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## Article

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Article

# Utilitarian and Hedonic Values of eWOM Media and Online Booking Decisions for Tourist Destinations in India

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**Abstract:** In this contemporary world, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) platforms (or media) have become a prerequisite information source for online surfers, especially when planning excursions. However, tourists refer to the reviews of these platforms based on utilitarian and hedonic aspects. The utilitarian value enhances users' task performance, whereas the hedonic value is related to pleasure and inner feelings. The present work was undertaken to study the importance of various utilitarian and hedonic determinants, and analyses their influence on the perceived usefulness (PU) of eWOM media and subsequent online booking decisions (OBD) for tourist destinations in India. In addition, the study investigates whether the influence of PU of eWOM media on OBD varies according to gender. A conceptual model was introduced based on data analysis done through SPSS 23 and AMOS 23. The model was empirically validated based on sample data comprising 338 Indian tourists. The purposive sampling technique was used in the current study, and only those samples who referred to eWOM media for information search were accepted. The findings indicate that utilitarian and hedonic determinants significantly influence tourist decision-making. TripAdvisor was the most popular web portal, followed by other social networking sites among the preferred sources of tourist destination information. The moderating analysis revealed that the impact of eWOM media PU on OBD was higher in males than in females. The study suggests that website designers and administrators design the contents according to the needs identified.

**Keywords:** perceived usefulness; utilitarian value; hedonic value; eWOM media; tourist destination; online booking decision; gender



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## 1. Introduction

The Indian tourism industry has emerged as an essential growth driver in the nation's service sector. The country's rich cultural and historical traditions and its diverse environment, terrains, and natural beauty have led to tourism in India having considerable potential. India's impressive growth in the tourism sector can be outlined in the country's overall economic progress. The number of domestic leisure travelers in India is the highest in comparison with other nations [1]. The factors antecedent to the country's economic growth include unprecedented advances in information technology, better transportation, improved and more widespread education, increasing disposable income, more leisure time, evolving corporate culture and change in lifestyles, and a rising preference for foreign investors. However, the intangible and perishable nature of various products and services offered by this sector has led tourists to rely heavily on reviewer comments, which assist them in obtaining appropriate and up-to-date information and supports in their decision-making [2]. The acceptance of various digital channels in the Indian tourism industry has heightened customer experiences, built confidence, and expanded tourist options for booking online.

The internet has become a pervasive and consistent part of users' daily routines. It has now opened up new opportunities for communication between people. Besides this,

it has also facilitated the customers' approach towards finding, researching, analysing, and making buying decisions about products and services. Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is one such information source when customers shop online. This new form of communication has become a necessity for customers [3]. With the significant development in information technology, eWOM is now available in different shapes and formats. Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) media has changed the customer perception of its usage, content creation, and information sharing. The various eWOM media channels such as "social media websites, third-party review sites, and company websites" have facilitated information seekers in gaining comprehensive and trustworthy information about the different products/services [4] available in the travel and tourism sector [5]. These online platforms facilitate tourists to acquire relevant information/reviews about travel, various tourist destinations, hotels, restaurants, and other services posted by users worldwide. The information/reviews are published either in the form of textual information or in combination with photos and videos [6]. With many eWOM media channels available, tourists can now compare facts from different review websites and undertake the most appropriate tour. This will assist them in diminishing the higher risk probability during the purchase cycle to a greater extent [7].

The use of eWOM media in India continues to excel steadily. As per the report by Statista [8], more than half of the country's population are active users of eWOM platforms. The report further projected that by 2025, 67% of the country's population would have access to eWOM media. The average spending time of web users on eWOM media is around 2.25 h per day [8]. The factors behind this achievement are exponential growth in the telecom industry, reasonable prices of smartphones and other gadgets, and affordable internet packages. Meanwhile, the influence of user-generated content on eWOM media has become a significant marketing source in India's travel and tourism industry.

From the previous literature, it has been observed that researchers have tried to understand how eWOM relevance helps in recognising its usefulness [9] and the purchase decision-making of an individual in different fields. However, scholars have rarely attempted to analyse it from a technology perspective, that is, the perceived usefulness (PU) of eWOM media and its impact on the individual purchase choice [10] in the context of tourist destinations. Reviewing eWOM media allows tourists to peruse peer-posted comments. Moreover, they feel pleasure and enjoyment when they find remarkable texts, pictures, and videos shared by others that are easy to visualise. Likewise, individuals only use a particular website when they perceive its overall usability [11]. Thus, by recognising the research gaps in the existing literature, the present study proposes a conceptual model undertaking information quality as a utilitarian value of eWOM platforms.

In contrast, perceived curiosity fulfilment, enjoyment, ease of use [12], reviewer proficiency, and reviewer trustworthiness [8] are undertaken as various determinants under the hedonic aspect of eWOM media. eWOM media's PU is anticipated to influence the online booking decisions (OBD) for various tourist destinations in India. Furthermore, the study reported in the paper attempts to probe whether the effect of eWOM media's PU on OBD is moderated by gender. The relationship between different factors is empirically validated using a structured questionnaire.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Utilitarian Value vs. Hedonic Value

The reasons behind an individual's purchase behaviour may be based on his/her motive. In earlier research [13], customers' motivation to purchase through the Facebook page was classified based on its functional and experiential values. The functional (or utilitarian) aspect is associated with the instrumental significance of the information, whereas the experiential (or hedonic) factor is related to experiencing the performance of the activity [14]. The authors of another research work reported in the literature [15] associated utilitarian values with ease of use and time-saving elements. On the other hand, the hedonic characteristics describe customers' emotional motives that deliver a more comprehensive picture

of their purchase perception and information search behaviour. Another research work [16] defined customer engagement as experience gained by assessing the hedonic information values of various products and services available on eWOM media. As eWOM is considered to be a more complex and hedonic system [17], from the marketer's perspective, it is vital to find the reasons for customer engagement in eWOM media and their selection behaviour [18].

### 2.2. Information Quality

The present study measures information quality as a utilitarian construct, defined as the user's resolute belief that the eWOM message is relevant or compelling in supporting its role [19]. In high involvement situations, the buyer assesses information quality as a predictor of their satisfaction [20] and purchase intent [21]. The author of [22] explained the significant influence of information quality on the PU of a website, whereas previous findings also concluded their impact on an online community [23].

### 2.3. Reviewer Proficiency

The term "proficiency", referred to by the author in [24], is stated as being "the extent to which the reviews provided by experts perceived as capable of providing correct information". However, it is challenging for most users to evaluate the source expertise level through an online mode [25]. The authors in [26] stated that the reviews posted by peer reviewers with a high level of proficiency usually generated a higher degree of perception of use among users than reviews posted by reviewers with a low proficiency level [27]. In [28], it was explained that the characteristics of an eWOM platform's credibility are defined by its intrinsic or hedonic values. They further stated that the component of source credibility, such as reviewer proficiency, is more related to the pleasure and emotion that may be derived from the activity rather than apparent reinforcement.

### 2.4. Reviewer Trustworthiness

Individuals can openly share their opinion about products/services and brands while remaining unidentified in an internet setting. The reviewer seems reliable when the assertion appears to be effective, authentic, trustworthy, unbiased, and up to date [26]. Users anticipate the value of the information when they start believing in the reviewer's trustworthiness [29]. The authors of [30] postulated that reviewer trustworthiness positively affects their information adoption behaviour. In [31], reviewer trustworthiness was found to be an essential predictor of travel review websites. The authors of [29] observed a positive relationship between source trustworthiness and the PU of the reviews. In [28], it was argued that reviewer trustworthiness as an element of source credibility is related to an intrinsic or hedonic value, as it results from an activity performed.

### 2.5. Perceived Curiosity Fulfilment

Curiosity fulfilment shows a person's cognitive inquiry in search of novel acquaintance [12]. Social media involvement may assist customers in satisfying their curiosity level as websites facilitate them in becoming acquainted with various forms of information shared by colleagues, unknown people, and companies [32]. The curiosity satisfaction of an individual influences its purchase behaviour under unclear settings [33], for instance, while making hotel product and service choices. Prior research discovered the significant role of curiosity that enhances the search experience against time spent on the internet and resource availability, resulting in quickly understanding new information objects [34].

Additionally, perceived curiosity fulfilment was found to significantly impact the PU of information systems [12] and multi-media learning systems on mobile devices [35]. eWOM media providing information related to tourist destinations aid in the vast information quantity from photographs, manuscripts, and videos, resulting in curiosity fulfilment towards a new expedition. Thus, we may deduce that customers' belief in eWOM media increases with the fulfilment of their curiosity.

### 2.6. Perceived Enjoyment

The term enjoyment describes how interacting with an information system contributes to pleasure, happiness, and flow for any medium, regardless of its anticipated consequence after using it [11]. The authors of [36] associated the term enjoyment with an intrinsic motivation that influences the PU of eWOM. In [37], the strong influence of enjoyment on the PU of travel review websites was found. In [38], it is stated that perceived enjoyment has a significant effect on Moodle platforms' PU, whereas the authors of [39] were of the opinion that heightened enjoyment predicts PU of e-shopping platforms for first-time users. Thus, from the above discussion, we may argue that when tourists obtain pleasure and enjoyment while exploring the tourist destination information, they perceive that eWOM media is useful.

### 2.7. Ease of Use

Understanding the elements that contribute to user experience has become more important as the significance of ease of use in information technology usage has grown. The author of [40] suggested that individuals are more receptive to systems viewed as user-friendly than others. Previous studies based on mobile applications [41], online education platforms [42], hotel software [43], and electronic commerce [44] have reconfirmed the strong correlation between EOU and technology acceptance. Additionally, ease of use has also been found to significantly affect the PU of a website [45]. Therefore, it is appropriate to consider EOU as an antecedent to PU of eWOM media in the context of tourist destination searches.

### 2.8. Perceived Usefulness (PU)

PU influences online users to react to the opinion provided by peer reviewers by affecting their attitude and subsequent purchase behaviour [46]. Customers find online reviews useful when the contents included in the information are easy to understand [47]. In [48], eWOM was postulated as an essential source of information for users' purchase decisions. In [49], a strong association between PU of eWOM and mobile purchase decisions by customers was found. Similarly, the authors of [37] hypothesised that travellers value a travel website when they consider it advantageous to their needs and preferences.

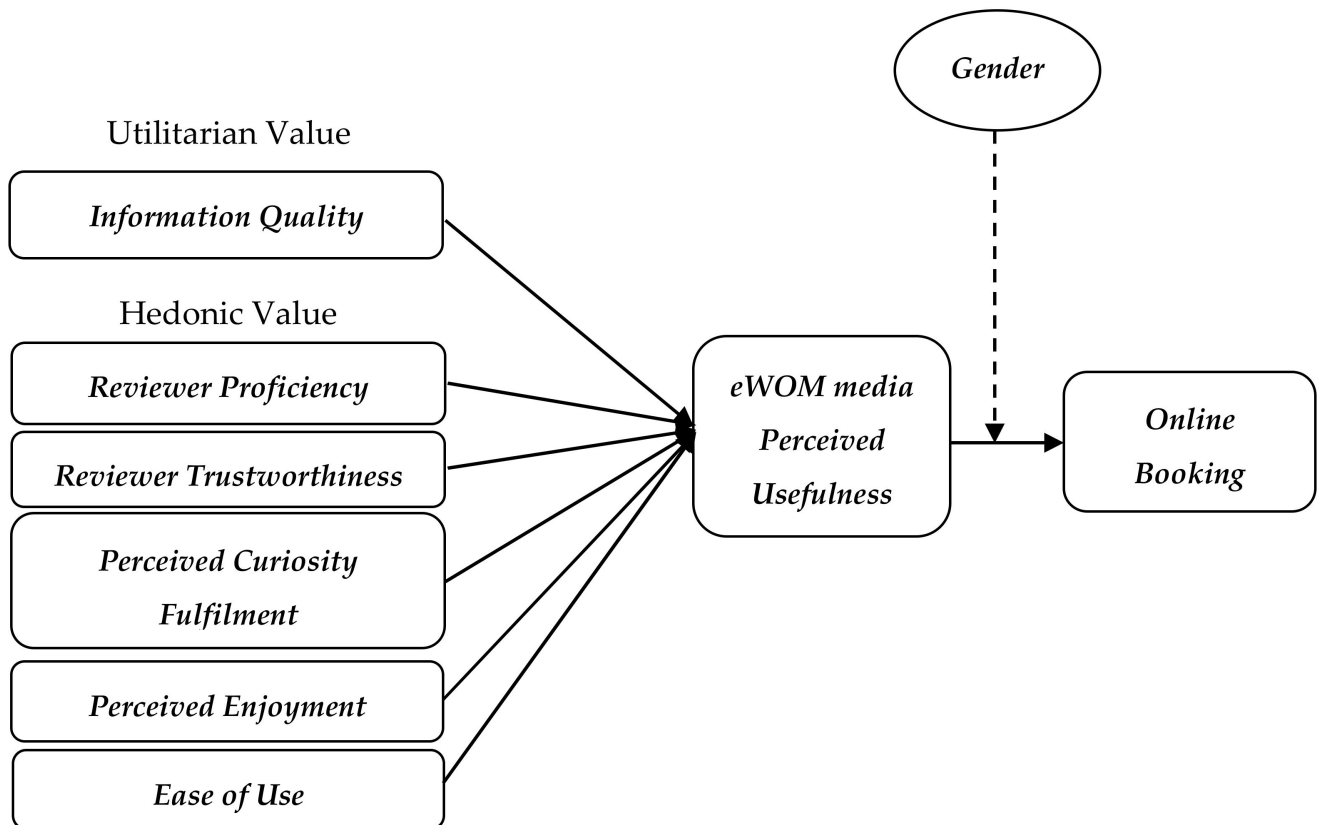
### 2.9. Male vs. Female

Various studies have described the influence of gender on individual behaviour. The authors of [50] described males as a more efficient and result-oriented human category than females. The literature also differentiates the gender as per specific characteristics; for example, males are adventure seekers, have a higher risk-taking attitude, and possess a high confidence level. On the other hand, females are more inclined toward straightforward and unchanging jobs and generally avoid taking risks [51].

Previous studies focused on hotel software acceptance [43], e-education channels [42], and virtual shopping [44] have shown mixed results regarding the use of various applications. However, none of the studies focused on gender-based analysis in travel and tourism in India.

## 3. Proposed Model and Hypotheses Formulation

Based on the previous literature, the research framework, as shown in Figure 1, has been developed.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual model.

The association among different factors and the moderation effect were analysed through the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** *The PU of eWOM media is determined by the quality of information available in it.*

**Hypothesis 2 (H2).** *The PU of eWOM media is determined by the tourist's belief in the reviewer's proficiency.*

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** *The PU of eWOM media is determined by the tourist's belief in the reviewer's trustworthiness.*

**Hypothesis 4 (H4).** *Perceived curiosity fulfilment regarding eWOM media strongly determines its PU.*

**Hypothesis 5 (H5).** *Perceived enjoyment regarding eWOM media usage strongly determines its PU.*

**Hypothesis 6 (H6).** *The PU of eWOM media is determined by the tourist's belief in its ease of use.*

**Hypothesis 7 (H7).** *PU of eWOM media leads to OBD for tourist destinations.*

**Hypothesis 8 (H8).** *Gender moderates the effect that PU of eWOM media has on OBD.*

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Sample Framework and Data Collection

For the current study, we administered an online survey to a panel of eWOM media users in India. The purposive sampling technique was applied to collect the data of those respondents who used to check on eWOM media before making any OBD for tourist destinations. The non-probability sampling technique defines the personal judgment of the researcher when selecting the sample elements. The Google Forms application was used in the present study for creating the questionnaire in the English language, with all questions marked as compulsory. The survey link was forwarded through email, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram to colleagues and friends, requesting them to participate. A period of six months, i.e., October 2021 to March 2022, was undertaken to collect 338 sample data.

### 4.2. Questionnaire Design and Measurement

The questionnaire designed for the present study was comprised of two sections (see Appendix A). The first section included questions related to the demographic profile, frequency of reading online reviews using eWOM media, and preferred eWOM media channel for acquiring tourist destination information. The second section included various constructs adapted from the previous studies, measured by multiple items (after checking their reliability and validity) on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The four items for information quality were adapted from the research of [52,53]. Seven items were adapted from the study of [54] for measuring reviewer proficiency and trustworthiness, whereas perceived curiosity fulfilment, enjoyment, and perceived usefulness were measured by adapting the research of [12,37]. The three ease of use items were measured by adapting the study of [12]. Finally, three items were adapted from [37,55] to explore online booking decisions.

### 4.3. Tools and Techniques

The model incorporates unobserved (latent) variables, the relation between these and the observed variables, an allowance for errors of measurement in the independent and dependent latent variables, and a causal model (structural equation modelling) linking the latent variables. The methodology adopted for the study first assessed the reliability and validity of the measurement model, followed by the development of a structural model to ascertain the relationships among the latent constructs. “The tendency towards consistency found in repeated measurements of the same phenomenon is referred to as reliability. Reliability is basically an empirical issue, focusing on the performance of empirical measure” [56]. “While reliability focuses on a particular property of empirical indicators—the extent to which they provide consistent results across repeated measurements—validity concerns the crucial relationship between the concept and indicator. Validity is evidenced by the degree that a particular indicator measures what it is supposed to measure rather than reflecting some other phenomenon” [56]. After reliability assessment, the construct validity of the measurement model was ascertained. “Construct validity is the extent to which an observation measures the concept it purports to measure. A test has construct validity if the relationship between scores obtained on it and various other measures entering into the theoretical formulation turns out to be significant and in the predicted direction” [56]. The construct validity of the measurement models was captured in terms of two dimensions—convergent validity and discriminant validity. “Convergent validity refers to the extent to which multiple measures of a construct agree with each other” [56]. On the other hand, “discriminate validity is the degree to which measures of different constructs are distinct from one other” [56].

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Descriptive Information

According to the distribution sheet, as shown in Table 1, 51.77% of the respondents were male and 48.22% were female. Based on age criteria, most sample respondents

were between 18–25 years old, representing 46.74% of the total sample. The majority of them were post-graduates (57.69%), followed by graduates (31.06%) and others (11.24%). However, the distribution chart for the preferred source of tourist destination information revealed that 61.24% of respondents referred to travel review sites for acquiring tourist destination information, followed by social networking sites (16.56%) and other eWOM media channels.

**Table 1.** Distribution of variables.

Variables		N	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	175	51.77%
	Female	163	48.22%
Age	<25	158	46.74%
	26–35	63	18.63%
	36–45	61	18.04%
	>46	56	16.56%
Educational qualification	Under-graduate	105	31.06%
	Post-graduate	195	57.69%
	Others	38	11.24%
Source of tourist destination information	Official tourism sites	21	6.21%
	Travel review sites	207	61.24%
	Social networking sites	56	16.56%
	Personal travel blogs	28	8.28%
	Travel agency	15	4.43%
	Others	11	3.25%

5.2. Exploratory Factor Analysis

The EFA condenses different scale items into a few variables. Table 2 outlines the values identified from the application of KMO (Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy) and Bartlett’s Sphericity tests. These tests are suitable for establishing whether the data should be used for factor analysis or not. The result revealed a KMO value of 0.87 compared with the minimum of 0.70 [57]. Furthermore, Bartlett’s test yielded a *p*-value of 0.000 and a 6679.15 score, thus authenticating the appropriateness of the factor analysis.

**Table 2.** KMO and Bartlett’s Test.

KMO	Bartlett’s Test
0.878	Approx. Chi-Square (6679.156) df (378) Sig. (0.000)

The use of principal components analysis (PCA) in SPSS-23 software extracted the factors. The varimax rotation was implemented to optimise the sum of the variance of the squared loadings for each element. The findings indicated that the factor loading for each item exceeded the study’s predetermined cut-off value of 0.4. A total of eight components were identified through the rotated component matrix with the reviewer’s proficiency, perceived curiosity fulfilment, ease of use, and OBD, which had three items each. The other factors included were perceived enjoyment, information quality, perceived usefulness, and reviewer’s trustworthiness, which had four items each. Table 3 shows the detailed results.

5.3. Evaluating Measurement Model

CFA was used to evaluate the fit between the proposed model and the data set using AMOS 23. AMOS 23 displays the relationships among the various latent constructs and indicator variables’ predictor and criterion variables’ through the model, making it ideal for studying multivariate models [58]. The results indicated that the items’ loadings surpassed the threshold value of 0.70 [59], with a range of 0.75 to 0.91. The composite reliability scores



(Table 4) were between 0.85 and 0.93, verifying the internal consistency of the scale. The average variance extract (AVE) was utilised to assess convergent validity. All of the results ranged from 0.66 to 0.77, satisfying the minimum of 0.50 value criteria [60].

**Table 3.** Pattern matrix.

Variables	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8
RP1						0.858		
RP2						0.886		
RP3						0.863		
PENJ1				0.872				
PENJ2				0.849				
PENJ3				0.90				
PENJ4				0.864				
EOU1								0.842
EOU2								0.870
EOU3								0.864
PCF1							0.837	
PCF2							0.879	
PCF3							0.860	
RT1			0.861					
RT2			0.901					
RT3			0.90					
RT4			0.854					
IQ1					0.843			
IQ2					0.847			
IQ3					0.899			
IQ4					0.811			
PU1	0.833							
PU2	0.791							
PU3	0.849							
PU4	0.822							
OBD1		0.716						
OBD2		0.805						
OBD3		0.784						
Total								
Variance Explained (Cumulative%)	17.56	22.237	18.726	40.963	52.33	60.904	69.459	77.956

The discriminant validity test (shown in Table 5) was carried out as per the criteria prescribed in [60]. It states that the AVE square root for each construct should be more than the correlation between that and another construct. The fit indices were calculated to evaluate the fit between the proposed model and the dataset. The values of the indices were as follows:  $\chi^2/df$  (1.546), RMR (0.069), GFI (0.904), AGFI (0.879), NFI (0.928), PNFI (0.79), IFI (0.973), TLI (0.968), CFI (0.973), PGFI (0.717), and RMSEA (0.026). All of the indicators surpassed their threshold limits, except the chi-square “*p*-value”, which could be attributable to a sample size of more than 200 [61].

#### 5.4. Evaluating Structural Model

The proposed hypotheses were evaluated using the methodology of structural equation modelling. The results show that the quality of information (Coef. = 0.30,  $p < 0.01$ ) significantly influenced the eWOM media’s PU. On the other hand, the various determinants of the hedonic value of the eWOM platform also significantly influenced the PU of the eWOM media: reviewer proficiency (Coef. = 0.12,  $p < 0.05$ ), reviewer trustworthiness (Coef. = 0.14,  $p < 0.05$ ), perceived curiosity fulfilment (Coef. = 0.12,  $p < 0.05$ ), perceived enjoyment (Coef. = 0.11,  $p < 0.05$ ), and ease of use (Coef. = 0.22,  $p < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, the

eWOM media’s PU had an affirmative influence on the OBD of the tourist in India (Coef. = 0.70,  $p < 0.01$ ). The detailed information on this is displayed in Table 6.

**Table 4.** Reliability and convergent validity.

Construct	Items	Items Loading	CR	AVE
Reviewer proficiency	RP1	0.825	0.874	0.699
	RP2	0.888		
	RP3	0.791		
Perceived enjoyment	PENJ1	0.873	0.918	0.737
	PENJ2	0.854		
	PENJ3	0.875		
	PENJ4	0.832		
Ease of use	EOU1	0.787	0.863	0.678
	EOU2	0.862		
	EOU3	0.818		
Perceived curiosity fulfilment	PCF1	0.816	0.868	0.686
	PCF2	0.842		
	PCF3	0.828		
Reviewer trustworthiness	RT1	0.888	0.932	0.775
	RT2	0.911		
	RT3	0.871		
	RT4	0.851		
Information quality	IQ1	0.842	0.913	0.725
	IQ2	0.829		
	IQ3	0.910		
	IQ4	0.819		
Perceived usefulness	PU1	0.862	0.908	0.712
	PU2	0.761		
	PU3	0.885		
	PU4	0.792		
Online booking decision	OBD1	0.758	0.855	0.662
	OBD2	0.832		
	OBD3	0.796		

**Table 5.** Discriminant validity.

	HV_PENJ	HV_RP	HV_EOU	HV_PCF	HV_RT	UV_IQ	PU	OBD
HV_PENJ	0.859							
HV_RP	0.168	0.836						
HV_EOU	0.253	0.288	0.823					
HV_PCF	0.193	0.275	0.185	0.828				
HV_RT	0.288	0.233	0.160	0.330	0.880			
UV_IQ	0.263	0.137	0.185	0.265	0.309	0.851		
PU	0.290	0.272	0.342	0.295	0.313	0.402	0.844	
OBD	0.292	0.218	0.286	0.257	0.315	0.426	0.718	0.814

**Table 6.** Hypotheses testing.

Hypotheses	Estimate	SE	CR	P	Findings
H1: The PU of eWOM media is determined by the quality of information available.	0.299	0.036	5.313	***	Supported at 99%
H2: The PU of eWOM media is determined by the tourist’s belief in the reviewer’s proficiency.	0.118	0.049	2.113	0.035	Supported at 95%

**Table 6.** Cont.

Hypotheses	Estimate	SE	CR	P	Findings
H3: The PU of eWOM media is determined by the tourist’s belief in the reviewer’s trustworthiness.	0.137	0.035	2.534	0.011	Supported at 95%
H4: Perceived curiosity fulfilment regarding eWOM media strongly determines its PU.	0.124	0.04	2.272	0.023	Supported at 95%
H5: Perceived enjoyment regarding eWOM media usage strongly determines its PU.	0.114	0.046	2.031	0.042	Supported at 95%
H6: The PU of eWOM media is determined by the tourist’s belief in its ease of use.	0.217	0.054	3.788	***	Supported at 99%
H7: PU of eWOM media leads to OBD for tourist destinations.	0.704	0.061	9.79	***	Supported at 99%
Moderation Analysis					
H8: Gender moderates the effect that PU of eWOM media has on OBD.					
Male	0.788	0.014	58.037	***	
Female	0.562	0.020	28.698	***	
Z score (>2.58)		3.448			Supported at 99%

Note: \*\*\* = significant at 99% confidence level.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusions

The present research investigates the association between utilitarian and hedonic value determinants and online booking decisions for tourist destinations in India. The study also encapsulated the moderating role of gender on the relationship between different determinants. Overall, the findings of our study highlight particular points of interest.

When evaluating eWOM media, the current study identified information quality (utilitarian value) as an essential aspect of the PU of eWOM media. The findings of this study are consistent with those of prior studies, which hypothesised that eWOM media channels offering qualitative information facilitate an individual’s decision-making [62,63]. When travellers acquire quality eWOM from the eWOM media website, they appreciate its usefulness [64].

Ease of use has been identified as the second most influential hedonic characteristic of eWOM media. This conclusion reaffirms the findings of prior research indicating that the customer impression regarding the usability of consumer-generated media influences their decision-making [41].

The trustworthiness of reviewers was another crucial hedonic factor in our study that influenced the PU of the eWOM platform. Online users are assumed to refer to societal evidence of the reviewer in order to cross-verify their reliability [65]. In the context of our study, we can say that tourists showed a positive attitude to reviews with more public information than non-identifiable online sources.

Curiosity fulfilment and reviewer proficiency were other vital determinants of hedonic value that significantly impacted the PU of the eWOM media. The tourism industry collaborates with various distribution channels that provide products and services to its customer, which are more often intangible in nature. Purchase decision related to tourism products and services has always been a sensitive affair, as extensive uncertainty complements the decision-making. When tourists obtain information from a review website, they satisfy their curiosity by filling the information gap. In this way, the tourist perceives the eWOM media’s usefulness, which assists them in their decision-making. Furthermore, the study also showed a positive association between reviewer proficiency and the PU of the eWOM media. The results are in sync with previous studies based on information technology acceptance [41].

This study investigated the effect of perceived enjoyment on the PU of eWOM media and found that it has a substantial impact. An individual experiences pleasure and obtains affective insights while reading valuable information related to the tourism product and service provided by the reviewers through eWOM media. The pleasure of enjoying reading fulfils one's need of hedonic requirements to a greater extent, which may further determine the PU of the eWOM media. As a result, tourists consider pleasure to be the most significant element influencing their opinions towards the usefulness of eWOM platforms. The empirical findings of our study are in line with [66]. The study highlights the hedonic aspect of the reviews received through the website and the subsequent effect on their behaviour.

Furthermore, the present study confirmed that the PU of eWOM media significantly affects the purchase behaviour of tourists in India. When individuals perceive that the eWOM platform fulfils both utilitarian and hedonic requirements, they are more inclined to purchase from the website. Notably, the results of the present study demonstrate that gender influences the adoption of eWOM media platforms and OBD. Males were found to go ahead with online bookings when they perceived the usefulness of technology as compared with females. This conclusion complements past research on technology adoption in diverse circumstances [67,68]. However, the current findings also contradict those that identify no difference between gender-based effects on PU and behavioural intention [43,44].

#### *Utilitarian and Hedonic Values of eWOM Media and Open Innovation*

The proliferation of eWOM on eWOM media platforms has increased the interest of most companies in open innovation. There is a paradigm shift from innovation to open innovation where marketers consider and leverage the synergy of internal and external ideas to maximise their visibility in a given market [69]. The understanding of utilitarian and hedonic values of eWOM media is bound to have an impact on open innovation. In the current times, it is imperative for companies to explore open innovation, which is a form of innovation that is more participatory and more decentralised in its approach to innovation. Open innovation is the deliberate and intentional use of the inflow and outflow of knowledge to maximise internal innovation [70,71] and thus expand the market for the external usage of innovation [72]. According to research of [73], in an open innovation context, "the boundaries between companies and their surrounding environment have become more permeable; innovation may easily get transferred inwards or outwards, between companies and companies as well as between companies and creative consumers, thus resulting in impacts at the level of the consumer, the company, the industry and of the respective society" (p. 579). In [74], it was observed that firms that engage in open inbound innovation seem to make great use of social media to synchronise their external search and thus exploit the rich knowledge pool located outside their boundaries. Prior studies have shown the importance of open innovation in the service industry; however, research in the tourism domain is still underexplored [75,76]. Implementing this alternative form of innovation through the inward flow of ideas from the customer in the form of eWOM will result in more synergy, better product delivery, and more profit in the long run. Companies need to develop a strategy for open innovation by including learning from the utilitarian and hedonic values of eWOM media [77], which can lead to the maximisation of results. Open innovation will confer a holistic approach to targeting customers, as conferring to a unilateral approach to target customers is no longer impactful [78].

#### **7. Theoretical Implications**

Most customers trust eWOM media to provide relevant information on different products, services, and brands [17]. This study is an attempt to address a gap in the literature pertaining to the application of information technology in the Indian tourism business. Previous researchers have examined the effect of online reviews in terms of their usefulness [52], adoption [79], and the impact of social media on sales and buying

behaviour [8]. This study contends that utilitarian and hedonic value-based variables of eWOM media impact Indian tourists' buying behaviour. In addition, it is anticipated that the contribution made by our research will offer future opportunities for in-depth studies on customers' online decision-making based on the many valuable components of eWOM media.

### 8. Practical Implications

This study makes suggestions to website designers and administrators of eWOM media that will aid them in creating and managing their online portals in accordance with the needs of tourists. The present study demonstrates that information quality, reviewer proficiency, trustworthiness, curiosity fulfilment, enjoyment, and ease of use significantly influence eWOM media PU. Online platform designers should emphasise the up-gradation of both the utilitarian and hedonic aspects of review websites as well as other factors. The inclusion of reviewers' profile pictures, pictures related to various products, videos, and exciting and attractive information related to consumption experience would encourage the usage of eWOM media for information search and booking decisions for tourist destinations. Thus, it is recommended that website administrators should motivate reviewers to share interesting information. Furthermore, tourism and hospitality service providers providing e-services should become associated with those eWOM media with more utility value, which would help in boosting their sales performance level.

### 9. Limitation and Future Scope

The present study also has some limitations that could be addressed in future studies. The primary sample respondents for the survey were Indian tourists of different age groups. It is suggested that the presented model be utilised to investigate the efficacy of eWOM media and their effects on individual behaviour in additional geographical regions and particular demographic groups. In addition, the study did not incorporate other variables that may influence the online booking behaviour of tourists. The current research was undertaken in the context of online booking of tourist destinations. Investigating the current model with other allied industries such as hotels and restaurants is recommended. The study did not focus on particular eWOM media. Future researchers are encouraged to study the model using a specific eWOM platform. Lastly, the present study acknowledges the responses of 338 respondents to analyse the data. It is recommended to use a larger sample size to attain better statistical reliability.

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**Appendix A**

**Table A1.** Questionnaire.

<b>(Part A)</b>		
<b>Questions</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Measurements</b>
1.	Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male</li> <li>• Female</li> <li>• Others</li> </ul>
2.	Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Below 25 y</li> <li>• 26 y–35 y</li> <li>• 36 y–45 y</li> <li>• 46 y and above</li> </ul>
3.	Qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Under-graduate</li> <li>• Post-graduate</li> <li>• Others (please specify)_____</li> </ul>
4.	What is your primary source to get the information about tourist destinations in India?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Official tourism sites</li> <li>• Travel review sites (TripAdvisor and Booking.com)</li> <li>• Social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Linked In)</li> <li>• Personal travel blogs</li> <li>• Travel agency</li> <li>• Other (please specify)</li> </ul>
<b>(Part B)</b>		
<b>Factors</b>	<b>Items</b>	
Information quality [52,53]	IQ1: The eWOM media provided me with the correct information about tourist destinations IQ2: The information provided by the eWOM media was relevant to my requirements. IQ3: The tourist destinations information provided by the eWOM media is always up-to-date. IQ4: The information available on the eWOM media were very well organised.	
Reviewer proficiency [54]	RP1: People who left reviews on eWOM media are knowledgeable. RP2: People who left reviews on eWOM media are experts. RP3: People who left reviews on eWOM media are experienced ones.	
Reviewer trustworthiness [54]	RT1: People who left reviews on eWOM media are reliable. RT2: People who left reviews on eWOM media are honest. RT3: People who left reviews on eWOM media are sincere. RT4: People who left reviews on eWOM media have integrity.	
Perceived curiosity fulfilment [12,37]	PCF1: My imagination for tourist destinations develops when I use eWOM media. PCF2: Interacting with this eWOM media makes me curious about searching for more tourist destinations. PCF3: Reading reviews of other reviewers on eWOM media excites my curiosity.	

Table A1. Cont.

(Part B)	Factors	Items
	Enjoyment [12,37]	ENJT1: Using eWOM media creates fun. ENJT2: It was delightful to use eWOM media. ENJT3: It was exciting to interact with other experts on eWOM media. ENJT4: I find eWOM media usage very boring.
	Ease of Use [12]	EOU1: I feel comfortable using eWOM media. EOU2: The eWOM media facilitates me to navigate anywhere within the website. EOU3: I find it easy to gain expertise using eWOM media.
	Perceived usefulness [12,37]	PUF1: The eWOM media enhances my knowledge of various tourist destinations. PUF2: The eWOM media facilitates me to get information quickly regarding various tourist destinations. PUF3: The eWOM media assists me in getting various tourist destinations information more efficiently. PUF4: The eWOM media assists me in making online booking decisions more efficiently.
	Online booking decision [37,55]	OBD1: After using eWOM media, it is good to make an online purchase decision for tourism products and services. OBD2: After using eWOM media, I have the intention to book tourist destinations online. OBD3: After using eWOM media, I am optimistic about making an online booking for a tourist destination.

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