

# Analyzing Borobudur tourist social media engagement: The role of demographic characteristics in triggering electronic words of mouth

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) behavior and the use of social media by tourists in the context of Borobudur Temple tourism based on differences in gender, nationality, and number of visits. This study uses a quantitative approach with descriptive analysis methods and Mann-Whitney U non-parametric tests and Chi-Square tests because the data are not normally distributed. A total of 296 respondents participated in this study. The descriptive analysis results show that the e-WOM level is in the moderate to high category (Mean = 3.63). Respondents most often read reviews before making decisions (highest Mean = 3.80), but still rarely write personal reviews (lowest Mean = 3.32). Comparative analysis showed that there were no significant differences in e-WOM behavior based on gender ( $p = 0.734$ ), nationality ( $p = 0.990$ ), or number of visits ( $p = 0.150$ ). This means that tourists' online communication behavior tends to be homogeneous, regardless of these demographic characteristics. However, in terms of social media usage, a significant difference was found based on nationality ( $p = 0.039$ ). Local tourists tended to be more active on TikTok, while foreign tourists used Facebook and Instagram more. In general, Instagram was the most dominant platform for all tourist groups in sharing visual experiences about Borobudur. These findings confirm that social media plays an important role in shaping the e-WOM behavior of tourists and has great potential in digital content-based destination promotion strategies.

## Keywords

e-WOM, Social media, Tourists, Borobudur temple, Digital behavior

## Introduction

Online reviews play a crucial role in reducing perceived risk and uncertainty in tourism decision-making, particularly for intangible destinations, by enhancing trust and credibility among potential visitors (Filiari et al., 2015). At global heritage sites like

**Published:**  
May 04, 2026

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Selection and Peer-  
review under the  
responsibility of the 7<sup>th</sup>  
BIS-HSS 2025 Committee

Borobudur Temple, success is increasingly influenced by electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) rather than traditional promotion. While prior research demonstrates that e-WOM drives destination trust (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016) and that social media marketing stimulates visit intention (Baber et al., 2022), most studies treat tourists as a homogenous group, overlooking how digital storytelling varies across demographic and behavioural segments.

e-WOM is particularly influential in tourism due to the intangible and experiential nature of services, which heightens perceived risk and uncertainty prior to consumption (Casaló et al., 2015; Abubakar et al., 2017). Tourists rely heavily on online reviews and user-generated content to make informed decisions (Filiari & McLeay, 2014; Babić Rosario et al., 2016). Recent studies further confirm that exposure to online reviews shapes destination image, perceived service quality, and travel intention (Filiari et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2018).

Despite this, limited research has examined how individual tourist characteristics influence e-WOM behaviour, particularly in heritage tourism settings. Most prior studies focus on e-WOM and travel intention without exploring segmentation variables. To address this gap, the present study analyzes e-WOM behaviour and social media usage at Borobudur, examining how gender, nationality, and visit frequency shape digital interactions. The objective is to understand how these variables affect the production and consumption of online content, providing heritage site managers with insights to adopt a segmented, data-driven marketing approach that reflects the complex realities of modern tourism.

The novelty of this study lies in its segmented analysis of e-WOM behaviour in a heritage tourism context, specifically at Borobudur Temple. Unlike previous research that examines the overall effect of e-WOM on tourist perception, this study explores how digital interaction patterns differ across demographic (gender, nationality) and experiential (visit frequency) groups. By moving beyond aggregate analyses, it provides a granular understanding of tourist behaviour, offering both theoretical advancement in e-WOM research and practical insights for destination managers seeking to implement targeted, data-driven marketing strategies tailored to diverse visitor profiles.

## Method

This study examine how electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) is associated with tourists' social media engagement at Borobudur Temple, with particular emphasis on the role of demographic characteristics (gender, nationality, and visit frequency) in triggering e-WOM behaviour. In line with the methodological principle that the method section explains how the research problem was addressed, this study employs a structured survey-based quantitative approach commonly used in tourism and consumer behaviour research. Detailed operational procedures are presented, while established analytical techniques are supported by relevant methodological references (Hair et al., 2019). The research involved a total of 296 tourist respondents who were selected using

an accidental sampling technique, which allows data collection from individuals encountered by chance at the research location as well as through online distribution channels. This sampling method is appropriate for tourism studies where respondents are mobile and heterogeneous, and it enables efficient access to tourists who actively engage with destinations and online information sources (Etikan et al., 2016). Data were collected through the distribution of structured questionnaires, administered both offline at the destination site and online, in order to ensure broader participation and capture diverse perspectives among tourists with varying travel experiences and digital engagement levels.

The questionnaire was developed to assess social media usage and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) behaviour among Borobudur tourists, with particular attention to differences based on demographic characteristics. The measurement items were adapted from Baber et al. (2022) and Abubakar and Ilkan (2016) to ensure conceptual consistency and content validity. The e-WOM construct was operationalized through six indicators reflecting both information-sharing and information-seeking behaviours.

These indicators include tourists' intentions to share their travel experiences with friends and on social media, their willingness to repost friends' travel experiences and photos, their intention to post honest online reviews (both positive and negative), the frequency of consulting online reviews prior to destination selection, and their perceived uncertainty in choosing Borobudur as a destination without exposure to online reviews. These dimensions are central to understanding the role of e-WOM in shaping destination perceptions and travel decision-making processes (Filiari & McLeay, 2014; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008).

In accordance with the characteristics of the collected data, non-parametric statistical techniques were applied. The Mann–Whitney U test examined differences in e-WOM behaviour across demographic groups, while the Chi-Square test analyzed associations between categorical variables. These methods are appropriate for survey data that do not meet normality assumptions and are widely used in social science and tourism research (Hair et al., 2022; Nanggong & Mohammad, 2020).

## Results and discussion

### Results

#### 1. Ewom analysis

Based on the results of EWOM analysis in Table 1 the average value of the e-WOM variable is (3.63), indicating that respondents generally agree with statements related to online communication and the use of online reviews. The item with the highest mean score is e-WOM 1 (Mean = 3.80), which reflects respondents' tendency to read online reviews or comments from other travellers before making travel-related decisions.

This finding aligns with more recent studies emphasizing that online reviews have become a dominant information source in the pre-trip decision-making stage (Filiari, McLeay, & Tsui, 2021; Kumar et al., 2022; Filiari et al. 2021).

In contrast, the item with the lowest mean score is e-WOM 5 (Mean = 3.32), indicating that respondents are still relatively reluctant to actively write or share their own travel experiences on social media. This finding is consistent with more recent studies suggesting that tourists tend to engage more frequently in passive e-WOM consumption (e.g., reading reviews) than in active content creation, as generating online content requires greater motivation, perceived usefulness, and self-efficacy (Dedeoğlu et al., 2022; Rather, 2021). Overall, the level of e-WOM engagement falls into the moderate-to-high category, suggesting that online reviews play an important role in shaping tourists' decision-making processes. Processes, although participation levels vary, particularly for activities requiring active involvement such as posting reviews or comments.

Table 1. Ewom analysis

	Ewom	Ewom 1	Ewom 2	Ewom 3	Ewom 4	Ewom 5
N	296	296	296	296	296	296
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	3.63	3.80	3.66	3.61	3.77	3.32
Median	3.80	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00
Standard deviation	0.687	0.778	0.880	0.978	1.01	1.01
Minimum	1.40	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	5.00	5	5	5	5	5

## 2. Gender analysis

The analysis of e-WOM and social media usage by gender shows no statistically significant differences show in Table 2. Male respondents had a slightly higher mean e-WOM score (3.67) than female respondents (3.61), but this difference was not significant with p-value ( $p = 0.734$ ). Overall social media usage also did not differ by gender p-value ( $p = 0.474$ ).

Instagram was the most widely used platform for both males and females (138 men, 82 women), followed by Facebook (25 men, 22 women) and TikTok (18 men, 11 women). These findings indicate that gender does not strongly influence e-WOM engagement or platform preference, supporting prior research that digital travel behaviours are increasingly similar across genders, as tourists tend to engage more frequently in passive e-WOM consumption than in active content creation (Dedeoğlu et al., 2022; Rather, 2021; Filiari, McLeay, & Tsui, 2021).

Table 2. Gender analysis

Variable	Mean Score		p	Result
	Man	Woman		
e-WOM	3.67	3.61	0.734	No different
Media Social Usage			0.474	No different
Facebook	25	22		
Instagram	138	82		
TikTok	18	11		

### 3. Nationality analysis

The analysis based on nationality also reveals no significant difference in overall e-WOM behaviour between local and foreign tourists at Table 3. The p-value for e-WOM behaviour ( $p = 0.990$ ) indicates that both groups demonstrate comparable levels of intention to share experiences, post reviews, and rely on online information when selecting Borobudur as a destination. This finding suggests that the influence of e-WOM transcends national boundaries, reflecting the increasingly globalized and borderless nature of digital travel information exchange (Casaló et al., 2023; Dedeoğlu et al., 2022). Although local tourists exhibit a slightly higher mean e-WOM score (3.73) compared to foreign tourists (3.54), this difference is not statistically significant.

However, unlike overall e-WOM behaviour, social media usage differs significantly by nationality, as indicated by a p-value ( $p = 0.039$ ). Local tourists tend to use TikTok (21 users) more frequently, whereas foreign tourists rely more heavily on Facebook (25 users) and Instagram (115 users). This pattern aligns with recent studies indicating that platform preference is shaped by cultural background, regional digital ecosystems, and varying levels of platform penetration across markets (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Oliveira & Casais, 2022). These findings highlight that while e-WOM engagement may be globally consistent, the channels through which it is expressed remain context-specific and culturally influenced.

Table 3. Nationality analysis

Variable	Mean Score		P value	Result
	local	Foreign		
e-WOM	3.73	3.54	0.990	No different
Media Social Usage			0.039	Different
Facebook	22	25		
Instagram	105	115		
TikTok	21	8		

### 4. Time visit analysis

The analysis of e-WOM and social media usage based on visit frequency shows no statistically significant differences between first-time and repeat visitors show at Table 4. The mean e-WOM score for first-time visitors (3.69) was slightly higher than

for repeat visitors (3.58), but this difference was not significant ( $p = 0.150$ ). Social media usage also did not differ significantly ( $p = 0.117$ ).

Instagram was the most commonly used platform for both groups, with 97 first-time visitors and 123 repeat visitors using it. Facebook (27 first-time, 20 repeat) and TikTok (10 first-time, 19 repeat) were less frequently used. These results indicate that visit frequency does not strongly affect e-WOM engagement or platform choice, suggesting that both first-time and repeat visitors rely on online reviews either for initial destination selection or to confirm expectations during revisits (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Leung et al., 2013).

Table 4. Time visit analysis

Variable	Mean Score		P	Result
	First time	Revisit		
e-WOM	3.69	3.58	0.150	No. different
Media Social Usage			0.117	No. different
Facebook	27	20		
Instagram	97	123		
TikTok	10	19		

## Discussion

From a theoretical perspective, tourists' engagement in e-WOM can be understood through contemporary digital engagement frameworks emphasizing social interaction, self-presentation, and perceived usefulness as primary motivational drivers in online environments (Dedeoğlu et al., 2022; Rather, 2021). In the context of heritage tourism, these motivations are further strengthened by the experiential and symbolic value attached to culturally significant destinations, which encourages tourists to seek and exchange digital information.

This study set out to examine whether electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) behaviour and social media usage among tourists visiting Borobudur Temple differ according to gender, nationality, and visit frequency. The findings provide important insights into contemporary digital tourist behaviour and contribute to the expanding literature on e-WOM engagement in heritage tourism settings.

The results demonstrate that tourists' engagement with e-WOM at Borobudur is generally moderate to high, indicating that online information plays a central role in travel decision-making. This finding aligns with recent research emphasizing that digital reviews reduce uncertainty, enhance perceived credibility, and support destination image formation in increasingly competitive tourism markets (Casaló et al., 2023; Oliveira & Casais, 2022). Given the experiential and intangible characteristics of tourism services, travellers rely heavily on peer-generated content to evaluate service quality and authenticity prior to visitation.

Moreover, the tendency of tourists to actively read reviews while remaining relatively hesitant to create their own content reflects the distinction between passive

consumption and active contribution in online communities. Recent studies confirm that while e-WOM consumption has become normalized across digital platforms, content creation requires higher levels of self-efficacy, emotional engagement, and perceived social value (Dedeoğlu et al., 2022; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). This suggests that although digital participation is widespread, motivational intensity still differentiates passive observers from active contributors.

Contrary to earlier assumptions that demographic characteristics significantly influence online communication behaviour, this study finds no significant differences in overall e-WOM behaviour based on gender. This outcome supports contemporary evidence indicating that gender-based disparities in digital engagement are gradually diminishing as social media usage becomes universally integrated into everyday life (Rather, 2021; Casaló et al., 2023). The similarity in e-WOM behaviour between male and female tourists suggests that destination-related online communication is increasingly shaped by platform affordances, algorithmic exposure, and shared digital norms rather than by traditional demographic distinctions.

This finding has important managerial implications: destination marketers should prioritize content relevance, visual storytelling, and authenticity over gender-based segmentation strategies when designing e-WOM-driven campaigns for heritage destinations such as Borobudur.

Similarly, the absence of significant differences in e-WOM behaviour between local and foreign tourists indicates that reliance on online reviews increasingly transcends national boundaries. Recent studies suggest that digital travel information now operates within a highly interconnected global ecosystem in which tourists regardless of cultural origin engage in similar patterns of online information search, review consultation, and digital interaction (Casaló et al., 2023; Dedeoğlu et al., 2022). The convergence of e-WOM behaviour may reflect the dominance of global review platforms, algorithm-driven content exposure, and standardized rating systems that shape how destinations are evaluated across markets. As digital infrastructures become more uniform worldwide, behavioural differences rooted in nationality appear to diminish in terms of information-seeking and review reliance.

However, while overall e-WOM engagement appears homogeneous, this study reveals a significant difference in social media platform usage based on nationality. Social media platforms function not only as communication tools but also as co-creation spaces where tourists construct and disseminate destination meanings through visual storytelling and interactive narratives (Oliveira & Casais, 2022; Casaló et al., 2023). Local tourists demonstrate greater engagement with TikTok, whereas foreign tourists rely more heavily on Facebook and Instagram. This pattern aligns with recent research indicating that platform adoption is shaped by regional digital ecosystems, generational dynamics, and market-specific media consumption trends (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Dedeoğlu et al., 2022).

The findings therefore highlight an important distinction: while motivational drivers of e-WOM may be globally consistent, the technological channels through which such behaviours are enacted remain context-sensitive. For destination managers, this implies that standardized content strategies may be effective for influencing e-WOM intentions, but platform-specific adaptations are essential for reaching distinct international market segments.

Furthermore, user-generated content (UGC) continues to be perceived as more credible and authentic than official promotional messages, particularly in heritage tourism contexts where experiential value and authenticity are central to decision-making (Rather, 2021; Casaló et al., 2023). Peer-generated reviews, images, and short-form videos provide socially validated information that reduces uncertainty and strengthens destination image formation.

The analysis based on visit frequency further reinforces the notion of behavioural consistency among tourists. The absence of significant differences between first-time and repeat visitors suggests that online reviews remain relevant throughout the tourist journey, functioning both as exploratory tools for new visitors and as confirmation mechanisms for repeat visitors (Dedeoğlu et al., 2022; Rather, 2021). Social media engagement appears to be driven more by emotional experience-sharing and visual appeal than by prior familiarity with the destination. The continued dominance of Instagram across both visitor groups underscores its role as a globally recognized visual storytelling platform within heritage tourism environments (Oliveira & Casais, 2022).

Taken together, these findings provide a meaningful contribution by distinguishing between e-WOM engagement behaviour and platform choice two dimensions that are often conceptually intertwined in tourism and digital marketing research. Recent digital engagement literature emphasizes that while motivational structures underlying online participation may converge across populations, platform selection is influenced by contextual, technological, and market-specific factors (Casaló et al., 2023; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

This distinction extends contemporary tourism research by demonstrating that although tourists at Borobudur Temple share similar motivations to seek and disseminate travel-related information online, the digital ecosystems through which these behaviours are expressed vary across demographic and contextual dimensions. Such insights refine our understanding of e-WOM dynamics in heritage tourism and offer a more nuanced framework for interpreting digital engagement patterns.

From a managerial perspective, these findings suggest that destination marketing organizations should avoid excessive demographic segmentation when designing strategies to encourage e-WOM participation. Instead, greater emphasis should be placed on tailoring content distribution to platform-specific characteristics and user preferences, particularly across national markets. This approach is consistent with prior studies emphasizing the strategic importance of platform alignment and media richness

in enhancing the effectiveness of tourism communication and destination branding efforts (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014).

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The use of accidental sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings beyond the Borobudur context, and self-reported data may be subject to response bias. Future research could employ longitudinal designs to capture changes in e-WOM behaviour over time or incorporate qualitative approaches to explore the motivations underlying tourists' reluctance to actively generate e-WOM. Additionally, examining the role of content type and emotional tone may provide deeper insights into what drives engagement across different platforms.

In conclusion, this study offers empirical evidence that e-WOM behaviour among tourists is increasingly standardized, while social media usage remains shaped by cultural and regional dynamics. This finding is particularly relevant for heritage destinations like Borobudur, where digital promotion strategies must balance global visibility with localized platform engagement.

## Conclusion

This study analyzed electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) behaviour and social media usage among tourists visiting Borobudur Temple by examining differences based on gender, nationality, and visit frequency. Using a quantitative approach with descriptive analysis, Mann-Whitney U tests, and Chi-Square tests applied to data from 296 respondents, several important findings emerged.

The overall level of e-WOM engagement was moderate to high (Mean = 3.63), indicating that online reviews and user-generated content play a substantial role in influencing travel-related decision-making. This finding is consistent with prior research highlighting e-WOM as a primary information source in tourism contexts. Tourists were more inclined to read online reviews (Mean = 3.80) than to actively write or share their own experiences (Mean = 3.32), suggesting that passive consumption remains more dominant than active contribution, a pattern also identified in studies on online tourist behaviour.

The comparative analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in e-WOM behaviour based on gender, nationality, or number of visits. This result implies that tourists' online communication patterns have become relatively homogeneous across demographic groups, reflecting the widespread integration of digital platforms into tourism decision-making processes. The absence of significant differences further supports the argument that e-WOM functions as a universal mechanism in travel planning regardless of individual background or prior destination experience.

A statistically significant difference was identified in social media platform usage based on nationality ( $p = 0.039$ ). Local tourists tended to engage more with TikTok, whereas foreign tourists showed a stronger preference for Facebook and Instagram. This finding

aligns with contemporary tourism research suggesting that platform characteristics and user engagement dynamics shape usage patterns across markets, with visual and interactive media such as Instagram and TikTok becoming primary channels for user-generated travel content and e-WOM. Despite these differences, Instagram remained the dominant platform across all groups, reinforcing its role as a key medium for visual storytelling and destination branding in heritage tourism.

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