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The Effect of Destination Attractiveness on the Intention to Visit Rural Tourist Destinations Mediated by electronic word of mouth

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Abstract

This study investigates the effect of destination attractiveness on the intention to visit rural tourist destinations, with a focus on the mediating role of electronic word of mouth. The research was conducted on a sample of 314 tourists in rural areas, utilizing structural equation modeling and path analysis to test the study's hypotheses. The findings revealed a significant direct effect of destination attractiveness on the intention to visit rural tourist destinations, as well as a significant direct effect of destination attractiveness on electronic word of mouth. Additionally, the study identified a significant direct effect of electronic word of mouth on the intention to visit rural tourist destinations.

The study concluded that electronic word of mouth serves as a mediating variable, partially mediating the relationship between destination attractiveness and the intention to visit rural tourist destinations.

Keys Word:
Destination attractiveness;
Intention to visit;
Electronic word of mouth;
Rural Tourism.

JEL Classification Codes: L83; M31; P25.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of technology has revolutionized the way information is disseminated and shared among individuals. Electronic word of mouth has risen as a potent force in shaping consumer behavior, including their intention to visit tourist destinations. With the increasing popularity of social media platforms and online review websites, individuals now have the ability to share their experiences and opinions about various products and services, including tourist destinations, with a wider audience.

Rural tourist destinations, characterized by their natural beauty, cultural heritage, and tranquility, have gained significant attention in recent years. These destinations offer a unique experience for tourists seeking to escape the hustle and bustle of urban life and immerse themselves in nature. However, attracting tourists to rural areas can be challenging due to limited resources and infrastructure compared to urban areas. Therefore, understanding the factors that influence tourists' intention to visit rural tourist destinations is crucial for the sustainable development of these areas.

One important factor that can significantly influence tourists' decision-making process is the destination attractiveness. The destination attractiveness refers to the overall attractiveness and desirability of a tourist destination, which includes factors such as natural beauty, cultural heritage, recreational activities, and amenities. Previous research has shown that the Destination attractiveness plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' intentions to visit a particular destination.

1.1. Problem Statement:

After the preceding discussion, the following question arises:

- What is the effect of destination attractiveness on the intention to visit rural tourist destinations, considering the electronic word of mouth as a mediating variable?

1.2. Study Objectives:

The objective of this study is to assess the indirect influence of destination attractiveness on the intention to visit rural tourist destinations, with electronic word of mouth as a mediator. Additionally, the study seeks to evaluate the direct effects of destination attractiveness on electronic word of mouth and intention to visit rural tourist destinations, as well as the direct impact of electronic word of mouth on the intention to visit rural tourist destinations.

1.3. Methodology and Study Tools:

To achieve the study objectives, we employed an appropriate descriptive-analytical methodology. Secondary data were utilized in the theoretical aspect of the study by reviewing a variety of articles related to the study variables. As for the applied aspect, an electronic questionnaire was utilized as a data collection tool, and the initial data were analyzed using SPSS V.23 and Smart PLS4 software.

2. Theoretical Framework:

2.1. Rural Tourism

Rural tourism is a dynamic and sustainable form of tourism that has gained momentum globally. It brings economic development, cultural preservation, social empowerment, and environmental conservation to rural communities. By attracting diverse visitors, it creates jobs, generates income, and celebrates local heritage. Additionally, rural tourism promotes sustainable practices and raises awareness about environmental protection. It showcases unique landscapes, encouraging visitors to respect and preserve the environment. Overall, rural tourism revitalizes

communities by combining economic, cultural, social, and environmental benefits for all involved.

2.1.1 Definition Rural Tourism

Rural tourism occurs in non-urban regions and typically involves nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyle, culture, angling, and sightseeing. Rural tourism offers visitors a chance to experience the unique culture and lifestyle of rural communities. It provides the opportunity to engage in various leisure activities such as farm visits, nature walks, and cultural events. Rural tourism is an important industry for promoting rural economic development and increasing farmers' income. It has been recognized as a strategy for developing rural areas, improving the quality of life of rural residents, and preserving the natural environment. (He, Wang, Gao, Wang, & Choi, 2021, p. 1)

It offers a much-needed break from the fast-paced and frenetic energy of urban living, providing a treasured respite in a tranquil and idyllic setting. With its untouched beauty and harmonious surroundings, this destination allows tourists to truly unwind and connect with the soothing rhythms of nature. Beyond its natural allure, it also presents a captivating tapestry of rich cultures and traditions, inviting visitors to delve into an immersive experience that embraces the essence of local life. (Kumar, Valeri, & Shekhar, 2021, p. 3)

2.1.2 Elements of Rural Tourism

The key elements that contribute to rural tourism include the location, attractions, services, experiences offered, and sustainability practices.

- Location: The rural setting significantly shapes the experience, including the physical environment, accessibility, accommodations, safety, and overall atmosphere. The natural beauty and diverse landscapes create a serene and tranquil

environment. Easy access to different parts of the region enhances exploration. Accommodations range from charming bed and breakfasts to rustic cabins. Rural areas offer a sense of security with close-knit communities and lower crime rates. The slower pace of life and strong sense of community create a warm and welcoming ambiance that adds depth to the rural experience. (Demirovic, Berjan, Milentijevic, Bilali, & Syromiatnikova, 2019, p. 31)

- **Attractions:** These can range from natural sites like parks, wildlife reserves, and untouched landscapes to heritage sites with rich historical significance. Moreover, they may encompass local events, festivals, and traditional celebrations that showcase the vibrant culture of the region, providing visitors with a unique and immersive experience. Furthermore, these destinations can also feature various recreational activities such as hiking, boating, and wildlife spotting, allowing visitors to engage in adventurous pursuits and connect with nature on a deeper level. (Yacob, Johannes, & Qomariyah, 2019, p. 123)

- **Services:** High-quality services are integral to a satisfactory rural tourism experience. This includes a wide range of hospitality services such as comfortable accommodations, friendly and knowledgeable staff, delicious local cuisine, and personalized experiences tailored to the interests of the visitors. Additionally, efficient and reliable transportation options should be available to ensure convenient travel within the rural area and to nearby attractions. Guided tours that showcase the unique cultural and natural heritage of the region can greatly enhance the overall experience for tourists. These well-organized tours should be led by experienced guides who possess in-depth knowledge about the local history, traditions, and landmarks. (Rahmawati, Permadi, & Rinuastuti, 2021, p. 47)

- Experiences: A crucial aspect of rural tourism lies in the unique experiences it offers - from participating in traditional customs, such as festivals and rituals that have been passed down through generations, to immersing oneself in the rich tapestry of local arts and crafts that showcase the region's cultural heritage. Moreover, rural tourism provides an opportunity for visitors to gain hands-on knowledge about diverse agricultural practices that sustain the community, allowing them to truly appreciate the hard work and dedication of local farmers while indulging in the scenic beauty and tranquility of the countryside. (Chen, Sotiriadis, & Shen, 2023, p. 2)

- Sustainability: Sustainability is a fundamental cornerstone of rural tourism, as it places great emphasis on the importance of minimizing negative impacts on the environment, society, and local communities. Moreover, it strives to make positive contributions to local economies by supporting local businesses, creating sustainable employment opportunities, and fostering cultural exchange and appreciation. By adopting sustainable practices such as promoting eco-friendly accommodations and encouraging responsible tourism behaviors, rural tourism can effectively contribute to the preservation of natural resources and the overall well-being of the destinations it operates (Polukhina, Sheresheva, Efremova, Suranova, & Anton, 2021, p. 7)

2.2. Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

Electronic word of mouth refers to any favorable or unfavorable communication made by potential, current, or past customers regarding a product or company. This includes opinions, reviews, recommendations, and critiques. It is important to note that eWOM is not limited to one particular platform or medium; it can be shared and disseminated through various online channels such as social media platforms, forums, blogs, review

websites, and more. The widespread accessibility of the internet enables eWOM to reach a multitude of people and institutions globally. (Babic-Rosario, Sotgiu,, & De Valck, 2019, pp. 424-425)

The creation of electronic word-of-mouth is often driven by customer experiences, perceptions, and evaluations of products or services. These experiences can encompass a wide range of interactions, including the actual usage of a product, interactions with customer service representatives, or even the overall brand reputation. It is through these experiences that customers form opinions and make judgments about a particular product or service, ultimately leading to the generation of eWOM. (Verma & Yadav, 2021, p. 112)

The exposure to electronic word-of-mouth varies among consumers depending on their frequency of internet use and their level of involvement in online communities. It has been observed that the more integrated a consumer is into an online community, the higher the likelihood of being exposed to eWOM information. This suggests that active participation in online communities amplifies the chances of encountering and engaging with eWOM content. (Alsheikh, Aziz, & Alsheikh, 2021, p. 1154)

The evaluation of electronic Word-of-Mouth depends on several factors, including its perceived credibility, quality, reliability, and effectiveness in influencing consumer behavior. (Bilal, Zeng, Dukhaykh, Fan, & Trunk, 2021, p. 10)

High-quality electronic word-of-mouth is characterized by being relevant, reliable, and complete with a balanced presentation of facts, allowing consumers to make well-informed decisions based on accurate and comprehensive information. (Erkan & Evans, 2016, p. 50)

2.3. Tourist visit intention

Conceptually, the "intention to visit" a tourist destination refers to a prospective traveler's plan or decision to travel to a specific location, driven by underlying purposes or motivations. This decision arises from an individual's subjective evaluation of the destination based on multiple factors, signifying the probability that a person will perform or engage in visitation behavior at a particular time in the future. (Alsheikh, Aziz, & Alsheikh, 2021, p. 1155)

Understanding tourists' intentions and motivations helps destinations in several key aspects: (Ismail, Zainordin, & Aziz, 2023, pp. 199-200)

- Improving destination image: Analyzing tourists' perceptions of a destination's personality and identifying the factors that drive their interest enables destinations to emphasize their strengths and address weaknesses, thereby enhancing their overall image.
- Optimizing marketing efforts: Knowledge of tourists' motivations informs targeted marketing campaigns aimed at specific segments, ensuring that promotional activities align with tourists' interests and values.
- Enhancing environmental sustainability: Understanding tourists' attitudes towards sustainability helps destinations implement responsible practices that preserve the environment and protect natural resources, thus promoting long-term viability.
- Managing electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM): Monitoring and responding to online reviews and comments enable destinations to manage their reputations, addressing misconceptions and showcasing positive experiences.
- Influencing destination choice: Identifying the factors that influence tourists' choices empowers destinations to compete

effectively against rival locations, helping them stand out in crowded markets.

- Encouraging revisits: Understanding tourists' motivations for revisiting a destination facilitates the implementation of initiatives designed to encourage repeat visits, boosting loyalty and generating additional revenues.
- Meeting tourist expectations: Insights into tourists' motivations allow destinations to anticipate and fulfill tourists' needs and wants, resulting in higher levels of satisfaction and improved guest experiences.

By focusing on tourists' intentions and motivations, destinations can adapt their offerings, marketing strategies, and management approaches to better serve their guests, ultimately driving growth and success within the tourism sector.

2.4. Destination attractiveness

2.4.1 Destination attractiveness and its importance:

Destination attractiveness refers to the overall appeal and desirability of a location or place as a tourist destination. It encompasses various factors that make a destination appealing to visitors, such as natural beauty, cultural heritage, recreational activities, infrastructure, safety, cleanliness, and hospitality services. The concept of destination attractiveness is crucial in tourism marketing and management as it influences travelers' decisions on where to visit. (Lam & Ryan, 2024, p. 16)

The importance of destination attractiveness lies in its significant impact on the tourism industry. A destination's attractiveness directly influences the number of visitors it attracts, their length of stay, spending behavior, and overall satisfaction. An attractive destination can drive up tourism revenue, foster job opportunities, and stimulate economic development within the local community. Furthermore, an attractive destination can set it

apart from competitors, elevate its brand reputation, and encourage repeat visits and favorable word-of-mouth referrals. Hence, destination attractiveness is pivotal in determining the success and longevity of a tourism destination. (Sakyi & Cornelius, 2021, p. 135)

2.4.2 Attributes of Destination Attractiveness:

The most important attribute of destination attractiveness varies among destinations due to the unique qualities that appeal to different groups of travelers. However, some generalizable aspects emerge from the literature. Scenic beauty, cultural heritage, history, environmental qualities, recreational opportunities, hospitality, and accessibility are commonly cited across various studies as influential elements in determining destination attractiveness. (Sakyi & Cornelius, 2021, p. 136)

The impact of these attributes on destination choice can be understood through the lens of the push-pull theory, which posits that tourists are motivated to travel by internal desires (push factors) and influenced by external stimuli (pull factors). Pull factors like scenic beauty, rich cultural heritage, and high-quality infrastructure serve to attract tourists to a destination. (Sakyi & Cornelius, 2021, p. 137)

For example, O'Leary and Deegan (2005) discovered that picturesque landscapes, serene environments, price-quality ratio, and cleanliness of areas were key factors drawing tourists to a destination. Naidoo and Ramsook-Munhurrun (2012) highlighted historical landmarks, beaches, and local cuisine as significant attractions in Mauritius. Moreover, Chang, Kivela, and Mak (2011) observed that tourists' familiarity with their own food culture, contextual aspects of dining experiences, food variety, destination perception, service quality, and tour guide performance all contributed significantly to destination

attractiveness. It is critical to note that the relative importance of each attribute differs among destinations and traveler segments. As such, understanding the specific mix of attributes that drive visitor preferences is crucial for effective destination management and marketing efforts. (Sakyi & Cornelius, 2021, p. 137)

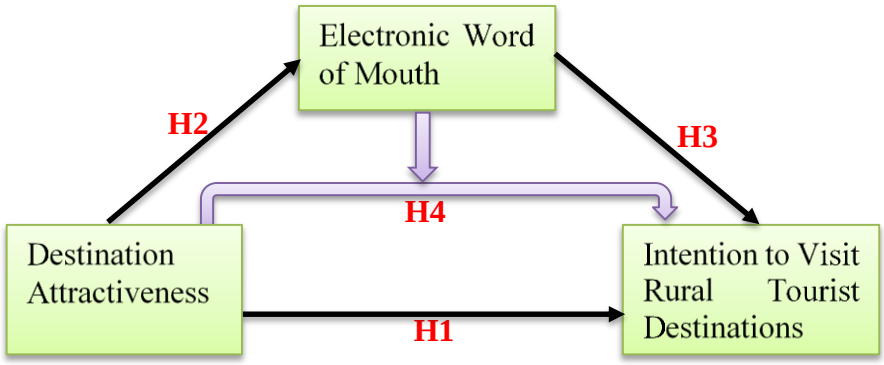
3. Applied Framework

3.1. Study Model and its Hypotheses:

3.1.1 Study Model:

The study model and its hypotheses were developed based on previous research, following the method proposed by Baron & Kenny (1986). This method outlines three conditions: firstly, the independent variable must impact the dependent variable; secondly, the independent variable should influence the mediating variable, which subsequently affects the dependent variable; and finally, there should be a relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable in the presence of the mediating variable. The figure below depicts the study model and its hypotheses:

Figure (1): Study Model



Source: Prepared by the researcher based on a set of previous studies.

3.1.2 Study hypotheses:

Drawing from the previous study model, the following hypotheses can be posited:

H_1: There is a statistically significant relationship between destination attractiveness and the intention to visit rural tourist destinations.

H_2: there is a statistically significant relationship between destination attractiveness and electronic word of mouth.

H_3: There is a statistically significant relationship between electronic word of mouth and the intention to visit rural tourist destinations.

H_4: There is a statistically significant relationship between destination attractiveness and the intention to visit rural tourist destinations, with electronic word of mouth as a mediating variable.

3.2. Sample and Study Instrument:

3.2.1 Study Population and Sample: The study population consists of all potential tourists who have visited or have the intention to visit rural tourist areas in the future. Due to the difficulty of conducting a comprehensive survey of all individuals in the study population, we relied on a sample comprising 314 clients from among these tourists.

3.2.2 Study Tool: To collect field data, a questionnaire was used as a tool to measure the effect of destination attractiveness (independent variable) on the intention to visit rural tourist destinations for the customer (dependent variable), in the presence of electronic word of mouth as a mediating variable. The formulation of its statements and the formation of the dimensions of the independent variable were based on a range of previous studies. The following table illustrates the variables used in the study tool and their coding during the analysis:

Table 1: Encoding Study Variables

Latent variables	Manifest variables
EWOM	Ewom1, Ewom2, Ewom3, Ewom4
Destination attractiveness	Attractiv1, Attractiv2, Attractiv3, Attractiv4, Attractiv5
Intention to visit rural tourist destinations	Intent1, Intent2, Intent3, Intent4, Intent5

Source: Prepared by the researcher.

As illustrated in the above table, the manifest variables for the latent variable of electronic word-of-mouth have been encoded as follows: Ewom1, Ewom2, Ewom3, Ewom4. Concerning the manifest variables representing the latent variable of destination attractiveness, they have been encoded as follows: Attractive1, Attractiv1, Attractiv2, Attractiv3, Attractiv4, Attractiv5. Regarding the latent variable of intention to visit rural tourist destinations, the phrases expressing its manifest variables have been encoded as follows: Intent1, Intent2, Intent3, Intent4, Intent5.

3.2.3 Reliability of the Study Instrument:

Reliability of the scale refers to obtaining consistent responses when redistributing the questionnaire to the same individuals under the same circumstances. It is verified through Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and the results obtained are depicted in the following table:

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for study instrument

	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
Study instrument	14	0.947

Source: Compiled by the researcher based on the outputs of SPSS.

From the preceding table, it is evident that the total reliability coefficient of the study instrument reached 0.947. Notably, this value surpasses the minimum threshold of 0.7, which is

indicative of the instrument's reliability. Consequently, we deduce that the study instrument possesses the requisite stability, enabling us to conduct further statistical analyses.

3.3 Descriptive Analysis of Sample Demographic Data

The questionnaire distributed included a set of inquiries regarding the demographic characteristics of the sample individuals. The outcomes can be highlighted through the following table:

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Variable		Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Male	189	60.19
	Female	125	39.81
Level of education	Under High School	31	9.88
	High School	69	21.97
	Bachelor	112	35.67
	Master	95	30.25
	Postgraduate	7	2.23
Age	Below 22 years	85	27.07
	22-30 years	146	46.49
	31-40 years	62	19.75
	40-50 years	21	6.69
Monthly income	under 30000 dinars	131	41.72
	between 30000 and 60000 D	108	34.39
	above 60000 dinars	75	23.89

Source: Compiled by the researcher based on the outputs of SPSS.

The table above provides valuable insights into the demographic characteristics of the respondents based on gender, age, education level, and monthly income.

- Gender: The majority of the respondents are male, constituting approximately 60.19% of the total sample, while females make up

39.81%. This indicates a slight imbalance in gender representation within the sample.

Age: The largest age group falls within the 22-30 years range, making up 46.49% of the total sample. Respondents under 22 years and those between 31-40 years represent significant proportions as well, at 27.07% and 19.75% respectively. However, there's a noticeable decrease in participation among respondents aged 40-50 years, constituting only 6.69% of the sample**.**

Education Level: The majority of respondents hold either a Bachelor's or Master's degree, with Bachelor's degree holders being the largest group at 35.67%, followed closely by those with a Master's degree at 30.28%. Respondents with education levels under High School or High School represent smaller proportions, indicating a higher level of education among the majority of the sample.

Monthly Income: The distribution of monthly income reveals that a significant portion of respondents earns less than 30000 dinars, constituting 41.72% of the sample. A considerable portion falls within the income range of 30000-60000 dinars, comprising 34.39% of the sample. Respondents with incomes above 60000 dinars represent a smaller proportion, accounting for 23.89% of the total sample.

3.4 Evaluation of Measurement Tool Axes

The evaluation: very low if the mean is between 1 and 1.80, low if the mean is between 1.81 and 2.60, Moderate if the mean is between 2.61 and 3.40, high if the mean is between 3.41 and 4.20, very high if the mean is between 4.21 and 5.

Table 4: Evaluation of Measurement Tool Axes

	Mean	**standard deviation**	**standard deviation**
Destination attractiveness	3.65	0.730	High
eWOM	3.49	0.787	High
intention to visit	3.37	0.833	Moderate

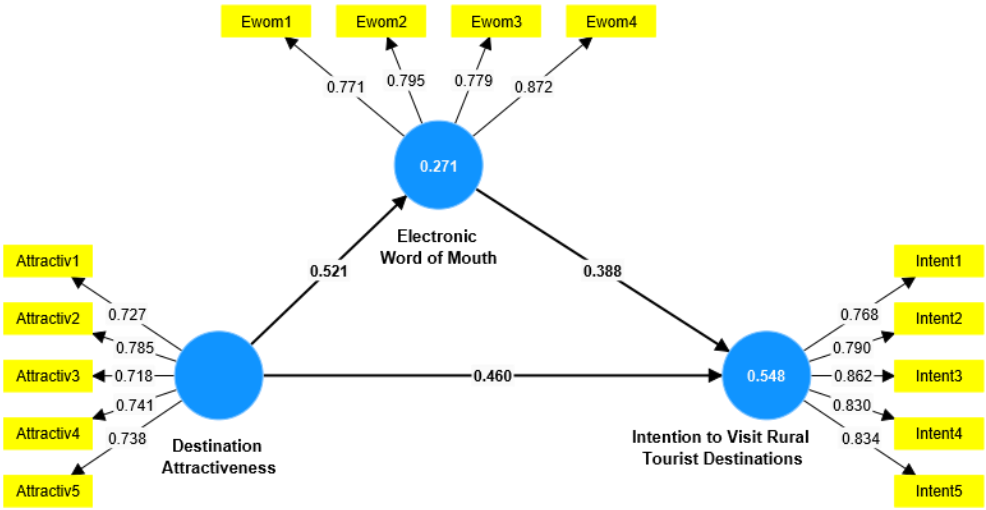
Source: Compiled by the researcher based on the outputs of SPSS.

As discerned from the preceding table, the axis of destination attractiveness attained a high evaluation, with a mean of 3.65 and a standard deviation of 0.730. Similarly, the axis of eWOM achieved a high appraisal, with a mean of 3.49 and a standard deviation of 0.787. Additionally, the axis of intention to visit rural tourist destinations garnered a moderate evaluation, with a mean of 3.37 and a standard deviation of 0.833.

3.5. Presentation and Analysis of Study Model:

The latent and manifest variables were represented in a model that integrates them to examine saturations, indicating the extent to which the manifest variables (questionnaire items) can express and accurately measure the latent variables (study variables). Upon saturation examination, it became evident that all items met the minimum required threshold of 0.70. Thus, the model, as depicted in the following figure, illustrates it:

Figure 2: Structural Model



Source: Smart PLS 4 outputs.

It is evident from the preceding figure that the model comprises three latent variables (destination attractiveness, electronic word of mouth, intention to visit), each latent variable being connected to a set of manifest variables.

3.6. Model Quality Indicators:

3.6.1 Convergent Validity: Convergent validity is the extent of positive interrelation among questionnaire items (manifest variables), and the criteria for evaluating this type of validity include: Factor Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, Rho_A coefficients, Composite Reliability (CR) coefficients, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) coefficients.

A - Factor Loadings: The following table illustrates the Factor Loadings for the questionnaire items:

Table 5: Examination of Factor Loadings for the Study Model

Destination attractiveness		**eWOM**		**Intention to Vist a Rural Tourist destination**	
Attractiv1	0.727	eWOM1	0.771	Intent1	0.768
Attractiv2	0.785	eWOM2	0.795	Intent2	0.790
Attractiv3	0.718	eWOM3	0.779	Intent3	0.862
Attractiv4	0.741	eWOM4	0.872	Intent4	0.830
Attractiv4	0.738			Intent5	0.834

Source: Compiled by the researcher based on the outputs of Smart PLS 4.

As discerned from the preceding table, all factor loadings meet the minimum threshold required, estimated at 0.70. Their values range from 0.718 (Attractiv3) to 0.872 (eWOM4), indicating that all items of the structural model adequately represent the study variables.

B- Cronbach's Alpha, Rho_A Coefficients, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted:

The following table illustrates both Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, Rho_A coefficients, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted for the study instrument.

Table 6: Convergent Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	**Rho_a**	**Composite reliability**	**Average variance extracted (AVE)**
Destination attractiveness	0,796	0,800	0,860	0,551
Intention to Visit a Rural Destination	0,875	0,877	0,910	0,668
eWOM	0,820	0,838	0,880	0,648

Source: Compiled by the researcher based on the outputs of Smart PLS 4.

From the table above, we can observe the following:

- All Cronbach's Alpha coefficients exceed the threshold of 0.7, indicating a significant stability of the measurement tool and a high level of internal consistency among all items measuring each variable of the study.
- Each Rho De Joreskog coefficient for the factors (Destination attractiveness, Rural Tourist Destination Visit Intention, electronic word of mouth) surpasses 0.7, rendering these coefficients statistically significant and acceptable.
- All Composite Reliability coefficients exceed 0.7, thus being statistically significant and acceptable, indicating an association between questionnaire items and the ability of manifest variables (represented by questionnaire items) to measure latent variables (represented by study variables), affirming the stability and reliability of the utilized model.
- All Average Variance Extracted coefficients are statistically acceptable as they surpass 0.5, signifying that each latent variable explains more than half of its indicator variances, confirming the convergent validity among manifest variables for each latent variable.

3.6.2 Discriminant Validity according to the Fornell-Larker Criterion:

The following table illustrates the results of discriminant validity according to the Fornell-Larker Criterion.

Table 7: Discriminant Validity according to the Fornell-Larker Criterion

	Destination attractiveness	**Intention to Visit a Rural Destination**	**eWOM**
Destination attractiveness	**0.742**		
Intention to Visit a Rural Destination	0.662	**0.818**	
eWOM	0.521	0.628	**0.805**

Source: Compiled by the researcher based on the outputs of Smart PLS 4.

Discriminant validity measures the degree of independence among variables, indicating that each variable is independent of the other variables. To achieve discriminant validity according to the Fornell-Larker Criterion, the relationship value between the variable and itself (diagonal value) must exceed its relationship value with other variables. As observed from the preceding table, all discriminant validity coefficients hold statistical significance, with the diagonal value surpassing the rest of the values representing the intersection of this variable with other variables. This signifies that each variable is distinct and represents only itself (independent of other variables), indicating a differentiation and lack of overlap among latent variables.

3.6.3 Cross Loadings

Cross loadings in factor analysis assess how variables intersect with the factors used. They indicate the shared variance between variables and factors, with high values suggesting significant contributions to multiple factors.

Table 8: Cross Loadings

	Destination attractiveness	Intention to Visit	eWOM
Ewom1	0,466	0,514	0,771
Ewom2	0,345	0,470	0,795
Ewom3	0,293	0,432	0,779
Ewom4	0,524	0,580	0,872
Attractiv1	0,727	0,465	0,447
Attractiv2	0,785	0,543	0,419
Attractiv3	0,718	0,493	0,282
Attractiv4	0,741	0,425	0,351
Attractiv5	0,738	0,520	0,414
Intent1	0,492	0,768	0,530
Intent2	0,584	0,790	0,538
Intent3	0,552	0,862	0,517
Intent4	0,536	0,830	0,405
Intent5	0,536	0,834	0,561

Source: Compiled by the researcher based on the outputs of Smart PLS 4.

The table above presents the criterion of Cross Loadings to assess discriminant validity. It is evident that all indicators bear higher loads on their respective variables compared to their loads on other latent variables. Each indicator, within its realm, attains the highest value, fulfilling the condition of differentiation among variables. The results of the table indicate that the criterion of Cross Loadings analysis is met, affirming that all variables in the study model exhibit discriminant validity, implying distinctions and dissimilarities among them, with each variable representing itself exclusively.

3.7 Evaluation of the structural model:

The following table illustrates the key indicators of structural model fit:

Table 8: Structural Model Fit Indicators

	R square	**R square ajusted**	**Q square**	**AVE**	**GOF**
Intention	0,545	0,548	0.431	0.668	0.52
eWOM	0,269	0,271	0.261	0.648	
$\overline{X}$	0.407	0.409	0.346	0.658	

Source: Compiled by the researcher based on the outputs of Smart PLS 4.

3.7.1 Goodness-of-fit (GOF) coefficient for structural model

The GOF coefficient serves to gauge the reliability of the study model. The quality of this model is assessed based on the value of GOF, which should exceed 0.36 to infer its quality.

This coefficient is computed using the following relationship:

$$GOF= \sqrt{\overline{R^2} \times \overline{AVE}}$$

$$GOF= \sqrt{0.407 \times 0.658}$$

GOF= 0.52

As observed, this condition is met, with a value of (GOF=0.52), indicating the quality of the proposed model and its reliability.

3.7.2 Coefficient of determination (R^2)

According to Chin (1998), the coefficient of determination is deemed unacceptable if it falls below 0.19, weak if it ranges between 0.19 and 0.33, moderate if between 0.33 and 0.67, and high if it exceeds 0.67. From the preceding table, it is evident that the values of the coefficient of determination (R square) are statistically significant and acceptable. Destination attractiveness explains 26.9% of the variance in the latent intermediary variable represented by eWOM, which is a weak value. Additionally, both destination attractiveness and electronic word of mouth together explain 54.5%, indicating a moderate value.

3.7.3 Effect size coefficient:

Table 9: Effect size coefficient indicator

	Size Effect F^2	
	eWOM	**Intention to Visit _a Rural Destination**
Destination attractiveness	0,372	0,341
Ewom		0,243

Source: Compiled by the researcher based on the outputs of Smart PLS 4.

This indicator is evaluated as follows:

-No effect if the indicator value is less than 0.02.

-Small effect if the indicator value is between 0.02 and 0.15.

-Moderate effect if the indicator value is between 0.15 and 0.35.

-Large effect if the indicator value is greater than 0.35.

As observed from the table above, both destination attractiveness and electronic word of mouth have a moderate effect on the Intention to Visit Rural Tourist Destinations because the effect coefficient values were 0.341 and 0.243 respectively, falling within the range of 0.15 to 0.35. Conversely, destination attractiveness has a significant effect on electronic word of mouth, with an effect coefficient value of 0.372, surpassing the threshold of 0.35.

3.8 Testing the study hypotheses

Testing the study hypotheses comes after verifying the validity and stability of the structural model. This involves testing the hypotheses using path coefficients for direct and indirect effects.

3.8.1 Path coefficients for direct effects:

The bootstrapping technique was employed, generating 5000 subsamples. The following table illustrates the results of the direct effect path analysis:

Table 10: Results of Direct Path Analysis

	Relatioship	Original sample (O)	Standard deviation (STDE)	T	P	Decision
H1	attractiveness -> Intention	0,460	0,049	9,357	0,000	Supported
H2	attractiveness -> eWOM	0,521	0,055	9,516	0,000	Supported
	eWOM -> Intention	0,388				
H3	eWOM -> Intention	0,388	0,057	6,786	0,000	Supported

Source: Compiled by the researcher based on the outputs of Smart PLS 4.

From the preceding table, it becomes evident that:

- There is a statistically significant direct effect of destination attractiveness on the intention to Visit Rural Tourist Destinations, estimated at 0.460, affirming the validity of Hypothesis 1 (H_1).
- There is a statistically significant direct effect of destination attractiveness on electronic word of mouth, estimated at 0.521, confirming the validity of Hypothesis 2 (H_2).
- There is a statistically significant direct effect of electronic word of mouth on the Intention to Visit Rural Tourist Destinations, estimated at 0.388, validating Hypothesis 3 (H_3).

3.8.2 Path Coefficients for Indirect Effects:

The subsequent table illustrates the results of the indirect effect path analysis:

Table 11: Results of Indirect Effect Path Analysis

	Relatioship	Original sample (O)	Standard deviation (STDE)	T	P	Decision
H4	attractiveness -> Intention	0,202	0,037	5,428	0,000	Supported

Source: Compiled by the researcher based on the outputs of Smart PLS 4.

From the preceding table, the following becomes apparent:

- There is an indirect effect of destination attractiveness on the Intention to Visit Rural Tourist Destinations through electronic word of mouth as a mediator with partial mediation. (The mediation here is partial because the study has accepted the first hypothesis indicating an effect of destination attractiveness on the Intention to Visit Rural Tourist Destinations; had this hypothesis been rejected, the mediation would have been complete). This indirect effect is estimated at 0.202, leading us to accept Hypothesis 4 (H_4).

3.8.3 Total Effect:

The subsequent table illustrates the total effect of destination attractiveness on the Intention to Visit Rural Tourist Destinations.

Table 12: Total Effect

	Intention to Visit a Rural Destination	
Destination attractiveness	Direct Effects	0.460
	Indirect Effects	0.202
	Total Effects	0.662

Source: Compiled by the researcher based on the outputs of Smart PLS 4.

The preceding table reveals the following:

- There is a cumulative effect of destination attractiveness on the intention to visit rural tourist destinations, estimated at 0.662. A portion of this effect stems from the direct relationship between these variables, estimated at 0.460. The remaining portion of this effect is attributed to the role of the mediating variable (electronic word of mouth), estimated at 0.202. Thus, the presence of electronic word of mouth as a mediating variable elevates the impact of destination attractiveness on the intention to visit rural tourist destinations from 0.460 to 0.662.

4. Conclusion:

The study aimed to investigate the impact of destination attractiveness on the intention to visit rural tourist destinations, mediated by the electronic word of mouth. Through the use of structural equation modeling and path analysis, the study found several significant results.

The results of the study indicated several significant findings:

- There is a statistically significant direct effect of destination attractiveness on the intention to visit rural tourist destinations, affirming the validity of Hypothesis (H_1).
- There is a statistically significant direct effect of destination attractiveness on electronic word of mouth, confirming the validity of Hypothesis (H_2).
- There is a statistically significant direct effect of electronic word of mouth on the intention to visit rural tourist destinations, validating Hypothesis (H_3).
- The study also found an indirect effect of destination attractiveness on the intention to visit rural tourist destinations through electronic word of mouth as a mediator, with partial mediation, affirming Hypothesis (H_4).

Based on the results of the study, several recommendations can be made:

1 .Destination management and marketing: The study shows that destination attractiveness significantly affects the intention to visit rural tourist destinations, mediated by electronic word of mouth (eWOM). It recommends utilizing destination attractiveness to promote rural tourist destinations and encouraging positive online reviews and testimonials to influence tourists' intentions.

2 .Understanding Visitor Preferences: Various attributes like natural beauty, cultural heritage, and service quality contribute to

destination attractiveness. Tailoring marketing efforts to highlight these unique attributes can attract more tourists.

3 .Targeted Marketing and Segmentation: Understanding demographic characteristics aids in targeted marketing and segmentation strategies, enhancing the appeal of rural destinations.

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