

## Exploring the Role of Tourism Destination Communications in Shaping Tourist E-WOM Intentions

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### Abstract

The objective of this work was to analyse to what extent communications about the tourist destination (online and offline generated by the destination and the communications of social media users) influence the destination's image and the tourist's intention to communicate online or generate eWOM. Performing quantitative research on tourists who visit the tourist information offices of the Valencian Community in Spain, 185 valid questionnaires were obtained through a survey. As a result of regression estimates and descriptive statistics techniques, support is found for the influence of online communications generated by destination and by the social media user on the image of the destination and the tourist's intention to communicate online. The influence of communications with tourist information office staff is also significant, while neither the content nor the visual appeal of brochures influence the image or the intention to communicate online about the tourist destination. This evidence can help tourism authorities to develop a more effective marketing strategy to promote the destination. Likewise, the variables included in the developed theoretical model have not been considered together in previous studies in this area, thus contributing to the extant literature. In addition, offline communications (brochures) are broken down into two different variables, which had not been studied together with the rest of the variables within the framework of the S-O-R model.

**Key Words:** eWOM, online communications generated by the destination, offline communications, image, intention to communicate online, social media, tourist information offices, personality

**JEL Classification:** M31, L84

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### 1. Introduction

Interpersonal influence and word-of-mouth (WOM) communication are considered the most important sources of information when making the final decision to purchase an item or service since they influence both attitudes toward the brand, as in the perceived value of the brand, and intention to communicate (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016; Litvin, 2008). In the tourism sector, the role of interpersonal communications is even more important since intangible experiences can hardly be evaluated before arriving at the destination. Therefore, it is important for those responsible for promoting tourist destinations to understand the factors that drive travellers' destination choice preferences and how these are influenced by communications about the destination (Yadav, 2022).

Likewise, with the emergence of the Internet, the evolution of information and communication technologies (ICT), and the rise of social media, there has been a greater consumption of online opinions about travel (Yadav, 2022). This leads to electronic word-of-mouth (or eWOM) and exchanging experiences in real time through digital platforms has become a useful means to promote tourist destinations (Litvin, 2008), giving rise to a new approach to marketing to attract and retain customers or tourists. Therefore, it is of great interest to analyse this eWOM, compared to other ways of communicating about the destination, since the tourism sector experiences high levels of competition between destinations, making online interpersonal influence a potential source of competitive advantage and the main reason why tourists decide whether or not to travel to a destination (Cheung, 2021).

Furthermore, tourists' travel preferences vary and depend on their level of involvement in the processing of eWOM reviews, which encourages, to a greater or lesser extent, the creation of online reviews or recommendations. Therefore, it is relevant to investigate the reasons why tourists take the initiative to communicate their opinion online in regard to the destination (Yadav, 2022).

The interest of this research topic today is remarkable due to several reasons. Firstly, in many Spanish regions, and especially in the Valencian Community, tourism activity is one of the main sources of income and job creation that has, unfortunately, been seriously affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is, in fact, one of the economic sectors most affected by the resulting health emergency (IvieLAB, 2021). The recent crises, on the other hand, have also had a negative impact on public coffers, raising public spending to historic highs. That is why, to reach pre-pandemic activity levels, it is necessary to streamline public spending dedicated to the promotion of tourist destinations, offering the managers of these destinations some guidance on how to invest their marketing budget in the most efficient way to attract tourists to these destinations. As argued by Arumugam et al. (2023), marketing and promotional activities are key factors in the development of tourism; therefore, analysing the use and evolution of marketing communication tools in tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic until these days will allow institutions to communicate more effectively with visitors and tourists (Lincényi and Bulanda, 2023).

Thus, there is a need for those responsible for the tourism promotion of destinations to know the communication actions that must be prioritised, rectified or eliminated in terms of destination promotion so that the institutions responsible for tourism management can follow a route towards strategic planning for the coming years. Furthermore, in order to reach this goal, the role of local governance as tourism entrepreneurship is quite relevant, enhancing innovation and being capable to deal with the weaknesses of tourism destinations (de Lurdes Calisto et al. 2023).

To this end, the objective of this work is to analyse to what extent different types of communication about the tourist destination influence the image of the destination and the tourist intention to communicate online about their experiences at the destination. Specifically, it involves analysing the influence of tourists' online communications on social media, the destination's online communications, and the destination's offline communications in the form of customer service at the tourist office and promotional brochures. Likewise, the aim is to analyse how the intention to communicate online varies depending on the gender, age, and certain personality traits of the tourist.

Therefore, in developing the proposed line of research, the aim is to contribute to academic literature by answering questions such as: What type of communication (online/offline generated by the destination or online generated by social media users) influences to a greater extent the image of the tourist destination? Which ones most encourage tourists to share their experience online? Does the image of the destination influence the intention to communicate on social media? In this way, we take a deeper look at the effects that different types of communications generate on tourists: carried out on digital platforms or offline by the destination and communications carried out online by tourists, thus responding to calls for future research (Stojanovic, 2022). To do this, the S-O-R theoretical model (Baber and Baber, 2023) is taken as a basis, incorporating psychological variables considered by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) theory to shed light on the decision-making process to predict tourist behavior in terms of intention to communicate online. In this way, by including elements of the TPB in the S-O-R model, not only environmental factors can be considered, but also psychological factors (perceptions

or perceived image, in this case, by the tourist) (Ajzen, 1991; Ulker-Demirel and Ciftci, 2020), thus making a novel contribution to the academic literature. Likewise, the research results shed light on a series of implications for the management of integrated marketing communications for tourist destinations stemming from the identification of the most efficient tools for tourism promotion.

To achieve the stated objectives, the work is structured as follows: below, a review of the literature regarding the variables and relationships under analysis is presented. The third section explains the methodology used to collect and process the data. The fourth describes the results obtained and, finally, the fifth points out the main conclusions, implications for management, limitations and derived research opportunities.

## 2. Literature review

Based on the S-O-R (stimulus, organism, response) model, developed in the field of environmental psychology, it has been analysed how the environment and the media affect people's response (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Baber and Baber, 2023). In this way, the stimuli that tourists receive about a destination allow them to configure an image of it and respond in a certain way, for example, by issuing communications on social media. Similarly, in line with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) proposed by Ajzen (1985), it makes sense to expect that elements of an environment or stimuli (online and offline communications generated by the destination and tourists) can generate a perception of an individual or organism (reputation or image of the destination) and, finally, elicit a response from the individual (tourist intention to communicate), as stated by Baber and Baber (2023).

In relation to the intention to communicate online (electronic word-of-mouth, or eWOM communications) on the part of tourists, various authors have been interested in trying to identify its determining factors (Stojanovic et al., 2022; Hu and Kim, 2018). Starting from the S-O-R and TPB models previously presented, this study proposes various stimuli to elicit such behaviour about the destination, namely: (1) offline communications generated by the institutions responsible for the promotion of the tourist destination (DGC off, e.g. the customer service provided by employees in tourist offices and brochures), (2) online communications generated by the tourist destination (DGC on), (3) online communications generated by tourist users on the Internet (UGC), namely the opinions or reviews generated by tourists about the destination on any of its digital platforms (website, blog, social media, etc.), also known as eWOM.

The use of the Internet and social media has caused a change in the way in which consumers give their opinion about products or services as it can be done through online platforms, thereby generating a direct impact on the image of an organisation (Castellano and Dutot, 2016) and the user's intention to communicate positively or negatively. We shall first propose the hypotheses regarding the determinants of destination image, and secondly, the hypotheses concerning the drivers of eWOM.

### 2.1 Determinants of destination image

Image can be defined as a collective system of attitudes and thoughts that influence people's decisions regarding an organisation (Balmer, 2001; Su et al., 2018). Based on Aaker's (1991) definition, the image of a destination has been defined as a holistic construct, consisting of a subjective interpretation of the place by the visitor (Llopis et al., 2018). The image of an organisation represented through one or more digital media is referred as the company's electronic reputation (Baber et al., 2024).

In the offline environment, the image of the tourist who has recently arrived at a destination can be built from the interaction between the tourist office employee and the tourist, and from the tourist perception of the usefulness of the information and the visual appeal of the brochures available to them. In this sense, a brochure is considered as printed promotional material that serves to communicate with

existing or potential tourists (Molina and Esteban, 2006). The quality of brochure information dissemination depends on how it is perceived by tourists (Chang et al., 2019).

Regarding the offline communications of the destination, few recent studies analyse these variables, since after COVID-19 until today new forms of communication have begun to gradually replace more conventional media with regard to the promotion of tourist destinations (Lacarcel and Huete, 2023). However, the customized service that tourists receive from employees in tourist offices continues to be relevant to the image that tourists have about the destination, as various authors point out (Chang et al., 2019).

According to Chang et al. (2019), this service provided can be measured based on perceived service quality, defining staff service quality as the outcome of the employee encounter, as understood by the tourist. Visitors value the service elements of tourist offices, especially regarding interactions with staff about places of interest or recommendations, the attitude and extensive knowledge of the destination on the part of the employee and the credibility of the message, among others. The customer's perception of the "service encounter" is shaped not only by the quality of the information provided by the employee about the destination and its services, but by a set of factors, such as the employee's interpersonal communication skills and the tools at their disposal (Chang et al., 2019). According to authors such as Chang et al. (2019), all of this contributes towards creating memorable experiences for tourists in the destinations visited. Likewise, Govindarajo and Khen (2020) argue that employee to tourist service quality in tourist destinations can create positive or negative images among tourists, thus influencing their degree of satisfaction and loyalty and the destination image.

Indeed, depending on the quality of the service perceived by tourists at the time of the "service encounter", they will associate positive or negative attributes with the destination, forming a first impression or perception of the destination when leaving the tourist office. This will create a mental image that will influence their perception of the experience at the destination, and their behavioural intentions (Chang et al., 2019). Visual appeal and usefulness of the information are the main attributes of brochures that can be considered as an influence on the image of the destination (Molina and Esteban, 2006). The dissemination of brochures allows tourists to become acquainted with the image of the destination, thus acquiring a more complete idea of the sensory, visual, and verbal stimuli.

Although the Internet presence is becoming an integral part of any promotional strategy nowadays, the offline communications generated by the destination should not be overlooked, since, together with the online ones, the tourist can form a more complete image of the destination before and after their visit. Likewise, sources of information with a high informative content and sought with active interaction by the tourist (such as brochures from tourist offices), are very useful since they create an image of the destination that is very close to reality and reduce the gap between pre- and post-images of the destination (Beerli-Palacio and Martín-Santana, 2020). Based on this, we state the following hypotheses concerning offline communications of the tourist destination:

*H1a. The communications generated by tourist office employees positively influence the image of the destination.*

*H1b. Brochures/posters about the destination positively influence its image.*

Likewise, today, every organisation, whether public or private, must have the mechanisms to be present on the Internet and thus be visible in the globalised and digitalised world in which we live. Companies are now aware of the need to develop two-way relationships with consumers/tourists to encourage interactions. Through social media, Internet users can create, make viral, and consume products, services, brands and, in this case, tourist destinations. The communications generated by organisations are considered an essential promotional tool, allowing them to interact with consumers and influence their perceptions (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016).

In this way, communications on social media created by the destination expose the tourist to a process of assimilation of new stimuli and information, which affects the tourist perception of the destination, and unconsciously creates an overall image of it in the tourist mind (Baber and Baber, 2023; Stojanovic et al., 2022). According to Huang et al. (2023), the impact of social media on the image of the

destination is observed at all stages of the tourist trip, causing destination communications to play an important role in the creation of positive images about the destination.

Likewise, according to Stojanovic et al. (2022), the content generated on social media by the destination affects its image, that is, it has a significant impact on the construction of the destination's image through graphical elements or text. For all these reasons, we state the following hypothesis regarding offline communications of the tourist destination:

*H1c. The communications generated on social media by the destination positively influence the image of the destination.*

On the other hand, apps and eWOM communications have an increasing influence on the selection of tourism destination (Kuo et al., 2019). In this sense, it is particularly remarkable the impact of the online communications generated by the user about their experiences in the destination they have visited consist of content prepared by the public (tourists) through social media, in a creative way and outside of their professional practices (OECD, 2007). This type of content has a great influence on tourist perceptions about the destination, since tourists play an active role in writing reviews on social media and other digital platforms related to the destination. These become a very valuable source of information and feedback for the marketing of destinations, capable of conjuring up in the tourist mind an attractive image of the place to visit. Therefore, the role of user-generated content (UGC or eWOM) on social media is extremely important to build images of a brand, product, or service (Baber and Baber, 2023; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016), or a tourist destination, in this case. The concept of destination image is multidimensional (Baber and Baber, 2023). Likewise, Adam et al. (2023) highlights the importance of examining the influence of eWOM on the destination image and its consequences on tourists' intentions. Based on the above, the following hypothesis is stated:

*H2. The communications generated by other tourists using social media (UGC) positively influence the image of the destination.*

## 2.2 Determinants of Electronic Word-of-Mouth

Destination image and tourist satisfaction are precursors of various tourist behaviours, including positive eWOM intentions. Likewise, eWOM has received attention in the literature, but there remains a call to investigate the factors that influence eWOM intentions (Goyal and Taneja, 2023).

It is expected that the better the image of a tourist destination, whether thanks to online or offline media, the more likely the tourist will be to issue positive online communications about that destination. In fact, previous work indicates that, by generating a good image of the destination from external stimuli (communications), tourists will be more likely to generate a response to it, recommending it to other people through positive eWOM (Baber and Baber, 2023; Afshardoost and Eshaghi, 2020). On the other hand, Meenakshy and Srivastava (2022) maintain that it is the perceptions of the destination's attributes, rather than the hotel's attributes or other factors, that explain the intention to communicate online about the destination. Based on this evidence, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H3. The image of the destination positively influences the tourist intention to communicate online (eWOM).*

For service industries, service quality is a vital source of competitive advantage (Santouridis et al., 2012). The moment of interaction between the tourist office employee and the tourist is of vital importance, so that, after the service provided at the tourist offices, the tourist can visit the place with a different predisposition to interact with the destination. That is, depending on whether the tourist receives prompt attention, the employee knows the tourist needs, or shows interest in them, there will always be a higher degree of satisfaction with the service and the tourist will be more inclined to communicate their experience to others (Chang et al., 2019). Likewise, Pandey and Sahu (2020) analyze the relationship between the quality of the service provided, level of attachment to the destination and eWOM intention, concluding that service quality positively influences attachment to the destination and tourist intention to communicate online his experience in the destination.

Regarding brochures and their impact on eWOM intention, although some authors (e.g. Kiliç et al., 2021) claim that there are other types of current promotional tools in destination marketing (such as virtual reality) may have a greater influence on tourists' intentions and the development of attitudes towards the product, Molina and Esteban (2006), constitute that brochures are a conventional communication tool that is frequently used in both public and private tourist activities. Although after the incorporation of new technologies and COVID-19, a large number of processes in the tourism sector have been digitised, so that digital brochures/posters have been created, they are still being used in tourist offices to capture the attention of visitors, specifically those belonging to the older generations who are not familiar with ICT (Chang et al., 2019). In this way, tourist information remains accessible to all audiences, adapting the brochures to the needs of tourists and thereby directly contributing to the formation of positive images of the destination, which can result in greater influence when tourists communicate their experiences (Cheung et al., 2019). In light of this, we formulate the following hypotheses concerning offline communications of the tourist destination:

*H4a. The communications generated by the staff of the tourist offices directly and positively influence the tourist intention to communicate online.*

*H4b. Brochures/posters about the destination directly and positively influence the tourist intention to communicate online.*

Furthermore, the content generated by the organisation is a tool of great importance when carrying out promotional and marketing strategies to publicise the destination and attract tourists. Tourism organisations use social media to promote their destinations and attract new customers (Abbasi et al., 2023). The literature has highlighted that it is increasingly important for destinations to take care of their posts on social media, in regard to format, content, and day of publication (Hernández-Ortega et al., 2020). While it is challenging for organisations to choose or create appropriate destination images on social media to attract tourists efficiently and motivate their eWOM behaviour, Abbasi et al. (2023) identify various factors of these publications created by the organisation itself that are directly and indirectly related to tourists' eWOM intentions.

Online content controlled by the destination not only helps to create tourist images but is also a highly relevant factor in getting tourists to speak well of it on digital platforms. If the destination publishes well-crafted posts, the tourist is more likely to have favourable expectations of the destination, in accordance with what they see published (developing the tourist visual and sensory perception). Consequently, it is expected that tourists will be more willing to comment on or recommend their experiences at the destination to their contacts or friends on social media, thereby contributing to creating an online community and influencing the opinion that other users may have, extrapolating the results obtained to different contexts (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016; Cheung et al., 2019). Therefore, we state the following hypothesis:

*H4c. The communications generated by the destination on social media directly and positively influence the tourist intention to communicate online.*

Moreover, word-of-mouth communication can improve the effectiveness of communication efforts (Šerić et al., 2022). Specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequent distancing measures caused these efforts to increase presence in online channels, such as social media, thus boosting electronic word-of-mouth communication (eWOM) in all areas, including tourist destinations.

Digital natives, who make up the generational cohorts known as *millennials* and *centennials*, show lower likelihood to be influenced by advertising (Spasova, 2023), and a clear preference for the use of social media as communication tools and compared to members of other generations (Pollák and Markovič, 2022), placing more trust in users' online reviews. This is their main influence when making decisions, whether visiting a destination or posting online reviews about it (Cetron et al., 2020). Likewise, there are various factors that drive tourists' intention to create online reviews, among which the tourist perception of the destination stands out (Šerić et al., 2022), which can be constructed from the vision offered by other tourists on social media. However, there are also other aspects, such as the characteristics of the source of information or eWOM (i.e. quality, credibility and reach/influence), which are important

predictors of trust in electronic word-of-mouth and eWOM intentions (Le and Ryu, 2023). Finally, it is worth highlighting the relevance of belief in expected reciprocity or generalised exchange (Cheung and Lee, 2012). In this way, individuals who most frequently consult the online reviews of digital platforms will be more inclined to contribute with their own online content. Likewise, people who share knowledge on online platforms also expect to receive future contributions from other people in return (reciprocity), which encourages them to continue consulting and generating online reviews. Therefore, we state the following hypothesis:

*H5. The communications generated by other tourists on social media (UGC) directly and positively influence the tourist intention to communicate online.*

Finally, it is expected that the intention to communicate online about the destination is explained not only by communications about the destination but also by variables related to the individual, such as gender, age, or certain personality traits. Regarding gender, there is scarce and sometimes contradictory empirical evidence on the influence of this variable on the intention to communicate online on tourism destinations. In this sense, Ahn et al. (2020) state that this is one of the demographic variables that exerts an important moderating role in terms of tourists' behavioural intentions, with differences observed between men and women in eWOM intention. Likewise, Anaya-Sánchez et al. (2019) observe that female users have a greater propensity than the male users to accept that online travel reviews are explanatory, thus facilitating their intentions to communicate and travel. For their part, Šerić et al. (2022) conclude that gender moderates the relationship between reputation or image of the destination and the intention of word-of-mouth communication, this relationship being stronger among women. However, framing the results within the tourism industry, Han and Ryu (2007) conclude that there is no gender difference in the relationship between customer satisfaction and eWOM intentions, while Mattila (2000) also does not observe gender differences in online reviews of hotels and restaurants. Likewise, Haro-Sosa et al. (2024) corroborate the studies by Mattila (2000) but only with regard to restaurant selection decisions, with gender not being a significant variable moderating the relationship between the reasons for consulting eWOM, the intention to consult it and the adoption of eWOM. Finally, Krishnapillai and Ying (2017) also corroborate a non-significant moderation effect of tourist gender on the relationship between eWOM and travel intention.

Regarding age, Sharipudin et al. (2023) find that differences between demographic cohorts are significant in terms of eWOM intentions and customer revisits, with Generation Z being the most influenced in both aspects. Coinciding with these results, Anaya-Sánchez et al. (2019) confirm that this same generation (specifically under 35 years of age) is more likely to use review sites and take them into account when making decisions. However, Šerić et al. (2022) conclude that of the two sociodemographic variables considered (gender and age), the only one that moderates the relationship between the reputation or image of the destination and word-of-mouth communication is gender, thus ruling out the influence of age on eWOM intentions (Šerić et al., 2022). Likewise, in contexts different from the tourism industry, several authors such as Sawaftah et al. (2020) and Winarno and Indrawati (2020), conclude that age does not moderate the relationship between social media communications and user intentions.

Regarding personality traits, it has been highlighted that the choice of a tourist destination and intentions to communicate about the destination are influenced by tourist personality traits, among other factors (Fanea-Ivanovici et al., 2023). In this sense, the Big Five personality traits (openness to new experiences, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness and neuroticism) significantly influence tourists' eWOM intentions about the destination (Fanea-Ivanovici et al., 2023). Similar results are reported by Hu and Kim (2018), Tha'er and Bohari (2016) and Camilleri (2021). Likewise, d'Ament et al. (2024) corroborate that neuroticism is the trait that influences intentions to communicate their experience in tourists visiting a destination with wineries; Majláth et al. (2013) state that extroversion, agreeableness, openness to new experiences and conscientiousness have a positive relationship with eWOM intentions, and Yoo and Gretzel (2011) also corroborate that tourists' personality traits motivate tourists' behavior to a greater or lesser extent to the degree of engagement with the contents created by the user. Likewise,

Hu and Kim (2018) also conclude that personality traits have a moderating influence on eWOM motivations and eWOM posting behaviour in the hospitality industry.

In contrast, according to Baber et al. (2024) personality differences do not moderate the relationships between eWOM intention and the value attributed to the destination by the tourist. Similarly, Meenakshy and Srivastava (2022) argue that the personality of the tourist, only in terms of their score on the extroversion scale, has no significant influence on the tourist intentions to generate eWOM.

Based on the extant literature, we state the following group of hypotheses:

*H6.1. There are significant differences in intention to communicate online about the tourism destination across gender.*

*H6.2. There are significant differences in intention to communicate online about the tourism destination across age group.*

*H6.3. Personality traits and intention to communicate online about the tourism destination are significantly related.*

### 3. Methods

To contrast the previously mentioned hypotheses, quantitative research is carried out through an online survey administered to tourists at the exit of the tourist offices they have visited, using a QR code shown in a poster at the tourist office. Specifically, sampling is carried out for convenience as only some tourist offices from various locations in the Valencian Community, in Spain, have agreed to collaborate with the study: Benicàssim, Sagunt, Gandia, Canet d'en Berenguer, Castelló de la Plana, Altura, Riba-roja de Túria, Segorbe, Valencia and other nearby cities and towns. Data collection was carried out during the months of May and June 2023, obtaining a total of 185 valid questionnaires.

All variables included in the study have been measured by items that have been proposed and adapted based on the review of various previous studies. 7-point Likert-type scales (ranging between 1 “strongly disagree” and 7 “strongly agree”) were used to measure the variables of the following sections included in the questionnaire: (1) opinion about online reviews generated by the user (7 items), adapted from Yadav et al. (2022); (2) content generated by the destination (4 items), adapted from Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016); (3) perception of the destination image (3 items), adapted from Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016); (4) service quality perceived by employees in the tourist information office (12 items), adapted from Chang et al. (2019); (5) quality of the tourist office brochures in terms of usefulness (7 items), of which the first three are adapted from Chang et al. (2019) and, the remaining four are adapted from Molina and Esteban (2006); (6) quality of the tourist office brochures in terms of visual appeal (3 items), adapted from Molina and Esteban (2006); (7) tourist intention to communicate online (4 items), adapted from Cheung et al. (2021); and (8) tourist personality traits (10 items), adapted from Hu and Kim (2018). Additionally, a series of classification variables have been measured, namely: gender, age, nationality, region of origin, level of education, current employment situation, personal income, reason for travel, and frequency of travel.

Regarding the profile of the tourists, the majority are women (68.1%) of Spanish nationality (92.4%). In relation to occupation and level of education, more than half (54%) work as employees and 49.7% completed university studies. Regarding the reason for travel, 89.9% travel for holidays and declare a high travel frequency (53.5% travel between 2 and 4 times per year).

Table 1. **Technical research sheet**

<b>Universe</b>	Tourists visiting Visitor Information Centres of the Valencian Community (Spain)
<b>Geographic scope</b>	Spain



<b>Sample size</b>	185 tourists
<b>Sampling design</b>	Online questionnaire (scanning QR code) at the exit of the tourist office.
<b>Data collection period</b>	May-June 2023
<b>Sampling type</b>	Convenience sampling
<b>Sampling type</b>	Outlier data analysis
<b>Statistical techniques</b>	Descriptive analysis Exploratory factor analysis Reliability analysis Regression analysis Test of equality of means Analysis of variance (ANOVA)
<b>Statistical software</b>	SPSS Statistics 29.0

Source: Authors' proposal

Table 2. General sample data

<b>Respondents' characteristics</b>	%		%
<b>Gender</b>		<b>Personal income level (per year)</b>	
Male	31.89%	0 – 9,000€	27.57%
Female	68.11%	9,001 – 12,000€	6.49%
<b>Age</b>		12,001 – 18,000€	14.05%
18-23 years	19.46%	18,001 – 24,000 €	15.14%
24-38 years	18.38%	24,000 – 36,000€	21.08%
39-58 years	38.92%	>36,000€	15.68%
59-72 years	22.16%	<b>Motivation of the journey</b>	
>72 years	1.08%	Holidays	89.19%
<b>Frequency of travel</b>		Business	1.08%
Once a year or less	33.51%	Others	9.73%
2 – 4 times a year	53.51%		
More than 4 times a year	12.97%		

Source: Authors' proposal

From the data collected in the questionnaire, using the SPSS Statistics 29.0 program, we apply descriptive data analysis techniques, an exploratory factor analysis to analyse the factor structure of the

scales, scale reliability analysis, regression analysis, the test of equality of means and the analysis of variance (ANOVA).

#### 4. Results

Firstly, with the aim of identifying the structure of the relationships between the analysed variables, a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation is carried out to configure the factorial structure of the constructs included in the hypotheses. This statistical data reduction technique is applied on successive occasions to eliminate those items that had low factor loadings in all factors (less than 0.55), in line with Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). Finally, a matrix of rotated components is obtained with 7 resulting factors, which have been named as follows: “F1.1 DGC staff”, “F1.2.1 DGC brochures-usefulness”, “F1.2.2 DGC brochures-appeal”, “F2 DGC online”, “F3 UGC online”, “F4 image” and “F5 intention to communicate online”, which together explain 72.8% of the total variance and present adequate adjustment indicators (KMO: 0.913; determinant value: 1.17E-016; Bartlett’s test of sphericity: 0.000). The resulting factorial structure shows the constructs initially contemplated in the hypotheses, although with regard to Destination-Generated Content through brochures, it is divided into two dimensions, which have been named “DGC brochures-usefulness” and “DGC brochures-appeal”, given that the items that are grouped in each of them refer to the interest of the content, and the quality of the images and visual presentation, respectively (see Appendix). All the factors present adequate values for the reliability coefficients according to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), greater than 0.8 for scales previously validated by the literature.

Once the reliability of the scales has been confirmed, we proceed to calculate an average variable with each of them, obtaining seven variables with which we estimate several linear regression models to contrast the proposed hypotheses. In particular, three multiple linear regression models are estimated using ordinary least squares, namely:

- Regression 1: Destination image based on communications issued by the destination (online and offline) and social media users.
- Regression 2: Tourist intention to communicate online based on the communications issued by the destination and social media users.
- Regression 3: Tourist intention to communicate online based on the perceived image of the destination.

Before analysing the results of the regression models, we checked whether the assumptions of linear regression were fulfilled. First, we calculated the variance inflation factor (VIF) to test the potential effects of multicollinearity. As shown in Table 3, all values ranged from 1.00 to 2.13, which was below the threshold of 10, so that the models used in this study are free of multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2019). Second, to determine normality, the values of skewness and kurtosis coefficients (Table 3) were between -0.170 and -0.872 for skewness and between -0.025 and 1.771 for kurtosis (in the range -2 to +2), which is considered acceptable in order to prove normal univariate distribution (George and Mallery, 2010). Last, to check for the presence of heteroscedasticity, we examined the plots of the standardized residuals by the regression standardized predicted value, following Osborne and Waters (2019). Since residuals were randomly scattered around the horizontal line, providing a relatively even distribution in all cases, so that the absence of homoscedasticity is assumed.

Table 3. Kurtosis and asymmetry coefficients, and VIF

	<u>Kurtosis coef.</u>	<u>Asymmetry coef.</u>	<u>VIF</u>
<b>F1.1 DGC staff</b>	1.771	-.872	1.939

<b>F1.2.1 DGC brochures usefulness</b>	.953	-.784	2.293
<b>F1.2.2 DGC brochures appeal</b>	.613	-.653	1.769
<b>F2 DGC online</b>	-.250	-.393	1.344
<b>F3 UGC online</b>	.362	-.644	1.178
<b>F4 Image</b>	.529	-.534	1.000
<b>F5 eWOM intention</b>	-.765	-.170	1.000

Source: Author's proposal

Once checked the fulfilment of the assumptions of linear regression, the results obtained from the estimation of the three regressions are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Regressions to contrast the model hypotheses

	Regression 1: <i>DV: Destination image</i>					Regression 2: <i>DV: eWOM intention</i>					Regression 3: <i>DV: eWOM intention</i>				
	Non-stand. coef.	Stand. coef.	t	95% confidence interval		Non-stand. coef.	Stand. coef.	t	95% confidence interval		Non-stand. coef.	Stand. coef.	t	95% confidence interval	
				Lower	Upper				Lower	Upper				Lower	Upper
<i>Constant</i>	1.115	-	2.512 <sub>b</sub>	0.239	1.991	-0.109	-	-0.146	-1.583	1.364	0.644	-	1.084	-0.528	1.816
H1: DGC off staff--> Image	0.158	0.154	2.037 <sub>b</sub>	0.005	0.312										
H1: DGC off brochures usefulness --> Image	0.041	0.039	0.478	-0.127	0.209										
H1: DGC off brochures appeal--> Image	0.034	0.038	0.526	-0.093	0.16										
H1: DGC online--> Image	0.439	0.497	7.887 <sub>a</sub>	0.329	0.548										
H1: UGC online--> Image	0.198	0.178	3.026 <sub>a</sub>	0.069	0.327										

H2.1: Image --> eWOM intention											0.638	0.409	6.061 <sup>a</sup>	0.430	0.845
H2.1: DGC off staff --> eWOM intention						-0.177	-0.11	-1.351	-0,435	0,081					
H2.1: DGC off brochure s usefulness --> eWOM intention						-0.022	-0.014	-0.153	-0,304	0,26					
H2.1: DGC off brochure s appeal --> eWOM intention						0.094	0.068	0.877	-0,12	0,31					
H2.1: DGC online--> eWOM intention						0.8	0.581	8.556 <sup>a</sup>	0,616	0,985					
H2.1: UGC online -- > eWOM intention						0.209	0.12	1.894 <sup>c</sup>	-0,009	0,426					
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.472</b>					<b>0.386</b>					<b>0.167</b>				

<sup>a,b,c</sup> Statistically significant at p < 0.01, p < 0.05 y p < 0.10, respectively

Source: Authors' proposal

From the results obtained, first, a significant positive influence of offline communications generated by tourism office staff on the perceived image of the destination by tourists can be observed (p<0.05; H1a). Likewise, the results evidence a strong positive influence of the communications generated online by the tourist (eWOM) on the destination image (p<0.01; H2) and the tourist intention to communicate online (p<0.1; H5). Regarding the online communications generated by the destination, they strongly and directly influence both the image and the tourists' intentions to communicate online (p<0.01; H1c; H4c). Finally, it should be noted that the better the image of the destination, the greater the intention to communicate online, so the image is a clearly influential variable in tourist intentions, obtaining support for H3 (p<0.01; H3).

Besides, online communications generated by the institutions in charge of tourism promotion have a greater influence than communications generated by users on social media, both on the image of the destination and on the tourist intention to communicate online. However, neither the usefulness of the brochures nor their visual appeal seems to influence either the image of the destination or the

intention to communicate online. Therefore, personal communications, through the employees of the tourist information office, and above all, online communications by the institution in charge of tourism promotion are much more effective compared to the promotional materials traditionally used, such as tourist information brochures.

Finally, we aim to assess the extent to which staff-related variables can influence the intention to communicate online. Along these lines, we analyse the intention to communicate online based on the tourist gender, age, and various personality traits.

Firstly, to check whether the tourist intention to communicate online varies depending on gender, we performed a difference in means test using the t-test for independent samples. The average eWOM intention for men is 4.0333, and for women it is 4.2620. The hypothesis of equality of variances is not rejected ( $F = 0.056$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ), so the t value for equality of means is calculated, finding no support for the existence of significant differences between men and women in terms of the intention to communicate online about the tourist destination ( $t = -0.927$ , ns).

Secondly, to study the influence of age on the tourist intention to communicate online, the average values for different age groups are calculated (Table 5), which reflect how the youngest tourists show a greater intention to communicate online, although the variability of the scores in each age group, measured through the standard deviation, is very broad. To contrast the existence of differences between age groups, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used, based on the results of which there is no support for the existence of significant differences in the intention to communicate online based on tourist age ( $F = 1.267$ ,  $p = 0.285$ ).

Table 5. Means and standard deviations by age groups on eWOM intention

<b>eWOM intention</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>
18- 23 years old	36	4.4792	1.56568
24-38 years old	34	4.4044	1.55336
39-58 years old	72	4.1701	1.52319
59-72 years old	41	3.8415	1.66373
More than 72 years old	2	3.0000	.00000
<b>TOTAL</b>	185	4.1878	1.56956

Source: Authors' proposal

Finally, we analyse the influence of personality, through the calculation of correlations between different personality traits of the individual and the intention to communicate online (Table 6). It can be seen that, although the correlations of the personality traits are not strong, they are positive and statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) except for the traits of anxiety, disorganisation, and creativity. Specifically, the higher the degree of enthusiasm, dynamism, and extroversion, the greater the propensity to post online reviews of the destination. Similar results are obtained for tourists who are critical, reliable/self-disciplined, open to new experiences, reserved, friendly/warm, and emotionally stable, a result that corroborates the findings of Hu and Kim (2018), in the sense that pleasant/friendly and conscientious/self-disciplined people are more likely to issue positive eWOM.

Table 6. Correlations between personality traits and the intention to communicate online

	<b>F5 eWOM intention</b>
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<b>PERSON1: Outgoing, enthusiastic, dynamic</b>	0.277**
<b>PERSON2: Critical</b>	0.313**
<b>PERSON3: Reliable, self-disciplined</b>	0.167*
<b>PERSON4: Anxious, easily disturbed</b>	0.041
<b>PERSON5: Open to new experiences, complex</b>	0.230**
<b>PERSON6: Reserved, calm</b>	0.067
<b>PERSON7: Sympathetic, warm</b>	0.210**
<b>PERSON8: Disorganized, careless</b>	-0.088
<b>PERSON9: Calm, emotionally stable</b>	0.203**
<b>PERSON10: Conventional, uncreative</b>	-0.111

\*Correlation is significant at level 0.05. \*\*Correlation is significant at level 0.01.

Source: Authors' proposal

## 5. Discussion

With the aim of analyzing what type of communications (offline or online generated by the destination or online generated by the user) most influence the perceived image of a destination and the tourist intention to generate eWOM, the present work proposes an approach based on the S-O-R theoretical model and the Theory of Planned Behaviour, and analyses the influence of additional variables (age, gender and personality) on the intention to communicate online. The results obtained provide evidence that online DGC and online UGC contribute greatly to tourists' intentions to communicate online, both directly and indirectly, through the image of the destination. These findings are consistent with those reported in previous research in other geographic contexts, e.g. Abedi et al. (2020) and Cheung y Lee (2012), regarding user-generated communications and their influence on forwarding or generating eWOM; Baber and Baber (2023), concerning the mediating role of image, and Blain et al. (2005) and Marchi and Raschi (2022) regarding the importance of destination branding created by tourism organizations in contributing to a positive image of the destination and influencing eWOM intentions.

It should be emphasized that, compared to works that indicate that communications generated by users are more effective than communications generated by organisations, such as Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016), this study provides evidence that communications generated by the institutions in charge of the promotion of tourist destinations influence the image of the destination and the tourist intention to communicate online to a greater extent than the communications of other users, following the study by Lim et al. (2012), in which it was observed that the variety of topics and the frequency of posts published by destinations on social media was greater compared to the content published by the user (tourist), these being some of the reasons why DGC has more impact (Marchi and Raschi, 2022). However, in the case of this study, the greater effectiveness of the communications generated by the destination may also be due to the few publications of user opinions, as in some cases they are little-known or small-sized municipalities, thus having a greater relative weight of communications generated by the destination (DGC) to explain the construction of a positive image and the intention to communicate online about the tourist destination.

Likewise, the results obtained provide evidence that the quality of the service provided by the staff in the tourist information offices contributes to generate a positive image of the destination, corroborating the findings of Beerli-Palacio y Martín-Santana (2020). On the other hand, print copies of

promotional brochures (divided into the usefulness of their contents and their visual appeal) do not significantly influence the image of the destination and the intention to communicate online in either of its two dimensions, contradicting the results of Molina and Esteban (2006) y Beerli-Palacio y Martín-Santana (2020). However, as Litvin et al. (2018) affirm, this can be explained by the evolution of technology, which allows for the design of multimedia content that is much more attractive than conventional materials like brochures, and which encourages tourists to publish online reviews of the destination (eWOM) to a greater extent (Litvin et al., 2018). Thus, eWOM is considered as a key source of information for tourists, playing an essential role in tourism marketing. In light of this, we conclude that to influence the intention to communicate and the perception of a positive image of the destination, a set of factors are needed, especially those accessible online. Likewise, it is confirmed that it is the service delivered by the staff in the tourist information offices, more than the information contained in the brochures and their visual appeal, that contributes most to the generation of a favourable experience at the destination, supporting the analyses by Chang et al. (2019).

Finally, the results confirm that not only communications but also some personality traits of the individual are related to the tourist intention to communicate online about the destination. People who are extroverted, friendly, critical, reliable/self-disciplined, open to new experiences and emotionally stable are more likely to share their experiences online about the destination, thus reinforcing the conclusions of Hu and Kim (2019), Majláth (2013), Fanea-Ivanovici et al. (2023), Tha'er y Bohari (2016) and Camilleri (2021), among others, and confronting those of Meenakshy and Srivastava (2022). On the other hand, the intention to broadcast eWOM presents wide variability in both men and women, and in the different age groups analysed, so, although women and younger people have higher scores in their intention to communicate online, there are no significant differences based on gender or between the different age groups, in support of the findings reported by previous research (Han and Ryu, 2007; Haro-Sosa et al., 2024; Šerić et al., 2022).

## 6. Theoretical implications

The present research is intended to propose a conceptual model within the field of tourism marketing that jointly considers the S-O-R model of Mehrabian and Russell (1974) and the Theory of Planned Behavior of Ajzen (1985) in order to determine the aspects that influence tourist intention to communicate online about his experiences in the tourism destination. In this way, the aim is to explain the tourist intention to communicate online by considering a series of variables that, after the literature review, had not been analyzed together, namely: online communications generated by tourists (eWOM) and by the destination, offline communications of the destination (service delivered by the tourist information center staff and brochures) and destination image. Likewise, we identify two main aspects of brochures differently evaluated by tourists (i.e. usefulness of the information and visual appeal), which, together with the other variables taken into account as a whole, contributes to expand the knowledge in this area. Thus, following the line of research of Baber and Baber (2023), the present research complements the works developed by Beerli-Palacio and Martín-Santana (2020) and Goyal and Taneja (2023) regarding communications and their influence on destination image and tourist eWOM intentions. Additionally, variables related to the tourist as an individual such as gender, age and personality are also analyzed, showing that differences in eWOM intentions across gender and age are not relevant, in contrast to research conducted in the past.

As regards the expected practical contribution of the proposed line of research, the results of this study can provide useful information for destination marketing strategies, both online (on social media) and offline, in the line of Kılıç et al. (2021). The results obtained can be valuable for the competent authorities in matters of tourism of a tourist destination (not only for public tourism organizations and managers but also in the future for the private sector dedicated to this field) in order to better define strategies and, thus, increase tourists' interest in the destination and the quality of the services offered.

## 7. Managerial implications

Based on the findings obtained, we present below some implications for tourism managers, both public and private, in order to guide their marketing communication strategy for the promotion of the destination, both online (on social media) and offline (in the tourist information office). With regard to the provision of information and promotion in offline format, the competent tourism authorities should not focus their efforts so much on the production of brochures and instead hire qualified personnel for their information offices. On the other hand, the promotion of the destination on digital platforms is also a priority, taking into account that tourists value the quality content generated by the organisations in charge of tourism promotion to a greater extent than the comments of users on social media, which in the case of small or scarcely known destinations may be rather limited. This research shows the importance of online marketing strategies today, which is why it is recommended to focus attention on online communications about the destination. To do this, it is necessary to invest in continuous training of the staff employed in the tourism promotion institution on data processing (Big Data), web positioning, and influencer marketing to improve the image of the destination and the intentions of the tourist to generate positive eWOM (Jang et al., 2021; Han and Chen, 2022). Likewise, using the storytelling technique, framed in the field of content marketing, to design effective brand stories, can be of great help for communication on the destination's social media, telling stories that capture the attention of tourists and elicit their emotions and, as a consequence, generate a positive image of the destination and activate the tourist intention to recommend it online (Pachucki et al., 2022). Finally, to encourage eWOM, it can be very useful to create promotions based on incentives such as rewards or contests for those who mention the destination to their friends on social media or share the posts with their acquaintances or family. In this way, we understand that this work contributes to guiding the institutions responsible for the promotion of tourist destinations on how to optimise their communication budget, increasing their effectiveness to recover tourist activity after the dramatic drop in the number of visitors due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As regards the practical contribution of the proposed line of research, the results of this study can provide a useful insight on marketing strategies of a destination, both online (on social media) and offline, such as those of Kılıç et al. (2021). The results obtained can be of value to the competent authorities in matters of tourism of a destination (not only for public tourism organizations and managers but also in the future for the private sector) in order to better define strategies and, thus, increase tourists' interest in the destination and the quality of the service delivered.

## 8. Limitations and future lines of research

Our work is not without limitations, which could be configured as opportunities for future research. Firstly, the small sample available, as well as the method used (convenience sampling) may give rise to continuing research in tourist offices in other regions and countries to analyse whether cultural differences influence the tourist intentions to communicate online. Likewise, there may be other factors that influence the perception of the tourist image as soon as they arrive at the destination, so additional variables could be considered for future research, such as online reputation and the attributes of publications about the destination (offline and online) or other sociodemographic variables such as nationality, level of education or frequency of travel. Thirdly, not only tourist perceptions, but also the perceptions of tourism organisations and their managers (tourism technicians) could be assessed. In this way, we could compare the image projected by the destination with the image perceived by tourists, thus collecting different points of view (supply and demand). Likewise, other lines of future research should focus on analysing aspects of digital marketing of tourist destinations that contribute to the perceptions, intentions, and behaviours of tourists, for example, the use of techniques such as influencer marketing or storytelling as well as the positioning of the destination in search engines or the use by the destination



of technological tools such as Big Data, Artificial Intelligence (AI) or augmented reality, among others. Last, the use of structural equation modelling is recommended in futures studies to test the existence of relations between the unobservable latent constructs under study.

## 9. Conclusions

This study contributes to illustrating the importance of communications of a destination on the perceived image and eWOM intentions of tourists in tourism promotion. It provides support to the notion that, among the communications generated by the destination tourism managers and Internet users, online communications have the greatest influence on tourists, followed by the service provided by the staff at tourist information centers. The findings allow to conclude that it is of great importance for tourist organizations to invest in online promotion strategies to generate a positive image of the destination and, consequently, encourage tourists to consult and publish more information about the destination on online platforms.

The theoretical implications expand existing knowledge on the promotion of tourist destinations, addressing the need to jointly investigate several types of communications (e.g. online versus offline, user-generated versus destination-generated communications). From a management perspective, useful promotional strategies are recommended for tourism organizations, focusing on both staff training and social media communications, with greater emphasis on the latter. Further research should consider additional online and offline destination marketing instruments to test their influence on image and eWOM intention.

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