

# UNDERSTANDING HOW SOCIAL MEDIA INFORMATION INTENSITY DRIVES CHOICES IN TOURISM DESTINATIONS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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## Abstract

*Social media platforms have fundamentally changed the way tourists discover, evaluate and select destinations by amplifying electronic word of mouth. This study examines the role of information intensity, a critical dimension of electronic word of mouth, in influencing the successive decision stages of awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and destination choice. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling was used to collect survey data from 100 active social media users from Algeria who had recently planned or selected a travel destination. The results show that information intensity has a significant effect on awareness and directly influences destination choice, with intermediate constructs such as interest, evaluation and trial playing an important mediating role. These results underline the importance of high quality, engaging content in increasing awareness and acceptance of destinations.*

**Keywords:** information intensity, tourism destination choice, social media, structural equation modelling (SEM)

**JEL Classification:** M31; L83; Z33

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, social media has revolutionized the way information is created, shared and consumed, especially in the context of tourism. Tourists increasingly rely on social media platforms such as Instagram, TripAdvisor and YouTube to explore potential destinations, gather opinions and evaluate their travel options. At the heart of this shift is electronic word of mouth (eWOM) — a digital phenomenon that amplifies user-generated content to inform consumers and influence their decisions. An important aspect of eWOM is information intensity, which refers to the richness, volume and relevance of information available online. Information intensity not only improves travelers' access to various insights, but also significantly influences the way they process, evaluate and respond to destination-related content.

Although the influence of social media on tourism is widely recognized, there is little evidence on how information intensity influences the destination selection decision-making process. The process itself is complicated and often involves several stages: Initial familiarization, developing interest, evaluating options, trying or testing, and finally making a decision. This sequence indicates a multidimensional relationship between information intensity and tourist behavior. Furthermore, research suggests that information intensity may also have a direct influence on destination choice, with certain travelers bypassing the intermediate stages. This complexity raises important questions about how eWOM elements interact with cognitive and affective processes during decision-making.

The study attempts to decipher the pathways through which information intensity influences the different stages of the decision-making process, also considering its direct influence on the final choice of destination. The main objectives of this study are: to investigate the role of information intensity in social media in influencing tourists' behavior during the decision-making process; to explore the

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mediating role of awareness, interest, evaluation and trial in tourists' destination choice; and to test the direct influence of information intensity on destination choice.

## **2. Literature review**

The advent of social media has profoundly transformed the tourism industry, particularly the way travelers gather information and decide on a destination. At the heart of this change is electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), i.e. user-generated content distributed via digital platforms. This literature review examines the role of eWOM, focusing on the intensity of information and its influence on the successive stages of tourists' decision-making processes.

### *2.1 Electronic Word-of-Mouth in Tourism*

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has become increasingly influential in the tourism industry and serves as a more credible source of information than traditional advertising (Ilieva and Boteva, 2023). EWOM refers to informal communication directed to consumers via internet-based technologies and relates to the use or characteristics of specific goods and services (Pourfakhimi, Duncan and Coetzee, 2020). eWOM includes positive or negative consumer reviews shared online (Pranaya, et al., 2023). Social media platforms and review sites play a crucial role in the spread of eWOM as travelers seek first-hand information and recommendations (Ilieva and Boteva, 2023). Positive eWOM can have a viral effect by quickly reaching a wide audience and encouraging the active participation of tourists in providing feedback (Juliana, Sihombing and Ferdi, 2023). The credibility and accessibility of eWOM have made it a key factor influencing tourists' decisions. Studies have shown that eWOM significantly influences destination choice, accommodation selection and activity planning (Sayed and Elsaid, 2022).

### *2.2 Social media information intensity as a dimension of eWOM*

Information intensity refers to the richness, scope and relevance of the information available online, particularly in the context of electronic word of mouth (eWOM). In the tourism industry, high information intensity provides potential travelers with detailed insights into destinations, reducing uncertainty and facilitating the decision-making process. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of information intensity for consumer perception and behavior. For example, Akdim (2021) highlights that the quality and quantity of eWOM significantly influence readers' decision-making processes, with factors such as valence, relevance and comprehensibility playing a crucial role. Similarly, Wang (2015) discusses how the quality of arguments and credibility of sources in eWOM influence tourists' attitudes towards destinations, further emphasizing the importance of information intensity in the tourism industry.

### *2.3 Tourism destination choice*

The decision-making process when choosing a travel destination is complex and is influenced by numerous factors. Research has identified several variables that affect destination choice, including tourists' motivations, information sources and demographic characteristics (Bell, 2016). Information seeking plays a crucial role in this process, with tourists evaluating the perceived usefulness of different information sources based on factors such as bias, accessibility and value (Bell, 2016). The search for external information has been shown to be particularly important and influential in the decision-making process (Do and Shih, 2016). The complexity of travel destination choice has led researchers to develop decision models and frameworks to better understand the process. Understanding these factors and models is essential for destination marketing professionals to effectively target potential tourists and increase the likelihood of their destination being selected (Bell, 2016; Do and Shih, 2016).

### *2.4 Impacts of Social Media Information Intensity on destination choice stages*

Social media plays an important role when deciding on a destination and planning a trip. Studies have shown that social media influences tourists' destination choice decisions, with factors such as shared travel experiences, photos and videos influencing the choice (Himangshu Shakor, Debashish and Raju, 2019). Social media is used throughout the travel planning process, especially when seeking information and sharing experiences after the trip (Matikiti-Manyevere and Kruger, 2019). They have become a reliable source of information, second only to recommendations from family and friends (Matikiti-Manyevere and Kruger, 2019).

The first stage of the destination decision-making process is awareness, where potential travelers learn about the different options for a destination. This phase is crucial as it forms the basis for the subsequent evaluation and selection phases. Exposure to in-depth information through eWOM can significantly increase awareness of potential destinations. Basco, Joy and Gueco (2021) found that social media campaigns with rich content effectively increase destination awareness among target audiences. Krakover and Corsale (2021) introduced the concept of "sieving" in tourism, highlighting how travelers filter numerous destinations during the awareness phase to make a shortlist. High information intensity on social media can significantly increase tourists' awareness of potential destinations. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

**H1:** Higher information intensity on social media positively influences tourists' awareness of potential destinations.

Awareness of a destination can stimulate interest, prompting individuals to seek more information. Research indicates that increased awareness through social media exposure correlates with heightened interest in destinations (Tham, Mair and Croy, 2019). Similarly, studies have found that social media marketing activities enhance destination attractiveness, which in turn fosters tourists' interest and positive attitudes towards tourism (Alzaydi and Elsharnouby, 2023). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H2:** Tourists' awareness of a destination positively influences their interest in that destination.

Once tourists develop an interest in a destination, they proceed to evaluate its attributes, including attractions, accommodation and cultural experiences. Engaging and detailed eWOM content greatly facilitates this evaluation process by providing comprehensive insights. Keelson et al. (2024) emphasize that eWOM is a crucial element in consumers' purchasing decisions in the tourism sector and contributes significantly to the intention to visit a destination. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that:

**H3:** Tourists' interest in a destination positively influences their evaluation of that destination.

The evaluation stage in tourists' decision-making involves comparing various destination options, leading to trial behaviors such as seeking further information or making preliminary visits. High information intensity in eWOM provides comprehensive data, facilitating informed comparisons and encouraging trial actions. Studies have shown that eWOM significantly influences tourists' attitudes toward destinations and their travel intentions (Reza Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012). Additionally, the quality and credibility of eWOM content play crucial roles in shaping tourists' perceptions and behaviors (Zarrad and Debabi, 2015). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H4:** Positive evaluation of a destination leads to trial or testing behaviors regarding that destination

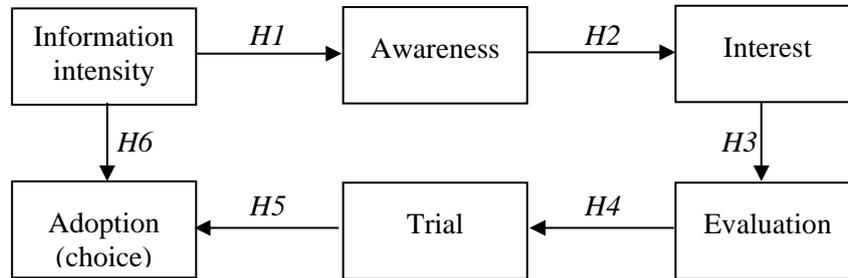
Engaging in trial behaviors, such as participating in virtual tours or reviewing detailed itineraries, can significantly reduce uncertainties and enhance confidence in a destination, thereby influencing the final decision-making process. Research indicates that immersive experiences such as virtual reality (VR) tours positively influence tourists' intentions to visit certain destinations as they provide a sense of presence and familiarity (Ouerghemmi, et al., 2023). In Saudi Arabia, the integration of VR in tourism has been explored as a tool to revitalize destinations, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting its potential to promote destinations and influence tourists' decisions (Elnagar, 2020). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

**H5:** Trial or testing behaviors positively influence the final choice of a destination.

Beyond the sequential stages of decision making, the intensity of information in electronic word of mouth (eWOM) can directly influence tourists' choice of destination. Compelling and abundant information has the potential to persuade tourists to select a destination without much deliberation. Studies have shown that high information intensity directly correlates with tourists' choice of destination. Wang and Yan (2022) found that the volume and richness of online reviews significantly influence travelers' decisions. In addition, Goyal and Taneja (2023) highlighted the importance of pre-trip online information in shaping destination image and influencing travel decisions. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

**H6:** Higher information intensity on social media directly influences tourists' choice of destination.

These hypotheses aim to elucidate the pathways through which information intensity affects each stage of the decision-making process, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the role of eWOM in tourism (Fig. no.1):



**Figure 1. Conceptual model**

*Source: Developed by the authors*

### 3. Methodology

The data for this study was collected using an online survey distributed via Google Forms. The survey instrument was designed to gather insights into how social media information intensity influences the sequential stages of the tourism decision-making process, leading to destination choice. The questionnaire was divided into sections corresponding to the constructs of the study: Information Intensity, Awareness, Interest, Evaluation, Trial, and Destination Choice, as well as the demographics of the sample. A convenience sampling approach was employed for this study. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where participants are selected based on their availability and willingness to participate (Taherdoost, 2016). This method was chosen due to its practicality and cost-effectiveness in reaching the target audience: active social media users who have recently researched or planned a travel destination. While this sampling method may limit the generalizability of the findings, it aligns with the exploratory nature of the study and provides initial insights into the research problem.

A self-administered online questionnaire was developed for this study, drawing on validated measures from prior literature in tourism and hospitality. The questionnaire was divided into two parts: the first part included items addressing the constructs relevant to the research model, while the second part collected socio-demographic information about the respondents. A five-point Likert scale was employed for all construct items, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), ensuring consistency and ease of interpretation. The construct of information intensity was measured using items adapted from studies on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and social media's role in tourism. Key references included: Thao, Caldicott and Kamal (2023). The measurement of destination choice decision process was adapted from Jacobsen and Munar (2012), Kumar and Ahmed (2023), Mishra, Kishan and Tewari (2023).

The study included 100 respondents, which is a suitable sample size for exploratory studies using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Participants were required to meet the following criteria to be included in the study: active use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TripAdvisor, or YouTube for travel-related purposes, as well as recent engagement in planning or choosing a tourism destination within the past 12 months. The online survey was disseminated through email, social media platforms, and personal networks to maximize reach. The survey was open for five weeks, during which participants could voluntarily respond. To enhance response accuracy, questions were framed in a simple and direct manner, with clear instructions provided for each section. Anonymity was assured to encourage honest and unbiased responses.

### 4. Data analysis and results

To evaluate the proposed hypotheses, this study utilized Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), implemented through the SmartPLS 4 software (Ringle, Wende and Becker,

2024). This analytical approach was selected due to its suitability for handling complex models with multiple constructs and pathways, especially when the dataset exhibits non-normal distribution characteristics (Latan, Hair and Noonan, 2023). Moreover, PLS-SEM aligns with the primary objective of this research, which is to predict endogenous variables such as destination choice, emphasizing its predictive capabilities. Recent studies underscore the increasing adoption of PLS-SEM in social sciences, particularly in domains such as tourism, marketing, and hospitality (Hair, Harrison and Ajjan, 2022). The analysis adhered to the standard two-step approach for PLS-SEM: (1) the measurement model was assessed to ensure the reliability and validity of constructs, and (2) the structural model was evaluated to test the hypothesized relationships (Latan, Hair and Noonan, 2023).

The study's sample comprised 100 respondents, with a gender distribution of 59% male and 41% female. Age-wise, a significant majority (77%) were between 18 and 30 years, 18% ranged from 31 to 40 years, and 5% were aged 41 to 50 years. Educational attainment varied: 5% had a secondary education or less, 65% held university degrees, 29% possessed postgraduate qualifications, and 1% reported other forms of education. Regarding marital status, 77% were single, while 23% were married. In terms of employment, 32% were employees, 25% engaged in freelance work, 33% were students, and 10% were unemployed. Income levels showed that 29% earned less than 20.000 DZD, 34% earned between 20.000 and 40.000 DZD, 14% between 41,001 and 50.000 DZD, 6% between 50.001 and 60.000 DZD, 8% between 60.001 and 100.000 DZD, and 9% earned more than 100.000 DZD.

**Table 1. Measurement model**

Item	Loading	Alpha Cronbach	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
awareness1	0,841			
awareness 2	0,753	0,713	0,839	0,635
awareness 3	0,794			
adoption15	0,901	0,739	0,885	0,793
adoption16	0,879			
evaluation10	0,852			
evaluation11	0,849	0,785	0,875	0,699
evaluation9	0,807			
intensity_info16	0,745			
intensity_info17	0,847	0,757	0,861	0,674
intensity_info18	0,866			
interest4	0,772			
interest5	0,725	0,733	0,833	0,554
interest6	0,761			
interest7	0,719			
trial12	0,854			
trial 13	0,807	0,809	0,886	0,722
trial 14	0,886			

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on SmartPLS 4 results

The measurement model was examined based on internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability), convergent validity (indicator reliability, average variance extracted), and discriminant validity (Latan, Hair and Noonan, 2023). Table 1 summarizes the results of the measurement model. Item loadings ranged from 0,719 to 0,901, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0,6, suggesting high item reliability. Items with loadings below 0,6 were excluded from the analysis (i.e., info\_intensity01, evaluation8, and adoption17 and 18). Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs ranged from 0,713 to 0,809, meeting the minimum threshold of 0,7. Composite reliability (CR) values were higher than 0,7, ranging from 0,833 to 0,886, which confirms satisfactory internal consistency across constructs. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0,5, with AVE values ranging from 0,554 to 0,793. This indicates that the constructs capture sufficient variance from their items.

The results confirm that the measurement model meets the requirements for internal consistency, convergent validity, and indicator reliability. All retained constructs and items show acceptable levels of reliability and validity, as recommended by Hair, et al. (2019). Composite reliability values greater than 0,7 and AVE values exceeding 0,5 demonstrate a robust measurement model fit. Discriminant

validity was assessed using both the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Table no.2) and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations (Table no.3), as recommended by Hair, et al. (2019). These tests ensure that constructs are sufficiently distinct from one another, which is a critical requirement for a valid measurement model. The Fornell-Larcker criterion suggests that the square root of the AVE for each construct (diagonal values in Table no. 2) should be greater than the correlation coefficients between the construct and other constructs in the model. This ensures that each construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with other constructs.

**Table 2. Discriminant validity according to Fornell-Larcker criterion**

	Adoption	Awareness	Evaluation	Info-intensity	Interest	Trial
Adoption	<b>0,890</b>					
Awareness	0,482	<b>0,797</b>				
Evaluation	0,569	0,484	<b>0,836</b>			
Info-intensity	0,535	0,637	0,461	<b>0,821</b>		
Interest	0,497	0,559	0,635	0,447	<b>0,745</b>	
Trial	0,559	0,384	0,434	0,350	0,420	<b>0,850</b>

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on SmartPLS 4 results.

As reported in Table 2, the diagonal values (square roots of AVEs) for all constructs are greater than the off-diagonal values (correlations between constructs), indicating adequate discriminant validity. For instance, the square root of the AVE of “adoption” is 0,890, which is higher than its correlations with other constructs (e.g., 0,482 with Awareness and 0,569 with Evaluation). Thus, the Fornell-Larcker results confirm that the constructs meet the discriminant validity requirements.

**Table 3. constructs’ discriminant validity to Hetrotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT)**

	Adoption	Awareness	Evaluation	Info-intensity	Interest	Trial
Adoption						
Awareness	0,668					
Evaluation	0,741	0,638				
Info-intensity	0,708	0,854	0,583			
Interest	0,665	0,755	0,824	0,579		
Trial	0,703	0,481	0,524	0,430	0,518	

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on SmartPLS 4 results.

The HTMT ratio provides a more stringent test of discriminant validity by assessing whether correlations between constructs are below a specific threshold. According to Henseler, et al. (2015), HTMT values should not exceed 0,85 for discriminant validity to be considered adequate. As shown in Table 3, all HTMT values fall below the threshold of 0,85. Overall, the HTMT results suggest that discriminant validity is adequately established for the model's constructs.

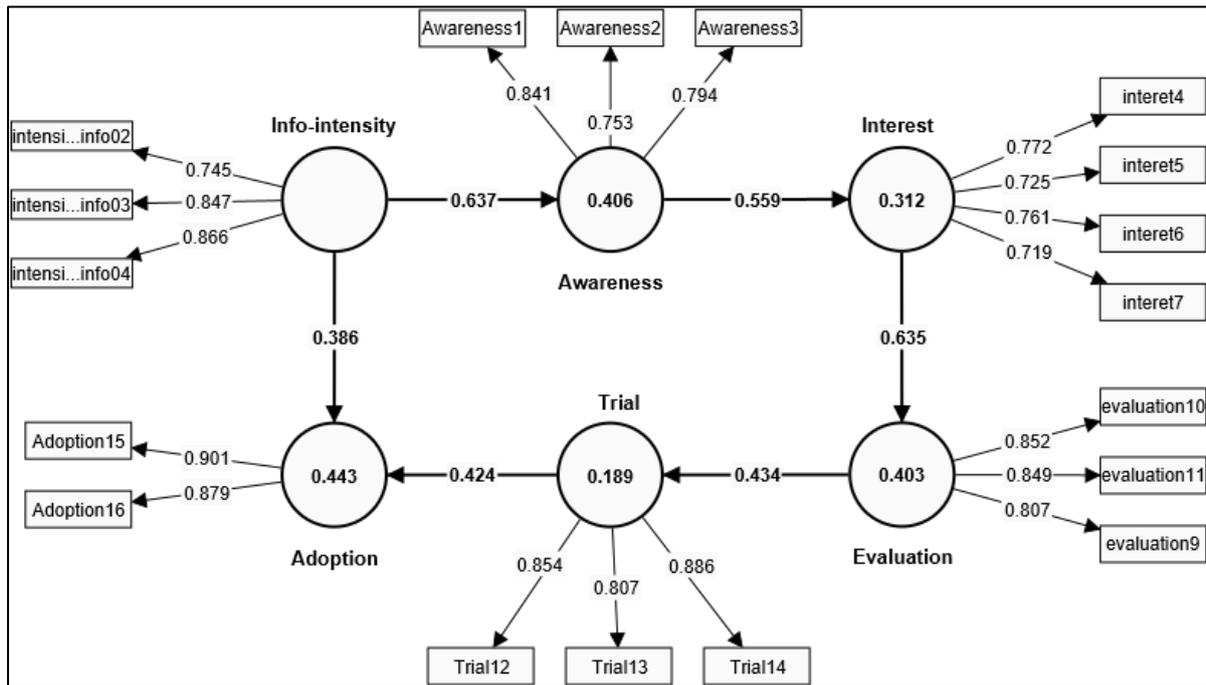
**Table 4. Structural model assessment results**

Hypothesis	Beta	T statistics	P values	Decision
H1: Information intensity → Awareness	0,637	9,162	0,000	Supported
H2: Awareness → Interest	0,559	7,142	0,000	Supported
H3: Interest → Evaluation	0,635	8,789	0,000	Supported
H4: Evaluation → Trial	0,434	5,320	0,000	Supported
H5: Trial → Adoption	0,424	5,665	0,000	Supported
H6: Information intensity → Adoption	0,386	4,258	0,000	Supported

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on SmartPLS 4 results.

After confirming the validity and reliability of the measurement model, the next step was the evaluation of the structural model. The structural model was assessed based on the statistical significance and relevance of the path coefficients. To test the significance of the path coefficients, a bootstrap resampling procedure with 5000 iterations was performed. The results of the structural model assessment are presented in Table 4.

The results of the path analysis indicate that all hypothesized relationships were significant, with  $p$ -values  $< 0,001$ , and all  $T$ -values exceeding the critical threshold of 1,96 (for a 95% confidence level).



**Figure 2. Resulted model**

Source: SmartPLS 4 results

The following is a summary of the key findings (Figure 2):

**H1: Information intensity**  $\rightarrow$  **Awareness** ( $\beta = 0,637$ ,  $t = 9,162$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ): Information intensity strongly influences Awareness, with the highest path coefficient in the model, supporting H1. This indicates that the richness of social media content plays a pivotal role in making users aware of potential destinations.

**H2: Awareness**  $\rightarrow$  **Interest** ( $\beta = 0,559$ ,  $t = 7,142$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ): Awareness has a significant positive effect on Interest, confirming H2. This result highlights the role of awareness created by social media information in generating interest among tourists.

**H3: Interest**  $\rightarrow$  **Evaluation** ( $\beta = 0,635$ ,  $t = 8,789$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ): Interest has a significant positive effect on Evaluation, confirming H3. This result highlights that curiosity about a destination leads to a more detailed analysis and comparison of destination attributes.

**H4: Evaluation**  $\rightarrow$  **Trial** ( $\beta = 0,434$ ,  $t = 5,320$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ): Evaluation has a significant positive effect on Trial, supporting H4. This suggests that the assessment of a destination's attributes strongly influences trial behaviors such as virtual exploration or seeking further information.

**H5: Trial**  $\rightarrow$  **Adoption** ( $\beta = 0,424$ ,  $t = 5,665$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ): Trial behaviors, such as engaging in virtual tours or reading travel blogs, have a significant positive effect on Adoption, supporting H5. This emphasizes the importance of pre-decision activities in shaping the final destination choice.

**H6: Information intensity**  $\rightarrow$  **Adoption** ( $\beta = 0,386$ ,  $t = 4,258$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ): Information intensity directly affects Adoption, providing support for H6. This implies that the richness and volume of information on social media have a significant influence on the final decision to adopt a destination.

To analyze the mediation effects in the model, the procedure suggested by Hair, et al. (2017) was employed. A bootstrapping approach with 5000 iterations was performed to test the indirect effects, and confidence intervals were examined to verify the significance of the mediation relationships. The indirect effects were considered significant if the confidence intervals did not include zero.

**Table 5. Mediating effect results**

Hypothesis	Beta (O)	T Value	P Value	Confidence Interval (2.5%–97.5%)	Decision
H1: Info-intensity → Awareness → Interest → Evaluation	0,226	3,738	0,000	(0,126 - 0,363)	Supported
H2: Info-intensity → Awareness → Interest	0,356	4,793	0,000	(0,219 - 0,512)	Supported
H3: Interest → Evaluation → Trial → Adoption	0,117	3,233	0,001	(0,059 - 0,200)	Supported
H4: Interest → Evaluation → Trial	0,276	4,129	0,000	(0,159 - 0,421)	Supported
H5: Info-intensity → Awareness → Interest → Evaluation → Trial	0,098	2,653	0,008	(0,044 - 0,189)	Supported
H6: Awareness → Interest → Evaluation → Trial	0,154	3,184	0,001	(0,078 - 0,266)	Supported
H7: Evaluation → Trial → Adoption	0,184	3,819	0,000	(0,102 - 0,289)	Supported
H8: Info-intensity → Awareness → Interest → Evaluation → Trial → Adoption	0,042	2,348	0,019	(0,018 - 0,086)	Supported
H9: Awareness → Interest → Evaluation → Trial → Adoption	0,065	2,671	0,008	(0,030 - 0,124)	Supported
H10: Awareness → Interest → Evaluation	0,355	4,910	0,000	(0,225 - 0,506)	Supported

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on SmartPLS 4 results.

**H1: Info-intensity → Awareness → Interest → Evaluation** ( $\beta = 0,226$ ,  $t = 3,738$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ): A significant indirect effect is observed, indicating that Information Intensity affects Evaluation indirectly through Awareness and Interest. The confidence interval (0,126 - 0,363) does not include zero, supporting the hypothesis. This highlights the cascading role of Awareness and Interest in driving Evaluation.

**H2: Info-intensity → Awareness → Interest** ( $\beta = 0,356$ ,  $t = 4,793$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ): The indirect effect is significant, confirming that Awareness mediates the relationship between Information Intensity and Interest. The confidence interval (0,219 - 0,512) further validates this finding. This demonstrates that higher information intensity creates awareness, which drives interest in a tourism destination.

**H3: Interest → Evaluation → Trial → Adoption** ( $\beta = 0,117$ ,  $t = 3,233$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ): The indirect effect is significant, showing that Evaluation and Trial mediate the relationship between Interest and Adoption. The confidence interval (0,059 - 0,200) does not include zero, supporting the hypothesis. This result underlines the importance of both Evaluation and Trial in translating Interest into Adoption.

**H4: Interest → Evaluation → Trial** ( $\beta = 0,276$ ,  $t = 4,129$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ): A significant indirect effect is observed, with a confidence interval (0,159 - 0,421). This supports the hypothesis that Evaluation mediates the relationship between Interest and Trial, showing the importance of evaluations in motivating trial behaviors.

**H5: Info-intensity → Awareness → Interest → Evaluation → Trial** ( $\beta = 0,098$ ,  $t = 2,653$ ,  $p = 0,008$ ): The indirect effect is significant, confirming that Information Intensity indirectly influences Trial through Awareness, Interest, and Evaluation. The confidence interval (0,044 - 0,189) supports this multi-stage mediation.

**H6: Awareness → Interest → Evaluation → Trial** ( $\beta = 0,154$ ,  $t = 3,184$ ,  $p = 0,001$ ): A significant indirect effect is observed, indicating that Interest and Evaluation mediate the effect of Awareness on Trial. The confidence interval (0,078 - 0,266) does not include zero, supporting the hypothesis. This highlights how awareness flows into evaluation and trial behaviors.

**H7: Evaluation → Trial → Adoption** ( $\beta = 0,184$ ,  $t = 3,819$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ): The indirect effect is significant, confirming that Trial mediates the relationship between Evaluation and Adoption. The confidence interval (0,102 - 0,289) supports this hypothesis, emphasizing the critical role of trial in the adoption process.

**H8: Info-intensity → Awareness → Interest → Evaluation → Trial → Adoption** ( $\beta = 0,042$ ,  $t = 2,348$ ,  $p = 0,019$ ): This multi-stage mediation path is significant, with the confidence interval (0,018 - 0,086) excluding zero. This result demonstrates the sequential influence of Information Intensity through multiple constructs, ultimately leading to Adoption.

**H9: Awareness → Interest → Evaluation → Trial → Adoption** ( $\beta = 0,065$ ,  $t = 2,671$ ,  $p = 0,008$ ): A significant indirect effect is observed, showing that Awareness indirectly impacts Adoption through Interest, Evaluation, and Trial. The confidence interval (0,030 - 0,124) confirms this mediation.

**H10: Awareness → Interest → Evaluation** ( $\beta = 0,355$ ,  $t = 4,910$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ): The indirect effect is significant, confirming that Interest and Evaluation mediate the relationship between Awareness and Evaluation. The confidence interval (0,225 - 0,506) further validates this finding.

## 5. Conclusion

This study aimed to address two key objectives: (1) to examine the role of information intensity in tourism destination decision-making processes for tourism destinations, and (2) to evaluate the mediating role of constructs such as awareness, interest, evaluation, and trial in explaining the relationship between information intensity and destination adoption. The findings provide insights into how information from social media influences tourism decisions and the implications for management and research.

The results highlight the significant role of information intensity in the decision-making process for tourist destinations. In line with previous studies on social media eWOM and destination choice (Akin and Şener (2024); Filieri, et al. (2021); Merabet (2020); Himangshu Shakor, Debashish and Raju (2019)), the findings confirm that high quality, rich and engaging content on social media strongly influences tourists' awareness and interest in destinations. This suggests that platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TripAdvisor play a pivotal role in guiding potential travelers through their decision-making stages.

Specifically, the study revealed that

1. Direct effects of Information Intensity: Information intensity significantly influences awareness ( $\beta = 0.637$ ,  $t = 9.162$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming its role as a starting point for destination decision making. In addition, information intensity has an indirect effect on evaluation and adoption through the mediating constructs.
2. Sequential effects of Awareness, Interest, Evaluation and Trial: a multilevel mediation model was confirmed, with significant paths such as awareness → interest → evaluation → trial → adoption ( $\beta = 0.042$ ,  $t = 2.348$ ,  $p = 0.019$ ). This is consistent with previous research suggesting that tourists go through cognitive and behavioral stages before making travel decisions (Dabholkar and Sheng, 2012).
3. Evaluation and Trial as critical stages: the findings show that evaluation plays a central role in trial ( $\beta = 0.434$ ,  $t = 5.320$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), which in turn influences adoption. This underlines the importance for tourists to compare and evaluate their options before virtually or physically engaging with a destination.

This study extends the literature on social media and tourism by confirming the mediating roles of intermediate constructs such as awareness, interest, evaluation and trial in the decision-making process. The findings emphasize the complex interplay between cognitive and behavioral stages and provide strong empirical support for multistage decision-making frameworks in tourism.

The findings of this study underscore significant implications for destination management for managers and marketers seeking to optimize the use of social media for destination promotion. Managers should focus on increasing information intensity by sharing high quality images, videos and user-generated

reviews while encouraging tourists to leave detailed comments and share their experiences to boost electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Raising awareness and interest through targeted social media campaigns and collaborating with influencers or travel bloggers is crucial to increase visibility and pique travelers' interest. Virtual tours, interactive content, personalized itineraries and user-friendly comparison tools can help tourists explore destinations and simplify their decision-making process. Given the importance of sequential messaging, campaigns should strategically guide tourists through the stages of awareness, interest, evaluation and trial, culminating in destination adoption. In addition, using analytics to monitor drop-off points within these stages allows tourism managers to refine their social media strategies and effectively close potential gaps.

This study provides valuable insights, but acknowledges several limitations that open avenues for future research. The reliance on convenience sampling may restrict the generalizability of the findings, warranting future research using probability sampling for more representative results. The relatively small sample size (n= 100) highlights the need for larger samples in subsequent studies to enhance the robustness of the results. Furthermore, the focus of this study on the tourism sector limits its applicability to other industries, suggesting the need to explore similar models in the retail, hospitality and healthcare sectors. Incorporating additional mediators such as trust, commitment and satisfaction could provide deeper insights into the factors that influence long-term loyalty. Future research could also examine moderators such as demographic factors (e.g., age, income) and frequency of social media use to understand their influence on decision-making processes. Furthermore, an extension to specific types of destinations such as ecotourism and cultural tourism would offer nuanced perspectives. Finally, dynamic decision-making models could be explored to examine how real-time social media interactions and trends influence tourism decisions over time.

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