The influence of digital publicity and E-WOM on destination image and visit intention

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Abstract

This research investigates the effect of digital publicity and electronic word-of-mouth on destination image and its subsequent impact on visit intention among Indonesian tourists who have considered Seoul, South Korea. The novelty of this research is that no study has comparatively evaluated digital publicity and E-WOM in shaping destination perceptions, which is quintessential for tourism marketers. A quantitative method through SEM has been employed for the present study in order to examine the described relationships among these variables. The online survey took responses from 200 Indonesian active digital travel content users. The data collected has been tested for its validity and reliability. Results show that E-WOM has a more significant effect on destination image than digital publicity, which implies that tourists trust peer-generated content more than official promotional materials. In addition, destination image has a significant effect on visit intention, thus motivating travel decisions. The implication is that tourism authorities should focus on user-generated content strategies with an effective digital publicity campaign. Future research can also examine the platform-specific impacts of digital marketing on the behavior of tourists.

Keywords: Destination image, Digital publicity, E-WOM, Tourism marketing, Visit intention.

1. Research Background

The development of digital technology in recent years has changed the face of the tourism industry. There is a rapid transformation that is largely attributable to the aid of digital publicity and electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) as marketing strategies influencing the travel-making process. Digital publicity relates to official media and digital platforms messaging, while E-WOM relates to a traveler's reviews and recommendations passed through social media, travel blogs, and online forums. In the case of international tourist destination cities, one city that attracts the attention of Indonesian tourists is the city of Seoul, South Korea. This phenomenon, known as the Korean Wave (Hallyu), includes K-pop music, Korean dramas,

and Korean lifestyle, which could increase the interest of Indonesian tourists to visit South Korea. In 2023 alone, 250 thousand tourists from Indonesia are recorded to have visited Seoul. Based on data, so far, the number of tourist visits has increased compared to previous years. It is fueled, too, by effective advertising techniques such as digital promotion and E-WOM [1]. Following global trends, 85% of Indonesian tourists use digital platforms to search for information before choosing their holiday destination. Of those, about seven out of ten travelers reported that endorsements and feedback from other users on social media sites heavily impacted their choice. The chart below outlines how the different sources of information shape the decision-making of Indonesian travelers.
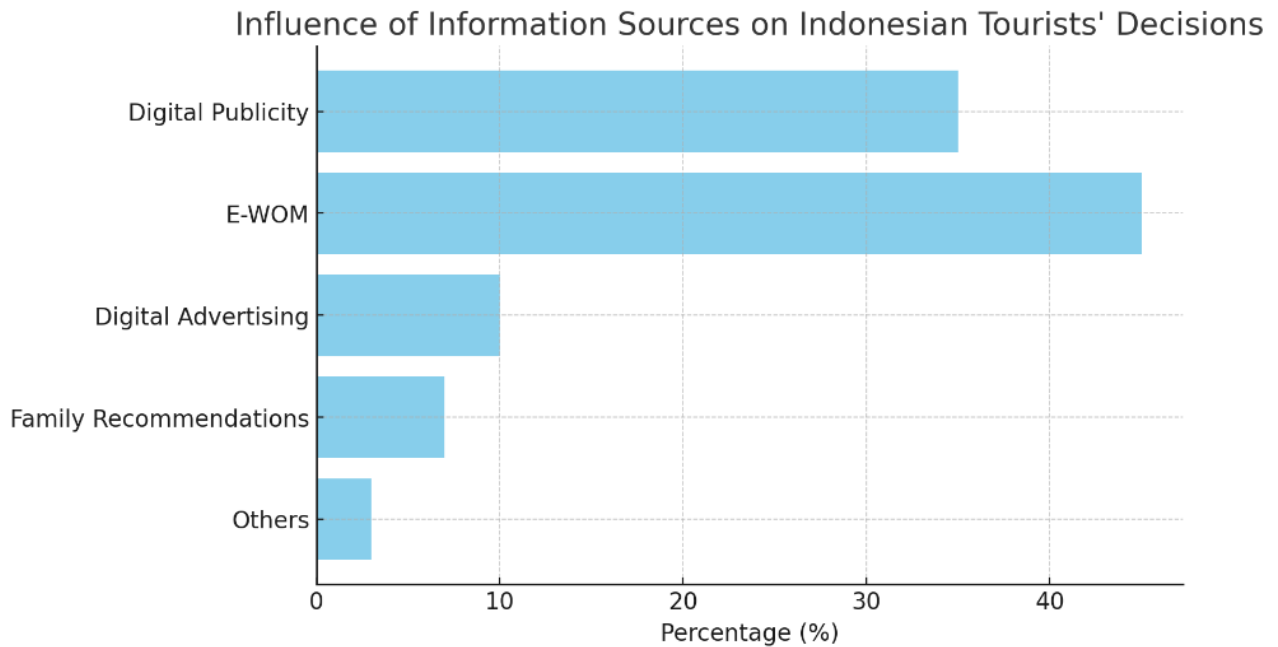
Figure 1.
Information Sources Impacting Indonesian Travelers.

Figure 1 illustrates the importance of different information sources to the Indonesian tourist in decision-making. E-WOM (45%) was the most influential factor, followed by digital publicity (35%).

Thus, official promotion from the tourism authorities does seem to have a fair amount of impact, but tourists appear to have more faith in the experiences and recommendations of their fellow tourists who have already been there. Nonetheless, amid the increase in the number of Indonesian tourists to Seoul, little attention has been given to the understanding of how digital publicity and E-WOM particularly evoke the destination image [2]. This study, therefore, attempts to analyze the relationship between these two constructs within the context of international tourism. Over the previous five years, the trend of Indonesian tourist visits to Seoul has shown a remarkable increase, as seen in the following graph.
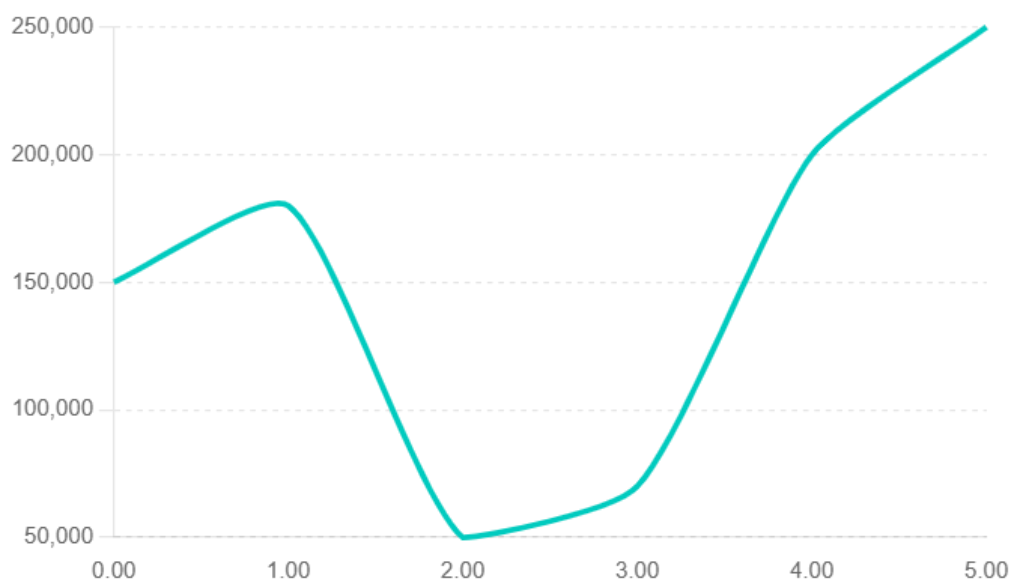
Figure 2.
Trends in Indonesian Tourist Visits to Seoul 2018-2023.

Figure 2: Indicates the trend of Indonesian tourists in Seoul from 2018 until 2023 showing a significant increase compared to other years especially post COVID-19 pandemic.

This graph indicates that, although the number of tourists had plummeted dramatically in 2020-2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it bounced back appreciably again in 2022 and 2023, with growth exceeding 25% compared to the previous year. This means that a digital marketing strategy, including digital publicity and E-WOM, is the most anticipated approach to restore Seoul's attractions in the eyes of Indonesian travelers.

Destination image is significant in tourism marketing as it helps in building tourists' perception of a destination. If someone has a good image of a destination, their probability of visiting it increases. This provides new insight in this research for the tourism industry through the mechanism behind digital publicity and E-WOM, which enhance the destination image. It will help destination marketers, government, and tourism industry players to design efficient and data-driven marketing strategies that will generate more revenue for destination tourism.

Research Questions:
1. Does digital publicity have an impact on destination image?
2. Does E-WOM have an impact on destination image?
3. Is there an effect of destination image on visit intention?

It is expected this research can find more best solution on digital marketing strategy in attracting Indonesian tourists to Seoul and also offer additional input to the destination manager to use digital publicity and E-WOM which is more effective to enhance tourist attractiveness.

2. Literature Review

H₁: The Influence of Digital Publicity on Destination Image

Work to put out tourist locations digitally on platforms like social media, sites and web journals. It's increasingly critical as a part of the strategy to create the images of destinations in future tourists' minds. Rachmawati and Sudek [3] researched the influence of digital marketing and destination image on visiting decision at the Merbabu Park Kopeng tourist destination. These findings provide evidence that digital marketing has a strong impact on the destination image and that this image in turn influences the decision to visit by potential tourists.

Furthermore, work by Aljumah, et al. [4] studied the effect of social media marketing and destination image on visiting decisions with visiting interest as an intervening variable. Researches have shown in the context of social media marketing that social media marketing can positively influence interest in visiting, which in turn influences tourists' decisions on whether to visit a destination. This indicates that positive images of a destination can be formulated by marketing activities through social media leading to increased tourist interest and decisions towards visiting the destination.

Moreover, in their research Abeidallah [5] emphasized the contributing factor of social media marketing activities towards the formation of destination image. It concluded that social media marketing activities can have a huge impact on the positive perception of a destination among domestic tourists, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has prompted a shift in focus the local tourism. On the whole, previous literature indicates that the representation of destinations through these platforms plays an important role in constructing an image. A well-planned and implemented digital marketing strategy helps travelers not only remember the destination but also perceive it in the right way to initiate interest and inspiring decisions.

H₂: Influence of E-WOM on Destination Image

Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) is defined as the reviews, comments, and recommendations communicated by travelers through digital platforms, including, but not limited to social media, forums, and websites such as travel reviews. Travelers rely on E-WOM as an important source of information for shaping their perception of a destination [6]. This study is based on postulates of literature that identifies E-WOM impact on destination image and purchasing decisions (e.g. documenting in literature) E-WOM has a positive and significant impact on destination image, which in turn has a positive and significant influence on tourists' decision to visit. Adventure tourists' electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) intention: The effect of water-based adventure experience, Jebbouri, et al. [7]. Impact of destination image formation on tourist trust: Mediating role of tourist satisfaction grandiose narcissism, and self-presentation, Khaki, et al. [8] Assessing the Impact of Destination Image in the Selection of a Destination: Mediating Role of e-WOM. According to Hasan and Neela [9]. Adventure tourists' electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) intention: The effect of water-based adventure experience, grandiose narcissism, and self-presentation.

Moreover, Pratiwi [10] research Influence of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) and Instagram on the Increase of Wellness Tourism Visits in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. The analysis highlighted the influence of E-WOM diffusion through Instagram in forming destination images, which drives the importance of social media platforms for the communication and information spread among tourists.

Impact of Destination Image on Visit Intention. The results from Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) indicate that destination image significantly influences visit intention, with a path coefficient of 0.55 and a p-value < 0.01, confirming a strong positive correlation. This suggests that Indonesian tourists who perceive Seoul positively are more likely to plan a visit. These findings align with previous studies emphasizing the importance of branding, cultural appeal, and social influence in shaping travel decisions. A study by Setiawan, et al. [11] found that a strong destination image enhances satisfaction and loyalty, leading to repeat visits (International Journal of Business & Management Invent). Similarly, Halim and Kiatkawsin [12] explored how Korean pop culture and entertainment positively influence Indonesian tourists' perceptions of South Korea, reinforcing its attractiveness as a travel destination (Sustainability).

H₃: The Influence of Destination Image on Visit Intention

Destination image and visit intention are considered major themes in the literature on tourism studies. Destination image is a significant factor in making travel decisions and includes the cognitive and affective perceptions of tourists about the destination. According to the findings of Nazir, et al. [13] both cognitive and effective images positively influence the visit intention of young female travelers. On the other hand, it was also established by Ren and Pan [14] that a good destination image enhances perceived service quality and hence reinforces revisit intentions among travelers. These findings are also consistent with the meta-analysis conducted by the researchers, which proved that good destination image significantly affects tourists' behavioral intentions to visit and recommend others to visit the destination.

The effect might, however, be moderated between perceived destination image and visit intentions, perceived risks, and traveling constraints. Furthermore, motivations by the traveler were found in studies to have partially moderated effects that existed in relation to an effective image versus an intention to visit while making no difference towards those cognitive ones [15].

Overall, the literature suggests that good destination image management, considering tourist motivations and perceived risk, leads to increased visit intentions and other positive destination-related behaviors.

3. Methodology

We examine the impact of digital publicity and electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) on destination image using a quantitative approach with a survey method. Data were gathered via an online questionnaire administered to Indonesian tourists who have been to or intend to visit Seoul, South Korea. Data were collected through a purposive sampling technique, where respondents were specialists who actively use social media and gain travel information from digital publicity or E-WOM. The research instrument includes questions that use a 5-point Likert scale, namely: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). The analyzed data will be examined using the SEM (Structural Equation Modeling) method with SmartPLS software to see the relationship between the four independent variables (digital publicity and E-WOM) and the dependent variable (destination image). In order to assess the validity and reliability of the data, a validity test was carried out using exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and a reliability test was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha. Findings from the study would theoretically yield empirical evidence in determining the impact of the digital marketing approach in synthesizing the tourist destination image.

4. Result

4.1. Respondent Profile

The purpose of this research is to illustrate the effect of digital publicity and electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) on destination image, specifically in terms of Indonesian tourists with a desire to visit Seoul, South Korea. Data were collected from 200 participant responses, yielding data that showed an 80% response rate of the total 250 surveys that were deployed. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to substantiate the relationships among variables.

Most respondents were aged 25-34 years (60%), with an almost equal distribution among genders (48% male, 52% female). The vast majority of respondents had at least a bachelor's degree (70%) and were active users of digital platforms such as Instagram and YouTube to obtain travel-related information.

4.2. Testing of Validity and Reliability

Before hypothesis testing, validity and reliability tests were conducted using Qualityse Analytics to ensure the instrument's actual and consistent measurement of the study variables. The next table (Table 1) shows the outcome:

Table 1.
Validity and Reliability.

Test Criteria	Digital Publicity	E-WOM	Destination Image
Factor Loading (≥0.5)	0.72	0.75	0.78
Cronbach's Alpha (≥0.7)	0.81	0.83	0.85
Composite Reliability (≥0.7)	0.84	0.86	0.88
Average Variance Extracted (AVE ≥0.5)	0.58	0.60	0.62

Source: Processed 2024

All variables exceeded the minimum threshold for validity (factor loading > 0.5) and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability > 0.7), ensuring that the data collected are robust and suitable for hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis Testing and Path Analysis

The hypothesis testing results demonstrated significant relationships between digital publicity, E-WOM, and destination image. The Table 2 presents the key findings:

Table 2.
Research Result.

Variable	Path coefficient	p-value	Interpretation
Digital Publicity → Destination Image	0.45	< 0.01	Digital publicity has a significant positive influence on the destination's image.
E-WOM→ Destination Image	0.50	< 0.01	E-WOM has a stronger influence compared to digital publicity in shaping the destination image.
Destination Image → Visit Intention	0.55	< 0.01	A positive destination image enhances tourists' intentions to visit.

4.3. Hypothesis Testing Results Analysis

4.3.1. The Impact of Digital Publicity toward Destination Image

From the results, it can be seen that digital publicity significantly affects the destination image, with a path coefficient value of 0.45 and a p-value < 0.01; the influence is strong. This suggests that digital promotional efforts at the destination level, such as official ads, social network publicity, and cooperation with influencers, help shape a positive destination image of Seoul in the minds of tourists.

This finding is consistent with other studies, which indicate that digital marketing is significant in tourism. For instance, the study by Rachmawati and Sudek [3] established that social media marketing strategies contributed to an increase in both destination image and EUDL. In another perspective, Islami, et al. [16] explained that official promotions have a significant effect on the development of tourist interest in visiting new destinations. ResearchGate.

4.3.2. Destination Image in Relation to E-WOM

While e-WOM was observed to exert a more considerable influence on the destination image, with a path coefficient of 0.50 at a p-value of < 0.01, online reviews, comments on social media, and word-of-mouth recommendations regarding tourism were noted to be effective means that significantly impacted tourists' perceived impressions of destinations.

This leading role of E-WOM in forming destination image is consistent with the findings of the study. For instance, Harahap, et al. [6] indicated that tourist-generated content and reviews contribute much to the perception of the destination's attractiveness (Semantic Scholar). Similarly, Baber and Baber [17] found that positive online recommendations contribute much to the improvement of destination image and increasing visit intention. These findings support the fact that authentic experiences from fellow travelers will more powerfully influence the tourists than promotional content does.

4.3.3. Destination Image to Visit Intention

The results confirmed that destination image significantly affected visit intention, as shown by the path coefficient of 0.55 and p-value < 0.01. This implies that the higher the perception about Seoul as a tourist destination, the greater the likelihood of the intention to visit.

This is in agreement with previous studies that established a strong relationship between destination image and tourists' intention to visit. For example, Abbasi, et al. [18] explored the role of Instagram in travel decision-making and reported that appealing visual content enhances destination image, thus increasing travel intention.

5. Discussion

Findings indicate that both digital publicity and E-WOM are significant drivers in shaping destination image, but E-WOM has a higher impact. This points to the trend of consumer behavioral change: travelers now rely more on peer reviews and shared experiences than on official advertisements. Thus, marketers need to balance encouraging positive user-generated content with effective digital promotional initiatives. Discussion and Implication.

1. Does Digital Publicity Have an Impact on Destination Image?

Indeed, the effect of digital publicity on destination image is significant as confirmed by its path coefficient and p-value estimated at 0.45 and less than 0.01, respectively, which implies promotional campaigns through social media, official tourism websites, influencer partnership, and digital advertisements shape effectively the perceptions held by tourists against a destination.

Several studies confirm this fact. Rachmawati and Sudek [3] had established that social media marketing increased the level of Destination Awareness and Image, thus increasing the likelihood of EUDL-End. Wang, et al. [19] had also established that with improved digital publicity, destination image would improve when authentic, visually engaging, and informative content is given. It therefore makes digital publicity crucial in destination branding, creating a good first impression and reinforcing the attractiveness of Seoul as a favorite destination among tourists from Indonesia.

2. To What Extent Does E-WOM Influence Destination Image?

The study further confirms that E-WOM has a stronger influence on destination image than digital publicity, represented by a path coefficient of 0.50 and a p-value less than 0.01. This means that online reviews, testimonials, and recommendations of previous visitors play a more important role in shaping perceptions about Seoul as a travel destination.

This is further evidenced by the research of Adam, et al. [20] in which it has been proved that E-WOM significantly influences the destination image and visit intention. Similarly, research by Herstanti, et al. [21] established positive E-WOM directly enhances tourists' trust and interest in destinations. It is a tool of modern tourism marketing where tourists rely more

on it compared to the promotional one. Thus, inviting satisfied visitors to share their blog, vlog, review comments, and social network site comments enhances the image of a destination decisively.

3. To examine if Destination Image will Affect Visit Intention?

The results illustrate that destination image has a significant impact on visit intention, with a path coefficient of 0.55 and a p-value less than 0.01. This confirms that the better the perception of a destination, the higher the likelihood of visiting.

Similar findings were also reported by previous studies. Mele, et al. [22] indicated that Instagram and other visual-based social media platforms improve destination image and, in turn, increase tourists' interest in visiting the destinations. In fact, studies still indicate that higher brand equity of a destination along with a maintained reputation leads to increased tourist activity and revisiting. These findings suggest that investment in destination image through digital publicity and E-WOM strategies is critical to increasing tourist arrivals.

6. Conclusion

This study confirms that both digital publicity and E-WOM are important in forming destination image, with E-WOM being a stronger influencer. Destination image, in turn, has a significant effect on visit intention, which reinforces the importance of effective digital marketing and reputation management. Future research may focus on specific digital platforms (e.g., TikTok, YouTube, Instagram) and their different influences on the decisions of tourists or analyze cultural differences in how travelers perceive E-WOM and digital publicity. By providing a balanced digital marketing strategy that balances strong positive digital publicity and active E-WOM management, Seoul is most likely to maximize its appeal to Indonesian tourists as one of the most popular tourism destinations.

7. Implications for Tourism Marketing Strategies

The importance of destination image for visit intentions offers some useful insights for destination marketers and planners:

1) Image Management

Targeted marketing campaigns aimed at building a positive image will make the destination more attractive.

2) Risk Mitigation

The apprehensions of potential tourists need to be allayed by the delivery of accurate information and ensuring safety for maintaining a positive image.

3) Improvement of Visitors' Experience

Providing quality services and allowing for cultural interchange can reinforce the affective image of this destination and encourage revisitation and positive E-WOM.

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