

SOCIAL MEDIA AS ENVIRONMENTAL STIMULUS: HOW eWOM, SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE, AND REVIEWS SHAPE THAI TOURISTS' MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES, DESTINATION TRUST, SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING, AND VISIT INTENTIONS TO ECOTOURISM DESTINATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This study examines the factors that influence memorable experiences, destination trust, subjective well-being, and visit intention among tourists at ecotourism destinations in Thailand. Digital communication channels increasingly influence tourist decision-making and experience formation in contemporary tourism contexts. **Objective:** To examine how electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), social media influence, and social media reviews affect memorable tourism experiences; how these factors influence destination trust; and the impact of memorable experiences and destination trust on subjective well-being and visit intention. **Methods:** A quantitative approach was employed, collecting data through electronic and traditional questionnaires from 499 tourists using quota sampling. Structural equation modeling was utilized to test the hypothesized relationships between variables. **Results:** eWOM, social media influence, and social media reviews demonstrated positive impacts on memorable experiences. These factors, together with memorable experiences, significantly enhanced destination trust. Both memorable experiences and destination trust positively influenced tourists' subjective well-being and visit intention, confirming the proposed relationships. **Conclusion:** Digital communication channels significantly shape tourist experiences, trust formation, and

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subsequent well-being and visit intentions in ecotourism contexts. These findings provide valuable insights for destination management and marketing strategies in the digital age.

Keywords: eWOM; Social Media Influence; Social Media Reviews; Memorable Experiences; Destination Trust; Subjective Well-Being; Visit Intention

1. INTRODUCTION

Thailand's ecotourism sector has flourished remarkably, with sustainable tourism revenues soaring from ฿906 million in 2024 to an anticipated ฿2,892 million by 2032—a striking 15.61% annual growth rate (Credence Research, 2025). This surge reflects the nation's extraordinary biodiversity and cultural richness, coupled with rising demand from environmentally conscious millennials seeking authentic nature and adventure experiences (Kumpiw et al., 2025). This form of tourism not only provides meaningful experiences for travelers but also generates economic and social benefits while preserving natural resources. In an era where the global tourism industry is seeking a balance between economic growth and sustainability, ecotourism emerges as a valuable alternative for maintaining such an equilibrium (Nguyen et al., 2024). However, research on the behaviors and motivations of Thai tourists who choose domestic ecotourism destinations remains limited, despite this group playing a crucial role in driving domestic tourism, especially during international tourism crises (Amloy et al., 2024), thus revealing a significant conceptual gap. Domestic tourism constitutes 28.6% of Thailand's total tourism revenue, with Thai tourists generating 900 billion baht in 2024 (The Nation, 2025). Major ecotourism destinations like Khao Yai National Park attracted 1.49 million visitors in 2023 (Statista, 2025). While global ecotourism research has grown rapidly at 19.7% annually from 2012-2022 (Jin & Gao, 2025). Thailand's sustainable tourism research focuses predominantly on international visitor patterns (FMI Future Market Insight, 2024). This creates a theoretical void because domestic tourists' cultural familiarity and proximity may produce distinct decision-making processes compared to international visitors, leaving Thai domestic ecotourism choice behaviors conceptually underexplored.

Ecotourism contributes significantly to Thailand's sustainable economic and social development through community-based tourism mechanisms that benefit local stakeholders, entrepreneurs, and the national economy. The sustainable tourism sector is valued at 1.2 billion baht in 2024, with 15.8% projected annual growth (FMI Future Market Insight, 2024), while community-based models position local people as key decision-makers (Rungchavalnont, 2022) and government initiatives target 3.4 trillion baht in tourism revenue for 2025 (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2025). This form of tourism not only generates direct income for communities but also supports natural resource conservation, promotes environmental awareness, distributes income to rural areas, and strengthens community enterprises, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Supun et al., 2025). The benefits of ecotourism encompass all sectors, including local communities, hotel operators, restaurants, souvenir vendors, and tour companies. Evaluating its economic, social, and environmental contribu-

tions, as well as analyzing impacts on gross domestic product and tax revenue, will lead to the development of sustainable ecotourism promotion policies that benefit all sectors in the long term (Bangperng, 2024).

This research aims to address the academic gap regarding the relationship between social media stimuli (electronic word of mouth (eWOM), social media influence, and social media reviews) and tourist responses (subjective well-being and visit intention), with memorable experiences and destination trust serving as mediating variables under the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theoretical framework in the context of ecotourism in Thailand. Although the influence of eWOM has been extensively studied (Liu & Chamaratana, 2024), its connection to memorable experiences remains limited, particularly in Thai ecotourism contexts. Additionally, previous research has predominantly focused on visiting intentions while neglecting the dimension of subjective well-being and lacks a distinct analysis between general social media influence and specific reviews (Luekveerawattana, 2024). This research therefore integrates concepts from multiple disciplines to develop an in-depth understanding and create effective digital marketing strategies for sustainable ecotourism in Thailand.

2. OBJECTIVES

1. To study the influence of eWOM, social media influence, and reviews on tourists' memorable experiences at Thai ecotourism destinations.
2. To study the influence of eWOM, social media factors, and memorable experiences on tourists' destination trust at Thai ecotourism sites.
3. To study the influence of memorable experiences and destination trust on tourists' subjective well-being during visits to Thai ecotourism destinations.
4. To study the influence of memorable experiences and destination trust on tourists' visit intention at Thai ecotourism destinations.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

S-O-R Model

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm, conceptualized by Russell (1974), establishes a theoretical foundation for understanding the intricate relationship between external environmental stimuli (including physical attributes, marketing communications, and social elements) and their impact on individuals' internal states—specifically regarding dimensions of pleasure, arousal, and dominance—which subsequently manifest as approach or avoidance behavioral responses. When applied to ecotourism contexts, this framework offers a sophisticated analytical lens through which tourist behavior can be comprehensively examined. Contemporary research demonstrates that destination imagery catalyzes cultivating memorable tourism experiences (Yabo et al., 2024), while digital platforms such as TikTok enhance destination selection motivation through flow experience mechanisms (C. Liu et al., 2024). Furthermore, Wee and Thomas (2024) provide substantive empirical evidence regarding the significant influence of extrinsic motivational factors and emotional responses on ecotourism des-

ination preferences. The integration of these elements within the S-O-R framework facilitates the advancement of sustainable tourism development—encompassing both environmental stewardship and preservation of indigenous cultural heritage—ultimately fostering meaningful and sustainable experiences that benefit both visitors and host communities.

An examination of tourist behavior within eco-tourism contexts through the S-O-R framework reveals the complex interrelationship between memorable experiences and destination trust as mediating variables that significantly influence tourists' visit intention, driven by electronic word-of-mouth, social media influence, and online platform reviews (Yabo et al., 2024). However, significant research gaps persist across two dimensions: First, current literature lacks empirically robust explanations of the causal mechanisms linking social media interactions, the formation of memorable experiences, and the development of destination trust, particularly in environmentally sensitive tourism contexts (Wilopo & and Nuralam, 2025). Second, despite acknowledging the importance of these factors, there remains an absence of integrated conceptual frameworks that effectively synthesize these variables with marketing strategies and tourism experience design that address the needs and values of digital-age travelers (Khoshroo & Soltani, 2025). This inconsistency underscores the necessity for research that investigates the dynamic relationships among these factors using robust quantitative methodologies that gather insights from diverse sources and employ advanced statistical techniques, ultimately developing effective and sustainable management approaches and promotion strategies for eco-tourism (Wee & Thomas, 2024).

Visit intention

Visit intention refers to the level of psychological commitment and planning readiness of tourists to travel to a specific destination or attraction within a defined timeframe. This includes consideration of the frequency of visit planning and the level of desire to visit that place (Rafidinal et al., 2025). The study of visit intention towards ecotourism destinations significantly contributes to the sustainable tourism ecosystem, particularly benefiting businesses, local communities, and all stakeholders involved. Research by Pratama et al. (2024) demonstrates that sustainable tourism management and increased environmental awareness not only enhance visit intention but also generate sustainable economic benefits for local entrepreneurs. This aligns with findings by Handiman et al. (2024), which revealed that when communities participate in tourism decision-making processes, it not only increases tourists' visit intention but also promotes equitable income distribution and social empowerment within communities. Furthermore, Kuqi and Vishaj (2024) highlight the positive interaction between visit intention and the development of environmentally friendly infrastructure, natural resource conservation, and cultural heritage restoration, which benefits all stakeholders. Visit intention thus serves not merely as a driver of tourism economics but as a crucial mechanism for balancing economic development, environmental conservation, and the sustainable preservation of community cultural identity.

Subjective well-being

Subjective Well-being refers to ecotourists' evaluation of personal fulfillment and positive emotional experiences resulting from participation in tourism activities that generate satisfaction, positive emotions, and

mental fulfillment (Zheng, 2024). In the context of ecotourism, tourists' subjective well-being emerges as a critical factor generating positive impacts for both the tourists themselves and the broader tourism ecosystem. Research demonstrates that ecotourism experiences enhance tourists' psychological states through connections with nature and culture (Yang et al., 2024), providing direct benefits through stress reduction, increased relaxation, improved emotional well-being, and enhanced self-worth (Li et al., 2024). Furthermore, interactions with local communities develop tourists' social skills and cross-cultural understanding, strengthening their social capital (Kuqi & Vishaj, 2024). These positive experiences lead tourists to participate more actively in conservation efforts for local resources and cultural preservation, generating stable income for communities (Scheyvens et al., 2024). Tourists with positive experiences tend to spend more, stay longer, and make return visits, creating sustainable economic circulation within communities (Kuqi & Vishaj, 2024) and fostering collaboration between local tourism businesses and visitors to develop environmentally and socially responsible practices. This collaboration yields long-term positive outcomes for both the local economy and residents' quality of life (Falter, 2024).

Mediating factors

In the context of ecotourism, memorable experiences, and destination trust serve as crucial mediating factors. Memorable experiences constitute positive perceptions that remain vivid in tourists' minds long after their journey ends (Bhandari et al., 2024). Research demonstrates that higher levels of memorable experiences increase tourists' trust in destinations (Sundari et al., 2024), while simultaneously contributing to enhanced subjective well-being (Yen et al., 2024) and visit intention (Albores et al., 2024). Destination trust reflects tourists' confidence in a location based on its reliability, transparency, and friendliness, characterized by locals who demonstrate honesty, sincerity, straightforwardness, and hospitality while conducting business transparently (Yang, 2022). Studies confirm that tourists who trust destinations experience greater subjective well-being (Zhao et al., 2024) and exhibit stronger visit intentions (Wang et al., 2024).

Driving factors

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) refers to the informational influence derived from electronic communications regarding tourism services or destinations that affects tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions. It functions as a contemporary marketing mechanism that leverages content generated by tourists to enhance the attractiveness of travel experiences (Hussain et al., 2023). Empirical research by Amali et al. (2024) provides evidence that eWOM has a causal relationship with memorable experiences of ecotourism tourists, as the transmission of experiences through online channels helps frame expectations and psychologically prepares tourists to embrace value-rich experiences. Meanwhile, Aldulaimi et al. (2025) found that eWOM significantly influences destination trust, demonstrating that the presentation of information and positive sentiment exchanges contribute to reducing perceived uncertainty and enhancing the credibility of tourism destinations.

Social media influence encompasses the dynamics of online social networks in creating awareness and appeal for ecotourism destinations. These platforms serve as communicative mechanisms for information dissemination and the enhancement of destination identity, directly affecting tourists' attitudes, behaviors, and motivations at both individual and societal contexts (J. Liu et al., 2024). Research findings by Mittal et al. (2022) reflect that social media influence positively impacts memorable experiences, as emotionally diverse and multidimensional content on social media platforms generates emotional engagement and profound impressions, making tourism experiences more meaningful. Concurrently, Iqbal et al. (2025) present evidence that transparent, accurate, and consistent information presentation on social media platforms plays a crucial role in building confidence and trust toward destinations.

Social media reviews denote interactive platforms where users can convey experiences and value assessments regarding ecotourism services, influencing the decision-making processes and behavioral patterns of target tourists through narratives and qualitative rating systems (Zaky & Mafruhah, 2024). The study by Yu et al. (2021) demonstrates that in-depth experiential reviews and strategic recommendations help tourists plan their trips efficiently and develop expectations aligned with reality, leading to more satisfying and memorable experiences. Similarly, Lam et al. (2025) present research supporting that consistent, credible, and diverse experiential review content significantly influences the establishment of destination trust, particularly in ecotourism contexts which are sensitive to credibility perceptions.

Hypothesis

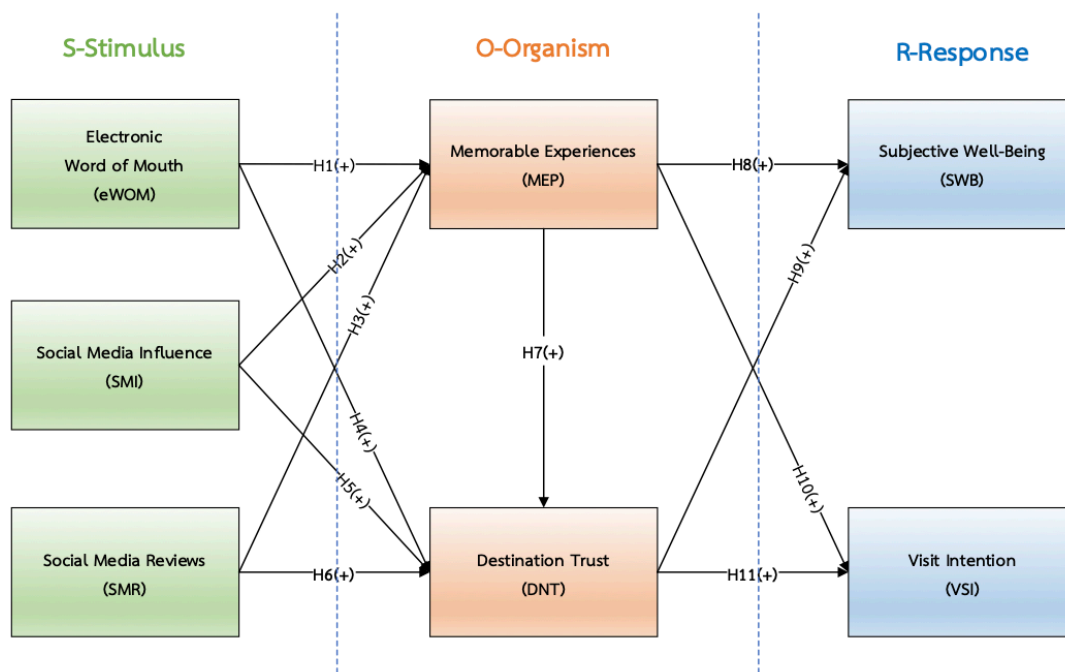
- H1: eWOM has a direct positive influence on memorable experiences.
- H2: Social media influence has a direct positive influence on memorable experiences.
- H3: Social media reviews have a direct positive influence on memorable experiences.
- H4: eWOM has a direct positive influence on destination trust.
- H5: Social media influence has a direct positive influence on destination trust.
- H6: Social media reviews have a direct positive influence on destination trust.
- H7: Memorable experiences have a direct positive influence on destination trust.
- H8: Memorable experiences have a direct positive influence on subjective well-being.
- H9: Destination trust has a direct positive influence on subjective well-being.
- H10: Memorable experiences have a direct positive influence on visit intention.
- H11: Destination trust has a direct positive influence on visit intention.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the S-O-R model literature review, a conceptual framework was developed with independent variables (eWOM, social media influence, social media reviews), mediating variables (memorable experiences, destination trust), and dependent variables (subjective well-being, visit intention), as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Source: Researchers

5. METHODOLOGY

1. Population and Sample

This quantitative research study examines ten premier ecotourism destinations in Thailand. The study population consists of Thai tourists visiting these ecotourism sites, which were selected based on rankings from the “Top hundred best ecotourism destinations in Thailand” (Tripadvisor, 2025). The selected destinations represent diverse ecological regions throughout Thailand: (1) Doi Inthanon National Park, Chiang Mai; (2) Thai Elephant Home, Chiang Mai; (3) Khao Yai National Park, Nakhon Ratchasima; (4) Phu Huai Isan, Nong Khai; (5) Sai Yok National Park, Kanchanaburi; (6) Erawan National Park, Kanchanaburi; (7) Mangrove Forest Conservation and Ecotourism Study Center, Chonburi; (8) Royal Commemorative Observation Tower and Mangrove Forest Ecosystem Learning Center at Water Pagoda, Rayong; (9) Bangkok Pirates, Bangkok; and (10) Bang Pu Recreation Center, Samut Prakan.

To determine the appropriate sample size, this study adhered to the criterion suggesting five respondents per parameter (Hair et al., 2019). With 85 parameters in the measurement model (15 for Lambda-X, 20 for Lambda-Y, 15 for Delta, 20 for Epsilon, 6 for Gamma, 5 for Beta, and 4 for Phi), the minimum required sample size was calculated as 425 tourists (85×5).

Due to the inability to ascertain the exact population figures and the impracticality of accessing every population unit, non-probability sampling techniques were employed. Specifically, quota sampling was imple-

mented to ensure a proportional representation of respondents across all ten ecotourism destinations, thereby enhancing the generalizability and validity of the research findings.

2. Scope of Research

Content Scope: The study examines electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), social media influence, and social media reviews as independent variables, with memorable experiences and destination trust serving as mediating variables, and subjective well-being and visit intention as dependent variables.

Population and Sample Scope: The research focuses on tourists visiting 10 ecotourism destinations across Thailand, with a total sample size of 499 respondents.

Geographical Scope: The study encompasses 10 popular ecotourism sites throughout Thailand.

Timeframe Scope: Data collection and analysis were conducted in May 2025, approximately one month.

3. Research Instrument

The research instrument comprised 8 sections: (1) a demographic questionnaire with closed-ended items; (2) eWOM; (3) Social media influence; (4) Social media reviews; (5) Memorable experiences; (6) Destination trust; (7) Subjective well-being; and (8) Visit intention. Sections 2-8 each contained 5 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

The research instrument, originally developed in English but intended for Thai tourists, necessitated a rigorous back-translation methodology. This process adhered to the following protocol: (1) An initial translation from English to Thai was conducted by a bilingual expert with proficiency in business administration; (2) Subsequently, a second language specialist performed a reverse translation from Thai back to English; and (3) A panel of three business administration scholars with English language expertise evaluated the semantic equivalence between the original questionnaire and its back-translated version. The evaluation employed a binary assessment system—assigning a score of 1 for matched content meanings and 0 for discrepancies—on an item-by-item basis. For each questionnaire item, an average score was calculated, with a perfect average of 1.0 established as the acceptability threshold. Any item failing to achieve this benchmark underwent iterative back-translation until the required score was attained. The analytical results confirmed that all questionnaire items successfully met the established equivalence criteria.

The psychometric properties of the research instrument were evaluated through two methodological procedures: (1) Content validity verification by a panel of five experts, yielding an Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) ranging from 0.60 to 1.00, which surpassed the established threshold criterion (≥ 0.5); and (2) Reliability assessment conducted via a pilot study with 40 sample sets and subsequent field data collection from 499 participants. Statistical analyses revealed Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.7 and item discrimination values greater than 0.3, thereby satisfying the quality criteria stipulated by Hair et al. (2019).

4. Data Collection

The research instrument utilized both online and physical questionnaire distribution channels. The respondent pool comprised Thai tourists who visited ten designated ecotourism locations across Thailand. The

empirical investigation was conducted in May 2025. The fieldwork resulted in 499 properly completed questionnaires, which conformed to statistical validity standards and constituted an appropriate sample size for subsequent data analysis procedures.

5. Data Analysis

The analytical framework employed a comprehensive multivariate statistical approach. Before hypothesis testing, data screening identified and eliminated two cases exhibiting extreme values based on Mahalanobis distance metrics. The dataset underwent rigorous reliability assessment, with all measures exceeding the established thresholds. Diagnostic examination confirmed compliance with fundamental statistical assumptions—normal distribution patterns, homoscedasticity, and linear relationships between key variables. Variance inflation factor analysis indicated acceptable independence among predictor variables with no concerning multicollinearity. Measurement model validation proceeded through confirmatory factor analysis, with convergent validity indices surpassing conventional benchmarks. The research hypotheses were subsequently evaluated using structural equation modeling techniques. Statistical procedures encompassed both descriptive analyses (frequency distributions, percentages, and measures of dispersion) and advanced latent variable modeling to examine theoretical construct relationships.

6. RESULTS

The instrument's psychometric properties were evaluated through a two-fold validation process. Initial content validation was followed by a reliability assessment using data from 499 respondents, which confirmed that the instrument exceeded conventional thresholds with Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient values surpassing 0.7 and corrected item-total correlation (CITC) values exceeding 0.3. The subsequent convergent validity examination further substantiated the instrument's robustness, with standardized factor loading (λ) and average variance extracted (AVE) values both exceeding the 0.5 benchmarks, while construct reliability (CR) values surpassed the 0.7 thresholds recommended by Hair, Babin, Anderson, and Black (2019). A comprehensive presentation of these analytical findings is available in Table 1.

Table 1

Displays reliability and convergent validity results (n=499)

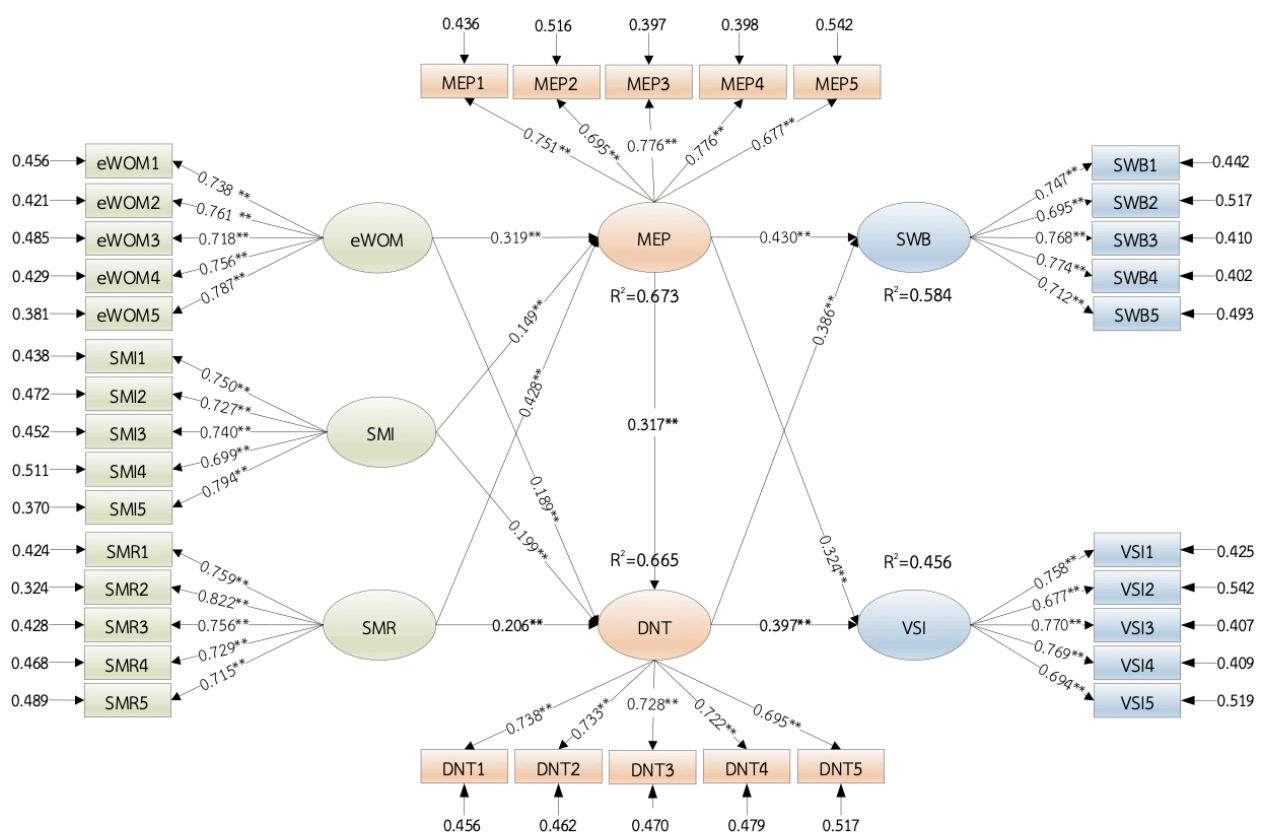
Latent Variables	CITC	α	λ	AVE	CR
Electronic word of mouth (eWOM)		0.864		0.566	0.867
eWOM1	.644		0.740		
eWOM2	.692		0.758		
eWOM3	.676		0.722		
eWOM4	.712		0.757		
eWOM5	.700		0.784		

Latent Variables	CITC	α	λ	AVE	CR
Social Media Influence (SMI)		0.857		0.551	0.860
SMI1	.642		0.747		
SMI2	.646		0.724		
SMI3	.728		0.741		
SMI4	.674		0.700		
SMI5	.668		0.797		
Social Media Reviews (SMR)		0.869		0.572	0.869
SMR1	.677		0.757		
SMR2	.737		0.826		
SMR3	.699		0.755		
SMR4	.667		0.724		
SMR5	.684		0.713		
Memorable Experiences (MEP)		0.852		0.551	0.859
MEP1	.642		0.755		
MEP2	.659		0.699		
MEP3	.726		0.783		
MEP4	.675		0.784		
MEP5	.617		0.684		
Destination Trust (DNT)		0.835		0.517	0.842
DNT1	.577		0.734		
DNT2	.676		0.774		
DNT3	.660		0.719		
DNT4	.648		0.670		
DNT5	.622		0.693		
Subjective well-being (SWB)		0.850		0.551	0.860
SWB1	.651		0.755		
SWB2	.643		0.694		
SWB3	.720		0.769		
SWB4	.659		0.777		
SWB5	.624		0.712		
Visit intention (VSI)		0.858		0.539	0.854
VSI1	.686		0.755		
VSI2	.656		0.678		
VSI3	.705		0.770		
VSI4	.684		0.770		
VSI5	.629		0.692		

According to the findings, respondents had visited various ecotourism sites in relatively equal proportions. The Mangrove Forest Conservation and Ecotourism Study Center in Chonburi emerged as the most frequented destination among the ten surveyed sites, attracting 57 participants (11.42%). Demographic analysis revealed that the majority of respondents were female (323 participants, 64.73%), predominantly in the 21-30 age bracket (224 participants, 44.89%), and married or cohabiting (271 participants, 54.31%). Regarding educational attainment, most participants had completed a bachelor's degree (292 participants, 58.52%). The sample exhibited a modal monthly income range of 30,001-50,000 THB (283 participants, 56.71%), with corporate employment constituting the primary occupational category (124 participants, 27.05%). Recreational purposes represented the predominant motivation for visitation to ecotourism attractions (423 participants, 82.78%).

Figure 2

Results of structural equation model analysis after model adjustment



$\chi^2 = 438.169$, $df = 409$, $\chi^2/df = 1.071$, $p\text{-value} = 0.154$, $RMSEA = 0.012$, $CFI = 0.997$, $TLI = 0.996$, $SRMR = 0.029$

Remark:

** Means for statistical significance level, $p\text{-value} \leq .01$, $t\text{-value} \geq 2.576$

The research findings can be summarized according to the established research objectives as follows:

Objective 1: The findings indicate that social media reviews ($\gamma=0.428$), eWOM ($\gamma=0.319$), and social media influence ($\gamma=0.149$) have statistically significant positive direct effects ($p<.01$) on memorable experiences, ordered by path coefficient values.

Objective 2: Memor

able experiences ($\beta=0.317$), social media influence ($\gamma=0.206$), eWOM ($\gamma=0.199$), and social media reviews ($\gamma=0.189$) exhibit statistically significant positive direct effects ($p<.01$) on destination trust, arranged in descending order of path coefficient values.

Objective 3: Memorable experiences ($\beta=0.430$) and destination trust ($\beta=0.386$) show statistically significant positive direct effects ($p<.01$) on subjective well-being, ordered by path coefficient values.

Objective 4: Destination trust ($\beta=0.397$) and memorable experiences ($\beta=0.324$) and show statistically significant positive direct effects ($p<.01$) on visit intention, ordered by path coefficient values.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) analysis yielded compelling results regarding the interrelationships among key tourism constructs. Specifically, the combined effects of eWOM, social media influence, and social media reviews collectively explained 67.30% of the variance in tourists' memorable experiences. Furthermore, these three social media factors together with memorable experiences accounted for 66.50% of the variance in destination trust. The analysis also revealed that memorable experiences and destination trust jointly explained 58.40% of the variance in tourists' subjective well-being. Finally, these same two factors—memorable experiences and destination trust—explained 45.60% of the variance in visit intention.

Table 1

Direct Effect, Indirect Effect, and Total Effect

Effect Variables	MEP			DNT			SWB			VSI		
	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE
eWOM	0.319**	-	0.319**	0.189**	0.101**	0.290**	-	0.249**	0.249**	-	0.218**	0.218**
SMI	0.149**	-	0.149**	0.199**	0.048*	0.247**	-	0.159**	0.159**	-	0.146**	0.146**
SMR	0.428**	-	0.428**	0.206**	0.134**	0.342**	-	0.316**	0.316**	-	0.274**	0.274**
MEP				0.317**		0.317**	0.430**	0.122**	0.552**	0.324**	0.125**	0.449**
DNT							0.386**	-	0.386**	0.397**	-	0.397**

7. DISCUSSIONS

This study contributes to the ecotourism literature by revealing a distinctive hierarchy of digital influence factors that shape memorable tourist experiences, with social media reviews emerging as the most powerful predictor ($\gamma=0.428$, $p<.01$), followed by eWOM ($\gamma=0.319$, $p<.01$), and social media influence ($\gamma=0.149$, $p<.01$). This finding challenges the prevailing assumption in tourism marketing literature that personal recommendations through eWOM typically dominate destination choice decisions (Amali et al., 2024; Mittal et al., 2022; Yu et al., 2021).

The primacy of social media reviews over eWOM in the Thai ecotourism context represents a significant departure from established tourism behavior patterns. While previous studies in general tourism settings have consistently identified eWOM as the strongest influencing factor (Amali et al., 2024), our results suggest that ecotourism experiences require more substantive, visual, and detailed information that social media reviews can provide more effectively than brief personal recommendations. This aligns with Yu et al. (2021)'s findings in nature-based tourism, where visual authenticity and detailed experiential accounts proved more influential than traditional word-of-mouth communications.

The relatively weaker influence of direct social media influence ($\gamma=0.149$) compared to user-generated content (reviews and eWOM) supports the authenticity-seeking behavior characteristic of ecotourists. This finding corresponds with Mittal et al. (2022)'s research but demonstrates a more pronounced gap in the ecotourism context, suggesting that sustainability-conscious travelers exhibit heightened skepticism toward promotional content and greater trust in peer-generated information. The ecotourism market's emphasis on environmental authenticity and conservation values may explain why tourists prioritize genuine user experiences over curated social media content.

From a theoretical perspective, these results extend the S-O-R framework by demonstrating that in ecotourism contexts, the stimulus hierarchy differs significantly from conventional tourism. The cognitive processing (organism) of ecotourism information appears to prioritize credibility and detailed experiential evidence over emotional appeal or social proof, ultimately generating stronger memorable experiences (response) when information sources are perceived as trustworthy and comprehensive.

The practical implications for Thai ecotourism destinations are substantial. Unlike mass tourism markets where social media influence campaigns may be most effective, ecotourism operators should prioritize encouraging detailed, authentic reviews from visitors and facilitating genuine eWOM conversations rather than investing heavily in influencer marketing or promotional social media content.

These findings are particularly relevant for emerging ecotourism destinations in Southeast Asia, where digital marketing strategies must balance promotional objectives with the authenticity expectations of environmentally conscious travelers. The study's limitations include its focus on Thai destinations, which may limit generalizability to other cultural contexts, and the cross-sectional design, which prevents examination of how these influences on patterns may evolve as social media platforms and user behaviors change.

This study advances understanding of trust formation in ecotourism by demonstrating that memorable experiences serve as the primary mediator between digital influences and destination trust, with on-site experiences ($\beta=0.317$, $p<.01$) exerting substantially stronger effects than pre-visit digital stimuli. This finding represents a significant contribution to tourism trust literature, which has traditionally emphasized the dominance of information-based trust formation over experiential trust development (Sundari et al., 2024).

The moderate and relatively similar effects of digital factors—social media influence ($\gamma=0.206$) (Iqbal et al., 2025), eWOM ($\gamma=0.199$) (Aldulaimi et al., 2025), and social media reviews ($\gamma=0.189$) (Lam et al., 2025)—on destination trust contrast sharply with their varied impacts on memorable experiences identified earlier. This convergence suggests that while digital channels differ in their ability to create memorable experiences, their direct trust-building capacity operates through more uniform mechanisms. Unlike previous studies in commercial tourism settings where social media reviews typically demonstrate superior trust-building effects (Lam et al., 2025), the ecotourism context appears to neutralize these differences, possibly due to the experiential nature of sustainability and conservation values that cannot be fully conveyed through digital media alone.

The primacy of memorable experiences over digital factors in trust formation challenges the information processing model commonly applied in tourism research. While Sundari et al. (2024) identified similar patterns in cultural tourism, our findings extend this understanding to ecotourism contexts where trust encompasses not only service reliability but also environmental authenticity and conservation credibility. This distinction is particularly important given that ecotourism trust involves multiple dimensions—trust in operators, trust in environmental claims, and trust in conservation impacts—that can only be validated through direct experience.

From a theoretical perspective, these results refine the S-O-R framework application in sustainable tourism contexts. The findings suggest that while digital stimuli effectively trigger initial interest and expectations (as demonstrated in the memorable experience formation), the organism-response relationship between memorable experiences and trust operates through different cognitive pathways. The experiential processing of authentic conservation activities, genuine cultural interactions, and visible environmental stewardship creates trust through verification rather than information processing, explaining why the experience-trust relationship ($\beta=0.317$) substantially exceeds any single digital factor's direct effect.

The practical implications challenge the digital-first marketing strategies prevalent in contemporary tourism. While digital presence remains crucial for initial engagement, ecotourism operators must recognize that sustainable trust, essential for visitation and positive word-of-mouth, develops primarily through authentic on-site experiences. This suggests that resource allocation should prioritize experience quality and conservation authenticity over digital marketing intensity, particularly for destinations seeking to build long-term reputational capital in the sustainable tourism market.

These findings have particular relevance for emerging ecotourism destinations in developing countries, where limited marketing budgets often force choices between digital promotion and experience investment. The study indicates that authentic conservation programs, meaningful community engagement, and genuine

environmental stewardship will generate more substantial trust dividends than equivalent investments in digital marketing campaigns.

However, the study's limitations include its focus on post-visit trust assessment, which may not capture the dynamic interplay between digital expectations and experience validation. Additionally, the cross-sectional design prevents examination of how trust formation patterns may evolve as ecotourism destinations mature and visitor expectations change over time.

This study makes a significant contribution to positive psychology in tourism by establishing memorable experiences as the primary driver of subjective well-being in ecotourism contexts ($\beta=0.430$, $p<.01$), with destination trust serving as a substantial secondary factor ($\beta=0.386$, $p<.01$). This finding extends beyond conventional tourism satisfaction research by demonstrating that well-being outcomes in sustainable tourism operate through dual psychological pathways: experiential fulfillment and cognitive security, representing a more complex mechanism than the single-pathway models typically applied in mainstream tourism research.

The stronger influence of memorable experiences over destination trust on well-being challenges the risk-mitigation paradigm prevalent in tourism psychology literature. While traditional tourism research emphasizes trust as the primary precursor to positive outcomes (Zhao et al., 2024). Our findings suggest that in ecotourism contexts, the intrinsic rewards from meaningful environmental and cultural encounters supersede the extrinsic comfort provided by trust and security. This pattern aligns with Yen et al. (2024) research in nature-based tourism but represents a departure from commercial tourism studies, where trust typically demonstrates stronger well-being effects.

The substantial impact of both factors reveals that ecotourism well-being operates through complementary rather than competing mechanisms. Memorable experiences ($\beta=0.430$) appear to activate hedonic well-being pathways through sensory engagement, cultural discovery, and environmental connection, while destination trust ($\beta=0.386$) facilitates eudaimonic well-being through perceived authenticity, safety, and conservation credibility. This dual-pathway model contradicts the hierarchical approaches common in tourism satisfaction literature, where trust typically mediates the experience-outcome relationship rather than operating as an independent well-being contributor.

From a theoretical perspective, these results advance self-determination theory applications in sustainable tourism by demonstrating that ecotourism well-being satisfies multiple psychological needs simultaneously. The memorable experience pathway addresses autonomy and competence needs through adventure and learning, while the trust pathway satisfies relatedness needs through community connection and environmental stewardship confidence. This multi-need satisfaction explains why both factors maintain strong independent effects rather than one dominating the other, as typically observed in single-need satisfaction models.

The findings have profound implications for ecotourism destination management, particularly in emerging markets like Thailand, where tourism development must balance economic benefits with community well-being and environmental conservation. Rather than prioritizing either experience quality or trust building, destination

managers should recognize that sustainable well-being outcomes—essential for positive word-of-mouth, repeat visitation, and community support—require simultaneous investment in both authentic conservation experiences and transparent, trustworthy operations.

These results are particularly relevant for post-pandemic tourism recovery, where visitor well-being expectations have heightened while trust concerns have intensified. Ecotourism destinations that can deliver both meaningful environmental experiences and demonstrate genuine conservation commitment will likely achieve superior well-being outcomes compared to those focusing solely on either dimension.

The practical implications suggest that ecotourism operators should integrate well-being metrics into their performance evaluation systems, moving beyond traditional satisfaction measures to assess both experiential fulfillment and trust-based security. This dual assessment approach could provide more accurate predictions of visitor advocacy behaviors and destination loyalty in sustainable tourism contexts.

However, the study's limitations include its focus on immediate post-visit well-being assessment, which may not capture the long-term psychological benefits associated with meaningful ecotourism experiences. Additionally, the cultural specificity of well-being constructs in Thai contexts may limit generalizability to other ecotourism destinations with different cultural values and environmental characteristics.

This study advances visit intention behavior in sustainable tourism by demonstrating that cognitive-based trust ($\beta=0.397$, $p<.01$) exerts substantially stronger influence on revisit intention than affect-based memorable experiences ($\beta=0.324$, $p<.01$), fundamentally challenging mainstream tourism literature where emotional experiences consistently dominate visit intentions. This finding illuminates how ecotourism visit decision-making operates through profoundly different psychological mechanisms compared to conventional tourism, wherein rational evaluation of destination credibility and conservation authenticity decisively supersedes emotional satisfaction in driving future visit intentions.

The striking primacy of destination trust over memorable experiences in predicting revisit intention fundamentally contradicts the experience-dominant paradigm that pervades tourism visit behavior research. While extensive previous research consistently demonstrates that emotional experiences serve as the predominant predictor of visit intentions, with Albores et al. (2024) exemplifying such patterns, our findings reveal that ecotourism contexts distinctively activate deliberative rather than intuitive visit decision-making processes. This remarkable pattern strongly aligns with Wang et al. (2024) pioneering findings in sustainable tourism contexts, where trust emerged as the critical determinant of visit intentions.

The substantial yet secondary role of memorable experiences ($\beta=0.324$) reveals that while emotional fulfillment remains fundamentally important, ecotourists demonstrate markedly heightened concern for destination authenticity and conservation credibility when formulating visit decisions. This sophisticated cognitive-affective hierarchy profoundly reflects the intrinsically values-driven nature of sustainable tourism, where visitors' environmental consciousness and deeply held social responsibility concerns systematically moderate the relationship between experiential satisfaction and visit intentions. Unlike conventional tourists who predominantly

seek hedonistic enjoyment and immediate gratification, ecotourists systematically evaluate destinations through comprehensive sustainability lenses, consistently prioritizing trustworthy conservation practices over purely experiential rewards when making visit decisions.

From a theoretical perspective, these compelling results substantially extend the S-O-R framework by demonstrating that in profoundly value-laden tourism contexts, the organism component (cognitive and emotional processing) operates through sophisticated hierarchical pathways where trust evaluation systematically supersedes experiential satisfaction in generating visit intention responses. The robust trust-visit intention relationship ($\beta=0.397$) compellingly suggests that when tourists cognitively process ecotourism stimuli, their meticulous assessment of destination reliability, environmental authenticity, and tangible conservation impact functions as the paramount mechanism driving visit intentions. This striking pattern definitively indicates that the S-O-R framework in sustainable tourism contexts requires fundamental modification to accommodate values-based organism processing, where rational evaluation pathways may systematically dominate emotional response pathways in generating visit intention outcomes.

The profound practical implications fundamentally challenge the experience-centric marketing strategies that overwhelmingly dominate contemporary tourism promotion. While creating memorable experiences unquestionably remains essential for immediate satisfaction and well-being enhancement, cultivating enduring visitor loyalty and sustained visit intentions in ecotourism necessitates strategic investment in transparently authentic conservation practices, genuinely meaningful community engagement, and demonstrably credible environmental stewardship. Destinations that myopically prioritize superficial marketing appeal over substantive conservation commitment may successfully achieve ephemeral short-term visitation gains but will inevitably fail to develop the deep-rooted trust indispensable for generating consistent future visit intentions and genuinely sustainable tourism growth.

These groundbreaking findings possess particularly profound relevance for emerging ecotourism destinations throughout developing regions, where severely constrained resources invariably force critical trade-offs between experience enhancement investments and conservation program funding. The results compellingly suggest that authentically implemented conservation programs and transparently communicated sustainability practices will systematically generate substantially stronger long-term visit intention returns than equivalent investments in experiential amenities or promotional marketing activities.

The trust-dominant visit intention pattern additionally indicates that negative trust violations—including greenwashing practices, cultural exploitation, or environmental degradation—may inflict disproportionately devastating impacts on ecotourism destinations' ability to generate future visit intentions compared to conventional tourism sites. This asymmetric vulnerability emphatically underscores the critical importance of maintaining authentic sustainability practices and ensuring transparent, honest communication throughout ecotourism development processes to preserve strong visit intention outcomes.

However, the study's inherent limitations include its exclusive examination of stated rather than actual revisit behavior, which may inadequately capture the complex, multifaceted factors genuinely influencing real-world visit decisions. Additionally, the cross-cultural validity of trust-visit intention relationships may vary considerably across different ecotourism markets characterized by varying environmental consciousness levels and distinctly different sustainability expectations.

8. ORIGINALITY AND BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

This study advances tourism theory by applying and demonstrating the robustness of the S-O-R framework within the digital tourism context. The research establishes how digital stimuli (eWOM, social media influence, and reviews) operate as environmental cues that trigger psychological responses through memorable experiences and destination trust as mediating mechanisms. By validating the S-O-R framework's explanatory power in contemporary digital environments, this study bridges the gap between established psychological theory and modern tourism behavior. The research broadens the scope of tourism outcome variables by incorporating subjective well-being alongside traditional visit intentions, creating a comprehensive model that integrates digital marketing, tourism psychology, and well-being research. This rigorous application reveals how digital social proof elements systematically influence tourist decision-making through experiential and trust-based psychological pathways, confirming S-O-R's continued relevance in explaining behavior within digitized tourism landscapes.

9. RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implications of the Study

Local Community

Local communities should develop integrated management strategies to enhance tourism value creation and sustainability. Social media reviews management through the development of a digital ecosystem conducive to collecting and analyzing tourist feedback, such as establishing digital touchpoints with QR codes and training personnel to respond constructively to critical comments. Electronic word-of-mouth promotion by designing unique tourist experiences and developing local community ambassadors capable of creating memorable impressions for visitors, as well as providing digital spaces for tourists to exchange experiences. Leveraging social media influence through content development that reflects local cultural identity, creating virtual communities for eco-tourism enthusiasts, and designing visually distinctive photo spots that can effectively promote user-generated content across social media platforms.

Tourism Businesses

Digital marketing resource management for ecotourism businesses necessitates an integrated approach across three critical dimensions. First, social media review management should be implemented through in-depth analysis using Sentiment Analysis technology to systematically monitor consumer sentiments, coupled

with developing mechanisms for creative and transparent responses to negative criticism, which influences long-term service quality perceptions. Meanwhile, eWOM promotion strategies should focus on designing programs that encourage positive experience sharing through appropriate incentives, such as repeat purchase discounts, prompt and friendly responses to feedback, and the creation of “Wow Moments” that naturally stimulate organic sharing. Furthermore, leveraging social media influence requires designing digital campaigns that showcase novel ecotourism experiences, combined with forming strategic partnerships with travel and environmental influencers, as well as developing content calendars that consistently present insightful information about ecotourism. This comprehensive approach enhances credibility and expands destination awareness among broader audiences, ultimately contributing to sustainable competitive advantage in the increasingly digitalized tourism landscape.

Government Sector

Government agencies should implement strategic initiatives to integrate key variables influencing tourist decision-making in the ecotourism context. Regarding social media review management, efforts should focus on developing systems to collect and display tourist feedback on official platforms, establishing guidelines for online review management for industry stakeholders, and creating rating systems for outstanding ecotourism-oriented destinations based on empirical user data. For the eWOM, establishing quality certification systems for ecotourism destinations would enhance credibility and stimulate positive information dissemination, alongside developing platforms for sharing valuable tourist experiences and promoting storytelling or photography contests that reflect the value of this tourism dimension. Concerning social media influence, governments should initiate the development of national or regional centralized platforms aggregating data on standardized ecotourism destinations, enhancing digital capabilities for communities and small-scale operators, and designing national campaigns leveraging social media to promote ecotourism through powerful hashtags that generate awareness and engagement.

2. Recommendations for Future Research

Examining the impact of user-generated content (UGC): Analyze how specific characteristics of user-generated content (authenticity, presentation formats) influence memorable experiences, destination trust, and ultimately affect subjective well-being and visit intention.

Integrating digital well-being and fear of missing out (FOMO) concepts: Investigate the relationship between tourism-related social media consumption and digital fatigue/FOMO, including destination trust's role in mitigating negative effects on tourists' overall well-being.

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