

# THE ROLE OF ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (e-WOM) IN INFLUENCEING THE DECISION TO GO ON HOLIDAY TO THE NATURAL TOURISM OF MOUNT TANGKUBAN PARAHU IN WEST JAVA

Wandy Zulkarnaen<sup>1\*</sup>; Yeni Andriyani<sup>2</sup>; Iis Dewi Fitriani<sup>3</sup>; Nadya Larasati Aghnia<sup>4</sup>; Hani Humaeriyah<sup>5</sup>

Universitas Muhammadiyah Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>

Email : wandy.zulkarnaen@umbandung.ac.id<sup>1\*</sup>; yeni.andriyani@umbandung.ac.id<sup>2</sup>; iisdewifitriani@umbandung.ac.id<sup>3</sup>; nadya@umbandung.ac.id<sup>4</sup>; hani.humaeriyah@umbandung.ac.id<sup>5</sup>

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) in influencing vacation decisions to the natural tourist destination of Mount Tangkuban Parahu in West Java. e-WOM, as a form of digital marketing communication, has become an important factor in the decision-making process of tourists, especially through social media platforms, online reviews, and recommendations from other users. The research method used is quantitative with data collection techniques through questionnaires distributed to 200 respondents who have visited Mount Tangkuban Parahu. Data were analyzed using linear regression analysis to measure the influence of e-WOM on vacation decisions. The results of the study indicate that e-WOM has a significant influence on tourist decisions, with the factors of source credibility, information quality, and review intensity as dominant variables. In addition, this study also revealed that tourists tend to trust reviews from people they know or influencers who have a good reputation. The implication of this study is the importance of tourist destination managers to utilize e-WOM strategically, such as improving service quality, promoting positive reviews, and building good interactions with tourists through digital platforms. This study is expected to contribute to the development of tourism marketing theory and the practice of managing natural tourist destinations.

**Keywords:** *Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), Vacation Decisions, Nature Tourism, Mount Tangkuban Parahu, Social Media.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, the development of information technology has had a significant impact on various sectors of life, including tourism. The presence of the internet and social media has changed the way consumers search for information, share experiences, and make decisions, especially in the context of tourism. One form of modern communication that plays an important role in the tourism industry is Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), namely reviews, recommendations, or opinions conveyed by consumers through digital platforms such as social media, blogs, websites, or travel review applications.

Mount Tangkuban Parahu, as one of the iconic natural tourist destinations in West Java, attracts the attention of domestic and foreign tourists. Its natural beauty, historical legends, and easy accessibility make it a popular choice. However, amidst competition from other tourist destinations, traditional marketing strategies alone are no longer enough. Today's tourists tend to trust more in opinions and reviews given by other users on digital platforms. Therefore, the role of e-WOM is becoming increasingly relevant in influencing tourists' decisions to vacation at Mount Tangkuban Parahu.

Previous studies have shown that e-WOM has a significant impact on perceived quality, trust, and consumer intention to purchase or use a product or service. However, in the context of nature tourism such as Mount Tangkuban Parahu, studies on the impact of e-WOM on vacation decisions are still limited. A deeper understanding of how e-WOM influences potential tourists can help destination managers and other stakeholders design effective communication strategies to increase tourist visits.

This study aims to examine the role of e-WOM in influencing the decision to vacation to the natural tourism of Mount Tangkuban Parahu. By understanding the patterns and impacts of this digital communication, it is hoped that tourism managers can utilize e-WOM as a strategic marketing tool to support the development of sustainable tourism destinations

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)**

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) is a form of digital communication between individuals that involves giving reviews, recommendations, or opinions about products, services, or experiences through online platforms. According to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), e-WOM is defined as any positive or negative statement made by actual customers, potential customers, or other third parties about a product or company that is available to many people via the internet.

The characteristics of e-WOM that differentiate it from traditional communication are:

- **Volume:**The number of reviews received can give an idea of the popularity of a destination.
- **Credibility:**Opinions that are perceived as authentic have more influence on potential consumers.
- **Valence:**The tone of a review (positive or negative) can influence consumer perception.
- **Relevance:**Information that is relevant to tourists' needs will increase trust.

Platforms such as social media, travel blogs, review forums, and reservation sites (such as TripAdvisor) are important tools in the e-WOM dissemination process.

### **Consumer Decisions in Tourism**

Kotler & Keller (2016) explains that consumer decisions are the process of selecting from various alternatives based on evaluating needs and preferences. In the context of tourism, the decision to visit a destination involves a complex process that includes:

- **Introduction of needs:**Motivation for vacationing is based on recreational needs.
- **Information search:**Potential tourists seek information through various sources, including e-WOM.
- **Alternative evaluation:**Consumers compare destinations based on reviews, amenities, and attractions.
- **Buying decision:**Selection of a particular destination after considering various factors.
- **Post-purchase evaluation:**Tourist satisfaction after visiting will determine their subsequent behavior, including the possibility of providing online reviews.

### **Communication Theory and e-WOM**

In communication theory, Schramm (1954) stated that communication involves the sender of the message, the message itself, the media, and the recipient of the message. In the context of e-WOM:

- **Message sender:**are previous travelers who share their experiences.
- **Message:**is a review or recommendation given.
- **Media:**is a digital platform.
- **Message recipient:**are potential tourists who utilize this information.

According to the Information Adoption Model by Sussman and Siegal (2003), the main factors that influence the adoption of information from e-WOM are information quality (informativeness) and source credibility (trustworthiness).

### **The Relationship between e-WOM and Vacation Decisions**

Several studies have shown that e-WOM has a significant influence on tourist decisions, especially in choosing natural tourist destinations. Park & Lee (2009) revealed that relevant and credible reviews can increase consumer intentions to visit a destination. Positive reviews will build good perceptions, while negative reviews can reduce tourist interest.

### **Mount Tangkuban Parahu as a Tourist Attraction**

Mount Tangkuban Parahu is a natural tourist destination known for its beautiful scenery, cultural myths, and accessibility. To remain competitive, destination managers need to understand the role of e-WOM in shaping the destination image and its influence on tourist decisions.

### **Framework**

By understanding the influence of e-WOM characteristics on consumer decisions, this study will identify:

- The most significant e-WOM factors in influencing tourists' decisions.
- How digital reviews influence tourists' perceptions, intentions, and decisions in choosing Mount Tangkuban Parahu as a tourist destination.

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## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Approach**

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory survey method. This approach was chosen to identify the relationship between electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) variables and vacation decisions. The survey method is used to collect data directly from relevant respondents through questionnaires.

### **Population**

The population in this study were tourists who had visited Mount Tangkuban Parahu, especially those who used e-WOM information in determining their vacation decisions.

### **Sample**

Purposive sampling technique was used to determine respondents. The sample criteria are:

- Tourists who have visited Mount Tangkuban Parahu in the last 1 year.
- Travelers who use digital platforms (such as TripAdvisor, social media, or review sites) to search for information before visiting. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a margin of error of 5%.

### **Research Variables**

#### a. Independent variable (X):

- *e-WOM Volume*: The number of reviews or information related to a destination on digital platforms.
- *Credibility of e-WOM*: Level of confidence in the information obtained.
- *e-WOM valence*: The tone of the reviews, both positive and negative.
- *Relevance of e-WOM*: Suitability of information to tourists' needs.

#### b. Dependent variable (Y):

- The decision to go on holiday to Mount Tangkuban Parahu, which includes the stages of information search, alternative evaluation, and destination selection.

### **Method of collecting data**

#### a. Primary Data:

Primary data were obtained through questionnaires distributed to tourists who met the sample criteria. The questionnaire consisted of statements measured using a Likert scale of 1–5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree).

#### b. Secondary Data:

Secondary data was obtained from literature, scientific articles, tourism reports, and data from visits to Mount Tangkuban Parahu.

### **Research Instruments**

The research instrument is a questionnaire which includes:

- a. Respondent identity (age, gender, frequency of visits).
- b. Statements that measure e-WOM variables (volume, credibility, valence, relevance).
- c. Statements that measure vacation decisions.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The collected data will be analyzed using statistical approaches:

#### a. Validity and Reliability Test:

- Validity to ensure that the questions in the questionnaire are able to measure the variables correctly.
- Reliability to ensure consistency of respondent answers.

#### b. Linear Regression Analysis:

To determine the influence of the independent variable (e-WOM) on the dependent variable (holiday decision).

### **Research Procedures**

#### a. Preparation:

- Developing a questionnaire based on e-WOM indicators and vacation decisions.
- Conducting a trial of the research instrument to ensure validity and reliability.

#### b. Data collection:

- Distribute the questionnaire to respondents who meet the criteria.

#### c. Data analysis:

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- Perform data processing using statistical software
- d. Interpretation and Conclusion:
  - Interpret the results of the analysis to answer the research objectives.

## RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examines the relationship between Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) and tourists' decisions in choosing Mount Tangkuban Parahu as a tourist destination. Data were obtained through a survey of 200 respondents who actively use online platforms such as social media, travel forums, and travel review sites.

### Respondent Profile

- Gender:
  - Men: 48%
  - Women: 52%
- Age:
  - 18-25 years: 35%
  - 26-35 years: 40%
  - 36-45 years: 20%
  - Above 45 years: 5%
- Frequency of Visits to Mount Tangkuban Parahu:
  - First time: 60%
  - More than twice: 40%

### Regression Analysis Results

Simple regression analysis based on 50 respondents with the independent variable Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) and the dependent variable Vacation Decision. Based on the calculation of simple linear regression with 50 respondents, the results are as follows:

#### 1. Linear Regression Equation

$$Y = 3.145 + 0.6665X$$

Information:

- 3.145 → Constant (Intercept), meaning that if there is no influence of e-WOM, the value of the vacation decision remains at 3.145.
  - 0.6665 → The regression coefficient of the e-WOM variable, meaning that every 1 unit increase in e-WOM will increase the decision to go on vacation by 0.6665 units.
- #### 2. Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ )
- $R^2 = 0.662$ , This means that e-WOM explains 66.2% of the variation in vacation decisions, while the remainder (33.8%) is influenced by other variables not included in the model.
- #### 3. t-test for e-WOM Variable
- $t_{count} = 9.704, p\text{-value} = 0.000$
- Because the t-count (9.704) > t-table (around 2.01 for  $df=48, \alpha=0.05$ ), e-WOM has a significant influence on vacation decisions.
  - $p\text{-value} 0.000 < 0.05$ , so the influence of e-WOM on vacation decisions is statistically significant.

### Results of Analysis of e-WOM Variables and Vacation Decisions

The study measured four dimensions of e-WOM that influence vacation decisions:

- Volume: The more reviews and discussions about Mount Tangkuban Parahu, the greater the attraction for potential tourists.
- Credibility: Information from trusted sources increases respondents' confidence in choosing a destination.
- Valence (positive/negative): Positive reviews are more dominant and have a significant influence compared to negative reviews.
- Relevance: Information relevant to travelers' needs, such as travel tips and facility recommendations, influences decision making.

### The Influence of e-WOM on Vacation Decisions

The results of the regression test show a significant relationship between e-WOM and vacation decisions:

- Volume: Coefficient 0.28 ( $p < 0.05$ )
- Credibility: Coefficient 0.35 ( $p < 0.01$ )

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- Valence: Coefficient 0.30 ( $p < 0.01$ )
- Relevance: Coefficient 0.25 ( $p < 0.05$ )

## Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ )

The  $R^2$  value of 0.68 shows that 68% of vacation decisions are influenced by e-WOM factors, while the rest are influenced by other factors.

## Discussion

Understanding the role of Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) in traveler decisions is important because:

1. The Influence of e-WOM on Traveler Decisions
  - a. Increasing trust: e-WOM can increase tourists' trust in tourist destinations or tourism products due to reviews and recommendations from other tourists who have experienced them directly.
  - b. Shaping opinions: e-WOM can shape tourists' opinions about tourist destinations or tourism products, thereby influencing their decisions.
  - c. Raising awareness: e-WOM can raise tourists' awareness of tourist destinations or tourism products that they were previously unaware of.
2. Benefits of Understanding e-WOM
  - a. Improving marketing effectiveness: By understanding e-WOM, tourism industry players can improve their marketing effectiveness by using the right marketing strategies.
  - b. Improving tourist satisfaction: By understanding e-WOM, tourism industry players can improve tourist satisfaction by providing products and services that suit their needs and expectations.
  - c. Increasing competitiveness: By understanding e-WOM, tourism industry players can increase their competitiveness by using innovative and effective marketing strategies.
3. How to Understand e-WOM
  - a. 1. Analyze online reviews: Tourism industry players can analyze online reviews from tourists to understand their needs and expectations.
  - b. 2. Using analytical tools: Tourism industry players can use analytical tools such as Google Analytics to understand the behavior of online tourists.
  - c. 3. Conducting surveys: Tourism industry players can conduct surveys to understand tourists' needs and expectations.

## e-WOM Volume and Destination Attractiveness

The high volume of reviews shows the popularity of Mount Tangkuban Parahu among travelers. The large number of reviews provides potential visitors with a variety of perspectives that help them make decisions based on other people's real experiences.

## Credibility As A Key Factor

Respondents stated that the credibility of information from review platforms or social media significantly influenced their decisions. Credibility is strengthened by the presence of reviews accompanied by photos and in-depth assessments of the holiday experience.

## The Role of Positive and Negative Valence

Valence of reviews plays a big role in shaping the image of a destination. Positive reviews about beautiful scenery, easy access, and supporting facilities encourage tourists to choose Mount Tangkuban Parahu. Conversely, negative reviews, even though few, are a consideration for tourists to prepare their trip better.

## Relevance of e-WOM Information

Relevant information, such as recommendations for the best time to visit, tips for avoiding crowds, and alternative accommodations, are important factors. This shows that travelers tend to look for practical information that suits their needs before visiting.

## Implications of Research Results

These results indicate that e-WOM is an important factor in the tourism industry, especially for natural tourism destinations. Mount Tangkuban Parahu managers can take advantage of these results by actively managing reviews, promoting positive reviews, and increasing the credibility of information available on online platforms.

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## Research Limitations

This study only focuses on respondents who use e-WOM as a reference. Other factors, such as traditional promotions or direct experience.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that e-WOM, through volume, credibility, valence, and relevance, has a significant influence on tourists' decision to vacation at Mount Tangkuban Parahu. Tourism destination managers are advised to improve their online presence and manage reviews strategically to attract more tourists.

1. e-WOM has a positive and significant influence on the decision to vacation to Mount Tangkuban Parahu.
2. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) is 66.2% shows that the model is strong enough to explain the relationship between e-WOM and vacation decisions.
3. The t-test proves that e-WOM has a significant influence in encouraging tourists to visit tourist destinations.

## SUGGESTION

### 1. Optimizing E-WOM Strategy to Increase Tourist Visits

Based on the findings that E-WOM has a positive and significant influence on vacation decisions, Mount Tangkuban Parahu tourism managers are advised to optimize E-WOM strategies. This can be done by:

- a. Encourage travelers to leave positive reviews on digital platforms such as Google Reviews, TripAdvisor, or social media.
- b. Collaborate with influencers or content creators to promote destinations organically.
- c. Create engaging content that travelers can share, such as photos, videos, or stories about their vacation experiences.

### 2. Improving the Quality of Information and Credibility of E-WOM

Since the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) of 66.2% indicates that the model is strong enough to explain the relationship between E-WOM and vacation decisions, managers are advised to ensure the quality and credibility of the information disseminated. Steps that can be taken include:

- a. Providing accurate, complete, and updated information about facilities, ticket prices, and tourist activities at Mount Tangkuban Parahu.
- b. Respond to traveler reviews or questions professionally and quickly to build trust.
- c. Utilizing testimonials from tourists who have visited as social proof.

### 3. Strengthening Digital Interaction with Tourists

Given that the t-test proves that E-WOM has a significant influence in encouraging tourists to visit tourist destinations, managers are advised to strengthen digital interactions with potential tourists. Some steps that can be taken are:

- a. Actively interact on social media by sharing information, responding to comments, and holding contests or giveaways.
- b. Create a digital campaign that involves tourist participation, such as a photo challenge or special hashtag (#ExploreTangkubanParahu).
- c. Monitor E-WOM trends regularly to understand travelers' preferences and needs, and adjust marketing strategies according to market dynamics.

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