The Influence of Internet Word-of-Mouth on Consumers' Choice of Tourist Destination: Take Consumers in East China on the Little Red Book as an Example

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Abstract: *Internet Word of Mouth of tourist destination can reflect local tourist market condition which has great impact on consumers' travel decision. Based on correlation analysis, regression analysis and word frequency analysis, this paper researched the influence of tourist network reputations on Litter Red Book platform on East China consumers' choice of where to have a trip. The empirical evidence shows that the quantity, reliability of IWOM and negative IWOM on Little Red Book will signally influence consumers' willingness to travel. Based on these, the paper put forward management suggestions to related departments.*

Keywords: *Internet Word of Mouth; Tourism consumption intention; Little Red Book; Choice of tourist destination*

1. Introduction

With the development of the economy and society, the improvement of people's living standards and the decreasing impact of COVID-19 on life, the hotness of tourism is rising. During May Day of 2023 holiday, 274 million people travel in domestic China, according to the comparable caliber, it was 119.09% of the same period in 2019 [1]. Tourism has become a good choice for people to relax. As one of the economically developed regions in China, East China has a high level of consumption and strong demand for tourist [2]. At the same time, the promotion of rational consumption and the pressure of scheduling make most consumers refer to the suggestions of online reference groups when choosing travel destinations and the travel experiences and suggestions of such groups are the Internet Word of Mouth (IWOM) of travel destinations. Therefore, to conduct an empirical study on IWOM of tourist destinations has great theoretical and practical significance. As a highly popular "grass-planting" platform, Little Red Book provides consumers numerous references. In view of this, this paper focuses on the IWOM of Little Red Book platform, selects consumers in East China as a questionnaire group and analyzes the impact of IWOM of Little Red Book on consumers' choice of tourist destinations by using the SPSS26.0 software, so as to put forward suggestions for the management of tourist destinations.

2. Research basis and theoretical hypothesis

2.1. Research basis

Internet Word of Mouth refers to the transmission of products, services and other related information by consumers through the Internet [3]. It's a product of the development of the Internet. Under the influence of network community and other factors, IWOM has wider spread and higher efficiency than traditional Word-of-Mouth and consumers are more likely to be affected by it [4].

At present, the research of IWOM mainly focuses on the influence of it on consumption and the measurement dimension of it. In terms of the impact of IWOM on consumption, a large number of scholars have verified the relationship between IWOM and consumption through empirical research. Gong Yixin et al. (2022) analyzed the reviews of forestry products on Tmall through breakpoint regression and obtained the impact of IWOM on the sales volume of forest products [5]. Chen Jing et al. (2021) verified the impact of online reviews on consumers' willingness to consume agricultural products

based on factor analysis and binary Logit model and put forward suggestions for IWOM management [6]. Yin Yutong et al. (2022) used Python crawler and mathematical statistics methods to build a multiple linear regression model based on the data of Yelp and analyzed the mechanism of the influence of IWOM on the intention to consume sports venues services [7]. In terms of measurement dimensions of IWOM, scholars put forward different measurement dimensions from multiple perspectives. Xin Chong et al. (2016) measured it from the perspective of quantity and quality [8]. Chen Saihua (2019) evaluated it from the perspective of its credibility [9]. Liu Beibei (2018) measured negative IWOM from the perspectives of consumer attitudes and corporate strategies [10].

After reviewing papers, it is found that current research on IWOM has the following shortcomings. Firstly, the research mainly focuses on catering, film, retail and other industries, the existing researches on IWOM in tourism involve the consumption of tourism destination products [11-12], accommodation consumption [13-14], etc., there are few researches on the choice of tourist destination. Secondly, the measurement dimensions of IWOM focus on individual angles and rarely integrate multiple measurement dimensions. This paper holds that the choice of tourist destination is the basis for consumers to carry out various kinds of consumption in tourist destination which is of great significance to promote the economic development of tourist destination and consumers will be affected by a variety of IWOM measurement dimensions when making tourist destination decision. Based on this, this paper extends the existing research, starts from the four dimensions of IWOM including quantity, quality, reliability of IWOM and negative IWOM, explores the impact of IWOM on consumers' choice of tourist destinations in East China through empirical research.

2.2. Theoretical hypothesis

2.2.1. The influence of the quantity of IWOM on consumers' choice of tourist destination on Little Red Book

The quantity of IWOM on Little Red Book (hereinafter refers to as the "quantity of IWOM") refers to the total quantity of evaluations including notes and comments, presented in a certain place on the platform within a certain period of time. The larger quantity of Word-of-Mouth, the higher the popularity of the place and the richer the content that consumers can refer to [15]. Chen Jiayu believes that with a large number of product reviews, information asymmetry will be greatly reduced and consumers are more likely to make rational consumption choices [16]. Based on this, this paper proposes the following research hypothesis:

H1: Quantity of IWOM has a positive impact on consumers' choice of tourist destination.

2.2.2. The influence of the quality of IWOM on consumers' choice of tourist destination on Little Red Book

For complex purchasing behaviors such as tourism, consumers often collect various kinds of information extensively before making travel-related decisions and make the final decision after careful selection and comparison [17]. Wang Yu et al. believe that customers tend to obtain high quality information to understand products through user evaluation [18]. Wang Junping et al. believe that the quality of Word-of-Mouth reflects the effective information contained in it. The higher the quality, the more effective information and more conducive to consumer decision-making [19]. Based on this, this paper proposes the following research hypothesis:

H2: Quality of IWOM (the quality of IWOM in tourist destinations on Little Red Book) has a positive impact on consumers' choice of tourist destinations.

2.2.3. The influence of the reliability of IWOM on consumers' choice of tourist destination on Little Red Book

Digitalization makes information more available to get, network anonymity makes it difficult to judge the authenticity of Word-of-Mouth and merchants have a variety of marketing methods, information reliability becomes particularly important. Shao Yiming et al. believe that the reliability of IWOM can affect consumers' perception of travel risk and improve their purchase intention [20]. Eagly A H et al. believe that the higher the credibility of the information source, the stronger the persuasion of the information recipient [21]. Based on this, this paper proposes the following research hypothesis:

H3: Reliability of IWOM (the reliability of IWOM in tourist destinations on Little Red Book) has a positive impact on consumers' choice of tourist destinations.

2.2.4. The influence of negative IWOM on consumers' choice of tourist destination on Little Red Book

The anonymity of the network provides more space for consumers' feedback dissatisfaction and the spread of network information is not limited by time and space and the rapid dissemination makes it easier for consumers to get negative information. Merchants tend to hide negative information to attract consumers [22], but negative Word-of-Mouth is often the real experience of consumers which has more influence. Guo Guoqing et al. believe that if the Word-of-Mouth viewed by consumers is inconsistent with their expectations, their consumption behavior will change [23]. Before consumers choose a tourist destination, they usually have formed a positive preference for the destination, so the impact of negative information on consumers' choice cannot be ignored. Based on this, this paper proposes the following research hypothesis:

H4: Negative IWOM (negative IWOM in tourist destinations on Little Red Book) has negative impact on consumers' choice of tourist destinations.

H5: Negative IWOM has more significant impact on consumers' choice of travel destination compared with positive IWOM.

3. Research design

3.1. Scale design

Based on the previous research results of scholars and the actual development of Little Red Book, this paper designs various dimensions of quantity [24-25], quality [26-27], reliability [28-29] and negative IWOM [30] based on maturity scale. The items in the scale are rated 1-5 points from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" on a five-level Likert scale.

3.2. Questionnaire design

The questionnaire is divided into two parts: personal basic information and the main body of it. At the beginning of the questionnaire, the purpose and concept of the research are introduced to improve the understanding of the respondents. The basic personal information includes gender, age, educational level, monthly income level, occupation, travel frequency and method. In the main part of the questionnaire, questions "Do you check relevant IWOM information before choosing a tourist destination" and "Have you ever used Little Red Book to check IWOM of a tourist destination" are designed to screen samples. Then is to measure the quantity, quality, reliability of IWOM and negative IWOM 4 dimensions and collect consumers' willingness to leave IWOM information after travel.

3.3. Questionnaire data processing and reliability and validity test

Questionnaires were distributed and collected through Little Red Book in this survey. The survey respondents are consumers in East China who had searched for tourist destination information in Little Red Book to choose tourist destination. 100 questionnaires were sent out for the pre-survey and SPSS26.0 was used for reliability and validity test. The Klunbach reliability coefficient of the total table is 0.825, the KMO value is 0.736 and the Bartlett test P value equals 0.000, the reliability and validity are all within the acceptable range. After modifying some questions, send out formal questionnaire.

The formal survey was conducted from August 11, 2023 to August 15, 2023 and 301 questionnaires were collected. After excluding unqualified samples, 289 valid questionnaires are obtained with an effective recovery rate of 96.01%. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire collection results were tested. The Klonbach reliability coefficient of the subscale is higher than 0.7 and that of the total scale is 0.775, indicating good reliability of the scale. Because the questionnaire scale is based on the mature scale design of relevant scholars and its content validity is considered to be good. Using factor analysis to test the structural validity of the questionnaire scale and the results shows that the KMO value of each subscale is larger than 0.7 and P=0.000 and the KMO value of the total scale is 0.756, which is suitable for exploratory factor analysis. A total of 4 principal components are extracted from exploratory factor analysis. Except for some items whose factor load number is about 0.6, the factor load numbers after principal component rotation are all close to or greater than 0.7 and the cumulative variance explanation rate was higher than 60%. There is no cross-factor phenomenon in the component matrix after rotation and the dimension division is consistent with expectations, suggesting that the scale structure validity is good.

4. Data analysis

4.1. Descriptive statistical analysis

289 valid questionnaires were collected and the proportion of men and women is relatively balanced. They are mainly aged between 18 and 24 years old, accounting for 77.85% of the total sample and are mainly students which accounts for 77.51%. People in this age group grow up with the Internet, are active in various Internet platforms, have sufficient time and energy and pay high attention to tourism. The proportion of people with bachelor degree or above is 89.27% and the education level of the respondents is relatively high. The distribution of average monthly income in each stage is relatively uniform and the proportion of average monthly income is 1001-2000 yuan. The frequency of travel is once a year or more, accounting for 86.51%, the sample travel frequency is relatively high. 88.24% of the respondents chose self-service travel as a way to travel, so their demand for collecting tourist information is high. The survey respondents have a high frequency of checking relevant IWOM (hereinafter referred to as "viewing frequency") before choosing tourist destination.

4.2. Analysis of current situation

4.2.1. Analysis on the overall status of influencing factors of sample tourist destination selection

The data in Table 1 shows that consumers attach more importance to the quantity, quality, reliability of IWOM and negative IWOM of tourist destinations and the average score of each scale is higher than 4 (relatively important). The average score of IWOM reliability is relatively low. In contrast, consumers' trust in IWOM is low and the reliability of IWOM needs to be improved. The average of negative IWOM items is 4.34 and the average of negative IWOM items is 4.30 and the follow-up comments of negative words, pictures and negative IWOM can increase negative impression of consumers. From the consumer's own point of view, hypothesis H5 is true.

Table 1: Statistical table of the importance of each dimension of IWOM to the selection of tourist destinations in the survey sample.

	Sample size	Min.	Max.	Average	Standard deviation
Quantity of IWOM	289	3.00	5.00	4.30	0.36
Quality of IWOM	289	3.00	5.00	4.35	0.39
Reliability of IWOM	289	2.00	5.00	4.11	0.49
Negative IWOM	276	2.67	5.00	4.34	0.47

4.2.2. Difference analysis of influencing factors of sample demographic variables in tourist destination selection

Independent sample T-test (Table 2) and single factor ANOVA analysis (Table 3) were used to explore the differences in the importance of different characteristics of consumers in each dimension of IWOM. The results show that men pay more attention to negative IWOM than women. People of different occupation and travel frequency have significant differences in the importance of quantity of IWOM. There are significant differences in the importance of negative IWOM between gender and viewing frequency. Students in school, workers in administrative units, freelancers, travel frequently pay more attention to quantity of IWOM. There are significant differences in the quantity and quality of IWOM and the importance of negative IWOM with different viewing frequency. The high level of education and high frequency of viewing are more affected by IWOM.

Table 2: Independent sample T-test.

	Basic characteristics	Classification	Sample size	Average	t	P
Negative IWOM	Gender	Male	124	4.41	2.458	0.015**
		Female	152	4.28		

Note: ** means P<0.001, the same below.

Table 3: Single factor ANOVA analysis

	Basic characteristics	Classification	Sample size	Average	F	P
Quantity of IWOM	Occupational	Student	224	4.31	2.375	0.030**
		Administrative unit worker	9	4.42		
		Enterprise manager	3	3.75		
		Doctor/lawyer/stylist/journalist/teacher	8	4.16		
		General staff	28	4.23		
		Others	17	4.37		
Quantity of IWOM	Travel frequency	Every few years	39	4.31	2.944	0.033**
		Once a year	64	4.21		
		2-3 times a year	147	4.31		
		Lager than 3 times a year	39	4.42		
	Viewing frequency	Rarely	2	4.25	22.791	0.000**
		Seldom	15	4.05		
		Often	119	4.15		
		Every time	153	4.45		
Quality of IWOM	Viewing frequency	Rarely	2	4.00	11.746	0.000**
		Seldom	15	4.03		
		Often	119	4.26		
		Every time	153	4.47		
Negative IWOM	Viewing frequency	Rarely	2	3.83	6.578	0.000**
		Seldom	15	4.15		
		Often	119	4.23		
		Every time	153	4.45		
Little Red Book IWOM influence on travel destination selection	Educational level	Junior high school	1	4.00	4.372	0.002**
		High school/technical school	7	3.29		
		Junior college	23	4.17		
		Undergraduate	186	4.22		
		Master's degree or above	72	4.32		
	Viewing frequency	Rarely	2	3.00	20.371	0.000
		Seldom	15	3.67		
		Often	119	4.01		
		Every time	153	4.45		

4.2.3. Analysis of the correlation between IWOM on Little Red Book and consumers' choice of tourist destination

Using Pearson correlation analysis to examine the correlation between the four dimensions of IWOM on Little Red Book and the impact degree of consumers' choice of tourist destination. The results show that at the confidence level of 0.01, the quantity, quality, reliability of IWOM and negative IWOM are significantly correlated with the impact of consumers' choice of tourist destination, which can be used for regression analysis. Negative IWOM is significantly negatively correlated with other items, indicating that negative IWOM will have a negative impact on the existing IWOM and affect consumers' positive impression of the tourist destination. Hypothesis H5 is verified.

4.2.4. Regression analysis

Through regression analysis, this paper explores the influence of Little Red Book IWOM on consumers' choice of tourist destination in East China (Y). The results are shown in Table 4. The model passed the F test, F=11.434 and P<0.01, VIF values are all less than 5, indicating that there is no multicollinearity problem. Quantity of IWOM (F1) (β=0.33, P<0.05) and reliability (F3) (β=0.178, P<0.05) has a significant positive impact on the choice of tourism destination, while negative IWOM (F4) (β=-0.215, P<0.05) has significant negative impact on the choice of tourism destination. H1, H3 and H4 are assumed to be valid, while the quality of IWOM(F2), P > 0.05, fails the significance test, indicating that the quality of IWOM has no significant impact on the choice of tourist destination and hypothesis H2 is not established. The regression equation is obtained:

$$Y=0.702+0.333F1+0.178F3-0.215F4 \tag{1}$$

Table 4: Influence of IWOM on Little Red Book on consumer tourism destination decision

Dependent variable	Model	Unnormalized coefficient		Standard coefficient Beta	t	Significance	VIF	Hypothesis
		B	Standard error					
Y	(Constant)	0.702	0.539		1.303	0.194		
	F1	0.333	0.115	0.186	2.898	0.004	1.304	H1 True
	F2	0.098	0.109	0.059	0.902	0.368	1.335	H2 False
	F3	0.178	0.08	0.137	2.220	0.027	1.200	H3 True
	F4	-0.215	0.081	-0.158	-2.640	0.009	1.140	H4 True
	R²				0.144			
	F				11.434			
	P				0.000			

5. Enlightenment for tourism

5.1. Survey conclusion

Based on the background of Little Red Book, this paper conducted an empirical study on the quantity, quality and reliability of IWOM and the impact of negative IWOM on consumers' choice of tourist destination in East China. The findings are as follows: (1) The quantity and reliability of IWOM presented by Little Red Book have positive impact on consumers' choice of travel destination, while negative IWOM has negative impact and affects the existing positive impression in consumers' minds. (2) Quantity of IWOM has the greatest impact on consumers' choice of tourist destination, followed by negative IWOM. IWOM reliability has a certain impact on consumers' choice of tourist destination, while IWOM quality has no significant impact on consumers' choice of tourist destination. (3) In recent years, consumers often choose self-help travel and usually browse IWOM information when choosing a tourist destination. The influence of IWOM on consumers' choice of tourist destination is significant among groups with different educational background and viewing frequency. The quantity, quality and negative IWOM have different degrees of influence on groups with different genders, occupations, travel frequency and viewing frequency.

5.2. Management enlightenment

Firstly, make reasonable use of IWOM to improve all aspects. As a hot "planting grass" platform, IWOM of the tourist destination presented on Little Red Book reflects not only the real experience of consumers on local products or services, but also reflects the direction of consumer demand. Tourism related parties should take a correct view of IWOM, maintain the mention of positive IWOM and promote it within a certain range to improve the influence of it. For negative one, especially if the negative sentiment is high in the IWOM, the relevant party should respond kindly and rectify the mentioned content. Improving their own service level and quality and filling the local attractions are the fundamental reason for consumers to choose a tourist destination and then improve consumer satisfaction, win high quality, rich positive reputation.

Secondly, use big data for targeted content push to improve consumers' travel intentions. Relevant tourism departments can cooperate with Little Red Book or other platforms to promote tourism information and accurately push it to different types of groups, such as pushing high-quality and popular IWOM content to users who often search for urban tourism related content to reduce negative IWOM push, push positive IWOM content with higher quality for groups with higher education level.

Thirdly, relevant parties of the tourism destination should strengthen the monitoring and management of the platform IWOM. Negative IWOM will have an impact on all kinds of consumption tendencies. Relevant parties of tourism destinations should timely understand consumers' travel satisfaction tendency, deal with consumers' negative emotions in a timely manner and make appropriate compensation, such as issuing vouchers to reduce negative IWOM at the source. The survey results show that respondents are more willing to evaluate on the platform after traveling. For consumers with higher satisfaction, relevant parties can create topics on the platform, take certain incentive measures to encourage consumers to evaluate and add related topics to form real experience evaluation, so as to improve the reliability of IWOM and give full play to the attraction of real positive IWOM to potential consumers.

6. Conclusions

In the Internet era, consumer behavior is in constant and rapid change and the IWOM can be a good response to consumer consumption trends and influence consumer consumption behavior. In the current surge in tourism demand, attention to IWOM can help regional tourism industry to thrive and promote the better growth of economy.

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