses the importance of communication and interaction among stakeholders and groups in ensuring successful tourism development. Secondly, the Inadequate promotion and lack of marketing for handloom products (74.62%, $M = 1.75$) represent the most pressing challenge. This perception, along with the awareness gap, indicates that the weavers' community recognised that their products and practices are not effectively reaching the potential market, as a structural challenge and requires systematic intervention with the help of digital platforms, tourism networks, and promotional campaigns.

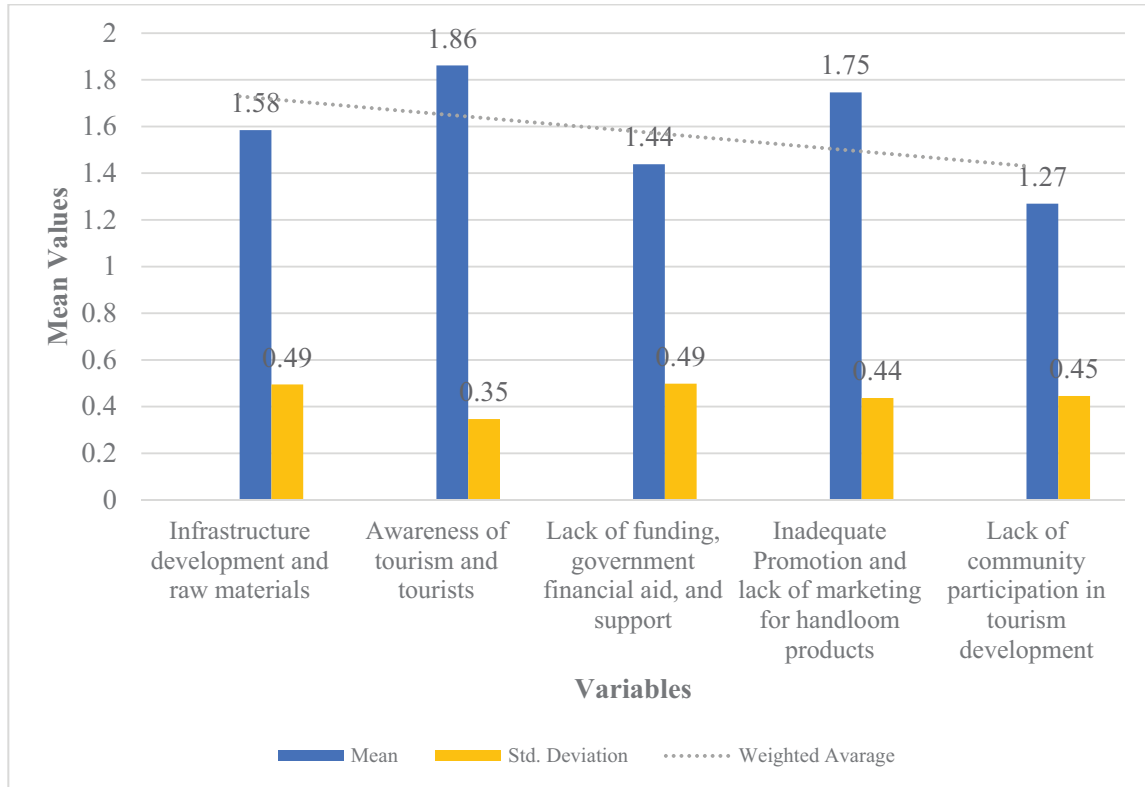


Figure 3: Mean Scores of Perceived Challenges in Tourism Integration (n=130)

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

Thirdly, the deficits of Infrastructure development and raw materials (58.46%, $M=1.58$) are moderate and one of the important concerns. The relatively lower agreement than the awareness and the marketing challenges may indicate that a basic infrastructure exists but requires improvements and upgradation through which the tourism development process may occur. This observation is consistent with the formal status of the village's establishment as an Eri silk production centre.

Interestingly, funding and government support (43.85%, $M=1.44$) were not seen as more pressing than awareness and marketing barriers. This observation can be interpreted as either adequate current support levels or a pragmatic community-focused perspective that prioritises market value solutions over institutional reliance. From an empowerment perspective, this market access preference over subsidies indicates that the weavers' community is seeking to integrate economic sustainability rather than being welfare dependent. The low perception of community participation, which is a considerable challenge (26.92%, $M=1.27$), is notable and somewhat contradictory given the context of the high importance placed on participatory planning. This implies that weavers feel adequately engaged in community planning processes and want to be actively involved in community-based tourism planning and development. This distinction underscores the importance of creating dedicated participatory mechanisms for tourism development initiatives.

Steps for the Integration of Traditional Handloom Practices with Tourism: Weavers' Community Perspectives

To complement the quantitative findings, respondents are encouraged to provide their observations through the open-ended questionnaire. Out of the 130 participants, 91 (70%) of the participants gave substantive responses, which were thematically analysed and categorised into major key themes as presented in Tables VI, VII, and VIII.

Table VI. Suggested Steps for Tourism Integration (n=91)

What steps should be taken for the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development in your locality?				
Criteria	Frequency	Per cent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Infrastructure Development	27	29.7	2.47	1.30
Marketing and Promotion Strategy	24	26.4		
Preservation of Culture and Tradition	18	19.8		
Innovation and training	14	15.4		
Governmental Policy	8	8.8		
Total	91	100.0		

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

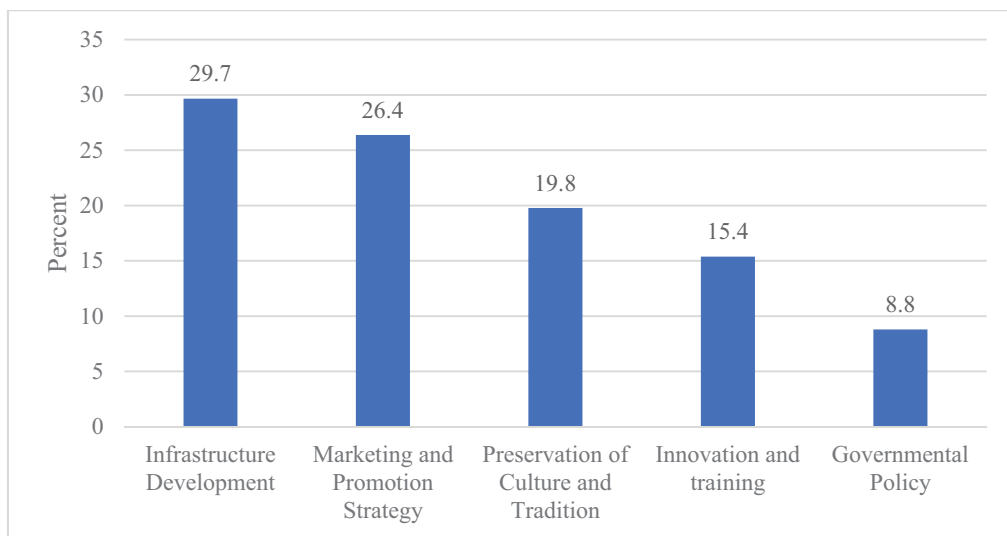


Figure 4: Percentage of respondent's observation on steps for integration traditional handloom practices with tourism.

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

The thematic analysis of community suggestions demonstrates practical and in-depth knowledge of the need for integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development. Infrastructure development (29.7%) and marketing/promotion strategies (26.4%) together account for over half of the responses, which support the quantitative findings on the key barriers. The infrastructure recommendation had certain components, such as proper road acces-

sibility, dedicated handloom products display centres, exhibition centres, and handicraft museums at the community level. These suggestions demonstrate that the weavers' community see the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development requires physical facilities. This can showcase their crafts and accommodate tourists, not merely the sale of their products, but also toward experiential tourism.

The Marketing and promotion responses emphasised the need for digital platforms, storytelling approaches, and partner-oriented events, including craft fairs and handloom festivals. The fact that the weavers' community has become aware of the importance of digital marketing is noteworthy. The relatively low educational levels identified earlier suggested that either exposure to successful examples of other locations digitally or aspirational thinking about market growth. Cultural preservation (19.8%) appeared as a diverse priority, distinct from but harmonising with economic concerns. Respondents emphasised the importance of maintaining authenticity while adapting to market trends, reflecting the tension between commodification and cultural integrity that is inherent in cultural tourism globally.

The need for contemporary design adaptations, the development of business skills, and sustainability practices were addressed in terms of innovation and training (15.4%). In the empowerment theory framework, these recommendations reflect individual-level empowerment processes, including learning new skills and managing resources effectively. The relatively lowest suggestion on governmental policies (8.8%) is consistent with the challenge perceptions. Perhaps because of less trust in the effectiveness of policies, or a community is more inclined toward self-reliance and market-based solutions. This indicates implications for intervention design, suggesting that community-driven approaches may be more effective compared to top-down policy implementation.

Weavers' Community Views on Support and Benefits from Tourism Development

The analysis of expected benefits, as shown in Table VIII, indicates a balanced perspective among the weaver's community, with relatively even distribution across three support dimensions. Market access (36.3%) received the highest endorsement, reflecting the community's primary concern with reaching customers for their products. This economic orientation aligns with the empowerment theory's importance, where access to resources is considered a foundation for community empowerment. Increased tourist footfalls (33.0%) is a somewhat different advantage, indicating that direct visitor engagement can create opportunities beyond simple product sales, such as live demonstrations, experiential workshops, and cultural interaction. The experiential dimension of tourism can increase both economic returns and cultural appreciation.

Table VII. Expected Benefits from Tourism Support (n=91)

If you are a weaver, what type of support will you benefit more from tourism?				
Criteria	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Market Access	33	36.3	1.95	.82
Increase Tourist Footfalls	30	33.0		
Government and Institutional Support	28	30.8		
Total	91	100.0		

Source: *Primary Survey, 2025*

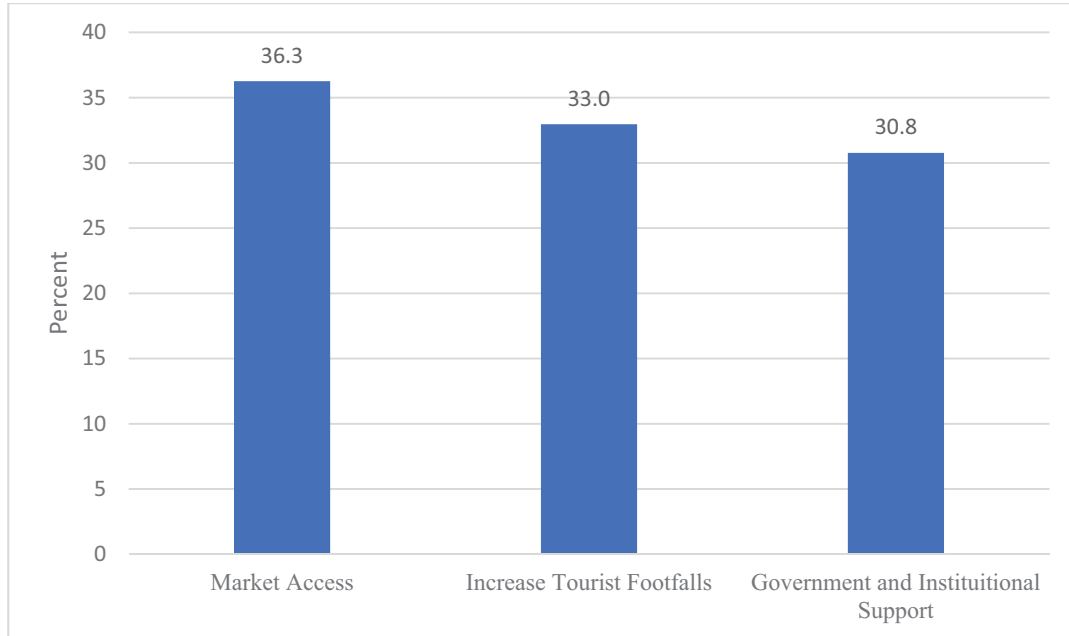


Figure 5: Respondent observation on the type of support and benefit from tourism.

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

Government and institutional support (30.8%) remain important to almost one-third of respondents. This includes support such as subsidies, training programmes, exhibition opportunities, and infrastructure investment. The balanced response distribution ($M=1.95$, $SD=0.82$) indicates that the weavers' community perceived these three dimensions as complementary benefits rather than opposing or competing priorities. From a stakeholder theory perspective, achieving these benefits requires coordinated action among multiple stakeholders: market access depends on private sector engagement (tour operators, retailers, e-commerce platforms), increasing tourist footfalls requires destination marketing by tourism stakeholders, government agencies and support from institutions or NGOs. The community is also prepared to engage in multiple stakeholders' partnerships while balancing their expectations for the integration.

Comments and Suggestions from Weavers' Community

The final thematic analysis in Table VIII captures the weaver's community's broader vision for the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development. Collaborative effort (40.7%) appeared as the dominant theme, indicating that successful tourism development requires partnerships among various stakeholders, including cooperatives, tourism departments, local government, private enterprises (tour operators, fashion houses, retailers), and NGOs. This resonates well with stakeholder theory and denotes a sophisticated understanding of tourism as a multi-actor system. Collaborative effort recommendations, such as joint marketing initiatives, public-private partnerships for infrastructure development, and networking with urban fashion markets. The ideas on collaboration also reflect organisational-level em-

powerment processes, where shared responsibility and inter-organisational networking contribute to enhanced empowerment outcomes.

Table VIII. Additional Comments and Suggestions (n=91)

Any other comments and suggestions on integrating traditional handloom practices with tourism as a development tool.				
Criteria	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Collaboration Effort	37	40.7	1.87	.81
Increase Tourist Activities	29	31.9		
Youth Participation	25	27.5		
Total	91	100.0		

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

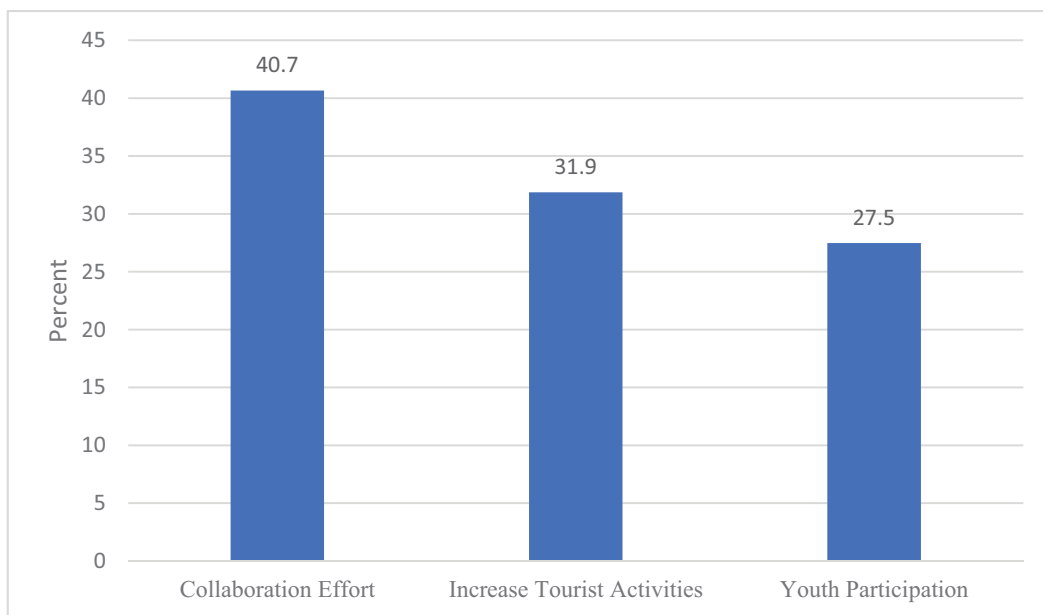


Figure 6: Respondent's comments and suggestions on integrating traditional handloom practices with tourism development.

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

Increased tourist activities (31.9%) signify a demand for various tourism products beyond passive sales of handicraft products. This suggested to include tourism activities such as craft festivals, live weaving demonstrations, cultural immersion tours, handloom village trails, and hands-on workshops where tourists can learn and observe basic weaving techniques. These suggestions indicate the community's vision for experiential and participatory tourism that creates deeper engagement with visitors.

Youth participation (27.5%) arose as a major concern about intergenerational continuity and innovation. Communities expressed concern about falling interest among younger generations and the underutilisation of modern design approaches and digital platforms. Engaging youth is

essential for both cultural continuity and for bringing new perspectives on marketing, design innovation, and technology adoption. These suggestions are relatively homogeneous ($SD=0.81$), which indicates general agreement within the community regarding priorities, providing a solid basis for coordinated action.

Discussion and recommendation

The findings of this study provide empirical support for integrating traditional handloom practices with tourism development in Umden-Diwon village while also emphasising the critical challenges that must be addressed for successful integration. This section discusses the findings in the context of the theoretical framework and presents literature, followed by evidence-based recommendations.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of the study strongly support the application of empowerment theory to the integration of traditional handloom practices with community-based tourism development initiatives. At the individual level, weavers are very conscious of their skills and express their willingness to learn and to participate in tourism initiatives. These are in line with the learning decision-making skills process and participatory behaviour outcomes identified by Perkins and Zimmerman (1995). However, the poor educational level and lack of marketing knowledge indicate that individual-level empowerment processes need to be reinforced by means of targeted training and capacity-building programmes, especially for the resource management process. At the organisational level, the domination of SHG and cooperative membership (73.85% combined) indicates that there are institutional frameworks which can further support the integration of traditional handloom with tourism development. These forms of collective structures that bring into line with organisational empowerment outcomes, such as networking, shared leadership, and outcomes of resource competition. The challenge lies in leveraging these present structures precisely for tourism development purposes.

At the community level, the highest responses of participatory planning ($M=4.88$) is an indicator of the need to have inclusive governance structures that would ensure equitable benefit distribution among the weavers' community. This finding echoes with community empowerment outcomes, such as pluralistic leadership and resident participation. The community's awareness of risks related to external dominance of tourism ventures means that critical consciousness is a key element of being empowered.

Stakeholder theory provides complementary information on the collaborative requirements for the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development. The recognition of the weaver's community on the role of multiple stakeholder collaboration, such as government agencies, private enterprises, cooperatives and NGOs, indicates their willingness to participate and engage in multi-stakeholder partnership. The emphasis on collaborative effort (40.7% of suggestions) indicates an understanding that tourism development initiatives require coordinated action across various actors with different resources, capabilities, and interests.

Comparison with Existing Literature

The findings are consistent with previous studies of cultural tourism and the development of the handloom sector. The weavers' community optimism regarding the potential of tourism

and economic growth can be seen in the case of Roy's (2021) on the role of the Indian handloom sector's contribution to regional economies. The acknowledgement of tourism as a preservation method and process justifies Pradhan and Khandual's (2020) claim that tourism-derived exposure can contribute to traditional handloom practices and sustainability. The findings also indicate challenges consistent with Devi's (2014) verdicts regarding structural barriers in Northeast India's handloom sector, including inadequate market access and technology gaps.

The awareness and marketing challenges of the findings were recognised (86.15% and 74.62%, respectively), similar to Ahmed et al.'s (2021) conclusions about Manipuri handloom industries' struggles with visibility and market accessibility. The recommendations on community participation reflect Adebayo and Butcher's (2022) findings from Nigeria regarding stakeholder demand for inclusive tourism planning. The apprehension about cultural legitimacy while embracing commercialisation resonates with Ara et al.'s (2022) explanations about tensions between tourist expectations and host community values in ethnic tourism contexts.

Recommendations

From the empirical findings and theoretical analysis of the study. The following are some of the recommendations for the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism as a development tool for the study area:

Enhancement of infrastructure development: Given the importance of weavers' community prioritisation on infrastructure development (29.7% of suggestions) and the high perceptions of challenges about infrastructure development and materials (58.46%), dedicated investment is required for the development of weaving demonstration centres in the area, which may also include basic physical facilities and amenities for tourists and visitors. Investment in the development of a community-based handicraft museum, improvement of road connectivity and setting up displays and exhibition centres or spaces with integrated facilities own controlled by the weaver's community can also enhance the implementation of the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development in the area.

Strengthening marketing and promotional strategy: Addressing the pressing gap identified in awareness of tourism and tourists (86.15%), and inadequate promotion and lack of marketing (74.62%), it is important to develop a digital marketing platform that suits the weavers' community's perception and tourists. Provided with training and capacity building programmes on social media marketing and product photography, among the weaver's community of the area. Also, encouraging the local communities with storytelling approaches, partnering with other stakeholders, and participating in regional, national and international craft fairs and exhibitions can also enhance the visibility of the traditional handloom products of the area, which may in turn attract tourists visiting the village area.

Capacity building and innovation: Responding to educational constraints and the need for innovation and training (15.4 %), the effort should also involve organising regular workshops on contemporary design and trends while maintaining and preserving the traditional method of production techniques. Basic business skill training is also required for the weavers' community that covers pricing, inventory and customer relationship management. This could enhance the productivity and management of the local resources available for the traditional handloom sustainability. And also, procurement of the mentorship programme with incentives for the younger practitioners is very much needed in order to preserve the traditional knowledge of the practices.

Policy and institutional support: While most of the weavers' community responses advocate a market-based solution (36.3%), the government and institutional support (30.8%) remain essential. This can be achieved by simplifying the access to existing government schemes for the weavers' community, subsidised financing on infrastructure, plant and materials through which the community are encouraged to sustain the traditional handloom practices. Importantly, the implementation of intellectual property law and fair-trading regulations, and a coordination mechanism among government departments (tourism, textiles and rural development) can enhance and protect the interests of the weaver's community of the area.

Integrated livelihood approaches: Since most of the weavers' community relies on multiple occupations (farming 33.85% and labour 29.23%), interventions should also cover an integrated tourism package by combining weaving demonstration with agricultural experiences to create unique tourism experiences for visitors. Eri silk production with a sericulture farm visit can also be linked to create village tour itineraries. This could position the village as a living heritage destination offering a holistic cultural immersion and experiential tours. And to deal with the issues of integrational continuity and young generation engagement in the practices of traditional knowledge, documentations, designing a competition, and entrepreneurial programmes can enhance the purpose of preserving traditional knowledge and practices.

Conclusion

This paper examined the possibilities for integrating traditional handloom practices with tourism development in Umden-Diwon village, Ri Bhoi District, Meghalaya, India, with the help of empowerment theory and stakeholder theory. The result shows that the weavers' community that possesses the traditional knowledge of handloom practices shows positive responses for the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development. This is being demonstrated by unanimously positive perceptions regarding the potential of tourism in economic growth, benefit of cultural preservation, and community empowerment outcomes. The weaver's community shows strong positive responses on participatory planning ($M=4.88$) and willingness to support tourism initiatives ($M=4.83$), which indicates a strong foundation for cultural tourism and community-based development initiatives.

However, the result also reveals various challenges, such as limited awareness among weavers and potential tourists (86.15%), inadequate marketing and promotional strategy (74.62%), and lack of infrastructure development (58.46%), that must be addressed by means of coordination and multi-stakeholder interventions. From a theoretical perspective, the findings of the study demonstrate the applicability of empowerment theory in understanding the community's perceptions of integrating traditional handloom practices with tourism development initiatives. The responses of the weavers' community reflect the awareness at individual, organisational, and community levels of the empowerment process and outcomes. The study mainly focused on the participatory behaviour and collective benefit-sharing of the process and outcomes of empowerment theory among the weavers' community. Stakeholder theory offers complementary understandings, with the community recognising the necessity of collaboration among government agencies, private enterprises, NGOs, and support from institutional organisations.

The result of the study also carries practical implications for policy formulation and project implementation for the integration process of traditional handloom practices with tourism development. Key barriers such as infrastructure development, marketing strategies, capacity building, and institutional support indicate a roadmap towards the interventions. The weaver's

community's preference for market-based solutions over welfare dependency also indicates that sustainable models need to place a special emphasis on economic growth possibilities and market integration rather than subsidy-driven approaches. Moreover, traditional handloom practices of Umden-Diwon village signify a valuable cultural heritage with substantial potential for tourism development. The strong optimism of community willingness, combined with the recent Geographical Indication recognition, creates a favourable environment for developing the village as a cultural and heritage tourism destination.

Limitations of the study

This study has a number of limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample was obtained from only one village of Ri Bhoi district, Meghalaya, which limits the generalisability of the other weaver's community of Ri Bhoi district, or the states of North East India. Future research should look into multiple communities to identify the specific context and generalisable factors. Second, the study primarily relies on the women weavers' community perceptions; future research should include perceptions of other stakeholders, including village residents, tourists, tourism stakeholders, government officials, and potential market partners. Third, the cross-sectional study design provides a snapshot of current perceptions only; longitudinal studies would enable tracking of attitudes during the progress of tourism development. Fourth, although the mixed-method approach provided complementary information, a more in-depth qualitative investigation, with focus group discussions and participant observation, may provide a deeper understanding of community perceptions and dynamics.

References

- Abrahams, R. (2015). Tourism and the reconfiguration of host group identities: A case study of ethnic tourism in rural Guangxi, China. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 13(1), 39–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2014.892505>
- Adebayo, A. D., & Butcher, J. (2022). Community Empowerment in Nigeria's Tourism Industry: An Analysis of Stakeholders' Perceptions. *Tourism Planning & Development*, 20(4), 583–603. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2022.2127865>
- Ahmed, Z., Hussain, A. H. M. B., Alam, R., & Singha, A. K. (2021). Perils and prospects of Manipuri handloom industries in Bangladesh: An ethnic community development perspective. *GeoJournal*, 87(3), 2125–2140. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-020-10365-3>
- Alcalá-Ordóñez, A., Brida, J. G., Cárdenas-García, P. J., & Segarra, V. (2023). Tourism as an instrument of economic growth: Empirical exploration at the regional level in Spain. *Natural Resources Forum*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1477-8947.12386>
- Ara, E., Tucker, H., & Coetzee, W. J. (2022). Handicrafts-enacted: Emplacing non-human agency in ethnic tourism. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 50, 345–354. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2022.01.008>
- Bareh, H. (1991). *The art history of Meghalaya*. South Asia Books. Retrieved from https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/The_Art_History_of_Meghalaya/HckrAAAAMAAJ?hl=en
- Baruah, S., B. (2016). *Umden eri cluster, Meghalaya*. Retrieved from <https://sriparna.in/d-umden-eri-cluster-meghalaya/>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

- Chi, C. G. Q., Cai, R., & Li, Y. (2017). Factors influencing residents' subjective well-being at World Heritage Sites. *Tourism Management*, 63, 209–222. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.06.019>
- Choudhury, K., Dutta, P., & Patgiri, S. (2018). Rural tourism of North East India: Prospects and Challenges. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 23(2), 69-74. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331744708_Rural_Tourism_of_North_East_India_Prospects_and_Challenges#:~:text=Northeast%20India%20witness-es%20a%20good,not%20yet%20got%20it%20momentum
- Cochran, W. G. (1977). *Sampling Techniques* (3rd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Cohen, J. H. (2001). Textile, tourism and community development. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 28(2), 378–398. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0160-7383\(00\)00060-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0160-7383(00)00060-8)
- Craig, G., & Mayo, M. (1995). *Community Empowerment*. Zed Books. http://books.google.ie/books?id=oRIL6kHLVgoC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Empowerment+and+community+planning&hl=&cd=2&source=gbs_api
- Deery, M., Jago, L., & Fredline, L. (2012). Rethinking social impacts of tourism research: A new research agenda. *Tourism Management*, 33(1), 64–73. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2011.01.026>
- Devi, C. V. (2014). *Handlooms for Livelihood in North-Eastern Region : Problems and Prospects*. 32(4), 427–438. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292846807_Handlooms_for_livelihood_in_north-eastern_region_Problems_and_prospects
- Diengdoh, D.R. (2017). *A study of women workers in eri silk handloom industry in ri Bhoi district of Meghalaya*. <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/250798>
- Eki, A. K. T., Ngadilah, C., & Eky, Y. E. (2024). Empowerment Poor Communities with the Strengths - Perspective in Empowerment Theory. *Eduvest - Journal of Universal Studies*, 4(2), 650–657. <https://doi.org/10.59188/eduvest.v4i2.1066>
- Esichaikul, R., & Chansawang, R. (2022). Community participation in heritage tourism management of Sukhothai historical park. *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, 8(4), 897–911. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijtc-03-2021-0035>
- Faulkenberry, L., Coggeshall, J., Backman, K., & Backman, S. (2000). A Culture of Servitude: The Impact of Tourism and Development on South Carolina's Coast. *Human Organization*, 59(1), 86–95. <https://doi.org/10.17730/humo.59.1.353730461t724j02>
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Pitman.
- Hani, U., & Barua, U. (2015). Craft Culture & Tourism: Scopes of improvement and promotion. *Bandung Creative Movement (BCM)*, 2(1). Retrieved from <https://jtitl.web.id/index.php/bcm/article/view/5800>
- Johnson, P. A. (2010). Realizing Rural Community-Based Tourism Development: Prospects for Social Economy Enterprises. *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 5(1), 150–162. <https://journals.brandonu.ca/jrcd/article/download/349/81>
- Joo, D., Cho, H., & Woosnam, K. M. (2019). Exploring tourists' perceptions of tourism impacts. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 31, 231–235. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2019.05.008>
- Khazaei, A., Elliot, S., & Joppe, M. (2015). An application of stakeholder theory to advance community participation in tourism planning: the case for engaging immigrants as fringe stakeholders. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 23(7), 1049–1062. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2015.1042481>

- Mbaiwa, J. E. (2011). Changes on traditional livelihood activities and lifestyles caused by tourism development in the Okavango Delta, Botswana. *Tourism Management*, 32, 1050–1060. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2010.09.002>
- Meynell, A. L. (2021). A Sustainable Model: Handloom and Community in Meghalaya, North-east India. In *Sustainable textiles* (pp. 165–196). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-5967-6_8
- MEYNELL, A. L. (2022). Blurred Boundaries: Exploring Textile Heritage of the Khasi Bhoi, Karbi and Khat-ar Lyngdoh of the Ri Bhoi District in Meghalaya, Northeast India. *The Highlander*, 2, 1-27. Retrieved from <https://journals.highlandinstitute.org/index.php/the-highlander/article/view/16/8>
- Mishra, A., Das, P., & Sangma, W. S. N. (2021). Handlooms Micro-enterprises for Empowerment of Women in Meghalaya. *International Journal of Current Microbiology and Applied Sciences*, 10(01), 2493–2500. <https://doi.org/10.20546/ijcmas.2021.1001.289>
- Mondoñedo, M. E. S. S. (2021). Stakeholder theory and the sustainable recovery of the tourism sector. *Atlántida Revista Canaria De Ciencias Sociales*, 12, 31–56. <https://doi.org/10.25145/j.atlantid.2021.12.03>
- Noonan, D. S., & Rizzo, I. (2017). Economics of cultural tourism: issues and perspectives. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 41(2), 95–107. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10824-017-9300-6>
- Nunnally, J. C. (1978). *Psychometric Theory* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Parida, R. C., & Tada, B. (2018). The Contribution of Handloom and Handicraft Industries for Rural Economic Growth: Study with Reference Sagalee Sub-Division of Papum Pare District, Arunachal Pradesh. *International Journal of Management Studies*, 5(2(3)), 57. [https://doi.org/10.18843/ijms/v5i2\(3\)/06](https://doi.org/10.18843/ijms/v5i2(3)/06)
- Perkins, D.D., & Zimmerman, M.A. (1995). Empowerment Theory, Research, and Application. Retrieved from <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/117200/ajcpbf02506982.pdf?sequence=1>
- Pradhan, S., & Khandual, A. (2020). Community, Local Practices and Cultural Sustainability: A Case Study of Sambalpuri Ikat Handloom. In *Sustainable textiles* (pp. 121–139). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-38532-3_7
- Pribadi, I. a. P., & Nastiti, D. (2023). The Stakeholders' Collaborative Toward the Community Empowerment Based on Village Tourism in the Melung Village. *JUSS (Jurnal Sosial Soed-irman)*, 6(1), 107. <https://doi.org/10.20884/juss.v6i1.8170>
- Rachmawati, E., & Fountain, J. (2020). Role Of External Stakeholders In Tourism Development And Community Empowerment. *International Journal of Applied Sciences in Tourism and Events*, 4(1), 25. <https://doi.org/10.31940/ijaste.v4i1.1640>
- Rahmawati, R., Oktora, K., Ratnasari, S. L., Ramadania, R., & Darma, D. C. (2021). Is It True That Lombok Deserves To Be A Halal Tourist Destination In The World? A Perception Of Domestic Tourists. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 34(1), 94–101. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.34113-624>
- Ray, N. (2014). Rural Tourism Issues And Challenges: A Case From Kamarpukur, India. *International Journal of Business Quantitative Economics and Applied Management Research*, 1(4), 90-106. Retrieved from <https://ijbemr.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Rural-Tourism-Issues-And-Challenges-A-Case-From-Kamarpukur-India.pdf>
- Richards, G. (2005). Textile Tourists In The European Periphery: New Markets For Disadvantaged Areas? *Tourism Review International*, 8(4), 323–338. <https://doi.org/10.3727/154427205774791519>

- Rout, H. B., Mishra, P. K., & Pradhan, B. B. (2017). Socio-Economic Impacts of Tourism in India: An Empirical analysis. *Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism*, 7(4), 762. [https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v7.4\(16\).22](https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v7.4(16).22)
- Roy Maulik, S. (2021). Handloom—The Challenges and Opportunities. In: Gardetti, M.Á., Muthu, S.S. (eds) *Handloom Sustainability and Culture. Sustainable Textiles: Production, Processing, Manufacturing & Chemistry*. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-5665-1_5
- Saad, S. (2021). Culture and Handicraft Tourism in India: Tourism supporting sustainable development goals. Retrieved from <https://openrepository.aut.ac.nz/server/api/core/bitstreams/c96b6e10-866c-4381-bc08-fb0f29012b4d/content>
- Sangchumngong, A., & Kozak, M. (2017). Sustainable cultural heritage tourism at Ban Wangka Village, Thailand. *Anatolia*, 29(2), 183–193. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2017.1414435>
- Shafieisabet, N., & Haratifard, S. (2020). The empowerment of local tourism stakeholders and their perceived environmental effects for participation in sustainable development of tourism. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 45, 486–498. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2020.10.007>
- Sharma, H., Karmakar, S., & Chakrabarti, D. (2021). The Possibility of Sustainable Development of Sualkuchi (The Biggest Silk Village of Assam) Handloom Sector Through Promotion of Rural Tourism. In *Design science and innovation* (pp. 213–221). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-2229-8_23
- Shukla, P. S., & Shamurailatpam, S. D. (2024). Sustainable Tourism in India: an Integrative approach for economic development and poverty alleviation. In *Emerald Publishing Limited eBooks* (pp. 121–141). <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83549-015-020241011>
- Soundarapandian, M. (2002). *Growth and Prospects of Handloom Sector in India*. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development Mumbai. Retrieved from <https://www.nabard.org/demo/auth/writereaddata/File/OC%2022.pdf>
- Textile Value Chain. (2020) Types of Handloom. Retrieved from <https://textilevaluechain.in/in-depth-analysis/articles/basics-of-textiles/types-of-hand-loom>
- Textiles Department. (2024). The Official Web Portal, Government of Meghalaya. Retrieved from <https://meghalaya.gov.in/dept/41>
- The Official Web Portal, Government of Meghalaya| *District Administration | India*. <https://ribhoi.gov.in/> (30.12.2025)
- Wilcox, R. R. (2003). Applying contemporary statistical techniques. In *Elsevier eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-751541-0.x5021-4>
- Zadel, Z., & Bogdan, S. (2013). Economic impact of cultural tourism. *UTMS Journal of Economics*, 4(3), 355–366. <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/105319/1/775077062.pdf>

Promoting Rural Tourism through Social-Media and Digital Entrepreneurship: Insights from Homestay Operators of Sikkim

Dr. Bhutia Jigmie Wanchuk^A, Lepcha Sonam Dorjee^{B*}, Dr. Bhutia Ruth Marie^C

Received: October 2025 | Accepted: February 2026

DOI:10.5937/turizam30-61867

Abstract

In the current digital age, social media can transform small rural businesses into globally visible enterprises. This study explores the adoption, perceived opportunities, and challenges of social media use among rural homestay operators in Sikkim, India. A qualitative research design was employed, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 homestay operators across all districts of Sikkim, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that social media adoption was highly strategic and uneven, with WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram being the most frequently used platforms. Operators strategically use WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram to promote homestays, build trust, and engage with guests, with video content being the most effective. However, adoption is limited by infrastructural constraints, digital skill gaps, operational time pressures, and exposure to online risks. This study contributes to the understanding of digital entrepreneurship in rural tourism and offers practical guidance for improving small-scale operators' social media adoption. The findings also provide policymakers with evidence for designing targeted interventions for infrastructure development and capacity-building programs.

Keywords: social media adoption, rural homestays, opportunities, challenges, tourism promotion

Introduction

The tourism industry has witnessed transformative changes with the advent of digital technologies, particularly social media, which have emerged as an important tool for marketing, customer engagement, and destination branding (Leung et al., 2013). Recent evidence suggests that platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have further accelerated this transformation by enabling real-time interaction, short form video marketing, and widespread user generated content that strongly influences travel decision (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019; Chen, 2025; Wu et al., 2025). This shift is especially significant for tourism-related businesses, particularly small and medium sized enterprises such as homestays, which often rely heavily on word-of-mouth for success. With the rise of social media platforms, word of mouth now

A Associate Professor, Department of Tourism, Sikkim University, Gangtok, Sikkim, India, Email: jbhutia@cus.ac.in

B Research Scholar, Department of Tourism, Sikkim University, Gangtok, Sikkim, India, corresponding author: sonamdorjeelepcha280201@gmail.com

C Associate Professor, NBB Government College, Gangtok, Sikkim, India, Email: ruthmarielepcha11@gmail.com

spreads more rapidly and reaches a broader audience, significantly shaping the trajectory of consumer decision-making (Leung et al., 2013). Recent studies confirm that social media-driven engagement has become one of the strongest determinants of purchase intention and destination appeal (Aboalghanam et al., 2025; Correia et al., 2025). Social media enhances and expands the market reach beyond traditional viral marketing strategies, facilitating homestay operators to upload images, videos, and customer reviews, which helps promote their property more effectively, communicate directly with potential customers, and engage with existing consumer databases, allowing rural homestay operators to sustain their businesses and improve their competitive advantage, resulting in greater sales and profitability with limited marketing resources (Kapri & Sharma 2024).

Homestays are an evolving alternative concept targeted at visitors seeking immersive experiences focused on authenticity, inclusivity, and host-guest interactions in destinations. Homestays provide an opportunity to explore local culture and lifestyle in a family like atmosphere, allowing visitors to achieve more within a modest budget (Kulshreshtha & Kulshreshtha, 2019). The Ministry of Tourism, has been actively working to position India as a prominent rural tourism destination by promoting local products and tourism activities aimed to strengthen rural economies and create employment opportunities. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, homestays gained significant popularity, as travelers prioritized privacy, sanitation, and social distancing. Further, the demand for homestays increased substantially, with travelers preferring small, locally managed accommodations offering both safety and personalized experiences. This rising preference for homestays has led to a notable expansion of homestay accommodations across India, addressing the needs of tourists seeking alternative lodging options while contributing to rural employment (Kulshreshtha & Kulshreshtha, 2019).

North eastern regions such as Sikkim have emerged as popular destinations, offering not only authentic homestay experiences, but also access to a rich abundance of biological and ecological diversity (Bhan & Singh, 2014). Despite the growing popularity and unique offerings of homestays in Sikkim, many rural operators continue to face challenges in term of branding and marketing. Common issues include limited or inaccurate information available to potential visitors, inadequate representation of facilities, and absence of compelling experiential storytelling. Furthermore, a significant number of rural homestays lack digital marketing strategies, such as functional websites, active social media engagement, and integrated online booking systems, which severely limit their visibility and market reach (Bhutia et al., 2022). These challenges reflect broader national and global findings on the digital divide affecting rural tourism entrepreneurs, who often struggle with digital literacy, connectivity barriers, and limited access to training resources (Cheuk et al., 2018; Fanelli & Fanelli, 2021; Sindakis & Showkat, 2024).

This study aims to understand the perceived opportunities and challenges of adopting social media by rural homestay operators in Sikkim, which can be beneficial to rural homestay operators in identifying gaps in their digital engagement and uncovering ways to enhance their visibility, attract tourists, and empower rural entrepreneurs. Moreover, examining these aspects provides valuable insights for policymakers and tourism stakeholders to pinpoint areas where social media can be strategically utilized to support sustainable tourism development. It also highlights the broader digital adoption issues faced by rural communities and offer a foundation for formulating targeted strategies to bridge this digital divide. Overall, exploring the perceived opportunities and challenges associated with social media adoption among rural homestay operators is essential for strengthening their market presence, promoting sustainable

community-based tourism, and fostering inclusive digital growth in the tourism sector. Therefore, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To understand the adoption and usage of social media among rural homestay operators in Sikkim.
- To understand the perceived opportunities of rural homestay operators to integrate social media to enhance their business performance.
- To explore the challenges faced by rural homestay operators in integrating social media into their businesses.

Review of Literature

Homestay Tourism in Rural Areas

Governments are now promoting homestays as catalysts for rural tourism development. Consequently, there has been a significant increase in research on the concept of homestay tourism among academics, and the field is experiencing gradual progression (Cakmakoglu Arici & Koc, 2024). Despite major research on the concept of homestays, there is no universal definition. The concept varies across countries, and researchers define and conceptualize it according to their studies. Lynch (2005) defined homestays as a type of lodging arrangement in which visitors and hosts share a common space, the host or family resides on the property, and interactions between the two occur. Dey et al. (2020) defines rural homestay as “alternative accommodation in the form of an opportunity available for tourists visiting rural areas to stay with host families for the purpose of experiencing the local culture, cuisine and activities undertaken by host communities” (p. 643). Homestays as establishments in rural areas complement each other as a source of income for individual operators and community development. Economically, revenues from operating homestays can be used in essential needs such as health-care and education (Shukor et al., 2014). Socially and culturally, homestays foster cultural exchanges and increase the awareness of indigenous lifestyles among visitors. Environmentally, homestays act as significant vehicles for promoting sustainability in key areas such as waste management, energy, and water use (Dahal et al., 2020).

Sikkim is a popular homestay tourism destination that encourages homestays to be ingrained in the fundamental values of Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET), emphasizing on authenticity, educational, and transformative experiences that align with active community participation and promote the sustainable management of destinations (Bhutia et al., 2022). Homestays in Sikkim have provided new avenues for job opportunities and income generation for women and youths (Yadav et al., 2018). Homestay tourism in Sikkim is developing as an important sustainable tourism model that benefits rural communities economically and socially, leverages cultural and natural attractions, and contributes to residents’ quality of life and support for tourism (J. Kumar et al., 2024; Thakur et al., 2024; Wani et al., 2024). The government of Sikkim also supports and provides the required training to homestay operators to improve Sikkim’s homestay ecosystem, visitor experiences, and economic prospects for youth and women through Homestay and Hospitality Sector initiatives under the Sikkim INSPIRES (Sikkim INSPIRES | Tourism, n.d.). This support is timely and relevant, as rural homestays are gaining popularity among tourists because of their distinct charismatic character, and rural residents are motivated to preserve their local way of life and traditions because of the economic benefits they gain (Thakur et al., 2024). Despite growing institutional support and increasing tourist interests, rural homestay operators continue to face a range of operational challenges that

hinder sustainable growth in the sector. Challenges include the lack of a formal management system, marketing and promotional expertise, basic facilities, communication obstacles (Thakur et al., 2024), continuity, short duration of capacity-building programs, gaps in training modules (Bhutia et al., 2022), and insufficient proficiency in using technology (Anuar & Qian, 2024). Taken together, these challenges underscore the need to explore how rural homestay operators perceive and engage with social media, particularly to improve business performance and long-term sustainability.

Role of Social Media in Tourism and Rural Entrepreneurship

Social media can be defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, allowing the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Social media enhances tourism marketing by facilitating interactive, information-rich, and visually engaging communication that influences travel decisions. Visuals, including photos and videos, enhance destination marketing by shaping tourists’ perceptions and visit intentions. Videos on YouTube provide comprehensive information, influencing tourists’ decisions through trusted content about destinations (Arora & Lata, 2020). Social media platforms, especially Facebook, are used by Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) to promote destinations through visual content of scenery, culture, and cuisine, increasing engagement and destination appeal (P. Kumar et al., 2022). In recent years, with the evolution of social media ecosystems, influencer marketing and user-generated content (UGC) have become central components of tourism promotion, significantly shaping travelers’ decision-making process (Abad & Borbon, 2021; Dai et al., 2022). Social media platforms serve as the primary ecosystem for influencer to disseminate curated travel content, engage directly with audiences, and respond to queries that build trust and brand affinity (Kapoor et al., 2022; Najar et al., 2024).

Social media empowers small businesses by providing cost-efficient means for marketing, customer engagement, and brand building (Bhardwaj et al., 2024; Chopra et al., 2024). It is an important marketing and communication tool that enables rural tourism, entrepreneurs, and enterprises such as homestays to promote their unique offerings and engage with potential customers. For instance, studies indicate that the use of social media by small and medium enterprises, such as homestays, can help connect with potential customers without the need for expensive infrastructure (S. Chatterjee & Kumar Kar, 2020). The younger generation, who are usually responsive to visual content, has been influenced by social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, which have increased awareness and visitor traffic to rural destinations (Bachtiar & Bernanthos, 2024). Additionally, social media plays a crucial role in attracting potential visitors to a destination and fostering community engagement, thereby contributing to sustainable economic growth (J. Chatterjee & Dsilva, 2021; Kansra et al., 2024).

Social media also facilitates rich storytelling, allowing tourism operators to communicate the cultural, natural, and experiential value of rural destinations. Research indicates that tourists perceive content shared directly by hosts as more authentic, trustworthy, and relatable (Dong et al., 2023; Wang & Yan, 2022). For small and informal tourism enterprises, including homestays, digital transformation offers both marketing and operational advantages. Studies from India, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Nepal show that micro-entrepreneurs adopt social media primarily because it is perceived as useful, accessible, and compatible with existing business routines (Anuar & Qian, 2024).

While previous studies have examined social media use in tourism marketing, rural entrepreneurship, and homestay development in India and other Asian contexts, limited research has explored how rural homestay operators themselves perceive, adopt, and integrate social media into their day-to-day business practices. Existing studies primarily focus on tourists' digital behaviour, destination branding, or quantitative assessments of marketing outcomes, leaving a gap in understanding the lived experiences, contextual constraints, and practical strategies used by operators in remote areas.

Research Methodology

This study investigates the adoption, opportunities, and challenges of social media use among rural homestay operators in Sikkim. A qualitative research design was employed to gain operators' perceptions and practices using semi-structured interviews. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth understanding of complex, context-specific phenomena that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measures. Social media adoption and its related opportunities and challenges are shaped by personal experiences, digital literacy, community dynamics, and local tourism practices; therefore, a qualitative design allowed the researchers to capture nuanced insights and meanings directly from the participants. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted for this study to ensure that only those participants who possessed direct and relevant experience with both homestay operations and social media use were included. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because the objective of the research was to gain in-depth insights from individuals who were actively involved in rural tourism and digital promotion, rather than to obtain a statistically representative sample. The selection criteria required that participants had been operating their homestays for at least one year and were already using social media platforms for business-related activities. These criteria ensured that the participants were familiar with the operational realities of running a homestay and had adequate exposure to the opportunities and challenges associated with social media adoption. In addition, purposive sampling allowed the researchers to select homestay operators from all districts of Sikkim.

Sikkim has made concerted efforts to leverage its natural beauty, cultural heritage, and commitment to conservation to develop sustainable tourism. The state also stands out for its vibrant culture, traditions, and unique indigenous heritage, making it a remarkable global tourism destination (SBFP & Department of Forest, 2011).

Thirty homestay operators from all the districts of Sikkim, namely Gangtok, Pakyong, Mangang, Gyalshing, Namchi, and Soreng, were chosen to provide a diverse sample that reflected the broader rural tourism landscape of the state. A landlocked Himalayan state in northeastern India, marked as the India's second smallest state by area covering 7,096 sq. km. Sikkim lies between Nepal to the west, the Tibet Autonomous Region of China to the north and east, and Bhutan to the southeast. The state's topography is highly varied, with elevations ranging from low subtropical valleys to high alpine zones. This steep altitudinal gradient gives rise to diverse climates from temperate in the lower hills to frigid and snowbound conditions in the high reaches (Government of Sikkim, 2024).

They were first contacted via phone calls to explain the purpose of the study and to request their participation. Interviews were scheduled at times and locations that were convenient for the operators. The interviews were conducted in Nepali because most of the participants were comfortable. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 30-45 minutes each. The participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary and

that they could skip any questions or end the interview at any time. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants to record the interviews.

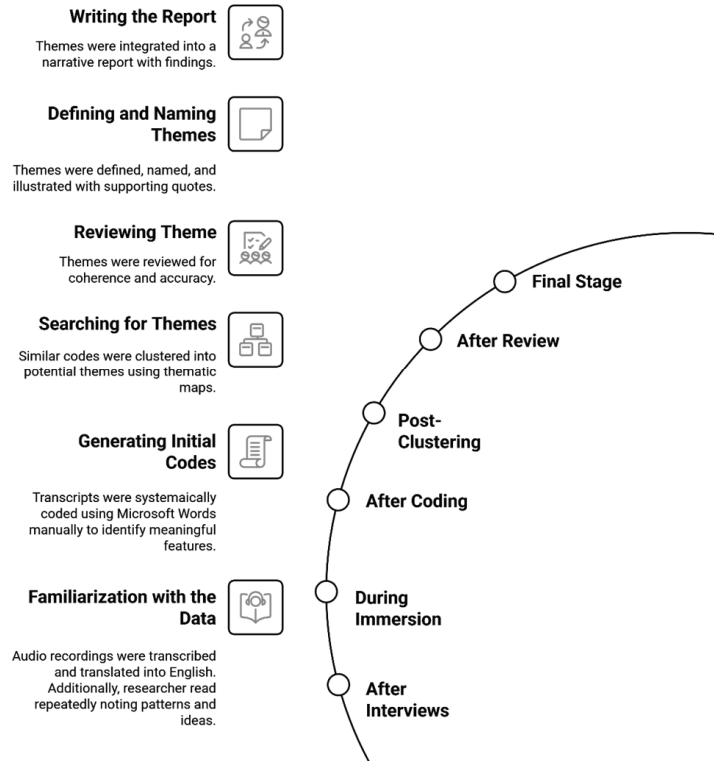


Figure 1. Steps of Thematic Analysis

Source: Adapted from Ahmed et al., 2025; Braun & Clarke, 2006, made with Napkin.ai

All recorded interviews were then translated into English by a language expert to ensure accuracy and to preserve contextual meaning. The translated transcripts were organized into a clean dataset and subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke (2006) six-phase framework. The analysis began with repeated reading of the transcripts to achieve familiarization, followed by systematic coding of meaningful data segments. Coding was conducted manually using structured coding sheets to categorize the content. These codes were then examined and grouped to identify initial themes, which were further reviewed, refined, and clearly defined through an iterative comparison of coded extracts with the broader dataset. Interpretation of the themes involved relating participants' experiences to existing literature on social media use in rural tourism, ensuring that the findings remained grounded in the data while responding to the research objectives. The figure 1. Illustrates the sequential steps undertaken, beginning with familiarization with the translated transcripts, followed by the generation of initial codes, the identification and refinement of themes, and finally the interpretation and presentation of findings.

Result and Discussion

Usage of Social Media

Platform Preference & Adaptation

The selection of a social media platform is a deliberate and strategic decision for homestay operators, tailored to their specific communication needs and target audiences. There is no one-size-fits-all approach; instead, platforms are chosen owing to their distinct advantages. WhatsApp is highly valued among homestay operators, as many perceive it as the most effective platform for immediate and functional communication in daily operations. In contrast, the use of platforms such as Facebook and Instagram tends to be shaped by operators' personal preferences and target guests.

"Sometimes, at the request of guests, I share pictures of the homestay through WhatsApp, as it resolves queries instantly..... It helps us respond to guest queries instantly, and tourists usually contact us through WhatsApp. Bookings are often made via it, and in some cases, payments are also processed through the platform." (HO2)

"Instagram is mostly popular among the younger generation, while my homestay caters to business-class guests, most of whom are older and use Facebook. Therefore, I prefer Facebook over Instagram." (HO5)

This indicates a clear understanding of the market segmentation. Simultaneously, operators are not afraid of abandoning platforms that yield poor results. Homestay Operator 4 stopped using Facebook because of the high volume of spam inquiries, messages, and calls. These choices align with digital marketing principles that emphasize the importance of audience analysis for effective platform selection (Roslan et al., 2024). Operators' adaptive strategies demonstrate a practical, results-oriented approach to their digital presence, prioritizing platforms that deliver tangible benefits, whether in terms of operational efficiency or reaching the right type of customer.

Content & Marketing Strategies

Rural homestay operators of Sikkim strategically use content to build an authentic brand identity with an approach rooted in showcasing the unique, experiential value of a rural stay, focusing on the utilization and optimization of locally available resources within the village. Homestay Operator 1 expressed the essence of their village, its natural landscapes, and its organic farming activities on social media platforms. Most homestay operators value video content as a promotional strategy. Homestay Operator 6 emphasized that video content is preferred over images, as they perceive videos to be more authentic and less likely to be manipulated and, in this sense, it helps build greater trust among tourists. Homestay Operator 4 highlighted that they had planned to develop video-based guest reviews on their social media platforms, where guests shared their experiences in their own language, believing that would reach and attract potential visitors. Content strategies are often underpinned by strong ethical considerations and desire for authenticity.

"... whatever I post I try to post authentic, realistic and achievable to offer when tourist arrives, so that their expectation would be fulfilled. If we are not able to provide the services... we would get negative feedback, not only for our homestay but for whole village." (HO2)

"When uploading videos and pictures on social media, it is important to ensure that the content is shared ethically. This includes avoiding the use of materials uploaded by others without prop-

er credit, and refraining from using copyrighted music or other protected content without permission.” (HO1)

In addition to organic content, some operators have adopted more advanced marketing strategies. These include proactive pre-launch promotions, the use of specific keywords to increase visibility on social media platforms, and targeted paid advertisements to reach specific customer segments. Operators are not just selling accommodations; they are marketing a unique cultural and natural experience, and their content choices reflect this sophisticated understanding.

“I think social media can be used effectively to maximize bookings and increase the popularity of our homestay. For this, it is important to make use of relevant keywords. Nowadays, most travelers rely on social media and Google to find travel information, and by using appropriate keywords, our homestay can appear in search results when visitors look for local homestays in Sikkim. This can significantly improve our visibility across social media platforms.” (HO3)

“In my view, homestay operators should go beyond simply posting pictures on social media and consider investing in advertisements. While maintaining an account provides visibility, its reach is often limited to a relatively small audience. In contrast, targeted advertising enables homestays to connect with potential customers across different locations, thereby expanding their market reach and visibility.” (HO5)

“I believe that running ads could help reach a larger, more targeted customer base. Since I don’t run ads, I have fewer followers and connections, and my content mainly circulates within my existing network.” (HO6).

Opportunities

Business Promotion & Visibility

One of the primary opportunities perceived by homestay operators is the ability of social media to enhance visibility and provide market access at minimal cost. For rural homestays, which often struggle with limited linkages to mainstream tourism markets, these platforms act as democratizing factors. Online visibility is not merely a promotional tactic; it is a crucial source of competitive advantage directly correlated with the ability to attract new clients and increase occupancy rates. Social media enables operators to bypass traditional intermediaries such as travel agencies and showcase their unique offerings to a wider audience. Most rural homestay operators in Sikkim view social media as powerful tools for promotion and visibility. Although they continue to rely on diversified channels, including travel agents, local taxi drivers, and Online Travel Aggregators (OTAs) social media remains a central medium for reaching potential guests.

“Facebook has helped me to reach tourists conveniently. Before that, I used to go to cyber cafes and send pictures of my homestays through mail to different travel agencies and tourists.” (HO1)

“If we use social media, it helps us to promote our area in low cost and I feel that in tourism business until and unless we don’t promote or showcase what we offer, it is impossible for tourist to know about the destination or the businesses.” (HO3)

“Social media helps us promote our homestay and motivates us to regularly upload related content. It also enables us to connect with a large audience.” (HO6)

This enhanced visibility is perceived to benefit not only the individual establishment but also the entire community, as homestay operator 1 stated that it allows the growth of not only their private establishment, but the whole village. Similar observations have also been reported in

other studies. (Kapri & Sharma, 2024) found that social media plays a significant role in strengthening brand image and expanding the customer base for rural homestays in Himachal Pradesh, India. Likewise, the findings also align with Anuar & Qian (2024) those that highlight that social media adoption substantially increases visibility and improves interactive communication with guests, thereby broadening market outreach.

Building Trust & Authenticity

Rural homestay operators in Sikkim view social media as a powerful tool for building trust, which is a critical currency in the hospitality industry. They achieve this by emphasizing authenticity and transparency in their online communications. There is a strong understanding that online representations must align with the reality of guest experiences to manage expectations and secure positive feedback. This commitment to honesty is essential to long-term sustainability. In particular, video content is identified as an effective medium for building confidence.

"... social media helps guest and host to communicate which leads to the increase of trust between host and guest." (HO2)

"I post both photos and videos of my homestay on social media, but I feel that videos work best as they help minimize trust issues among viewers." (HO6)

Homestay Operator 2 also highlighted that WhatsApp allows instant and direct communication, that fosters trust. WhatsApp allows conversations between the host and guest to be saved, providing both sides with transparency and reassurance.

"... communicating via WhatsApp, it keeps a record of communication (things being said) between host and guest." (HO2)

These insights are consistent with recent research that emphasizes the interdependence of authenticity, trust, and digital affordances in rural tourism contexts. Dong et al. (2023) demonstrated that the perceived authenticity of destinations on social media is reinforced when endorsers present content consistent with cultural identity, thereby fostering visitor trust. Similarly, it has been established that the quality of tourism information shared on social media directly enhances trust, which mediates the relationship between self-congruity and travel intentions (Wang & Yan, 2022).

Direct Communication & Relationship Building

For many operators, the perceived opportunities of rural homestay operators in Sikkim include the use of social media as a vital platform for building and maintaining relationships. It provides a direct and continuous line of communication that fosters a sense of connection and trust with both past and potential guests. Operators use these platforms to engage with past guests and interact with them, helping build long-term relationships. This direct interaction is seen as a key element in establishing long term relationship. According to Homestay operator 6, building a good relationship with guests often leads to the exchange of phone numbers and social media accounts, enabling continued communication. This highlights how rural homestay operators use social media as a tool for managing relationships that merge professional and personal interactions.

"... social media has still allowed us to engage with our guests and interact with them, helping to build long-term relationships..... communication over the phone call can be limited. Most of the time, we interact through social media platforms." (HO6)

“... sharing videos of guests participating in activities can generate interest among potential visitors and help us build strong, long-term relationship with those who have already stayed with us.” (HO7)

This approach reflects how operators perceive social media as a means of building trust, encouraging loyalty, and sustaining engagement, all of which directly contribute to business resilience and community-level promotions. This finding aligns with the principles of relationship marketing, which emphasize that customer loyalty and long-term interaction are crucial for small enterprises competing in dynamic markets (Guha et al., 2018). Prior research further highlights that SMEs in the hospitality sector actively use social media to manage customer relationships and reputation, while fostering cooperation and loyalty (Siti-Nabiha, Nordin, and Poh 2021; Sedalo, Boateng, and Kosiba 2022).

Challenges

Infrastructural Barriers

Despite the eagerness to embrace digital tools, operators are frequently hamstrung by inadequate local infrastructure, turning the promise of digital connectivity into a daily struggle. Poor Internet services and unreliable electricity are the most cited challenges, acting as a significant brake on marketing efforts and operational efficiency. Homestay Operator 1 notes that even the best available network has issues, and that problems with the electricity supply prevent him from making and uploading videos. The situation is dire in some areas where power outages can last for an entire week.

“A major issue in our village is power supply, sometimes power outage can last for an entire week and because of that we can’t use electronic devices...” (HO3)

This is not a minor inconvenience but a critical business failure point that leads to direct financial loss, especially as tourist needs evolve. The inability to conduct pre-booking video calls or provide stable Wi-Fi for ‘workation’ guests is a major concern.

“We also face network problems... many guests come for workations and require reliable internet facilities. However, because of network issues, their stays are often shortened for example, some plan to stay for a month but leave within a week.” (HO7)

“Only Jio performs well in our village, but sometimes it too has network issues, additionally there is issues of electricity supply...” (HO1)

Limited bandwidth and unstable connections often disrupt content-sharing, particularly during peak hours. However, operators can adapt by rescheduling digital activities to maintain visibility. This demonstrates resilience and digital improvisation, as homestay owners adjust their practices to overcome infrastructural constraints and remain competitive.

“Sometimes I face problems to upload videos in social media due to internet issues in day hours. So, I post most of my long video after 10:00 PM at night.” (HO6)

These findings are consistent with extensive research on the challenges of rural development, where the ‘digital divide’ is defined not only by access to devices but also by the quality and reliability of the underlying infrastructure (Vimalkumar et al., 2021). The high demand for connectivity has driven some operators to make significant personal investments, such as Homestay Operator 2, who paid a large sum to lay 8 km of cable for Wi-Fi, which was justified by subsequent bookings from remote workers.

"In my homestay I have installed wi-fi via cable, and was connected from around 8 km. it cost me a lot, but I got my expenses back because after COVID, most of the guests who opted for work from home, stayed at my homestays." (HO2)

Digital Skill Divide

The interviews revealed a clear digital skill divide among homestay operators, which directly influences how effectively they engage with and benefit from social media platforms. This divide spans from highly skilled and digitally confident operators to those who are hesitant, less experienced, or dependent on others.

At one end of the spectrum are digitally native or professionally experienced operators. For example, Homestay Operator 3 demonstrates the advanced use of social media, posting three to four times daily, employing relevant keywords to improve visibility, and even suggesting structured training on listing homestays in OTAs and maximizing social media efficiency.

"I usually upload 3 to 4 posts in a day to maintain consistency of my social media platform and sometime I face time related constrain to meet my daily target post."

"It is important to make use of relevant keywords. Nowadays, most travelers rely on social media and Google to find travel information, and by using appropriate keywords, our homestay can appear in search results when visitors look for local homestays in Sikkim. This can significantly improve our visibility across social media platforms."

"... I feel that there is need for training for all the rural homestay operators and it should be organized in GPU level for around 10 days in which courses like how to list their homestays in OTAs, how to maintain their social media platforms to maximize the efficiency should be introduced."

Similarly, Homestay Operator 5, who had prior IT-based professional experience, independently managed his social media presence, ran paid advertisements on Facebook, and strategically used different platforms, focusing on those most relevant to his target audience. These operators treat social media as a professional tool, and invest consistent time and effort.

On the other hand, operators acknowledge their limitations or engage at a very basic level. Some homestay operators have only recently started using Facebook and Instagram to learn through YouTube tutorials. They admitted that they are still experimenting with these platforms. Some reflected that posting content without ads admitting that reach was restricted.

'I have learned to use social media from YouTube and created dashboard for homestay to promote it in my free time.' (HO1)

'I believe that running ads could help reach a larger, more targeted customer base. Since I don't run ads, I have fewer followers and connections, and my content mainly circulates within my existing network.' (HO6)

Between these two poles lie operators relying on intergenerational knowledge transfer or selectively engagement with social media. Some delegate social media management to family members, acknowledging their expertise.

'My daughter knows lots about social media and recent trends, she knows what kind of photos, videos would attract tourists.' (HO2)

This finding resonates with, Carlisle & Dijkmans (n.d.) who identifies a similar divide in the wider tourism industry, where operators with advanced digital skills are able to maximize social media, online marketing, and review management, while others lag behind due to limited capabilities.

Operational & Personal Constraints

Beyond infrastructural and skill-based challenges, operators face significant practical constraints rooted in the reality of running a small, often family operated business. The lack of time is a critical barrier. Many operators juggle their homestays with other primary occupations, most notably farming, which leaves very little time to create content and manage a consistent online presence. This reality shapes their perceptions of the importance of social media.

'We can't use social media daylong, because we have other works to do as well... we are farming family, we usually have busy schedule. So, I don't feel compulsion or important that I should upload contents regularly in social media.' (HO4)

The scarcity of time has financial implications. Operators could hire external help, such as content creators who approach them for collaborations, which comes at a price, making it an unviable option for many. This demonstrates that even when operators have the desire and skills to use social media, the day-to-day operational realities of their businesses can prevent them from implementing their digital marketing strategies effectively.

Online Risks & Negative Experiences

Although social media offers opportunities, it also exposes operators to a range of online risks and negative experiences that can be both financially and emotionally taxing. A major threat is outright fraud, with one operator highlighting a serious issue where certain individuals create fake accounts of legitimate homestays by using their photos and videos and scam tourists to make booking payments. This can severely damage the reputation of an entire area, not just of a single business.

On a daily basis, operators must contend with less malicious but frustrating interactions. One participant abandoned Facebook because of the high volume of spam inquiries, messages, and calls.

'I experience spamming practices in social media, they only inquire, bargain rates, and basically ghost after certain time.' (HO4)

For small rural operators lacking dedicated customer service teams or IT security departments, these risks are particularly acute. It forces them to spend precious time vetting inquiries and leave them vulnerable to scams that can undermine the trust they work hard to build through their authentic online presence.

Conclusion and Discussion

Social media has become a crucial tool for communication, marketing, and customer engagement, offering individuals and businesses a fast, low-cost way to reach wider audiences and stay connected to market trends. Against this growing importance, this article examined how rural homestay owners in Sikkim use social media through qualitative research design. The study has shown that social media adoption is neither uniform nor incidental; rather, it is a strategic, selective, and contextually embedded practice shaped by operators' market positioning, resource constraints, and lived experiences of running homestays in remote Himalayan settings.

Empirically, few interrelated insights have emerged. First, social media use among rural homestays in Sikkim is highly platform-specific and purpose-driven. WhatsApp, Facebook, and Ins-

stagram are not treated as generic tools but are differentiated on the basis of audience profile, communication immediacy, and perceived effectiveness. Operators gravitate towards WhatsApp for real-time coordination and transaction-related communication, while Facebook and Instagram are used more for destination storytelling, visibility, and brand-building. This aligns with broader tourism literature that positions social media as a core for information search, destination image formation, and engagement (Afifi et al., 2025; Leung et al., 2013).

The findings highlight authenticity, ethical content creation, and relational trust as central logics guiding digital engagement. Operators consciously avoid over-promising, curate content that reflects “what can actually be delivered,” and increasingly privilege video content, which they perceive as more credible and less susceptible to manipulation. This ethos resonates with evidence that perceived authenticity and information quality on social media strengthen trust and shape travel intentions (Dong et al., 2023; Hussain et al., 2023; Wang & Yan, 2022), but the present study nuances these insights by showing how authenticity is actively produced and protected by rural hosts themselves, rather than merely interpreted by tourists.

Lastly, the study underscores that intra-community differences are compounded by infrastructural deficits such as unstable electricity, poor network quality, and unreliable bandwidth, alongside time constraints associated with agriculture and other livelihood activities. These findings are consistent with research on the multi-level digital divide and barriers to technology adoption in rural small and medium enterprises (Cheuk et al., 2018; Fanelli & Fanelli, 2021; Sindakis & Showkat, 2024; Vimalkumar et al., 2021), but add a tourism-specific lens by showing how such divides directly shape visibility, guest retention, and the viability of “workation” markets.

Taken together, these results make several contributions to theory. First, they advance the literature on digital entrepreneurship in rural tourism by demonstrating that social media adoption is best understood as a contextual negotiation between technological affordances and structural constraints, rather than as a linear diffusion of innovation. In contrast to studies that focus primarily on the demand side of tourists’ digital behavior, destination branding, or influencer effects, this study centers the voices of rural hosts and shows how authenticity, community representation, and ethical considerations are embedded in their digital strategies.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

This research contributes to the literature on digital entrepreneurship and rural tourism by highlighting the nuanced ways rural actors navigate social media adoption. Previous studies have focused on how social media content influences tourist awareness and decision making (Hussain et al., 2024), the impact of online channels (including social media) on homestay bookings in rural contexts, (Kapri & Sharma, 2024) and the role of social networks in how homestay hosts operate and promote homestays (Gyamtscho et al., 2025). This study emphasizes authenticity, ethical content creation, and relational trust as the critical dimensions of digital engagement in rural hospitality contexts. Additionally, the findings underscore that digital adoption is not merely a function of individual agency but is deeply mediated by infrastructural, socio-economic, and operational conditions, advancing the understanding of the contextual embeddedness of technology adoption in rural enterprises.

Practical Implications

Homestay operators should not view social media as a channel to communicate; they should strategically leverage digital platforms by tailoring platform use to target demographics, emphasizing video content for trust, optimizing keywords, and considering paid promotion to significantly enhance visibility and customer engagement. The study also demonstrates the value of collaborative strategies, such as knowledge sharing among operators or community-based content initiatives, to overcome individual skill and resource limitations. Moreover, operators should adopt proactive online risk management practices to safeguard their reputation and trust.

Policy Implications

Policymakers and tourism development agencies must adopt a multi-layered approach to support rural homestay. The 2022 National Strategy for Promotion of Rural Homestays recognises digital technologies and platforms for rural tourism as one of the five key strategic pillars for developing rural tourism across India (Ministry of Tourism, 2022). Under this strategy, the Ministry aims to provide necessary financial, technical and marketing support to rural homestays to foster entrepreneurial opportunities, sustainable livelihoods, and inclusive community-based tourism. At the state level, Sikkim under the state tourism policy, 2018 homestay and community-based tourism are explicitly highlighted as key components of inclusive tourism strategy (Government of Sikkim, 2018). Beyond regulatory and infrastructural support, the state has also invested in capacity-building: under the Sikkim INSPIRES (Integrated Service Provision and Innovation for Reviving Economies) providing workshops and training to upgrade hospitality standards and equip local homestay owners with necessary skills (Government of Sikkim, 2024). Further, Yakten village in Pakyong district has been officially declared India's first Digital Nomad village, transforming it into a fully digital-ready rural destination by ensuring high-speed internet, stable power supply, co-working homestays, and integrated hospitality services, all while leveraging traditional hospitality and community-based living (The Hindu, 2025).

Building on these policy precedents, further action by government and tourism development agencies could deepen and operationalize support for rural homestays through a coordinated, multi-pronged strategy. Further, facilitating community-level digital cooperatives or shared online platforms that provide collective marketing, booking, payment, and support services will help reduce individual costs and shield smaller operators from fraud or market volatility.

Limitations & Future Research Directions

Although this study offers critical insights, it is not without limitations. First, the research focuses exclusively on rural homestays in Sikkim with a small sample size, limiting its generalizability to urban contexts. Second, the qualitative approach, while providing depth, does not quantify the relative impact of different social media strategies on business performance. Future research could address these limitations and further advance knowledge by using quantitative research design with theories such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). The study could also explore comparative studies across regions or contexts to assess regional variations in digital adoption and strategy effectiveness. Employing mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to quantify the

impact of social media practices on business performance over time can be helpful in understanding the effectiveness of social media usage in the homestay sector.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all individuals and institutions who contributed to the development of this research. Special thanks are extended to the homestay operator for generously providing essential data and valuable insights that greatly supported this study. We are also grateful to the anonymous reviewer for their review, recommendations and constructive feedback, which contributed to improving the quality of this paper.

Declaration

Conflict of Interest Declaration: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest. Informed Consent Declaration: This study complied with standard ethical practices in qualitative research. The participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Verbal/written informed consent was obtained from all interviewed homestay operators. No information was disclosed in this study.

References

- Abad, P. E. S., & Borbon, N. M. D. 2021. Influence of travel vlog: Inputs for destination marketing model. *International Journal of Research Studies in Management*, 9(3). <https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrsm.2021.m7729>
- Aboalganam, K. M., AlFraihat, S. F., & Tarabieh, S. 2025. The Impact of User-Generated Content on Tourist Visit Intentions: The Mediating Role of Destination Imagery. *Administrative Sciences*, 15(4). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ADMSCI15040117>
- Afifi, S., Bakti, I. G. M. Y., Yaman, A., & Sumaedi, S. 2025. A behavioral intention model of Gen Z female' health information behavior on social media. *Aslib Journal of Information Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AJIM-08-2024-0665>
- Ahmed, S. K., Mohammed, R. A., Nashwan, A. J., Ibrahim, R. H., Abdalla, A. Q., Ameen, B. M. M., & Khahir, R. M. 2025. Using thematic analysis in qualitative research. *Journal of Medicine Surgery and Public Health*, 6, 100198. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.GLMEDI.2025.100198>
- Anuar, F. I., & Qian, W. 2024. Use and Adoption of Website and Social Media Marketing: Insights from Homestay Business Owners. *Information Management and Business Review*, 16(3(I)), 574–583. [https://doi.org/10.22610/IMBR.V16I3\(I\).4010](https://doi.org/10.22610/IMBR.V16I3(I).4010)
- Arora, N., & Lata, S. 2020. YouTube channels influence on destination visit intentions. *Journal of Indian Business Research*, 12(1), 23–42. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIBR-09-2019-0269>
- Bhan, S. 2014. Homestay tourism in India: opportunities and challenges. *DOAJ (DOAJ: Directory of Open Access Journals)*. <https://doaj.org/article/1cd98f59f4ad4260bc743c7b012f9d41>
- Bhardwaj, S., Kumar, N., Gupta, R., Baber, H., & Venkatesh, A. 2024. How Social Media Influencers Impact Consumer Behaviour? Systematic Literature Review. *Vision the journal of Business Perspective*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09722629241237394>
- Bhutia, S. G., Bhutia, J. W., & Mahapatra, S. S. 2022. Analyzing the Issues and Challenges of Homestays for Sustainable Tourism Development in Sikkim and Darjeeling Hills. *Orissa Journal of Commerce*, 43(4), 73–88. <https://doi.org/10.54063/ojc.2022.v43i04.06>

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706QP063OA>
- Buhalis, D., & Sinarta, Y. 2019. Real-time co-creation and nowness service: lessons from tourism and hospitality. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 36(5), 563–582. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2019.1592059>
- Cakmakoglu Arici, N., & Koc, D. E. 2024. Research hotspots, emerging patterns, and intellectual structure of homestay tourism: a bibliometric analysis. *Quality and Quantity*, 58(3), 2571–2589. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S11135-023-01763-Z>
- Carlisle, S., Ivanov, S., & Dijkmans, C. 2021. The digital skills divide: evidence from the European tourism industry. *Journal of Tourism Futures*, 9(2), 240–266. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jtf-07-2020-0114>
- Chatterjee, J., & Dsilva, N. R. 2021. A study on the role of social media in promoting sustainable tourism in the states of Assam and Odisha. *Tourism Critiques Practice and Theory*, 2(1), 74–90. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TRC-09-2020-0017>
- Chatterjee, S., & Kumar Kar, A. 2020. Why do small and medium enterprises use social media marketing and what is the impact: Empirical insights from India. *International Journal of Information Management*, 53, 102103. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.IJINFOMGT.2020.102103>
- Chen, Z. 2025. Four-stage framework of tourism decision-making in the social media era. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTT-06-2025-0475>
- Cheuk, S., Atang, A., Chiun, L. M., & Ramayah, T. 2018. Barriers to digital marketing adoption at remote rural tourism destinations in Sarawak: An exploratory study. *International Journal of Engineering & Technology (UAE)*, 7(2), 86–90. www.sciencepubco.com/index.php/IJET
- Chopra, I. P., Lim, W. M., & Jain, T. 2022. Electronic word-of-mouth on social networking sites: What inspires travelers to engage in opinion seeking, opinion passing, and opinion giving? *Tourism Recreation Research*, 49(4), 726–739. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2022.2088007>
- Correia, R., Aksionova, E., Venciute, D., Sousa, J., & Fontes, R. 2025. User-generated content's influence on tourist destination image: a generational perspective. *Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality*, 20(2), 167–185. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CBTH-11-2023-0208>
- Dahal, B., C, A. K., & Prasad Sapkota, R. 2020. Environmental Impacts of Community-Based Homestay Ecotourism in Nepal. *The Gaze Journal of Tourism and Hospitality* 11(1), 60–80. <https://doi.org/10.3126/gaze.v11i1.26618>
- Dai, F., Wang, D., & Kirillova, K. 2022. Travel inspiration in tourist decision making. *Tourism Management*, 90, 104484. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.TOURMAN.2021.104484>
- Dey, B., Mathew, J., & Chee-Hua, C. 2020. Influence of destination attractiveness factors and travel motivations on rural homestay choice: the moderating role of need for uniqueness. *International Journal of Culture Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 14(4), 639–666. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCTHR-08-2019-0138>
- Dong, Y., Li, Y., Hua, H. Y., & Li, W. 2023. Perceived tourism authenticity on social media: The consistency of ethnic destination endorsers. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 49, 101176. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.TMP.2023.101176>
- Fanelli, R. M., & Fanelli, R. M. 2021. Barriers to Adopting New Technologies within Rural Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), *Social sciences*, 10(11) 430. <https://doi.org/10.3390/SOCSCI10110430>
- Government of Sikkim. 2018. *Sikkim Tourism Policy*.

- Government of Sikkim. 2024. *IHM Promotes Sustainable Tourism With Workshop on Rural Homestays Under Sikkim INSPIRES*. <https://www.sikkim.gov.in/media/news-announcement/news-info>
- Guha, S., Harrigan, P., & Soutar, G. 2018. Linking social media to customer relationship management (CRM): a qualitative study on SMEs. *Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship*, 30(3), 193–214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08276331.2017.1399628>
- Gyamtsho, P., Lewis, C., & Bond, J. 2025. 'Dependent on the relationship you maintain': an exploration into the intermediaries within homestay social networks in Bhutan. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 24(1), 85–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14724049.2024.2332248>
- Hussain, K., Abbasi, A. Z., Khwaja, M. G., Hussain, A., & Ting, D. H. 2023. *Perceived Value of Images Carrying Tourism Location Information on Social Media and Customer Brand Engagement*. 97–117. <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003336228-6>
- Hussain, K., Didarul Alam, M. M., Malik, A., Tarhini, A., & Balushi, M. K. A. 2024. From likes to luggage: The role of social media content in attracting tourists. *Heliyon*, 10(19). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e38914>
- Kansra, P., Oberoi, S., Singh, N., & Choi, H. 2024. Role of Innovation, Policy, Social Media, and Environmental Munificence for Sustainable Ecotourism Development in Punjab, India. *Sustainability*. 16(21), 9359. <https://doi.org/10.3390/SU16219359>
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. 2010. Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003>
- Kapoor, P. S., Balaji, M. S., Jiang, Y., & Jebarajakirthy, C. 2022. Effectiveness of Travel Social Media Influencers: A Case of Eco-Friendly Hotels. *Journal of Travel Research*, 61(5), 1138–1155. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875211019469>
- Kapri, S. S., & Sharma, A. 2024. Digital marketing impact on rural Homestay booking and role of destination image. *Anatolia*, 35(4), 764–776. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2024.2319075>
- Kulshreshtha, S., & Kulshreshtha, R. 2019. The emerging importance of “homestays” in the Indian hospitality sector. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 11(4), 458–466. <https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-04-2019-0024>
- Kumar, J., Chandra, P. undefined. 2023. Exploring psychological mechanisms behind tourists' sustainable behaviours at homestays. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 32(12), 2500–2517. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2023.2289005>
- Kumar, P., Mishra, J. M., & Rao, Y. V. 2022. Analysing tourism destination promotion through Facebook by Destination Marketing Organizations of India. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 25(9), 1416–1431. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2021.1921713>
- Leung, D., Law, R., Van Hoof, H., & Buhalis, D. 2013. Social Media in Tourism and Hospitality: A Literature Review. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(1–2), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2013.750919>
- Lynch, P. 2005. Sociological impressionism in a hospitality context. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 32(3), 527–548. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ANNALS.2004.09.005>
- Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. 2022. *National Strategy for Promotion of Rural Homestays-An Initiative towards Atmanirbhar Bharat*.
- Najar, A. H., Wani, I. S., & Rather, A. H. 2024. Impact of Social Media Influencers Credibility on Destination Brand Trust and Destination Purchase Intention: Extending Meaning Transfer Model? *Global Business Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09721509241225354>

- M. A. A. Roslan, N. A. Nasharuddin and M. A. A. Murad, 2024. Understanding Technology Acceptance and Use in Social Media Platforms: A Systematic Literature Review and the Development of Research Framework. *Journal of Social Computing*, 5(3), 261-291. <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/10767779>
- SBFP, 2011. *Sikkim Ecotourism Policy*.
- Sedalo, G., Boateng, H., & Kosiba, J. P. 2022. Exploring social media affordance in relationship marketing practices in SMEs. *Digital Business*, 2(1), 100017. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.DIG-BUS.2021.100017>
- Shukor, M. S., Salleh, N. H. M., Othman, R., & Idris, S. H. M. 2014. Perception of Homestay Operators towards Homestay Development in Malaysia. *Jurnal Pengurusan*, 42, 3–17. <https://doi.org/10.17576/pengurusan-2014-42-01>
- Sikkim INSPIRES | Tourism*. n.d. Retrieved July 30, 2025, from <https://sikkiminspires.in/home-stay>
- Sindakis, S., & Showkat, G. 2024. The digital revolution in India: bridging the gap in rural technology adoption. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship* 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/S13731-024-00380-W>
- Siti-Nabiha, A. K., Nordin, N., & Poh, B. K. 2021. Social media usage in business decision-making: the case of Malaysian small hospitality organisations. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Business Administration*, 13(2), 272–289. <https://doi.org/10.1108/APJBA-08-2020-0276>
- Thakur, S., Sood, S., Singh, R. K., & Singh, R. 2024. Status of homestay tourism in Indian Himalayan region: Analysis of customer review and policy support for sustainable tourism. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 24(4), 588–601. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14673584231170578/FORMAT/EPUB>
- The Hindu. *Sikkim's Yakten declared India's first digital nomad village*. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/sikkim/sikkims-yakten-declared-indias-first-digital-nomad-village/article69810938.ece> (14.07.2025).
- Vimalkumar, M., Singh, J. B., & Sharma, S. K. 2021. Exploring the Multi-Level Digital Divide in Mobile Phone Adoption: A Comparison of Developing Nations. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 23(4), 1057–1076. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10796-020-10032-5/TABLES/7>
- Wang, H., & Yan, J. 2022. Effects of social media tourism information quality on destination travel intention: Mediation effect of self-congruity and trust. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 1049149. <https://doi.org/10.3389/FPSYG.2022.1049149/BIBTEX>
- Wani, M. D., Batool, N., Dada, Z. A., & Shah, S. A. 2024. Investigating the impact of community-based tourism on the residents' quality of life and their support for tourism. *Community Development*, 55(1), 138–159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2023.2272271>
- Wu, W., Meng, X., Xu, C., Zhao, M., Ye, Q., & Law, R. 2025. User-generated content-driven smart tourism: system review and future prospects. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 30(12) 1689–1706. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2025.2486017>
- Yadav, S. C., Gupta, P., & Lama, R. 2018. Potential of Homestays as Tourism Product in Sikkim. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325076920>

Sentiment Analysis of Social Media Data in Tourism Destination Studies: A Systematic Literature Review

Syed Arif Hussain Shah^{A*}

Received: August 2025 | Accepted: February 2026

DOI:10.5937/turizam30-61068

Abstract

Sentiment analysis of social media platforms has become an important method for examining tourists' perceptions and behavioral patterns. This study provides a systematic review of tourism destination research applying sentiment analysis to social media data. It identifies methodological trends, highlights underutilized platforms and analytical approaches, and outlines directions for future research. A systematic review of studies published between 2016 and 2024 was conducted using major academic databases, including ScienceDirect, IEEE Xplore, Emerald Insight, Springer, Scopus, Google Scholar, and Web of Science. Following a structured screening process, 30 relevant studies were selected for detailed analysis. The findings indicate a gradual shift from lexicon-based methods to machine learning and transformer-based models, although hybrid approaches remain limited. Research relies heavily on platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and TripAdvisor, while visually oriented platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok are comparatively underexplored. Overall, the evidence confirms that social media sentiment analysis contributes significantly to understanding destination image formation and visitor evaluation. However stronger theoretical integration and broader data representation are needed to advance the field.

Keywords: sentiment analysis, machine learning, lexicon based, tourist destination, Smart tourism

Introduction

Web 2.0 fundamentally changed the digital environment by enabling users not only to interact with online content but also to create and share it. Travelers now actively capture and share their experiences through reviews, comments, photos, and videos, generating large volumes of user-generated content (UGC). Global social media usage increased from 2.73 billion users in 2017 to 5.17 billion in 2024, and it is projected to exceed six billion by 2028(Statista, 2025). This growth is especially important for tourism research because it has generated a large volume of publicly available traveler-generated data.

Travelers now regularly share reviews, impressions, and stories across platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), TripAdvisor, Instagram, and TikTok. Travel-related expressions (e.g., travel vlogs or social media content) have been shown to contribute to how destination image is perceived by audience and influence travel decision-making processes (Abad & Borbon, 2021; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Empirical evidence shows that peer-generated reviews and user-generated content shape tourists' initial destination evaluations and influence travel intentions

A Research Fellow, Japan Transport and Tourism Research Institute, 3-18-19 Toranomom, Minato-ku, Tokyo,105-0001, Japan, Corresponding author email: arif-hsn@jttri.or.jp

and choices (Lam et al., 2020). Consequently, social media functions not only as a communication channel but also as a participatory and evaluative environment where perceptions and reputations are co-constructed and amplified (Feldkamp, 2021; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

The scale and complexity of user-generated content have increased the need for automated analytical techniques. Sentiment analysis (SA), also known as opinion mining, is a Natural Language Processing (NLP) technique used to identify and classify the sentiment polarity of textual data, typically as positive, negative, or neutral (Liu, 2017). In tourism research, SA has been used to examine tourists' attitudes toward destinations, attractions, accommodations, and services (Borrajó-Millán et al., 2021; Gupta & Kumra, 2024). By analyzing large volumes of online reviews and posts, this approach reveals patterns in satisfaction and travel behavior that are hard to identify manually. Recent methodological developments, including lexicon-based techniques, machine learning algorithms such as Support Vector Machines (SVM), and deep learning models, have enhanced the accuracy and scalability of sentiment classification in tourism research (Afrianto Singgalen et al., 2024; Erdoğan et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2015).

Although the use of sentiment analysis in tourism research has increased in recent years, the existing literature is still scattered. Past studies differ broadly in their analytical methods, data sources, thematic focus, and geographical settings. Some focus on destination image, while others examine service quality, tourist satisfaction, or behavioral intentions. Methodologically, approaches range from lexicon-based techniques to machine learning and deep learning models. While previous review studies have addressed social media analytics in tourism more generally, there is still a need for a recent and focused review that specifically examines how sentiment analysis has been applied in destination research between 2016 and 2024.

To address this need, the present study systematically reviews empirical research published during this period that applies sentiment analysis to social media data in the context of tourist destinations. It compares methodological approaches, identifies commonly used platforms, examines thematic areas of application, and considers the geographical distribution of studies. By bringing these findings together, the review highlights current research patterns, identifies gaps, and suggests directions for future research. Overall, it aims to provide a clearer picture of how sentiment analysis contributes to destination research and management.

Methodology

This study undertakes a comprehensive review of prior studies employing SA of social media within tourism destination studies. To achieve its purpose, this study applies a systematic literature review method to provide researchers with a clear and structured overview of prior knowledge in the field (Chandler & Hopewell, 2013; Kitchenham & Charters, 2007; Mulrow, 1997). Systematic reviews offer a rigorous and objective method for synthesizing evidence across multiple studies, replacing traditional narrative reviews as the standard approach. (Riesenberg et al., 2014)

This research considers only English-language publications, emphasizing peer-reviewed journal papers and conference proceedings, while omitting books, chapters, theses, and dissertations. In line with the approach outlined by various researchers, the adopted methodology consists of the following key stages:

Development of research questions

The review process was guided by research questions defined at the beginning, aligned with the study's purpose and the structured methodology of a systematic literature review. This study aims to address following research questions:

- **RQ1:** What sentiment analysis techniques are used for social media data in tourism destination research?
- **RQ2:** What thematic areas are addressed in tourism destination studies applying sentiment analysis?
- **RQ3:** What platforms and geographic regions are most examined in tourism destination sentiment analysis research?
- **RQ4:** What methodological approaches and research areas are insufficiently addressed in tourism destination sentiment analysis research and should be explored further?
- **RQ5:** What are the key findings and policy implications of these studies?

Selection and Retrieval of Relevant Literature Sources

The literature search covered publications from 2016 to 2024 and was conducted using ScienceDirect, IEEE Xplore, Emerald Insight, SpringerLink, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Keywords such as “social media,” “sentiment analysis,” and “tourism destination” were combined using Boolean operators. The initial search yielded 211 records.

Titles and abstracts were first screened to remove irrelevant studies. Articles were included if they applied sentiment analysis to social media data within a tourism destination context and met the defined time frame and publication criteria. Studies were excluded if they did not focus on tourism destinations, used social media data without sentiment analysis methods, were review or conceptual papers, or were not peer-reviewed. After applying these criteria, 81 studies remained.

A full-text review was then conducted to assess methodological relevance and alignment with the research questions, resulting in a final sample of 30 studies for detailed analysis. The selection process was carried out by the author based on predefined criteria. For each selected study, key information including publication year, geographical focus, platform type, analytical technique, and key focus and main findings were systematically extracted and synthesized.

Integration and Analysis of the Literature

This review paper covers research published between 2016 to 2024, with 30 articles meeting the study objectives. The following table shows the data extracted from the selected articles.

Table 1. Summary of Studies Applying Sentiment Analysis in Tourism Destination Research (2016–2024)

Title and Country	Methodology	Data source	Research Focus	Application / Result	Authors
Combined sentiment score and star rating analysis of travel destination prediction based on user preference using morphological linear neural network model with correlated topic modelling approach (India)	Machine learning-based	67,871 TripAdvisor reviews	Prediction modeling	Sentiment + ratings improve prediction accuracy (95%).	(Kumar & Hanji, 2024)
Understanding Fine-Grained Sentiments of Super-Priority Destination Visitors using Multi-task Learning for Extraction of Aspect Terms and Polarity Classification on Reviews (Indonesia)	Machine learning-based	TripAdvisor Reviews	Aspect-based sentiment	Fine-grained SA improves expectation detection.	(Kusumawardani et al., 2024)
The world from the perspective of digital nomads: exploring sentiments in destination reviews (Turkey)	Lexicon-based	Twitter, and Reddit	Destination perception	Trust and joy dominate preferred destinations.	(Özgen Çiğdemli et al., 2024)
Destination image branding for world heritage sites: a methodology combining GIS with sentiment analysis (Malaysia)	Machine learning-based	Reviews from Weibo and Google map	Destination branding	Sentiment reveals distinct branding themes.	(SangKun et al., 2024)
Enhancing Sentiment Analysis of Indonesian Tourism Video Content Commentary on TikTok: A FastText and Bi-LSTM Approach (Indonesia)	Machine learning-based	TikTok comments	Platform-based analysis	Majority of comments classified as positive.	(Ariyus et al., 2024)
Sentiment analysis applied to tourism: exploring tourist-generated content in the case of a wellness tourism destination (Portugal)	Lexicon-based	1249 TripAdvisor reviews	Visitor satisfaction	Spa and massage services highly valued.	(George & Ramos, 2024)
Understanding Digital Engagement through Sentiment Analysis of Tourism Destination through Travel Vlog Reviews (Indonesia)	Machine learning and lexicon-based	442 travel vlogs reviews from YouTube	Digital engagement	Positive sentiment supports marketing engagement.	(Singgalen, 2024)
Visual Analysis of Social Media Data on Experiences at a World Heritage Tourist Destination: Historic Centre of Macau (China)	Lexicon-based	Tourist reviews from Ctrip and Mafengwo	Heritage experience	Strong positive perception of cultural heritage.	(Jia et al., 2024)
Exploring Tourist Feedback on Riau Attractions Through Indonesian Language YouTube Opinion Using Naive Bayes Algorithm (Indonesia)	Machine learning-based	1680 YouTube Comments	Feedback analysis	Predominantly positive; halal tourism potential.	(Kurniawan et al., 2023)
Are customer star ratings and sentiments aligned? A deep learning study of customer service experience in tourism destinations (Italy)	Machine learning and lexicon-based	20,954 TripAdvisor reviews	Service quality	Sentiment largely aligns with star ratings.	(Bigne et al., 2023)
Thematic analysis of reviews on the air quality of tourist destinations from a sentiment analysis perspective (China)	Machine learning-based	Reviews from Ctrip and Sina Weibo	Environmental perception	Platform differences in credibility and sentiment.	(Tao et al., 2022)
Extracting insights from big social data for smarter tourism destination management (Italy)	Machine learning-based	Flickr and X (Twitter) based data	Smart management	Overall high positive sentiment clusters.	(Solazzo et al., 2022)

Discovering a tourism destination with social media data: BERT-based sentiment analysis, (Spain)	Machine learning-based	90,725 Instagram posts and 235,755 tweets	Emerging destinations	BERT improves sentiment classification accuracy.	(Viñán-Ludeña & de Campos, 2022)
SmartSenti: A Twitter-Based Sentiment Analysis System for the Smart Tourism in Turkey	Machine learning-based	Twitter dataset of 5 tourist places	Smart tourism system	Transfer learning improved accuracy of SA.	(Umut SALUR et al., 2022)
Sentiment analysis of online destination image of Hong Kong held by mainland Chinese tourists (Hong Kong)	Machine learning and Lexicon-based	72,284 online reviews	Destination image	Positive image; cost concerns noted.	(Paolanti et al., 2021)
Do Tourists from Different Countries Interpret Travel Experience with the Same Feeling? Sentiment Analysis of TripAdvisor Review, 10 Countries	Lexicon-based	27,177 TripAdvisor reviews	Cross-country perception	Sentiment varies by tourist origin.	(Wang & Kirilenko, 2021)
Analyzing Tourism Reviews Using an LDA Topic-Based Sentiment Analysis Approach (Morocco)	Lexicon-based	39,200 TripAdvisor Reviews	Topic-based sentiment	VADER aligns closely with ratings.	(Ali et al., 2021)
Exploring destination loyalty: Application of social media analytics in a nature-based tourism setting (Canada)	Machine learning and lexicon-based	17,224 TripAdvisor reviews	Loyalty	Sentiment linked to loyalty patterns.	(Mirzaalian & Halpenny, 2021)
Using social media in Tourist Sentiment Analysis: A Case Study of Andalusia during the Covid-19 Pandemic (Spain)	Machine learning-based	25532 Tweets	COVID impact	Shift toward safer destinations.	(Flores-Ruiz et al., 2021)
Tourism destination management using sentiment analysis and geo-location information:" A deep learning approach (Italy)	Machine learning-based	Tourism-related tweets from social media	Geo-management	Geo-sentiment identifies hotspots.	(Paolanti et al., 2021)
Sentiment analysis as a tool for assessing the negative impact of tourism on a destination (Russia)	Lexicon-based	33,475 TripAdvisor Reviews	Negative impact assessment	Overall sentiment remains positive.	(Vetitnev et al., 2021)
Visitors' experience at Angkor Wat, Cambodia: evidence from sentiment and topic analysis (Cambodia)	Lexicon-based	32,394 TripAdvisor reviews	Visitor experience	Crowding and cost drive negativity.	(Baniya et al., 2021)
Mining Tourist's Perception toward Indonesia Tourism Destination Using Sentiment Analysis and Topic Modelling 2019 (Indonesia)	Machine learning and lexicon-based	X (formerly Twitter) Dataset	Emotion analysis	Joy identified as dominant emotion.	(Irawan et al., 2019)
Twitter Text Mining for Sentiment Analysis on People's Feedback about Oman Tourism (Oman)	Lexicon-based	X (formerly Twitter) Dataset	Feedback analysis	Major attractions linked to positive sentiment.	(Ramathan & Meyyappan, 2019)
Croatia as a Virtual Tourist Destination: A Linguistic and Sentiment Analysis. (Croatia)	Lexicon-based	Texts from official tourism websites and cultural platforms	Virtual image	Positive narrative dominates content.	(Suzana et al., 2018)
Analysis Sentiment and Tourist Response to Rinjani Mountain Tour Based on Comments from Instagram (Indonesia)	Lexicon-based	Instagram Comments	Engagement	Positive engagement via posts.	(Melati et al., 2018)
Is Xenios Zeus Still Alive? Destination Image of Athens in the Years of Recession (Greece)	Lexicon-based	TripAdvisor Reviews	Destination image	Athens' image largely positive.	(Gkritzali et al., 2018)

Do Local Residents and Visitors Express the Same Sentiments on Destinations Through Social Media? (Europe)	Machine learning-based	6,000 tweets	Residents vs tourists	Generally positive with some neutrality.	(Jabreel et al., 2017)
What makes tourists feel negatively about tourism destinations? Application of hybrid text mining methodology to smart destination management (Paris)	Machine Learning-based	A total of 19,835 reviews were collected	Negative drivers	Identifies satisfaction and dissatisfaction factors.	(Kun et al., 2017)
Post-visit and pre-visit tourist destination image through eWOM sentiment analysis and perceived helpfulness. (Spain)	Lexicon-based	Online travel reviews	Expectation vs reality	Pre-visit sentiment more positive.	(M. Rosario et al., 2016)

Analysis of Sentiment Analysis in Tourism Destination Research

Methodological Trends

The 30 reviewed studies reflect a gradual methodological shift in tourism sentiment analysis research. Of these, 13 applied machine learning techniques, 12 relied on lexicon-based approaches, and 5 adopted hybrid models. While the distribution appears relatively balanced, earlier studies tended to use lexicon-based tools due to their simplicity, whereas more recent research increasingly used supervised and deep learning methods. Classical algorithms such as Naïve Bayes and Support Vector Machines remain common, but transformer-based models, including BERT, have gained prominence in recent years. Some studies combine sentiment classification with topic modeling techniques such as LDA to capture both polarity and thematic structure. This suggests a movement from basic sentiment scoring toward more aspect-level analysis.

Lexicon-based tools, particularly VADER, remain widely used for short and informal social media texts. Although these approaches offer transparency and ease of implementation, they may be less adaptable to contextual nuances. Hybrid approaches, though fewer in number, aim to balance interpretability and predictive performance.

Thematic Areas of Application

The reviewed studies can be grouped into five main thematic categories. First, a significant number of reviewed articles focus on destination image and branding, examining how tourists perceive cities, heritage sites, and regions. These studies consistently show that cultural heritage, landscape quality, and hospitality generate positive sentiment, while cost and crowding often contribute to negative evaluations.

Second, many studies focus on visitor satisfaction and service quality. In most cases, sentiment scores are broadly consistent with star ratings, indicating that combining textual feedback with numerical ratings can improve performance evaluation. Aspect-based analyses also show that safety, authenticity, and personalized experiences are important factors shaping positive perceptions.

Third, some studies use sentiment analysis to support smart tourism and destination management. By combining sentiment data with geolocation information, they identify areas of high satisfaction or concern. These findings show how social media analytics can help monitor public perception and guide strategic planning.

Fourth, some studies examine behavioral outcomes such as loyalty and engagement. In this area, machine learning models are often used for prediction and forecasting. Finally, several studies focus on environmental and crisis-related issues, including air quality and the impact of COVID-19. While overall sentiment toward destinations is generally positive, these external factors often generate negative responses.

Overall, the thematic range shows that sentiment analysis in tourism is not limited to measuring positive or negative opinions, but also supports branding, management decisions, behavioral prediction, and crisis monitoring.

Platforms and Geographic Distribution

The reviewed studies rely on multiple social media platforms. TripAdvisor and X (formerly Twitter) are the most frequently used sources. TripAdvisor is commonly applied in satisfaction and image studies, while X (formerly Twitter) is used to capture real-time public discourse. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok appear less frequently despite their growing role in tourism communication. Regional platforms such as Ctrip and Weibo are mainly used in studies focused on Chinese tourism behavior. Cross-platform comparative research remains limited. Geographically, most studies primarily focus on European and Asian destinations, so there are opportunities for expanding research into underrepresented regions.

Underexplored Methods and Direction

Despite increasing methodological techniques, several gaps remain. Advanced transformer models beyond BERT are not often applied in tourism studies, and multimodal analyses integrating text, images, and video are still limited. Hybrid approaches, although promising, are not yet widely adopted. In terms of data sources, research continues to rely heavily on TripAdvisor and X (formerly Twitter), while visually oriented platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok remain underexplored. Expanding analytical techniques and diversifying data sources would enhance both methodological robustness and practical relevance in future research.

Key Findings and Policy Implications

Across the reviewed studies, tourist-generated content is generally positive, while negative sentiment tends to focus on specific operational issues rather than overall destination image. This indicates that social media interaction often highlights targeted areas for improvement. Studies also show that combining textual sentiment with numerical ratings improves the reliability of visitor evaluation. In addition, analyses incorporating geolocation or platform-specific data reveal that sentiment varies across locations and contexts within the same destination.

From a policy perspective, these findings suggest that sentiment analysis can serve as a continuous monitoring tool. Regular analysis of digital feedback can help Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) detect emerging concerns and support more responsive, evidence-based management decisions.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This review combines the use of sentiment analysis in tourism destination research and highlights key methodological trends. It shows that, despite technical advances, stronger links to established tourism theories particularly those related to destination image, visitor evaluation, and behavioral intention are still needed.

For practitioners, sentiment analysis can act as an ongoing decision-support mechanism rather than a simple monitoring tool. Integrating sentiment data with ratings and spatial information may enable more targeted service improvements. Broadening analysis to include emerging platforms can strengthen destination strategies and support more responsive policy decisions.

Conclusions

This review examined how sentiment analysis has been applied to social media data in tourism destination research between 2016 and 2024. The findings show a gradual shift from lexicon-based methods to machine learning and transformer-based models, although advanced and hybrid approaches remain limited. Research also relies heavily on a small number of platforms, particularly TripAdvisor and X (formerly Twitter), while visually driven platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok remain underrepresented.

The analysis demonstrates that sentiment analysis contributes to understanding destination image, visitor behavior, and management decisions, but stronger integration with established tourism theory is still needed. Future research should expand methodological approaches and diversify data sources to improve both analytical depth and practical relevance.

This review is limited to English-language, peer-reviewed publications published between 2016 and 2024, which may exclude relevant studies in other languages. In addition, recent advances in sentiment analysis methods may not yet be fully represented in the reviewed literature.

Financial Support - No funding was received.

Disclosure of Interest - No conflict of interest.

References

- Abad, P. E. S., & Borbon, N. M. D. (2021). Influence of travel vlog: Inputs for destination marketing model. *International Journal of Research Studies in Management*, 9(3). <https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrsm.2021.m7729>
- Afrianto Singgalen, Y., Yuliana Wahyuningtyas, S., Widodo, Y. E., Nur, M., Dasra, A., & Setiawan, R. W. (2024). Sentiment Analysis For Tourism Destination Reviews Using Cross-Industry Standard Process For Data-Mining. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Information Technology*, 15(17). www.jatit.org
- Ali, T., Marc, B., Omar, B., Soulaïmane, K., & Larbi, S. (2021). Analyzing tourism reviews using an LDA topic-based sentiment analysis approach. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2021.100892>
- Ariyus, D., Manongga, D., & Sembiring, I. (2024). Enhancing Sentiment Analysis of Indonesian Tourism Video Content Commentary on TikTok: A FastText and Bi-LSTM Approach. *En-*

- gineering, *Technology and Applied Science Research*, 14(6), 18020–18028. <https://doi.org/10.48084/etasr.8859>
- Baniya, R., Dogru-Dastan, H., & Thapa, B. (2021). Visitors' experience at Angkor Wat, Cambodia: evidence from sentiment and topic analysis. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 16(6), 632–645. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743873X.2020.1833892>
- Bigne, E., Ruiz, C., Perez-Cabañero, C., & Cuenca, A. (2023). Are customer star ratings and sentiments aligned? A deep learning study of the customer service experience in tourism destinations. *Service Business*, 17(1), 281–314. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11628-023-00524-0>
- Borrajó-Millán, F., Alonso-almeida, M. del M., Escat-cortes, M., & Yi, L. (2021). Sentiment analysis to measure quality and build sustainability in tourism destinations. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 13(11). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13116015>
- Chandler, J., & Hopewell, S. (2013). Cochrane methods--twenty years experience in developing systematic review methods. *Systematic Reviews*, 2, 76. <https://doi.org/10.1186/2046-4053-2-76>
- Erdoğan, D., Kayakuş, M., Çelik Çaylak, P., Ekşili, N., Moiceanu, G., Kabas, O., & Ichimov, M. A. M. (2025). Developing a Deep Learning-Based Sentiment Analysis System of Hotel Customer Reviews for Sustainable Tourism. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 17(13). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17135756>
- Feldkamp, J. (2021). *The Rise of TikTok: The Evolution of a Social Media Platform During COVID-19*. <http://www.springer.com/series/10189>
- Flores-Ruiz, D., Elizondo-Salto, A., & Barroso-González, M. D. L. O. (2021). Using social media in tourist sentiment analysis: A case study of andalusia during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 13(7). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13073836>
- George, O. A., & Ramos, C. M. Q. (2024). Sentiment analysis applied to tourism: exploring tourist-generated content in the case of a wellness tourism destination. *International Journal of Spa and Wellness*, 7(2), 139–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24721735.2024.2352979>
- Gkritzali, A., Gritzalis, D., & Stavrou, V. (2018). Is Xenios Zeus Still Alive? Destination Image of Athens in the Years of Recession. *Journal of Travel Research*, 57(4), 540–554. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287517705225>
- Gupta, C. P., & Kumra, V. V. R. (2024). A Study on Sustainable Tourism and Application of Sentiment Analysis in the Tourism Industry. *2024 International Conference on Emerging Techniques in Computational Intelligence (ICETCI), Hyderabad, India*, 52–57.
- Irawan, H., Akmalia, G., & Masrury, R. A. (2019). Mining tourist's perception toward Indonesia tourism destination using sentiment analysis and topic modelling. *ACM International Conference Proceeding Series*, 7–12. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3361821.3361829>
- Jabreel, M., Moreno, A., & Huertas, A. (2017). Do Local Residents and Visitors Express the Same Sentiments on Destinations Through Social Media? In *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2017* (pp. 655–668). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51168-9_47
- Jia, M., Feng, J., Chen, Y., & Zhao, C. (2024). Visual Analysis of Social Media Data on Experiences at a World Heritage Tourist Destination: Historic Centre of Macau. *Buildings*, 14(7). <https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings14072188>
- Kitchenham, B., & Charters, S. M. (2007). *Guidelines for performing Systematic Literature Reviews in Software Engineering*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/302924724>
- Kumar, N., & Hanji, B. R. (2024). Combined sentiment score and star rating analysis of travel destination prediction based on user preference using morphological linear neural network

- model with correlated topic modelling approach. *Multimedia Tools and Applications*, 83(22), 61347–61378. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11042-023-17995-y>
- Kun, K., Oun-joung, P., Seunghyun, Y., & Haejung, Y. (2017). What makes tourists feel negatively about tourism destinations? Application of hybrid text mining methodology to smart destination management. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, 123, 362–369. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2017.01.001>
- Kurniawan, R., Iskandar, I., Lestari, F., Harpizon, H. A. R., & Husti, I. (2023). Exploring Tourist Feedback on Riau Attractions Through Indonesian Language YouTube Opinion Using Naïve Bayes Algorithm. *Proceedings of the 2023 IEEE International Conference on Industry 4.0, Artificial Intelligence, and Communications Technology, IAICT 2023*, 415–419. <https://doi.org/10.1109/IAICT59002.2023.10205795>
- Kusumawardani, R. P., Rahman, R. A., Wibowo, R. P., & Tjahjanto, A. (2024). Understanding Fine-Grained Sentiments of Super-Priority Destination Visitors using Multi-task Learning for Extraction of Aspect Terms and Polarity Classification on Reviews. *Procedia Computer Science*, 234, 602–613. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2024.03.045>
- Lam, J. M. S., Ismail, H., & Lee, S. (2020). From desktop to destination: User-generated content platforms, co-created online experiences, destination image and satisfaction. *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, 18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2020.100490>
- Liu, B. (2017). Many Facets of Sentiment Analysis. In D. and B. S. and F. A. Cambria Erik and Das (Ed.), *A Practical Guide to Sentiment Analysis* (pp. 11–39). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-55394-8_2
- Liu, B., Zhao, J., Liu, K., & Xu, L. (2015). Book Review Sentiment Analysis: Mining Opinions, Sentiments, and Emotions. *Press*. <https://doi.org/10.1162/COLI>
- M. Rosario, G.-R., Rocio, M.-T., & Sergio, T. (2016). Post-visit and pre-visit tourist destination image through eWOM sentiment analysis and. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 28, 2609–2627.
- Melati, R., Miftahul, M., Rizki Tri Puji Wanggono, Arief Setyanto, Andhika Agus Selameto, & Sri Ngudi Wahyuni. (2018). *Analysis Sentiment And Tourist Response To Rinjani Mountain Tour Based On Comments From Photo Upload In Instagram*. IEEE.
- Mirzaalian, F., & Halpenny, E. (2021). Exploring destination loyalty: Application of social media analytics in a nature-based tourism setting. *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, 20. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2021.100598>
- Mulrow, C. (1997). *Systematic Reviews: Synthesis of Best Evidence for Clinical Decisions*. <https://doi.org/10.7326/0003?4819?126?5?199703010?00006>
- Özgen Çiğdemli, A. Ö., Yayla, Ş., & Çiğdemli, B. S. (2024). The world from the perspective of digital nomads: exploring sentiments in destination reviews. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 16(3), 303–315. <https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-03-2024-0044>
- Paolanti, M., Mancini, A., Frontoni, E., Felicetti, A., Marinelli, L., Marcheggiani, E., & Pierdicca, R. (2021). Tourism destination management using sentiment analysis and geo-location information: a deep learning approach. *Information Technology and Tourism*, 23(2), 241–264. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40558-021-00196-4>
- Ramanathan, V., & Meyyappan, T. (2019, February 19). Twitter text mining for sentiment analysis on people's feedback about Oman tourism. *2019 4th MEC International Conference on Big Data and Smart City, ICBDS 2019*. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICBDSC.2019.8645596>
- Riesenberg, Lee Ann, & Ellen, M. Justice. (2014). Conducting a successful systematic review of the literature, part 1. *Nursing*, 44(4), 13–17.

- SangKun, K., Woon, P. Y., & Tan, P. L. (2024). Destination image branding for world heritage sites: a methodology combining GIS with sentiment analysis. *Tourism Critiques: Practice and Theory*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/trc-04-2024-0012>
- Singgalen, Y. A. (2024). Understanding Digital Engagement through Sentiment Analysis of Tourism Destination through Travel Vlog Reviews. *Media Online*, 4(6), 2992–3004. <https://doi.org/10.30865/klik.v4i6.1947>
- Solazzo, G., Maruccia, Y., Lorenzo, G., Ndou, V., Del Vecchio, P., & Elia, G. (2022). Extracting insights from big social data for smarter tourism destination management. *Measuring Business Excellence*, 26(1), 122–140. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MBE-11-2020-0156>
- Statista. (2025). *Social media - statistics & facts* | Statista. 2024. <https://www.statista.com/topics/1164/social-networks/>
- Suzana, M. B., Brigita, J., & Valković, B. (2018). *Croatia As A Virtual Tourist Destination: A Linguistic And Sentiment Analysis I*. <https://croatia.hr/en-GB>,
- Tao, Y., Liu, W., Huang, Z., & Shi, C. (2022). Thematic analysis of reviews on the air quality of tourist destinations from a sentiment analysis perspective. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 42. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2022.100969>
- Umut SALUR, M., Aydin, İ., & Alali Alghrsi, S. (2022). *SmartSenti: A Twitter-Based Sentiment Analysis System for the Smart Tourism in Turkey*. <https://t.co>
- Vetitnev, A., Chigarev, D., & Enushevskaya, V. (2021). Sentiment analysis as a tool for assessing the negative impact of tourism on a destination. *E3S Web of Conferences*, 311. <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202131106008>
- Viñán-Ludeña, M. S., & de Campos, L. M. (2022). Discovering a tourism destination with social media data: BERT-based sentiment analysis. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 13(5), 907–921. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTT-09-2021-0259>
- Wang, L., & Kirilenko, A. P. (2021). Do Tourists from Different Countries Interpret Travel Experience with the Same Feeling? Sentiment Analysis of TripAdvisor Reviews. In *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2021* (pp. 294–301). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-65785-7_27
- Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U. (2010). Role of social media in online travel information search. *Tourism Management*, 31(2), 179–188. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2009.02.016>
- Zeng, B., & Gerritsen, R. (2014). What do we know about social media in tourism? A review. In *Tourism Management Perspectives* (Vol. 10, pp. 27–36). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2014.01.001>

Exploring the Link between Transcendent Tourist Experience, Destination Brand Love, and eWOM Intention in Wellness Tourism in Kerala

*Krishnaveni K.^A, Johnney Johnson^B

Received: September 2025 | Accepted: February 2026

DOI:10.5937/turizam30-61718

Abstract

Providing exceptional experiences to tourists has become a paramount goal of the emerging hospitality and tourism industry (H&T) due to its experiential nature. Transcendent customer experience is a dimension of customer experience that refers to exceptional or deeply meaningful interactions that go beyond mere satisfaction to create a lasting emotional connection with a brand or product. In the context of H&T, tourists serve as primary customers. Hence, this study empirically examines the influence of transcendent tourist experience (TTE) on eWOM intention, with destination brand love (DBL) as a mediating variable, within the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework. The research follows a quantitative research design. Using path analysis, this study examined data from 404 tourists as samples who visited wellness tourism destinations in Kerala. The study's findings reveal that TTE significantly influences eWOM through the mediation of DBL. It also provides valuable insights for tourism marketers who aim to leverage tourists' sentiments to promote destinations online, which may, in turn, lead to increased tourist engagement behaviours.

Keywords: eWOM intention, destination brand love, stimulus organism response (S O R), transcendent experience

Introduction

The hospitality and tourism (H&T) sector is inherently service-intensive, with its success largely dependent on how well tourists are treated and how satisfied they are with their experiences (Zehrer, 2009). Rapid technological advancements have enabled destinations to offer differentiated products and services while improving operational efficiency, thereby enhancing competitiveness in an increasingly crowded global market. Destination management systems (DMS), for instance, facilitate the coordination and promotion of destination offerings, allowing tourists to customise their travel experience and access local resources at reduced costs (Buhalis, 2000). These technological innovations have transformed how destinations interact with tourists and manage service delivery. Beyond functional efficiency, destinations increasingly rely on experiential differentiation to engage tourists. Destination experiences have become a key strategic instrument for fostering meaningful relationships between tourists and

A Senior Research Fellow, School of Management and Business Studies, Mahatma, Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala. Orcid id: 0009-0006-6321-1747 Corresponding author: krishnavenik815@gmail.com

B Professor, School of Management and Business Studies, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala. Orcid id: 0000-0002-5111-5022, email: j.johnney@gmail.com

destinations (Karayilan & Cetin, 2016). Contemporary tourism management prioritises on creating exceptional tourist experiences that resonate with tourists' transcendent experience and go beyond basic service satisfaction (Çulha, 2020). Such extraordinary or transcendent experiences encourage deeper personal engagement and intense emotional rapport, which in turn enhance customer loyalty (Tussyadiah, 2013). As tourism is widely regarded as a massive producer of consumer experiences (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009), understanding how these experiences shape tourist behaviour has become a central concern in tourism research.

Among various dimensions of tourist experience, transcendent tourist experience (TTE) represents a particularly profound form of engagement. Identified as a subdimension of total customer experience (Hwang & Seo, 2016), TTE refers to moments of intense joy and self-transcendence, during which individuals feel deeply connected to their surroundings (Williams & Harvey, 2001). These experiences are characterised by high levels of emotional, psychological, and sometimes spiritual involvement. Previous research has asserted that hospitality products generate customer loyalty primarily when they deliver a memorable, transcendent experience (Kim, 2014; Pizam, 2010). Furthermore, studies on sequence effects indicate that the order and structure of service encounters significantly influence customer perceptions and emotions (Dixon & Verma, 2013), reinforcing the importance of carefully designed experiential journeys. Despite the growing interest in experiential tourism, previous studies have mainly focused on hedonic, memorable and service-based tourist experiences, with limited attention to transcendent experiences that involve emotional and spiritual dimensions (Huang et al., 2023; Kirillova et al., 2017). The concept of transcendent customer experience was articulated by Carù and Cova (2003) and Schouten et al. (2007), while Hwang and Seo (2016) highlighted its relevance for H&T research. They argued that delivering extraordinary experiences is essential in a market where tourists are increasingly saturated with standardised offerings. Nevertheless, empirical research examining the behavioural consequences of TTE remains scarce.

One of the most significant behavioural outcomes in tourism is electronic word of mouth (eWOM). The importance of revisiting and recommending a destination is now recognised as a crucial element in the future growth of tourism (Cerdá-Mansilla et al., 2025). eWOM is "any positive or negative comment shared online by potential, current, or past customers about a product or company that reaches a large audience" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In the tourism context, eWOM has become a critical source of information for destination choice (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). The digital age has empowered tourists to instantly share their experiences through social media, online reviews, and blogs, making eWOM an essential driver of destination marketing (Al-Dmour et al., 2024).

Another important concept in understanding tourists' post-consumption behaviour is destination brand love (DBL). It refers to (Amaro et al., 2020), a deep emotional attachment that tourists develop towards a destination, motivating them to share their experiences through online platforms. Emotional bonding has been widely acknowledged as a critical component of destination branding. For instance, Amaro et al. (2020) demonstrated that positive experiential engagement among 'Erasmus students' contributed to destination brand love, suggesting the potential relevance of experiential variables in shaping emotional attachment. However, empirical research investigating brand love in relation to TTE remains limited.

A review of existing literature reveals three significant research gaps. Firstly, although previous studies have examined overall destination experience as an antecedent of eWOM intention (Meenakshy et al., 2024; Paisri et al., 2022), no studies have investigated the influence of TTE on eWOM intention. While destination experience represents a tourist's overall perception of attractions, amenities, infrastructure, environment, accommodation, transportation and social

interactions (Lugosi & Walls, 2013; Prayag et al., 2013), TTE reflects an extreme delight experience which is more personal and subjective for a tourist during a trip and has profound influence on tourists' behavioural intentions than general destination evaluations. Although destination brand love is identified as a key predictor of eWOM, no research has examined it as a mediating variable between TTE and eWOM intention, which is the second gap identified. Moreover, few studies address the effective, sustainable marketing of wellness tourism destinations in Kerala, which is another gap. Aiming to address these research gaps and broaden the literature, the current research was designed to develop and test a conceptual model that elucidates how tourists' transcendent experience leads to destination brand love and eWOM intention. To be more precise, this study focusses on the following research objectives: (1) to analyse the influence of the TTE on destination brand love towards wellness tourism destinations in Kerala; (2) to assess the effect of the destination brand love on eWOM intention of tourists; and (3) to ascertain the mediating role of destination brand love in explaining the relationship between TTE and eWOM intention.

Theoretical Underpinning of the Study

The study's framework is based on the SOR model developed by Mehrabian & Russell (1974), which emphasises the critical role of internal psychological factors in consumer behaviour. He stated that the environment (S) causes changes in people's internal or biological states (O) that cause approach or avoidance responses (R). Their study concluded that environmental stimulus (S) triggers an emotional response (O) in the individual, which then leads to a behavioural response (R) from the consumer. The SOR model is widely applied in different fields of research. Prominent studies that use the SOR model include research on purchase intention from video advertisements (Yu et al., 2024), brand love and purchase intentions toward local food distribution (Kumar et al., 2021), customer experience, satisfaction, and brand loyalty toward electronic home appliances (Uzir et al., 2021), traveller adoption of the Airbnb platform (Tamilmani et al., 2020), the effects of environmental advertising and green attitudes on frugality in the Malaysian hotel industry (Sadom et al., 2020), and the relationship between restaurant food quality, revisit intention, and word-of-mouth intentions (Konuk, 2019). The SOR framework has been widely acknowledged as a pivotal theoretical model in tourism research (Asyraff et al., 2023).

The present study formulates a research model grounded in the SOR framework within the context of the wellness tourism sector. Schouten et al. (2007) described transcendent customer experience as a break from the usual perception of time, a sense of detachment from everyday life, and a connection to deep and meaningful experience. Transcendent customer experience has two aspects: flow experience and peak experience (Hwang & Seo, 2016; Privette, 1983; Schouten et al., 2007; Sukhu et al., 2018). Flow experience is characterised as an enjoyment, an intrinsically rewarding, or autotelic, experience, and peak experience is denoted as the "pleasurable, fleeting, unexpected, rare, valuable, and unusual characteristics, often seeming to derive from a natural source" (Privette, 1983). Existing H&T literature has conceptualised flow experience as a stimulus to consumption intention (Yang et al., 2022). Likewise, spiritual experience (Tan et al., 2021) and memorable tourism experiences (Chen et al., 2020; Guleria et al., 2023) were treated as stimuli in prior literature. Therefore, the present study conceptualised TTE as a stimulus. Previous literature also indicates that destination brand love is perceived as an organism due to the emotional responses elicited by stimulus factors (Atsiz et al., 2024; Kareem & Venugopal, 2023). eWOM, which is a behavioural intention in terms of consumption,

is considered a response towards an organism and pointed out in earlier works in the H&T sector (Abbasi et al., 2022; Fan et al., 2023; Kareem & Venugopal, 2023; Roy et al., 2020; Souki et al., 2023). With prior support from past studies, the transcendent tourist experience (TTE) has been identified as a stimulus (S) for this study, leading to an organism (O) of Destination Brand Love (DBL) due to an emotional reaction, which ultimately influences the behaviour of the tourists in response to eWOM intention as a response (R).

Literature Review

Wellness Tourism

The global wellness institute defines wellness tourism as “travel to maintain or improve one’s personal well-being”. (Global Wellness Institute, 2021). Wellness tourism, as a distinct sub-category of health tourism, differs from medical tourism, which emphasises preventive interventions and the enhancement of holistic well-being, comprising the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of health (Weerakit & Tkachuk, 2024). Andreu et al. (2021) and Zeng et al. (2021) mentioned in their study that it is essential to focus on health and safety as tourism recovers after COVID-19. Aebli et al. (2021) found that mental health and well-being are significant yet often underemphasised motivational themes in tourism, particularly in the face of global health crises. Recreational, aesthetic, and escapist experiences of wellness tourism can positively affect tourists’ hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Liu et al., 2023). Apart from relieving stress and restoring people’s physical and mental health, wellness tourism can also elevate their sense of happiness (Kazakov & Oyner, 2020). Tourists who are more satisfied with a wellness destination provide more positive evaluations for each determinant of a wellness destination’s attractiveness (Medina-Muñoz & Medina-Muñoz, 2013).

Wellness tourism in Kerala

Destinations develop genuinely distinctive, location-specific wellness tourism offerings and a well-distinguished brand. The state of Kerala in India, which branded itself as the “Land of Ayurveda”, promotes wellness tourism experiences linking wellness with yoga, Ayurveda, meditation, spirituality, pilgrimage, indigenous medicine, faith healing and happiness (Global Wellness Institute, 2018). Kerala has won the Asia Spa India award for best wellness destination 2019 (Government of Kerala, Department of Tourism, 2019). After the COVID-19 pandemic, Kerala’s tourism industry is in its renewal phase. Kerala received 2.25 crore tourist visits in 2023, which is much higher than the pre-COVID level of 1.96 crore in 2019 (The Hindu Business Line, 2023), and the revenue thus generated is a major contributor to the state’s total GDP. Ayurveda, a traditional medicine system of India, is the main attraction of Kerala’s wellness tourism. Backed by numerous wellness centres across the state, popular ayurvedic services include detoxification, rejuvenation, stress relief, weight loss, anti-ageing, and skin and hair care (Ramesh & Kurian, 2012). Accredited Ayurveda wellness centres are unevenly distributed: 80% of the centres are spread across five of Kerala’s districts, which are Thiruvananthapuram, Pathanamthitta, Thrissur, Kottayam and Kollam (Romão et al., 2021). Based on recent trends and future implications, Kerala’s wellness tourism combines ayurveda, yoga, medical tourism, backwater tourism, spiritual tourism, and cultural tourism (Nair, 2019).

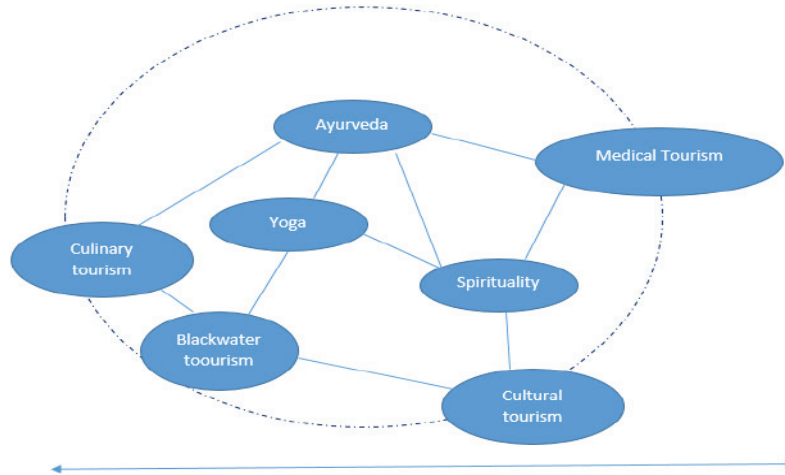


Figure 1: Proposed model of wellness tourism in Kerala
Source: Nair (2019)

Focusing on the concept of escape, wellness treatments in Kerala offer rejuvenation and rejuvenation packages aimed at enhancing the well-being of mind, body and spirit. By combining health, hospitality, and tourism, Kerala has positioned itself as a leading wellness tourism destination (Nair, 2019). Parakkal et al. (2024) underscored the significance of balancing mental and physical well-being in Kerala's wellness tourism. Focusing on culinary experiences and the mind-body connection could help differentiate Kerala from other wellness destinations globally.

Transcendent Tourist Experience (TTE)

Schouten et al. (2007) defined transcendent customer experience as the “temporary suspension of reality, a sense of detachment from the mundane and a sense of union with some higher plane experience”. The previously mentioned author stated that transcendent tourism experiences are extraordinary moments in tourism where individuals experience heightened emotions such as awe, wonder, and profound personal transformation (Schouten et al., 2007). It was elucidated that flow and peak experience are the distinct subsets of transcendent customer experience. A flow experience occurs when a person is fully immersed in a task, combining focused performance and enjoyment. It is a state of deep concentration in which time seems to fade away, and the individual feels detached from everyday life. A peak experience is more natural and emotional. It is a defining and meaningful moment that feels transformative and often comes from outside the individual, like an epiphany. Both lead to a sense of transcendence (Schouten et al., 2007). The discussion of customer experience in H&T research was first discussed by Clawson and Knetsch (1963). Cohen (1979) was the first to coin the term “tourist experience”, similar to customer experience from a tourism perspective. Therefore, in this research, transcendent customer experience is renamed transcendent tourist experience, as the study focuses on tourists' transcendent experience in wellness tourism destinations.

Destination Brand Love (DBL)

Destination brand love has emerged from the concept 'brand love' (Batra et al., 2011; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Brand love is the strong emotional bond a satisfied customer feels toward a brand. DBL refers to the deep affection and emotional connection individuals have with a particular travel destination or location when the brand helps them express or shape their identity, evokes meaningful memories, and creates happiness and excitement (Huang, 2018). It is when people feel a strong, positive attachment and loyalty to a place, often driven by their positive experiences, memories, and a genuine fondness for that destination (Seyyedamiri et al., 2021). Previous research by Amarao et al. (2021) and Aro et al. (2018) found that emotional connections can lead to repeat visits, positive word-of-mouth recommendations, and a strong desire to advocate for and promote the destination. Lv and Wu (2021) revealed that an extraordinary positive sensory tourism experience is a powerful means of enabling destination brand love. The study conducted by Ghorbanzadeh (2023) in six cities in Iran found that memorable city tourism experiences lead to DBL. In the work of Kim et al. (2024), among Chinese tourists in Thailand, it was found that wellness tourism experiences can lead to DBL.

eWOM Intention

According to Litvin et al. (2008), eWOM can be defined as "all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers". eWOM has been demonstrated to offer a reliable source of product information. The research done by Trusov et al. (2009) provides a powerful impetus for an improved utilisation of the eWOM communication medium. Modern tourists increasingly rely on recommendations and travel reviews when purchasing services or experiences that are difficult to evaluate without firsthand experience (Sparks & Browning, 2011). Post-purchase behaviour and experiences of tourists contribute to the creation of tourist-generated travel reviews and recommendations on digital platforms (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2015; Shi et al., 2018). The readiness to leave comments, whether positive or negative, reflects a greater dynamic approach to engaging with the organisation or brand (Kannan & Li, 2017). Bilro et al. (2018) found that engagement and hedonic experience significantly affect tourism consumers' review activities and that they are more inclined to engage in positive advocacy. In the tourism context, post-experience behaviour denotes the tourist's satisfaction, quality holiday travel experience, attitude, and recommendation intentions (Singh et al., 2024). The present research conceptualises eWOM intention as the online sharing of experiences, reviews, and recommendations through Web 2.0 platforms by foreign and domestic tourists who have experienced wellness tourism destinations in Kerala.

Previous studies on eWOM

Previous studies have primarily conceptualised electronic word of mouth (eWOM) as a source of destination information and a key determinant of destination selection (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Anannukul & Yoopetch, 2022; Aprilia & Kusumawati, 2021; Doosti et al., 2016; Goh, 2015; González-Rodríguez et al., 2022; Hashemi et al., 2019; Kanwel et al., 2019; Manero et al., 2019; Nguyen & Hsu, 2022, 2023; Lin et al., 2024; Popy & Bappy, 2020; Ran et al., 2021; Salah et al., 2021; Setiawan et al., 2021; Seyitoğlu & Davras, 2021; Sharma et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2024).

This body of literature primarily emphasises the informational and persuasive functions of eWOM in tourists' decision-making processes. Whereas, research examining eWOM as an outcome variable within the hospitality and tourism sector remains limited. Existing studies in this stream suggest that tourists' experiential, emotional, and cognitive evaluations play a critical role in shaping eWOM intentions. For instance, Fan et al. (2023) demonstrated the significant mediating effects of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being on the relationship between tourist experience and eWOM intention. Similarly, Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021) found that destination image and memorable tourism experiences positively influence tourists' eWOM intentions. Pandey and Sahu (2020) further reported that destination service quality significantly enhances destination attachment, which subsequently leads to stronger eWOM intentions among foreign tourists visiting heritage destinations. Moreover, individual and relational factors have also been identified as important antecedents of eWOM. Hisham et al. (2020) empirically established altruism as a major determinant of eWOM intention among Generation Z tourists. Chu et al. (2018), in their study of WeChat users, revealed a partial positive relationship between consumer engagement and eWOM intention, highlighting users' dedication to the platform as a key driver. Likewise, Rizal et al. (2018) found that information quality and e-service quality significantly enhance customer satisfaction, which in turn promotes eWOM intention among homestay lodgers in Malaysia.

Building on these the present study conceptualises eWOM as an outcome variable shaped by tourists' emotional engagement and self-reflection.

Proposed Research Framework and Hypotheses for the Study

TTE and eWOM intention

Customer experience is an inevitable facet of the tourism industry. A transcendent tourist experience is a customer-centred outcome of the post-consumption phase of tourism activity (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). A transcendent customer experience indicates that consumers experience extreme enjoyment, attention, self-transformation, freshness of experience, and emotional intensity from shopping and service experiences (Schouten et al., 2007). A transcendent customer experience can mould customers' attitudes and behaviours. It can intensify an individual's connection to a brand community (Schouten et al., 2007). Previous literature emphasises that consumer commitment (Wei et al., 2016), customer delight (Ball & Barnes, 2017), and emotional intelligence (Sukhu et al., 2018) are strong antecedents of a transcendent customer experience. Tourist happiness, customer loyalty, and customer word-of-mouth intentions are outcomes of TTE (Tsaur et al., 2012). Transcendent experiences elicit robust emotional responses that are conducive to the long-term well-being of pilgrimage tourists (Rahtz et al., 2021). Past literature shows that positive transcendent customer experiences lead to word-of-mouth intentions to spread word of mouth (Hartline & Jones, 1996; Klein et al., 2016; Sukhu et al., 2018). Recent literature has noted that self-transcendent emotions among tourists facilitate value co-creation in sustainable tourism (Assiouras & Bayer, 2025). Therefore, the tourists who have better experiences with wellness tourism destinations are more satisfied; those who are more satisfied are more inclined to actively engage in eWOM (Seow et al., 2024). The memorable tourism experiences of the tourists will also lead to eWOM intention (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Therefore, the study hypothesises that 'TTE has a significant and positive effect on eWOM intention.'

TTE and DBL

DBL is a form of anthropomorphism, which means attributing human emotions to a non-humanistic thing. Tourist-dependent factors act as antecedents to DBL (Aro et al., 2018). Previous literature shows that tourist experiences lead to the development of DBL (Chen et al., 2020; Swanson, 2017). Lv and Wu (2021) emphasised that extraordinary sensory tourism experiences naturally evoke immediate positive emotions and momentary happiness in tourists, ultimately leading to the development of DBL. Amaro et al. (2020) likened the Erasmus experience (an academic exchange that offers students the chance to study in another European Union nation) to a transcendent consumer experience, in which participants undergo a personal transformation, escape the routine, and feel connected to something greater. It was underscored that these intense and memorable moments create an emotional depth akin to that of tourist experiences, fostering loyalty and a desire to revisit. Therefore, this paper hypothesises that ‘transcendent experiences of tourist from their wellness tourism experiences have a significant and positive effect on DBL.’

DBL and eWOM intention

Word of mouth (WOM) has taken on a new form, eWOM, in which people can express their views about brands online and on social media (Erkan & Evans, 2016). This enables much faster communication and reaches a larger audience than ever. There is a remarkable relationship between brand love and positive word of mouth (Batra et al., 2011). Loureiro et al. (2017) empirically proved that brand love is more effective than simple satisfaction in boosting positive eWOM. The emotional connection, excitement, and fear of losing the brand drive consumers to advocate for the brand and recommend and share it online and offline. Previous literature proves that eWOM is an outcome of DBL (Amaro et al., 2020). Hence, this research hypothesises that DBL significantly and positively influences eWOM intentions among tourists who visited wellness tourism destinations in Kerala.

H1: TTE has a direct and positive relationship with eWOM intention

H2: TTE has a direct and positive relationship with DBL

H3: TTE has a direct and positive relationship with eWOM intention

PROPOSED MODEL

Drawing on the literature review and formulated hypotheses, the study presents a theoretical model linking TTE, DBL, and eWOM intention within the framework of wellness tourism, as illustrated in Fig. 2. The model concurrently assesses the interrelationships among three latent variables: TTE, DBL, and eWOM intention. The primary objectives of the study are (a) to investigate the relationship between TTE, DBL and eWOM intention, (b) to analyse the relationship between TTE and eWOM intention, and (c) to validate the research model.

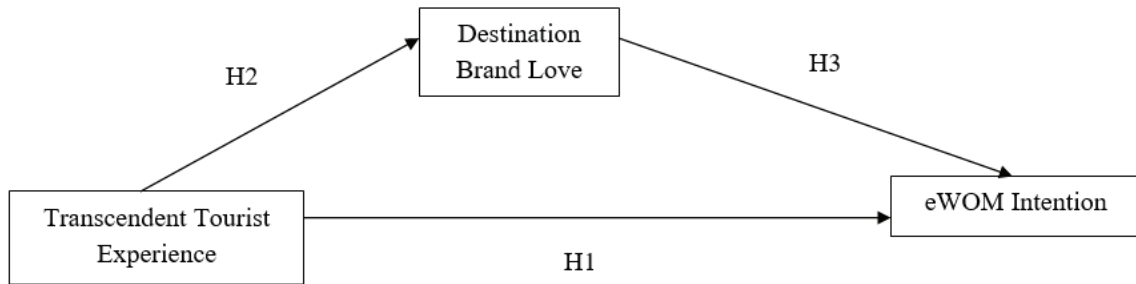


Figure 2: Direct and Indirect Effects of TTE on eWOM Intention

Source: Author's work

Research Methodology

Sample and Procedure

The study follows a quantitative research design and was conducted among domestic and international tourists visiting 82 ayurvedic wellness tourism destinations in districts such as Thiruvananthapuram, Pathanamthitta, Thrissur, Kottayam and Kollam in Kerala (Romão et al., 2021), which provide not only Ayurvedic treatment but also the experiences of cuisine, yoga, spirituality and culture. (Nair, 2019). Twenty-five (25) locations from Thiruvananthapuram, seventeen (17) from Pathanamthitta, sixteen (16) from Thrissur, thirteen (13) from Kottayam, and eleven (11) from Kollam were selected (Kerala tourism statistics, 2019). The respondents were approached for the study with assurances regarding the confidentiality of the data collected. A total of 404 tourists who were involved in eWOM activities, such as disseminating tourism experiences on social media or posting comments online, were considered for the study using a convenience sampling method. Among the tourists, 287 were domestic, and 117 were foreign. Tourists were approached and asked to complete surveys at parking areas, rest zones, and places where they were found free and available. The research aimed to test hypotheses, confirm existing theories, and employ empirical research. Of these 404 respondents, 57.42% were men, and 42.58% were women. Prior to participating, all individuals were provided with a consent form that explained the study's objective, its confidential nature, and the ethical considerations, and informed consent was secured from all respondents.

Instruments

TTE was measured by using 10 items adapted from Schouten et al. (2007). DBL was measured using 7 items adapted from Carroll & Ahuvia (2006), and eWOM intention using 3 items adapted from Amaro & Duarte (2015). Variables were measured by using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Covariates include age, gender and destination image. Destination image was measured using 5 items adapted from Lee & Lockshin (2011).

Statistical Methods

IBM SPSS software was used to analyse the data. Cronbach’s alpha was used to evaluate the internal consistency of the measurement scales. There is no significant multicollinearity among the independent variables, as the tolerance value (.446) is above .1, and the VIF (2.241) is below 5. The PROCESS macro version 3.4 (Hayes, 2019) was used to check the direct and indirect effects of TTE on eWOM intention. The bootstrap estimation approach assessed the significance of the indirect effect.

Analysis and Results

Table 1 presents summary statistics for all variables and covariates. Respondents had an average TTE score of 1.92 out of 3.20. Their destination brand love score averaged 2.26 out of 3.29, and their eWOM intention score averaged 2.60 out of 5.

Table 1. Summary Statistics

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
TTE	1.9252	.49714	1.00	3.20
DBL	2.2634	.53372	1.00	3.29
eWOM Intention	2.6073	1.04821	1.00	5.00
Destination Image	1.8619	.51905	1.00	3.40
Gender	232 (57.4)			
Male, n (%)				
Age	68 (16.8)			
>30, n (%)				

Table 2 shows the reliability analysis of the variables. Cronbach’s alpha estimates the internal consistency of the items in each variable among the target respondents. Table 2 shows that Cronbach’s Alpha ranges from 0.777 to 0.901, indicating that all variables are reliable, as they exceed the recommended value of 0.7.

Table 2. Reliability Analysis

Factors	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
TTE	10	.901
DBL	7	.777
eWOM intention	3	.895
Destination Image	5	.829

Table 3 presents Pearson and partial correlations among TTE, DBL, and eWOM intention. TTE exhibit a positive and significant relationship with DBL and eWOM intention. The relationship between DBL and eWOM intention is also positive and significant. The research indicates that, after controlling for covariates, all the relationships remain significant.

Table 3 Correlation coefficients between TTE, DBL and eWOM intention

	Transcendent Tourist Experience	Destination brand love	eWOM intention
Pearson correlations			
TTE	1		
DBL	.744**	1	
eWOM intention	.459**	.495**	1
Partial correlations (Controlling for covariates)			
TTE	1		
DBL	.603**	1	
eWOM intention	.329**	.377**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4: Summary of total, direct, and indirect effects

Paths	Coefficients	SE	T	P-VALUE
Path c: DV-eWOM intention				
$R^2 = .2747, F(4,399) = 37.7848, p = .0000$				
TTE	.7768	.1115	6.9636	.0000
Gender	.4287	.0906	4.7328	.0000
Age	-.1158	.0830	-1.3949	.1638
Destination Image	.3464	.1071	3.2336	.0013
Path a: DV – Destination Brand Love				
$R^2 = .5938, F(4,399) = 145.8414, p = .0000$				
TTE	.6409	.0425	15.0792	.0000
Gender	-.0123	.0345	-.3568	.7215
Age	.0018	.0316	.0579	.9539
Destination Image	.2548	.0408	6.2407	.0000
Path b and c': DV-eWOM intention				
$R^2 = .3153, F(5,398) = 36.6600, p = .0000$				
DBL (b)	.6209	.1278	4.8580	.0000
TTE (c')	.3788	.1360	2.7861	.0056
Gender	.4364	.0881	4.9510	.0000
Age	-.1169	.0807	-1.4479	.1484
Destination Image	.1882	.1092	1.7240	.0855
Total effect			(Path c)	
Direct effect			(Path c')	
Indirect effect (Path a * Path b)			Effect = .3980 SE = .0908 Confidence interval: .2251 to .5832	

The study found that TTE is indirectly related to eWOM intention through its effect on DBL, using ordinary least squares path analysis. The findings indicated that the regression coefficient between TTE and DBL was statistically significant (Path 'a'), as was the regression coefficient between DBL and eWOM intention (Path 'b'). The respondents exhibiting positive and satisfactory TTE tend to have DBL ($a' = .6409$), as demonstrated in Table 4. A bootstrap confidence range for the indirect effect ($ab' = 0.3980$), derived from 5000 bootstrap samples, was totally above zero (0.0594 to 0.1458). These results demonstrate a link between TTE and eWOM intention, explained by DBL. TTE remained a substantial predictor of eWOM intention after accounting for DBL (path 'c'). In other terms, positive TTE is associated with eWOM intention irrespective of its influence on DBL ($c' = .3788$). These observations and outcomes validate the hypotheses H2 and H3; therefore, both hypotheses are accepted. The total effect of TTE on eWOM intention was found to be significant (Path 'c'); therefore, H1 is accepted.

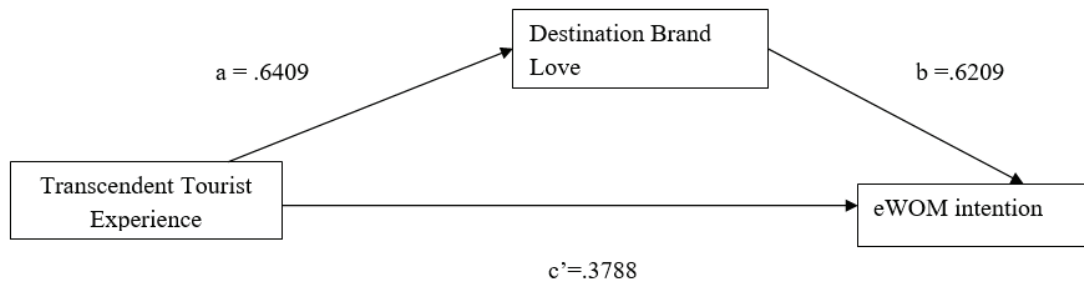


Figure 3. Various paths and their coefficients
Source: Author's work

The study found a direct link between TTE and eWOM intention, via the direct effect of TTE on eWOM intention. This suggests that tourists visiting wellness tourism destinations in Kerala have idealised and cherished experiences and are inclined to be satisfied with the destination. The indirect effect indicates that tourists who visited wellness tourism destinations were more attached to the destination and were fond of tourism experiences, thereby disseminating eWOM. Specifically, TTE is related to eWOM intention through DBL. In other words, destination image is positively related to destination brand love, and DBL is positively related to eWOM intention.

Discussion

The study confirmed the proposed research model and examined the effects of DBL and eWOM intention by using the S-O-R framework. Findings revealed that TTE significantly and positively relates to DBL and eWOM intention. Furthermore, it was proven that TTE has an indirect effect on eWOM intention through DBL. Finally, DBL has emerged as a predictor of eWOM intention. The present study underscores that TTE significantly and positively affects DBL and eWOM intention, as tested in the first hypothesis (H1). This relationship has been empirically validated, marking the first exploration of its kind within the context of domestic and international wellness tourists, supported by past literature (Chen et al., 2020; Lv & Wu, 2021; Swanson, 2017). The second hypothesis (H2 and H3) was also consistent with prior stud-

ies (Amaro et al., 2020), which showed that DBL has a significant impact on eWOM intention. The study also reveals that TTE has an indirect effect on eWOM intention through DBL. From the perspectives of marketing and management, it is recognised that a key to surviving and thriving in the increasingly competitive tourism market is to offer unique, differentiated products and services that create memorable experiences that add value for visitors (Tussyadiah, 2013). As tourists increasingly rely on online communication channels, their engagement in electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has also grown substantially. This study highlights that tourists use these online platforms to share their perceptions and experiences of their visits. Despite the growing importance of eWOM, it is worth noting that tourists' affection for a destination's brand has an even more significant impact on their eWOM behaviour. This suggests that online channels are viewed as secure spaces for expressing feelings and experiences about destinations that evoke strong emotions. Tourists' dissemination of eWOM may be attributed to focus-related utility, the intention to help other members of the particular online environment by sharing valuable information about a product or brand, or to approval utility or self-enhancement (Khan & Khan, 2016). This eWOM dispersion can be used by tourism marketers as a no-cost promotional tool to nurture their business by attracting new tourists. Positive eWOM from wellness tourists can support sustainable tourism development by promoting mindful, high-value travel experiences rather than mass tourism. Therefore, the habit of giving eWOM on online platforms should be cultivated as part of the feedback received to gauge the pulse of tourists, which helps detect deficiencies. Positive reviews from satisfied tourists about a destination encourage other tourists to choose it for their upcoming trips.

Implications of the study

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the field of TTE in wellness tourism, destination brand love and eWOM intention. Past literature has examined destination image, destination experience, satisfaction, hedonism, place attachment, destination personality, place dependence, and uniqueness as antecedents of destination brand love (Amaro et al., 2020). The present research seeks to broaden the theory to the wellness tourism concept and to explore the effect of TTE on DBL and eWOM intention. Past research on transcendent customer experience in the H&T industry focused on adventure tourism (Tsaur et al., 2012), concerts (Ball & Barnes, 2017), and forest environments (Williams & Harvey, 2001). The current research highlighted a substantial positive correlation among TTE, DBL, and eWOM intention among domestic and foreign tourists within the framework of wellness tourism. The path analysis shows that TTE directly and indirectly affects eWOM intention. A notable outcome of this research is that DBL mediates between TTE and eWOM intention.

Practical Implications

This research emphasises that TTE and DBL are the antecedents of eWOM intention of foreign and domestic tourists exploring wellness tourism destinations. Negative eWOM generated by dissatisfied customers may affect online users' attitudes, thereby affecting the brand's reputation (Shangreputation et al., 2006). Negative eWOM shared by a disgruntled customer

on the Internet can reach thousands of potential customers (Beneke et al., 2015). Negative eWOM has a more detrimental impact on a destination's image than positive eWOM, due to the hedonic and experiential nature of tourism products (Ishida et al., 2016). Tourism service providers, as well as other tourism stakeholders, should rely on these matters by overseeing aspects related to accountability for such conduct among tourists. This research identified TTE as a significant determinant of eWOM intention among domestic and foreign tourists visiting wellness tourism destinations. The finding suggests that tourism stakeholders prioritise enhancing the tourism experience for tourists by improving services at destinations. thereby fostering transcendence. Moreover, for instance, encouraging peak and flow experiences by offering a multitude of products, such as yoga combined with ayurvedic treatments and culinary cuisines with backwater cruising, could captivate and appease tourists. Creating love with a destination can be the best strategy to maintain emotional connectivity with tourists, encouraging them to recommend and revisit the destination. Personally, rejuvenating and mentally gratifying experiences which yield organisational growth (Schouten et al., 2007). Tourists are motivated to visit wellness tourism destinations for pleasure, spiritual happiness and meaningful experiences (Smith & Diekmann, 2017). Consequently, tourism service providers and stakeholders must understand the individual differences that either facilitate or obstruct perceptions of transcendent experiences and subsequently tailor their experience-centric services to tourists' traits and inclinations.

Conclusion

The present research emphasised the significant role of transcendent tourist experience on eWOM intention and destination brand love within the context of wellness tourist destinations in Kerala. Despite these contributions, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other tourist destinations in Kerala, such as hills, backwaters, and beaches. Additionally, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to capture the changes in the experiences and behavioural intentions of domestic and foreign travellers over time. Therefore, future research is recommended to replicate the model in different geographical and tourism settings and to use longitudinal designs. Furthermore, future studies can incorporate additional mediating variables, such as destination brand attachment, tourist satisfaction, and perceived value, and additional moderators, such as personality traits, tourist involvement, and social media usage intensity, to gain deeper insights into the mechanisms driving eWOM intention.

References

- Abbasi, A. Z., Tsiotsou, R. H., Hussain, K., Rather, R. A., & Ting, D. H. (2022). Investigating the impact of social media images' value, consumer engagement, and involvement on eWOM of a tourism destination: A transmittal mediation approach. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 71, 103231. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2022.103231>
- Abubakar, A. M., & Ilkan, M. (2016). Impact of online WOM on destination trust and intention to travel: A medical tourism perspective. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 5(3), 192–201. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2015.12.005>
- Aebli, A., Volgger, M., & Taplin, R. (2021). A two-dimensional approach to travel motivation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 25(1), 60–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2021.1906631>

- Al-Dmour, R., Al-Dmour, H., & Al-Dmour, A. (2024). The crucial role of EWOM: Mediating the impact of marketing mix strategies on international students' study destination decision. *SAGE Open*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241247661>
- Al-Sulaiti, I. (2022). Mega shopping malls technology-enabled facilities, destination image, tourists' behaviour and revisit intentions: Implications of the SOR theory. *Frontiers in Environmental Science*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fenvs.2022.965642>
- Amaro, S., Barroco, C., & Antunes, J. (2020). Exploring the antecedents and outcomes of destination brand love. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 30(3), 433–448. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-08-2019-2487>
- Anannukul, N., & Yoopetch, C. (2022). The determinants of intention to visit wellness tourism destination of young tourists. *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, 43(2). <https://doi.org/10.34044/j.kjss.2022.43.2.20>
- Andreu, M. G. N., Font-Barnet, A., & Roca, M. E. (2021). Wellness Tourism—New Challenges and Opportunities for Tourism in Salou. *Sustainability*, 13(15), 8246. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13158246>
- Appiah-Adu, K., Fyall, A., & Singh, S. (2000). Marketing Culture and Customer Retention in the Tourism Industry. *Service Industries Journal*, 20(2), 95–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02642060000000022>
- Aprilia, F., & Kusumawati, A. (2021). Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth on Visitor's Interest to Tourism Destinations. *Journal of Asian Finance Economics and Business*, 8(2), 993–1003. <https://doi.org/10.13106/jafeb.2021.vol8.no2.0993>
- Aro, K., Suomi, K., & Saraniemi, S. (2018). Antecedents and consequences of destination brand love — A case study from Finnish Lapland. *Tourism Management*, 67, 71–81. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.01.003>
- Assiouras, I., & Bayer, R. (2025). Self-transcendent emotions as the locomotive of value co-creation in sustainable tourism: a horizon 2050 paper. *Tourism Review*, 80(1), 221–231.
- Asyraf, M., Aliff, M., Hanafiah, M., Aminuddin, M., & Mahdzar, N. (2023). Adoption of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) Model in Hospitality and Tourism Research: Systematic Literature Review and Future Research Directions. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Innovation in Hospitality and Tourism (APJIHT)*, 12, 2023.
- Atsız, O., Çokal, Z., Yıldırım, İ., & Cankül, I. (2024). Understanding travelers' masstige consumption values: an application of masstige theory and SOR model paradigm. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2024.2380045>
- Ball, J., & Barnes, D. C. (2017). Delight and the grateful customer: beyond joy and surprise. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, 27(1), 250–269. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jstp-01-2016-0013>
- Batra, R., Ahuvia, A., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2011). Brand Love. *Journal of Marketing*, 76(2), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.09.0339>
- Beneke, J., Mill, J., Naidoo, K., & Wickham, B. (2015). The impact of willingness to engage in negative electronic word-of-mouth on brand attitude: a study of airline passengers in South Africa. *Journal of Business & Retail Management Research*, 09(2). https://jbrmr.com/cdn/article_file/i-21_c-194.pdf
- Binkhorst, E., & Dekker, T. D. (2009). Agenda for Co-Creation Tourism Experience Research. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 18(2–3), 311–327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368620802594193>
- Bilro, R. G., Loureiro, S. M. C., & Guerreiro, J. (2018). Exploring online customer engagement with hospitality products and its relationship with involvement, emotional states, experi-

- ence and brand advocacy. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 28(2), 147–171. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2018.1506375>
- Buhalis, D. (2000). Marketing the competitive destination of the future. *Tourism Management*, 21(1), 97–116. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0261-5177\(99\)00095-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0261-5177(99)00095-3)
- Carroll, B. A., & Ahuvia, A. C. (2006). Some antecedents and outcomes of brand love. *Marketing Letters*, 17(2), 79–89. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-006-4219-2>
- Carù, A., & Cova, B. (2003). Revisiting Consumption Experience. *Marketing Theory*, 3(2), 267–286. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14705931030032004>
- Cerdá-Mansilla, E., Rubio, N., & Campo, S. (2025). “Unpacking smart destination dimensions: insights into tourist recommendation, revisit intentions, and destination preference.” *Current Issues in Tourism*, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2025.2512398>
- Chen, X., Cheng, Z., & Kim, G. (2020). Make It Memorable: Tourism Experience, Fun, Recommendation and Revisit Intentions of Chinese Outbound Tourists. *Sustainability*, 12(5), 1904. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12051904>
- Chen, N., Wang, Y., Li, J., Wei, Y., & Yuan, Q. (2020). Examining Structural Relationships among Night Tourism Experience, Lovemarks, Brand Satisfaction, and Brand Loyalty on “Cultural Heritage Night” in South Korea. *Sustainability*, 12(17), 6723. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12176723>
- Chu, S., Lien, C., & Cao, Y. (2018). Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on WeChat: examining the influence of sense of belonging, need for self-enhancement, and consumer engagement on Chinese travellers’ eWOM. *International Journal of Advertising*, 38(1), 26–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2018.1470917>
- Clawson, M., & Knetsch, J. L. (1963). Outdoor Recreation Research: Some Concepts and Suggested Areas of Study. *Natural Resources Journal*, 3(2), 250. <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3863&context=nrg>
- Cohen, E. (1979). A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences. *Sociology*, 13(2), 179–201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003803857901300203>
- Çulha, O. (2020a). Experience economy applications in tourism. *Alanya Academic Review Journal*, 4(2), 495–519. <https://www.cabdirect.org/cabdirect/abstract/20203251235>
- Dixon, M., & Verma, R. (2013). Sequence effects in service bundles: Implications for service design and scheduling. *Journal of Operations Management*, 31(3), 138–152. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jom.2012.12.002>
- Doosti, S., Jalilvand, M. R., Asadi, A., Pool, J. K., & Adl, P. M. (2016). Analyzing the influence of electronic word of mouth on visit intention: the mediating role of tourists’ attitude and city image. *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, 2(2), 137–148. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijtc-12-2015-0031>
- Erkan, I., & Evans, C. (2016). The influence of eWOM in social media on consumers’ purchase intentions: An extended approach to information adoption. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 61, 47–55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.03.003>
- Fan, Y., Isa, S. M., Yang, S., & Wen, J. (2023). Effects of the guest experience, well-being, and eWOM intention for resort hotels: A positive psychology perspective. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 56, 197–206. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2023.06.014>
- Ghorbanzadeh, D. (2023). City brand love: destination attractiveness and memorable tourism city experiences. *Tourism Review*, 79(3), 703–718. <https://doi.org/10.1108/tr-01-2023-0016>
- Global Wellness Institute. (2018). *Global wellness tourism economy*.
- Global Wellness Institute. (2021, September 7). *Wellness Definitions - Global Wellness Institute*. <https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/what-is-wellness/wellness-economy-definitions/>

- Godovykh, M., & Tasci, A. D. (2020). Customer experience in tourism: A review of definitions, components, and measurements. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 35, 100694. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100694>
- Goh, S. (2015). The Effect of Electronic Word of Mouth on Intention to Book Accommodation via Online Peer-to-Peer Platform: Investigation of Theory of Planned Behaviour. *The Journal of Internet Banking and Commerce*, 01(s2). <https://doi.org/10.4172/1204-5357.s2-005>
- González-Rodríguez, M. R., Díaz-Fernández, M. C., Bilgihan, A., Okumus, F., & Shi, F. (2022). The impact of eWOM source credibility on destination visit intention and online involvement: a case of Chinese tourists. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 13(5), 855–874. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jhtt-11-2021-0321>
- Government of Kerala, Department of Tourism. (2019). *Kerala tourism statistics 2019*. https://www.keralatourism.org/tourismstatistics/tourist_statistics_2019_book20210306071249.pdf
- Guleria, A., Joshi, R., & Adil, M. (2023). The impact of memorable tourism experiences on customer-based destination brand equity: the mediating role of destination attachment and overall satisfaction. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, 7(4), 1994–2013. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jhti-03-2023-0220>
- Hartline, M. D., & Jones, K. C. (1996). Employee performance cues in a hotel service environment: Influence on perceived service quality, value, and word-of-mouth intentions. *Journal of Business Research*, 35(3), 207–215. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0148-2963\(95\)00126-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0148-2963(95)00126-3)
- Hashemi, S., Singh, K. S. D., Mughal, M. A., & Kiumarsi, S. (2023). REIMAGINING TRAVEL INTENTIONS TO CHINA IN THE POST COVID-19 ERA: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF PERCEIVED SAFETY, ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH AND DESTINATION IMAGE. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 49(3), 1185–1194. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.49333-1117>
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K. P., Walsh, G., & Gremler, D. D. (2004). Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: What motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the Internet? *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(1), 38–52. <https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.10073>
- Hisham, M. I. B., Bogal, N., Royali, S. A., Harun, N. A., & Tamrin, M. (2020). Factors Influencing Consumers' Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) Intention among Generation Y (Gen Y) towards Travel Destination. *2020 International Conference on Data Analytics for Business and Industry: Way Towards a Sustainable Economy (ICDABI)*. <https://doi.org/10.1109/icdabi51230.2020.9325706>
- Huang, T. (2018). Psychological mechanisms of brand love and information technology identity in virtual retail environments. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 47, 251–264. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2018.11.016>
- Huang, X., Wang, P., & Wu, L. (2023). Well-being through Transformation: an integrative framework of transformative tourism experiences and hedonic versus eudaimonic well-being. *Journal of Travel Research*, 63(4), 974–994. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875231171670>
- Hwang, J., & Seo, S. (2016). A critical review of research on customer experience management. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 28(10), 2218–2246. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijchm-04-2015-0192>
- Ishida, K., Slevitch, L., & Siamionava, K. (2016). The Effects of Traditional and Electronic Word-of-Mouth on Destination Image: A Case of Vacation Tourists Visiting Branson, Missouri. *Administrative Sciences*, 6(4), 12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci6040012>

- Jalilvand, M. R., & Samiei, N. (2012). The impact of electronic word of mouth on a tourism destination choice. *Internet Research*, 22(5), 591–612. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10662241211271563>
- Kareem, S. A., & Venugopal, P. (2023). Examining the relationship between gastronomic experience, revisit intention, destination image and destination brand love: a moderating role of cewebrity reviews. *Leisure/Loisir*, 48(3), 393–419. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14927713.2023.2211582>
- Kanwel, S., Lingqiang, Z., Asif, M., Hwang, J., Hussain, A., & Jameel, A. (2019). The Influence of Destination Image on Tourist Loyalty and Intention to Visit: Testing a Multiple Mediation Approach. *Sustainability*, 11(22), 6401. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11226401>
- Karayilan, E., & Cetin, G. (2016). Tourism destination: Design of experiences. In M. Sotiriadis & D. Gursoy (Eds.), *The handbook of managing and marketing tourism experiences* (pp. 65–83). Emerald Group Publishing.
- Kazakov, S., & Oyner, O. (2020). Wellness tourism: a perspective article. *Tourism Review*, 76(1), 58–63. <https://doi.org/10.1108/tr-05-2019-0154>
- Kim, J. (2014). The antecedents of memorable tourism experiences: The development of a scale to measure the destination attributes associated with memorable experiences. *Tourism Management*, 44, 34–45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2014.02.007>
- Kim, M. J., Lee, C., & Jung, T. (2018). Exploring Consumer Behaviour in Virtual Reality Tourism Using an Extended Stimulus–Organism–Response Model. *Journal of Travel Research*, 59(1), 69–89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287518818915>
- Kim, S. I., Al-Ansi, A., Lee, J., Chua, B., Phucharoen, C., & Han, H. (2024). Wellness tourism experience and destination brand love. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 41(7), 988–1004. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2024.2369752>
- Kim, J., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2015). Sharing Tourism Experiences. *Journal of Travel Research*, 56(1), 28–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287515620491>
- Kirillova, K., Lehto, X., & Cai, L. (2017). What triggers transformative tourism experiences? *Tourism Recreation Research*, 42(4), 498–511. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2017.1342349>
- Klein, J. F., Falk, T., Esch, F., & Gloukhovtsev, A. (2016). Linking pop-up brand stores to brand experience and word of mouth: The case of luxury retail. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(12), 5761–5767. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.04.172>
- Konuk, F. A. (2019). The influence of perceived food quality, price fairness, perceived value and satisfaction on customers' revisit and word-of-mouth intentions towards organic food restaurants. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 50, 103–110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.05.005>
- Kumar, S., Murphy, M., Talwar, S., Kaur, P., & Dhir, A. (2021). What drives brand love and purchase intentions toward the local food distribution system? A study of social media-based REKO (fair consumption) groups. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 60, 102444. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102444>
- Lin, P. M. C., Tung, V. W. S., Zhang, H. Q., & Gu, Q. (2018). Tourist experience on memorable hospitality services. *Journal of China Tourism Research*, 14(2), 123–145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19388160.2018.1455613>
- Lin, F., Ryu, K., & Ahn, Y. (2024). Effect of product design on repurchase intention, electronic word-of-mouth, and museum visit intention: Museum random boxes in China. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 26(3). <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2657>

- Litvin, S. W., Goldsmith, R. E., & Pan, B. (2008). Electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality and tourism management. *Tourism Management*, 29(3), 458–468. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2007.05.011>
- Liu, L., Zhou, Y., & Sun, X. (2023). The Impact of the Wellness Tourism Experience on Tourist Well-Being: The Mediating Role of Tourist Satisfaction. *Sustainability*, 15(3), 1872. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15031872>
- Loureiro, S. M. C., Gorgus, T., & Kaufmann, H. R. (2017). Antecedents and outcomes of online brand engagement. *Online Information Review*, 41(7), 985–1005. <https://doi.org/10.1108/oir-08-2016-0236>
- Lugosi, P., & Walls, A. R. (2013). Researching destination experiences: Themes, perspectives and challenges. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 2(2), 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2013.07.001>
- Lv, X., & Wu, A. (2021). The role of extraordinary sensory experiences in shaping destination brand love: an empirical study. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 38(2), 179–193. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2021.1889447>
- Manero, C. B., Ciobanu, A. V., & Iglesias, M. P. (2019). The electronic word of mouth as a context variable in the hotel management decision-making process. *Cuadernos De Gestión*, 20(1), 111–136. <https://doi.org/10.5295/cdg.170860cb>
- Medina-Muñoz, D. R., & Medina-Muñoz, R. D. (2013). The Attractiveness of Wellness Destinations: An Importance-Performance-Satisfaction Approach. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 16(6), 521–533. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.1944>
- Meenakshy, M., Prasad, K. D. V., Bolar, K., & Shyamsunder, C. (2024). Electronic word-of-mouth intentions in personal and public networks: a domestic tourist perspective. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03753-4>
- Mehrabian, A., & Russell, J. A. (1974). *An approach to environmental psychology*. the MIT Press.
- Nair, B. B. (2019). Heal and Revive. In *Advances in hospitality, tourism and the services industry (AHTSI) book series* (pp. 220–235). <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-9787-2.ch012>
- Nguyen, D. T. A., & Hsu, L. (2022). Exploring visit intention to India among Southeast Asian solo female travelers. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 25, 100725. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2022.100725>
- Paisri, W., Ruanguttamanun, C., & Sujchaphong, N. (2022). Customer experience and commitment on eWOM and revisit intention: A case of Taladtongchom Thailand. *Cogent Business & Management*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2022.2108584>
- Pandey, A., & Sahu, R. (2020). Modeling the relationship between service quality, destination attachment and eWOM intention in heritage tourism. *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, 6(4), 769–784. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijtc-08-2019-0125>
- Parakkal, A. K., Thazhathethil, B. V., & George, B. (2024). The Physical, Mental, Spiritual, and Environmental (PMSE) Framework for Enhancing Wellness Tourism Experiences and Its Validation in the Context of Kerala, India. *Administrative Sciences*, 14(7), 140. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci14070140>
- Prayag, G., Hosany, S., & Odeh, K. (2013). The role of tourists' emotional experiences and satisfaction in understanding behavioral intentions. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 2(2), 118–127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2013.05.001>

- Privette, G. (1983). Peak experience, peak performance, and flow: A comparative analysis of positive human experiences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45(6), 1361–1368. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.45.6.1361>
- Pizam, A. (2010). Creating memorable experiences. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 29(3), 343. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2010.04.003>
- Popy, N. N., & Bappy, T. A. (2020). Attitude toward social media reviews and restaurant visit intention: a Bangladeshi perspective. *South Asian Journal of Business Studies*, 11(1), 20–44. <https://doi.org/10.1108/sajbs-03-2020-0077>
- Rahtz, E., Warber, S. L., Goldingay, S., & Dieppe, P. (2021). Transcendent Experiences Among Pilgrims to Lourdes: A Qualitative Investigation. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 60(6), 3788–3806. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01306-6>
- Ramesh, U., & Kurian, J. (2012). A study to develop an advanced marketing strategy for wellness tourism in Kerala based on the prevailing scenario. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 1, 211–222.
- Ran, L., Zhenpeng, L., Bilgihan, A., & Okumus, F. (2021). Marketing China to U.S. travelers through electronic word-of-mouth and destination image: Taking Beijing as an example. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 27(3), 267–286. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766720987869>
- Rasoolimanesh, S. M., Seyfi, S., Hall, C. M., & Hatamifar, P. (2021). Understanding memorable tourism experiences and behavioural intentions of heritage tourists. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 21, 100621. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2021.100621>
- Rizal, H., Yussof, S., Amin, H., & Chen-Jung, K. (2018). EWOM towards homestays lodging: extending the information system success model. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 9(1), 94–108. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jhtt-12-2016-0084>
- Romão, J., Seal, P. P., Hansen, P., Joseph, S., & Piramanayagam, S. (2021). Stakeholder-based conjoint analysis for branding wellness tourism in Kerala, India. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Regional Science*, 6(1), 91–111. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41685-021-00218-3>
- Roy, G., Datta, B., Mukherjee, S., & Basu, R. (2020). Effect of eWOM stimuli and eWOM response on perceived service quality and online recommendation. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 46(4), 457–472. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2020.1809822>
- Salah, M. H. A., Abdou, A. H., Hassan, T. H., El-Amin, M. a. M., Kegour, A. B. A., Alboray, H. M. M., Mohamed, A. S. D., Ali, H. S. a. M., & Mohammed, E. F. A. (2023). Power of eWOM and Its Antecedents in Driving Customers' Intention to Revisit: An Empirical Investigation on Five-Star Eco-Friendly Hotels in Saudi Arabia. *Sustainability*, 15(12), 9270. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15129270>
- Setiawan, P. Y., Purbadharmaja, I. B. P., Widanta, A. a. B. P., & Hayashi, T. (2021). How electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) triggers intention to visit through destination image, trust and satisfaction: the perception of a potential tourist in Japan and Indonesia. *Online Information Review*, 45(5), 861–878. <https://doi.org/10.1108/oir-03-2019-0111>
- Seyitoğlu, F., & Davras, Ö. (2021). Determinants and implications of travel motivations: international travellers visiting Cappadocia. *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, 8(2), 311–326. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijtc-01-2021-0006>
- Sadom, N. Z. M., Quoquab, F., Mohammad, J., & Hussin, N. (2020). Less is more: the role of frugality in the Malaysian hotel industry. *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, 8(1), 260–285. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijtc-02-2020-0021>
- Seow, A. N., Foroughi, B., & Choong, Y. O. (2024). Tourists' Satisfaction, Experience, and Revisit Intention for Wellness Tourism: E Word-of-Mouth as the Mediator. *SAGE Open*, 14(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241274049>

- Seyyedamiri, N., Pour, A. H., Zaeri, E., & Nazarian, A. (2021). Understanding destination brand love using machine learning and content analysis method. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 25(9), 1451–1466. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2021.1924634>
- Schouten, J. W., McAlexander, J. H., & Koenig, H. F. (2007). Transcendent customer experience and brand community. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 35(3), 357–368. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-007-0034-4>
- Shang, R., Chen, Y., & Liao, H. (2006). The value of participation in virtual consumer communities on brand loyalty. *Internet Research*, 16(4), 398–418. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10662240610690025>
- Sharma, N., Khatri, B., & Khan, S. A. (2023). Do e-WOM Persuade Travelers Destination Visit Intentions? An investigation on how Travelers Adopt the Information from the Social Media Channels. *Journal of Content Community and Communication*, 17(9), 147–161. <https://doi.org/10.31620/jccc.06.23/11>
- Shi, J., Hu, P., Lai, K. K., & Chen, G. (2018). Determinants of users' information dissemination behaviour on social networking sites. *Internet Research*, 28(2), 393–418. <https://doi.org/10.1108/intr-01-2017-0038>
- Singh, R., Nazki, A. A., & Mir, M. A. (2024). Investigating the moderating role of active participation in the relationship between tourist behaviour and revisiting intention in creative tourism context. *Almatourism - Journal of Tourism, Culture and Territorial Development*, 14(25), 29–57. <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2036-5195/11043>
- Smith, M. K., & Diekmann, A. (2017). Tourism and wellbeing. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 66, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2017.05.006>
- Souki, G. Q., De Oliveira, A. S., Barcelos, M. T. C., Guerreiro, M. M. M., Da Costa Mendes, J., & Moura, L. R. C. (2023). Does guests-perceived value for money affect WOM and eWOM? The impact of consumer engagement on SNS on eWOM. *The TQM Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/tqm-03-2023-0088>
- Sparks, B. A., & Browning, V. (2011). The impact of online reviews on hotel booking intentions and perception of trust. *Tourism Management*, 32(6), 1310–1323. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2010.12.011>
- Sukhu, A., Seo, S., Scharff, R., & Kidwell, B. (2018). Emotional intelligence in transcendent customer experiences. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 35(7), 709–720. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jcm-06-2017-2242>
- Swanson, K. (2017). Destination brand love: managerial implications and applications to tourism businesses. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 10(1), 88–97. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jpmd-11-2016-0073>
- Tamilmani, K., Rana, N. P., Nunkoo, R., Raghavan, V., & Dwivedi, Y. K. (2020). Indian Travelers' Adoption of Airbnb Platform. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 24(1), 77–96. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-020-10060-1>
- Tan, C. C., Damnoen, P. S., Toprayoon, Y., Dabjan, N., & Damkam, K. (2021). An Exploratory Study of the Spirituality-Oriented Experiences of Tourists. In *Lecture notes in networks and systems* (pp. 307–314). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-3807-7_25
- Tang, J., Wang, J., Zhang, M., & Huang, W. (2023). How destination brand experience influences tourist citizenship behaviour: Testing mediation of brand relationship quality and moderation effects on commitment. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1080457>

- The Hindu Business Line. (2023). Kerala witnesses all-time record in tourist arrivals in 2023. *The Hindu Business Line*. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/kerala-witness-all-time-record-in-tourist-arrivals-in-2023/article68242478.ece>
- Trusov, M., Bucklin, R. E., & Pauwels, K. (2009). Effects of Word-of-Mouth versus Traditional Marketing: Findings from an Internet Social Networking Site. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), 90–102. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.5.90>
- Tsaur, S., Yen, C., & Hsiao, S. (2012). Transcendent Experience, Flow and Happiness for Mountain Climbers. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 15(4), 360–374. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.1881>
- Tussyadiah, I. P. (2013). Toward a Theoretical Foundation for Experience Design in Tourism. *Journal of Travel Research*, 53(5), 543–564. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287513513172>
- Yang, X., Mohammad, J., & Quoquab, F. (2024). A study of cultural distance, eWOM and perceived risk in shaping higher education students' destination image and future travel plan. *Journal of Tourism Futures*, 10(2), 165–184. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jtf-03-2023-0080>
- Yang, C., Yan, S., Wang, J., & Xue, Y. (2022). Flow Experiences and Virtual Tourism: The Role of Technological Acceptance and Technological Readiness. *Sustainability*, 14(9), 5361. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14095361>
- Yu, S., Zhang, H., Zheng, Q., Chu, D., Chen, T., & Chen, X. (2024b). Consumer behaviour based on the SOR model: How do short video advertisements affect furniture consumers' purchase intentions? *BioResources*, 19(2), 2639–2659. <https://doi.org/10.15376/biores.19.2.2639-2659>
- Wei, W., Torres, E., & Hua, N. (2016). Improving consumer commitment through the integration of self-service technologies: A transcendent consumer experience perspective. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 59, 105–115. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2016.09.004>
- Weerakit, N., & Tkachuk, A. (2024b). Motive based segmentation of the wellness tourism market. *International Journal of Spa and Wellness*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24721735.2024.2327646>
- Williams, K. J., & Harvey, D. (2001). TRANSCENDENT EXPERIENCE IN FOREST ENVIRONMENTS. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 21(3), 249–260. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jevp.2001.0204>
- Zeng, L., Li, R. Y. M., & Huang, X. (2021). Sustainable Mountain-Based Health and Wellness Tourist Destinations: The Interrelationships between Tourists' Satisfaction, Behavioural Intentions, and Competitiveness. *Sustainability*, 13(23), 13314. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su132313314>
- Zehrer, A. (2009). Service experience and service design: concepts and application in tourism SMEs. *Managing Service Quality*, 19(3), 332–349. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09604520910955339>