

How Important is e-WOM for an Agrotourism in Batu City? Second-order PLS-SEM Approach

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The objective of this research is to compare the influence of each dimension (first-order e-WOM) with its second-order e-WOM. This research also examined how e-WOM can influence tourists' decision behavior and satisfaction in Batu City agrotourism.

Methodology: This research was conducted using primary data in 2023. The population in this study consists of 119 respondents who have visited agrotourism in Batu City and obtained information about agrotourism from e-WOM on Social Networking Services. The data was processed using Warp-Partial Least Square (WarpPLS) 8.0.

Finding: E-WOM has proven itself as a valuable source of information for tourists visiting agrotourism in the city of Batu. With the help of e-WOM, tourists can obtain more up-to-date insights into the conditions of agrotourism. Agrotourism operators also benefit since they receive free marketing from their tourists.

Conclusion: Overall, this research results indicate a contrasting comparison between the first-order e-WOM model and the second-order e-WOM. Only two dimensions of e-WOM, namely the valence of opinion and content, have a direct influence on visitation decisions and tourist satisfaction. Additionally, this study demonstrates that all three dimensions of e-WOM collectively have a significant impact on tourist behavior. Second-order e-WOM has a more substantial impact on tourists in influencing their decisions and satisfaction levels.

Keywords: E-WOM; Tourist Behavior; Agrotourism; Social Networking Services.

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, industrial development is currently progressing rapidly (Soelton et al., 2020). Currently, the tourism industry plays a crucial role in its surroundings. The tourism industry significantly contributes to job creation (Zhao et al., 2023), national income growth (Florido-Benítez, 2022), as well as infrastructure development (Aram & Darioosh, 2013), economic drivers (Maulidah & Muhaimin, 2021), and also economic development (Supryadi et al., 2023). Even during times of crisis, the tourism industry has the potential to safeguard the national economy (Rahayu et al., 2023). In addition, agriculture-based tourism (agrotourism) is currently facing competition and uncertainty in tourist visits. The BPS data (2023), highlights fluctuations and a tendency of decreasing tourist visits to agrotourism in Kota Batu. To address this challenge, strategies need to be explored to enhance tourists' decision-making in choosing to visit the city. However, some consumers do not consider promotions as the primary factor when choosing (Hamdan et al., 2023), while social influence does (Rohman et al., 2020). Recommendations from friends or word-of-mouth communication (WOM) emerge as a powerful influence in shaping decision-making behavior before visiting (Lee, 2014).

Word-of-mouth (WOM) provides informal information regarding the offered products/services, and it has become a crucial reference for consumers in deciding whether a product/service aligns with their expectations. Information from WOM can alleviate doubts in the decision-making process (Ismagilova et al., 2020; Pauli et al., 2023). Additionally, Yadav et al. (2023) state that WOM can play a role in reducing perceived risks by enhancing knowledge levels and can take the form of critical e-WOM communication. Currently, online WOM or electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) has become a valuable reference platform for discovering various related reviews. This trend reduces time and space constraints, enabling recommendations from other tourists to spread quickly, extensively, and efficiently (Akdin, 2021; Lee, 2014). This makes e-WOM an alternative, reducing uncertainty in decision-making for tourists.

The implementation of e-WOM in agrotourism destinations has become crucial in the current digital era. The use of social networking services (SNS) is on the rise, and SNS plays a significant role in influencing tourist behavior (Jiang et al., 2021). The changing behavior of people in Indonesia, coupled with the increasing popularity of mobile phones, has led them to heavily rely on smartphones (Sriwidadi & Prabowo, 2022). This condition results in tourists leaning towards online reviews, friend recommendations, and electronically shared personal experiences to form their perceptions of a place through SNS. E-WOM can provide a more authentic and real-time representation of travel experiences (Goyal & Taneja, 2023), aiding potential tourists in making informed and contextual decisions (Amin, 2023). For agrotourism, maintaining a positive reputation in the digital space can enhance its appeal, broaden the potential reach of tourists, and build trust within the industry.

This study examines agrotourism in Kota Batu to determine the impact of implementing e-WOM on tourist satisfaction through visitation decisions. Tourist satisfaction and visitation decisions are crucial factors for the success of agrotourism. Satisfaction can be interpreted as behavior reflecting the fulfillment of expectations after visiting a destination. While there are studies on the influence of e-WOM on visitation decisions and tourist satisfaction (Pasaribu & Yuliawati, 2019), there is still an empirical gap in research that compares the implementation of e-WOM with the implementation of each dimension, and a scarcity of studies using the SEM-PLS second-order approach. Therefore, this research is necessary to test these variables.

Through this study, we also hope to contribute valuable insights for agrotourism units to consider factors influencing tourist behavior.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Electronic Word of Mouth

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) has become a focal point in influencing consumer behavior with the evolution of online communication through social media (Leong et al., 2022). e-WOM stems from the development of Word of Mouth (WOM), which entails the dissemination of information and recommendations directly to individuals or groups (Akbari et al., 2022). In the information dissemination process, e-WOM leverages online internet media to convey the quality of a product or service and the positive or negative experiences of an individual providing recommendations to potential consumers or others (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Harahap, 2017). Various forms of dissemination, including text, images, videos, and audio, follow current technological advancements, making them easily accessible to a wide audience (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006). The dissemination of information in the form of e-WOM in the tourism sector facilitates reaching a broader audience with fewer constraints on time and geography (Silaban et al., 2023).

Interactions conducted through online media, such as social media and websites, enable tourists to share and exchange opinions and experiences regarding a service or product (Camilleri & Kozak, 2022). This facilitates the spread of information to various segments, making word-of-mouth promotion more accessible and popular (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Compelling and positively valued information through e-WOM captures the attention of tourists, influencing their decision-making process (Gosal et al., 2020; Silaban et al., 2023).

Tourist Visit Decision

Visitation decisions represent one of the behaviors individuals engage in to fulfill their desires and needs in the tourism sector (Wibowo et al., 2020). Coşar & Kozak (2014) posit that visitation decisions are choices made by tourists before visiting a place or area, involving considerations related to various factors. The factors underpinning tourists' visitation decisions can stem from personal perspectives such as desires and needs, tourist experiences, as well as the intentions and purposes of the visit (Jannit & Aeka, 2016). It is crucial for companies to identify factors that can enhance visitor satisfaction (Haryati et al., 2021).

Tourist Satisfaction

Satisfaction is a perception felt by an individual through the comparison of expectations and actual experiences (Mohamad et al., 2019; Nurjannah et al., 2022). A customer who finds satisfaction in the value offered by a product or service is likely to remain a loyal customer for an extended period (Wasito & Baihaqi, 2023). In the context of agrotourism, tourist satisfaction is the feeling of joy or disappointment experienced by tourists during their visit (Libre et al., 2022). The more satisfied a tourist is after a visit, the more likely they are to express a desire to return and share positive or satisfying information or experiences with others (Quynh et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2012). Tjiptono (2019) explains that positive visitor satisfaction has beneficial effects on the company, including providing positive information to potential tourists.

The Relationship Between e-WOM and Visitation Decision

E-WOM provided by tourists can influence trust and the tourist visitation decision-making process (Gosal et al., 2020). The E-WOM conveyed serves as a consideration for tourists when deciding on their upcoming visits (Aprilia & Kusumawati, 2021). Previous research asserts that e-WOM marketing communication can significantly impact an individual's decision to visit a destination. Therefore, hypotheses can be formulated as follows:

- H1a.** There is a positive and significant influence of intensity on Visitation Decision
- H1b.** (VDC).
- There is a positive and significant influence of valence of opinion on Visitation
- H1c.** Decision (VDC).
- H1d.** There is a positive and significant influence of content on Visitation Decision (VDC).
- There is a positive and significant influence of second-order e-WOM on Visitation Decision (VDC).

The Relationship Between e-WOM and Tourist Satisfaction

Complete information from SNS or e-WOM can fulfill tourists' satisfaction (Goyal & Taneja, 2023). When tourists find information about a destination that meets their needs, satisfaction arises (Arabacıoğlu & Dedeoğlu, 2023). Previous research indicates that e-WOM can contribute to the satisfaction of potential visitors. Based on these premises, the following hypotheses are proposed in this study:

- H1a.** There is a positive and significant influence of intensity on Tourist Satisfaction (TSF).
- H1b.** There is a positive and significant influence of valence of opinion on Tourist Satisfaction (TSF).
- H1c.** There is a positive and significant influence of content on Tourist Satisfaction (TSF).
- H1d.** There is a positive and significant influence of second-order e-WOM on Tourist Satisfaction (TSF).

The Relationship between e-WOM, Tourist Satisfaction, and Mediated Visitation Decision

Tourists will seek information first about the destination they plan to visit (Gosal et al., 2020). Tourists' expectations are formed after obtaining information that meets their needs and preferences, and after that, they will proceed with their visit (Yerizal & Abror, 2019). When the conditions of agrotourism align with the information acquired and meet the expectations, tourists are likely to feel satisfied (Bang Nguyen Viet & Nguyen, 2020). Previous research indicates that visitation decisions can mediate the relationship between e-WOM and tourist satisfaction. The hypothesis is as follows:

- H1a.** There is a positive and significant influence of intensity on Tourist Satisfaction (TSF) mediated by Visitation Decision (VDC).
- H1b.** There is a positive and significant influence of valence of opinion on Tourist Satisfaction (TSF) mediated by Visitation Decision (VDC).
- H1c.** There is a positive and significant influence of content on Tourist Satisfaction (TSF) mediated by Visitation Decision (VDC).
- H1d.** There is a positive and significant influence of second-order e-WOM on Tourist Satisfaction (TSF) mediated by Visitation Decision (VDC)

Table 1. Research Indicators

No	Variables/Dimensions	Indicators
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1	Electronic Word of Mouth	
	a. Intensity	- Frequency of accessing information on SNS. - Frequency of interaction among users on SNS. - Number of reviews written by users on SNS.
	b. Valence of opinion	- Positive comments from users on SNS. - Recommendations from users on SNS.
	c. Content	- Information related to various tourist attractions. - Information related to the company's quality on SNS. - Information related to the prices offered by the company.
2	Tourist Visit Decision	- Stability in choosing agrotourism destinations. - Habits in visiting agrotourism destinations. - Engaging in repeat visits.
3	Tourist Satisfaction	- Price suitability - Service quality - Tourism quality - Emotional factors - Ease of reaching agrotourism destinations

Research Framework

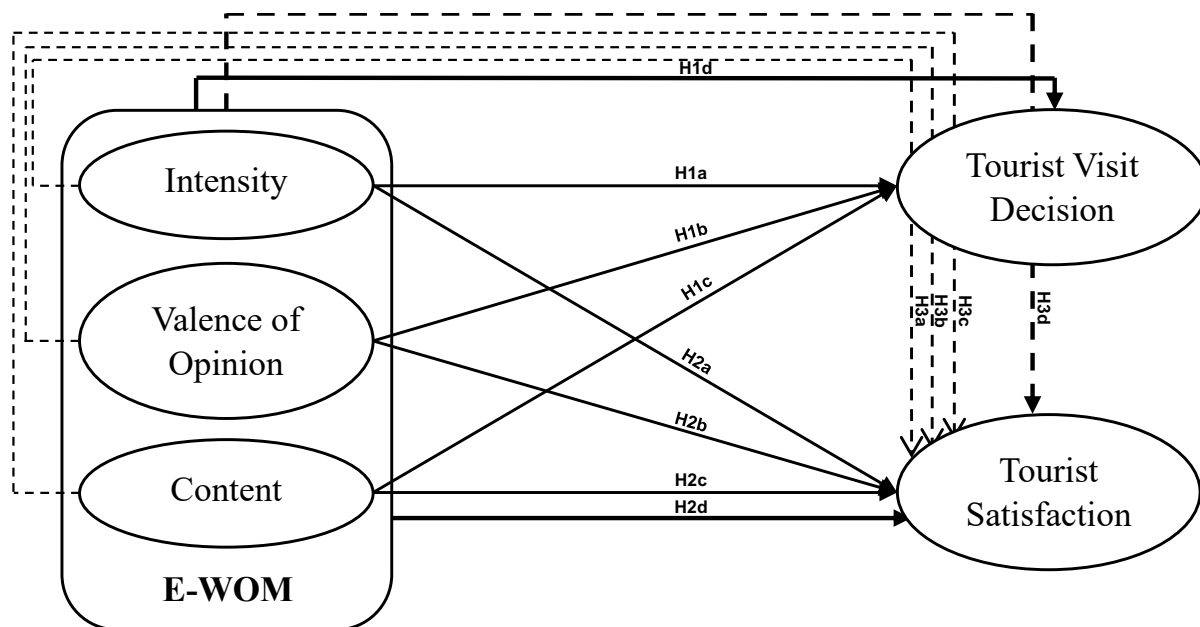


Figure 1. Research Framework. Notes: — Direct Relationship; - - - Indirect Relationship

METHOD

The research with a quantitative approach was conducted in agrotourism in Kota Batu to obtain information in line with the researcher's objectives. Primary data were collected by distributing questionnaires directly at the location. The questionnaire was designed based on the variables

used. The units of analysis in this study involve the comparison of two construct models, the importance of e-WOM for agrotourism, and the observational units include the amount of information, online testimonials/reviews, and interactions between tourists and business practitioners.

The selection of respondents is determined based on the Cohen table, resulting in a minimum sample size of 110 (Hair et al., 2021). This research adopts a non-probability sampling approach, a method that does not provide equal chances for all units in the population to be selected as research samples (Sugiyono & Lestari, 2021). Purposive sampling is utilized in this study, a method of sample selection that imposes specific characteristic limitations to align with the required sample for the research (Sugiyono & Lestari, 2021). The respondents in this study consist of 119 individuals who have visited agrotourism sites in Kota Batu, selecting these locations based on information related to agrotourism obtained from e-WOM on SNS.

The conceptual model employed in this study is portrayed through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), linking latent variables and measurement variables associated with cause-and-effect relationships (Solimun et al., 2017). The data in this research are analyzed using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach. The analysis procedure in this study comprises two stages. The first stage involves the evaluation of the measurement model or the outer model, followed by the second stage, which involves the evaluation of the structural model or the inner model (Hair et al., 2021). Both stages are analyzed using the WarpPLS 8.0 software with a 3-dimensional and 3-variable model, covering e-WOM (intensity, valence of opinion, content), visit decision and tourist satisfaction

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

Based on the data obtained from the questionnaire distribution, it is evident that the largest age category is 17-25 years, with 79 respondents (66.4%). This indicates that the majority of visitors to agrotourism in Kota Batu fall within the age range of 17-25 years, which is the teenage age group. More than half of the visitors are female (63 respondents), while the remainder are male. Consistently, research shows that women tend to require more refreshing experiences due to their susceptibility to depression and anxiety compared to men (Seedat et al., 2009; Suanrueang et al., 2022).

Agrotourism in Batu City is predominantly visited by tourists from outside the city, totaling 112 individuals (94.1%). People tend to prefer visiting attractions outside their city rather than within it. This preference may be attributed to the fact that the majority of tourists are accustomed to the atmosphere (Grilli et al., 2021) and culture (Bock, 2015) of their city, leading them to choose to travel to other cities.

This study is also dominated by tourists with an upper-middle income range, constituting almost 40% of the participants. Visitors with academic/university-level education dominate agrotourism in Batu City, accounting for 52.1%. This aligns with the surrounding conditions, as there are many universities and institutions of higher learning in the vicinity.

Results

Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

Table 2. Combined Loading and Cross Loadings Value

	INT	VOP	CTN	Type	P Value
INT1	(0.873)	0.209	-0.136	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001
INT2	(0.853)	-0.348	0.158	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001
INT3	(0.875)	0.132	-0.018	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001
VOP1	0.054	(0.897)	0.178	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001
VOP2	-0.054	(0.897)	-0.178	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001
CTN1	-0.112	-0.059	(0.843)	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001
CTN2	0.372	-0.186	(0.813)	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001
CTN3	-0.258	0.250	(0.807)	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001
	EWOM	VDC	TSF		
INT	(0.919)	-0.047	-0.081	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001
VOP	(0.916)	0.107	-0.010	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001
CTN	(0.945)	-0.058	0.089	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001
VDC1	0.053	(0.844)	0.040	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001
VDC2	-0.190	(0.807)	0.113	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001
VDC3	0.133	(0.825)	-0.151	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001
TSF1	0.028	-0.077	(0.878)	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001
TSF2	-0.105	0.044	(0.819)	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001
TSF3	0.054	0.045	(0.848)	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001
TSF4	-0.107	0.041	(0.873)	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001
TSF5	0.129	-0.050	(0.847)	<i>Reflective</i>	<0.001

Source: Processed primary data

According to Hair et al. (2021), loading factor values between 0.6 and 0.7 are considered acceptable, and loading factor values above 0.8 are considered high. Table 2 displays the loading factor values for both models, including first-order and second-order conditions (0.807 - 0.945). Based on these results, it can be concluded that the overall loading factor values meet the criteria for convergent validity, indicating that the convergence of indicators is valid and accepted.

Composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha are used to assess the reliability of the research instrument. The criteria for using composite reliability require these values to be greater than 0.7, while Cronbach's alpha should exceed 0.6. When these values have surpassed the specified criteria, it can be stated that all variables in this study have met the criteria (Hair et al., 2021; Solimun et al., 2017).

Table 3. Discriminant Validity and Reliability

Variable	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach Alpha
First-order e-WOM Model			
INT	0.751	0.901	0.835
CTN	0.805	0.892	0.758
VOP	0.675	0.861	0.759
VDC	0.681	0.865	0.766
TSF	0.728	0.930	0.906

Second-order e-WOM Model

EWOM	0.933	0.917	0.635
VDC	0.865	0.766	0.681
TSF	0.930	0.906	0.728

Source: Processed primary data

Discriminant validity is employed to understand the differences between the concepts of each latent variable compared to others. The AVE with values above 0.50 meets the criteria for convergent validity as required (Hair et al., 2021; Solimun et al., 2017). Based on Table 3, the AVE values for all variables, both in the model of each dimension and second-order, have shown values above 0.50, indicating that all constructs have good convergent validity.

Table 3 provides the composite reliability values for all variables above 0.7, and Cronbach's alpha values for all variables are above 0.5. This indicates that each variable can be relied upon as a research instrument and has been consistent in measuring its construct because each variable meets the established criteria.

Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

Path Coefficient and Significant

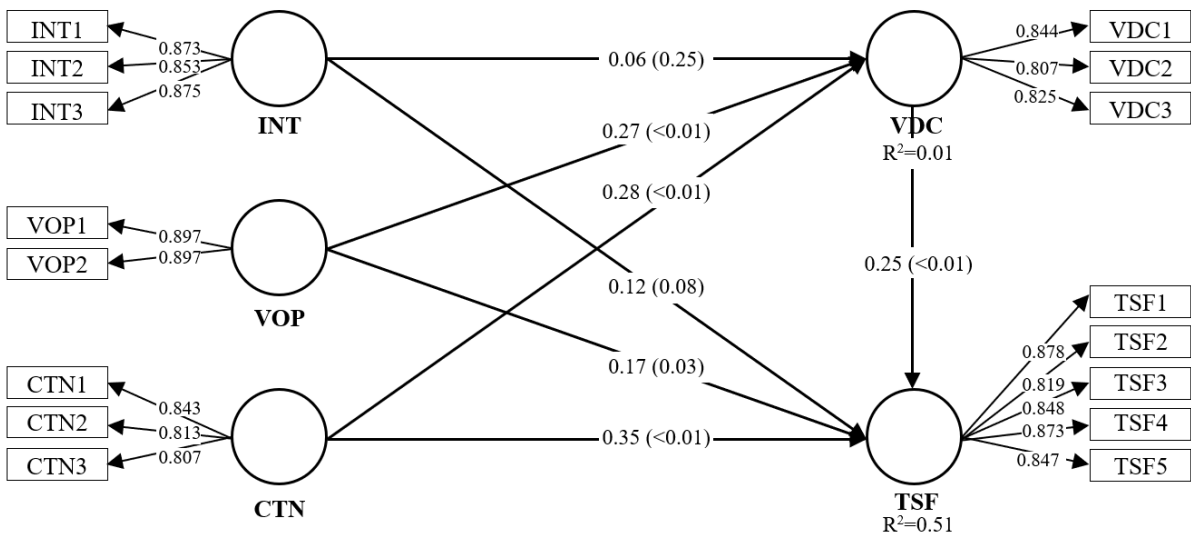


Figure 2. First-order e-WOM Model

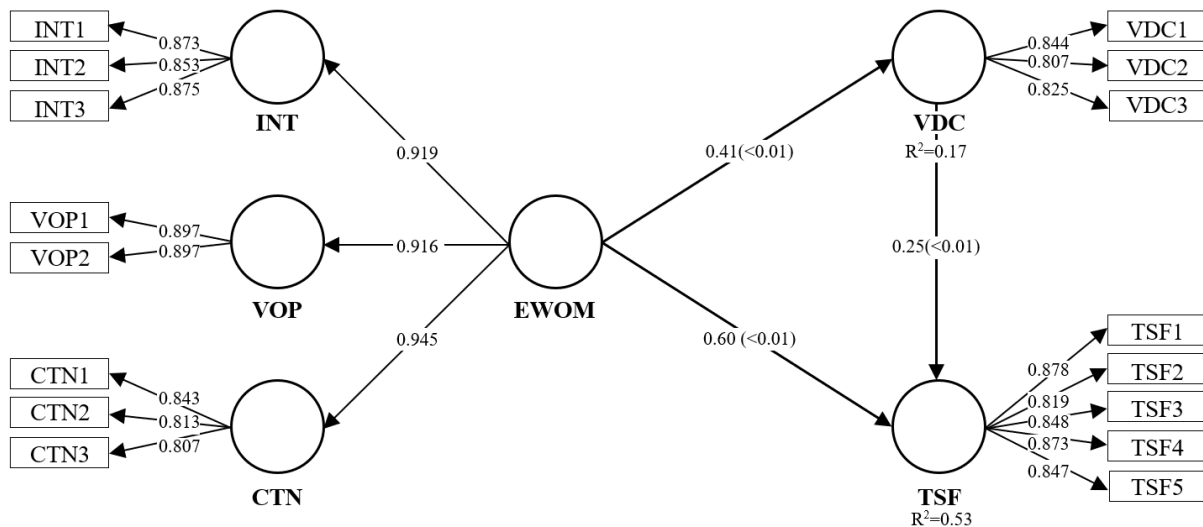


Figure 3. Second-order e-WOM Model

Based on the statements of Hair et al. (2021) and Solimun et al. (2017), hypothesis testing can be observed from the inner model based on the significance values. When the significance value (p-value) is ≤ 0.05 , the independent variable influences the dependent variable. Path coefficient evaluation is used to determine whether variables have a positive or negative impact on each other. If the path coefficient value is closer to 0, the relationship is weaker. The following are the results of hypothesis testing based on Figures 1 and 2.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results

	Variable	Path Coefficient	P-value	Test Result
First-order e-WOM Model				
H1a	Intensity → Visit Decision	0.06	0.25	Not Significant
H1b	Valence of Opinion → Visit Decision	0.27	<math><0.01</math>	Significant
H1c	Content → Visit Decision	0.28	<math><0.01</math>	Significant
H2a	Intensity → Tourist Satisfaction	0.12	0.08	Not Significant
H2b	Valence of Opinion → Tourist Satisfaction	0.17	0.03	Significant
H2c	Content → Tourist Satisfaction	0.35	<math><0.01</math>	Significant
H3a	Intensity → Visit Decision → Tourist Satisfaction	0.015	0.407	Not Significant
H3b	Valence of Opinion → Visit Decision → Tourist Satisfaction	0.067	0.148	Not Significant
H3c	Content → Visit Decision → Tourist Satisfaction	-0.07	0.137	Not Significant
Second-order e-WOM Model				

H1d	e-WOM → Visit Decision	0.41	<0.01	Significant
H2d	e-WOM → Tourist Satisfaction	0.60	<0.01	Significant
H3d	e-WOM → Visit Decision → Tourist Satisfaction	0.101	0.05	Significant

Source: Processed primary data

Results Discussion

E-WOM on visit decision.

The research findings, as per Table 4, reveal a complex relationship between e-WOM dimensions (intensity, valence of opinion, and content) and VDC. Overall, H1b, H1c, and H1d are accepted, while H1a is rejected. Individually, VOP and CTN show a significant influence on visit decisions, with a p-value <0.01. However, surprisingly, the INT dimension indicates an insignificant impact on visit decisions, as indicated by the p-value of 0.25.

Furthermore, when considering the simultaneous impact of all e-WOM dimensions on visit decisions, this study identifies a significant simultaneous influence with a p-value <0.01, meaning H1d is accepted. This implies that even though INT alone may not be significant in influencing visit decisions, the combined effect of INT, VOP, and CTN collectively contributes significantly to shaping the decision-making behavior of tourists to visit agrotourism.

E-WOM on tourist satisfaction.

Table 4 provides an overview indicating that H2b and H2c are accepted, but not H2a. Individually, the VOP and CTN dimensions show a significant influence on tourist satisfaction, with p-values of 0.03 and <0.01, respectively, emphasizing the crucial role of positive sentiments and informative content in shaping overall tourist satisfaction. However, the INT dimension shows a marginally non-significant impact on tourist satisfaction, as indicated by the p-value of 0.08.

When considering the simultaneous impact of all e-WOM dimensions on tourist satisfaction, this study identifies a collectively significant influence with a p-value of 0.01. This implies that, although the intensity dimension may not individually have a significant impact on tourist satisfaction, its inclusion in the overall context of e-WOM, along with valence of opinion and content, creates a collective effect that significantly influences overall tourist satisfaction.

E-WOM on tourist satisfaction and mediated by visit decision.

This study, based on Table 4, explores the intricate relationship between e-WOM dimensions (intensity, valence of opinion, and content) on tourist satisfaction (TSF) and mediated by visit decision (VDC). Surprisingly, the research findings indicate that individually, none of the e-WOM dimensions has a significant impact on tourist satisfaction when mediated by the visit decision. The dimensions of INT, VOP, and CTN, when considered separately, do not show a substantial effect on tourist satisfaction mediated by tourists' visit decisions.

However, noteworthy findings emerge when testing the impact of second-order e-WOM on tourist satisfaction mediated by the visit decision. The combined influence of INT, VOP, and CTN in the e-WOM construct demonstrates a significant effect on tourist satisfaction mediated by the visit decision. This suggests that the interaction between e-WOM dimensions collectively contributes to shaping tourist satisfaction, particularly after being mediated by tourists' visit choices.

CONCLUSION

This research has produced a novel research model, bringing innovation compared to the study by Pasaribu & Yuliawati (2019). The findings indicate a contrasting comparison between the first-order e-WOM model and the second-order e-WOM model. Only two e-WOM dimensions, namely valence of opinion and content, have a direct influence on visit decisions and tourist satisfaction. Additionally, this study demonstrates that all three e-WOM dimensions collectively have a significant impact on tourist behavior. Second-order e-WOM has a more substantial effect on tourists in influencing their decisions and satisfaction levels.

This research indicates that intensity does not influence the decision to visit and visitor satisfaction; this may be due to the fact that the quality of content and the strength of other visitors' opinions are crucial factors influencing them. The three dimensions of e-WOM do not affect visitor satisfaction through the decision to visit; however, when combined as a whole, e-WOM influences visitor satisfaction regarding the decision to visit. This suggests that intensity, valence of opinion, and content are integral components in formulating the e-WOM variables.

For agrotourism in Batu City, it is recommended to pay attention to all three e-WOM dimensions, especially the two dimensions that have individual influences, namely valence of opinion and content. Additionally, agrotourism establishments can enhance or maintain e-WOM marketing due to its significant influence on tourist behavior.

The recommendation for future researchers involves expanding the scope of the study by increasing the sample size, which can strengthen the generalizability of findings. Furthermore, it is advised to explore or employ additional dimensions/indicators to deepen the understanding of the studied phenomenon. These steps are expected to identify and further delve into aspects that may have remained undiscovered, providing a significant contribution to a more comprehensive understanding of this research field.

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