

Exploring the Link between Transcendent Tourist Experience, Destination Brand Love, and eWOM Intention in Wellness Tourism in Kerala

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Abstract

Providing exceptional experiences to tourists has become a paramount goal of the emerging hospitality and tourism industry (H&T) due to its experiential nature. Transcendent customer experience is a dimension of customer experience that refers to exceptional or deeply meaningful interactions that go beyond mere satisfaction to create a lasting emotional connection with a brand or product. In the context of H&T, tourists serve as primary customers. Hence, this study empirically examines the influence of transcendent tourist experience (TTE) on eWOM intention, with destination brand love (DBL) as a mediating variable, within the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework. The research follows a quantitative research design. Using path analysis, this study examined data from 404 tourists as samples who visited wellness tourism destinations in Kerala. The study's findings reveal that TTE significantly influences eWOM through the mediation of DBL. It also provides valuable insights for tourism marketers who aim to leverage tourists' sentiments to promote destinations online, which may, in turn, lead to increased tourist engagement behaviours.

Keywords: eWOM intention, destination brand love, stimulus organism response (S O R), transcendent experience

Introduction

The hospitality and tourism (H&T) sector is inherently service-intensive, with its success largely dependent on how well tourists are treated and how satisfied they are with their experiences (Zehrer, 2009). Rapid technological advancements have enabled destinations to offer differentiated products and services while improving operational efficiency, thereby enhancing competitiveness in an increasingly crowded global market. Destination management systems (DMS), for instance, facilitate the coordination and promotion of destination offerings, allowing tourists to customise their travel experience and access local resources at reduced costs (Buhalis, 2000). These technological innovations have transformed how destinations interact with tourists and manage service delivery. Beyond functional efficiency, destinations increasingly rely on experiential differentiation to engage tourists. Destination experiences have become a key strategic instrument for fostering meaningful relationships between tourists and

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destinations (Karayilan & Cetin, 2016). Contemporary tourism management prioritises on creating exceptional tourist experiences that resonate with tourists' transcendent experience and go beyond basic service satisfaction (Çulha, 2020). Such extraordinary or transcendent experiences encourage deeper personal engagement and intense emotional rapport, which in turn enhance customer loyalty (Tussyadiah, 2013). As tourism is widely regarded as a massive producer of consumer experiences (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009), understanding how these experiences shape tourist behaviour has become a central concern in tourism research.

Among various dimensions of tourist experience, transcendent tourist experience (TTE) represents a particularly profound form of engagement. Identified as a subdimension of total customer experience (Hwang & Seo, 2016), TTE refers to moments of intense joy and self-transcendence, during which individuals feel deeply connected to their surroundings (Williams & Harvey, 2001). These experiences are characterised by high levels of emotional, psychological, and sometimes spiritual involvement. Previous research has asserted that hospitality products generate customer loyalty primarily when they deliver a memorable, transcendent experience (Kim, 2014; Pizam, 2010). Furthermore, studies on sequence effects indicate that the order and structure of service encounters significantly influence customer perceptions and emotions (Dixon & Verma, 2013), reinforcing the importance of carefully designed experiential journeys. Despite the growing interest in experiential tourism, previous studies have mainly focused on hedonic, memorable and service-based tourist experiences, with limited attention to transcendent experiences that involve emotional and spiritual dimensions (Huang et al., 2023; Kirillova et al., 2017). The concept of transcendent customer experience was articulated by Carù and Cova (2003) and Schouten et al. (2007), while Hwang and Seo (2016) highlighted its relevance for H&T research. They argued that delivering extraordinary experiences is essential in a market where tourists are increasingly saturated with standardised offerings. Nevertheless, empirical research examining the behavioural consequences of TTE remains scarce.

One of the most significant behavioural outcomes in tourism is electronic word of mouth (eWOM). The importance of revisiting and recommending a destination is now recognised as a crucial element in the future growth of tourism (Cerdá-Mansilla et al., 2025). eWOM is "any positive or negative comment shared online by potential, current, or past customers about a product or company that reaches a large audience" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In the tourism context, eWOM has become a critical source of information for destination choice (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). The digital age has empowered tourists to instantly share their experiences through social media, online reviews, and blogs, making eWOM an essential driver of destination marketing (Al-Dmour et al., 2024).

Another important concept in understanding tourists' post-consumption behaviour is destination brand love (DBL). It refers to (Amaro et al., 2020), a deep emotional attachment that tourists develop towards a destination, motivating them to share their experiences through online platforms. Emotional bonding has been widely acknowledged as a critical component of destination branding. For instance, Amaro et al. (2020) demonstrated that positive experiential engagement among 'Erasmus students' contributed to destination brand love, suggesting the potential relevance of experiential variables in shaping emotional attachment. However, empirical research investigating brand love in relation to TTE remains limited.

A review of existing literature reveals three significant research gaps. Firstly, although previous studies have examined overall destination experience as an antecedent of eWOM intention (Meenakshy et al., 2024; Paisri et al., 2022), no studies have investigated the influence of TTE on eWOM intention. While destination experience represents a tourist's overall perception of attractions, amenities, infrastructure, environment, accommodation, transportation and social

interactions (Lugosi & Walls, 2013; Prayag et al., 2013), TTE reflects an extreme delight experience which is more personal and subjective for a tourist during a trip and has profound influence on tourists' behavioural intentions than general destination evaluations. Although destination brand love is identified as a key predictor of eWOM, no research has examined it as a mediating variable between TTE and eWOM intention, which is the second gap identified. Moreover, few studies address the effective, sustainable marketing of wellness tourism destinations in Kerala, which is another gap. Aiming to address these research gaps and broaden the literature, the current research was designed to develop and test a conceptual model that elucidates how tourists' transcendent experience leads to destination brand love and eWOM intention. To be more precise, this study focusses on the following research objectives: (1) to analyse the influence of the TTE on destination brand love towards wellness tourism destinations in Kerala; (2) to assess the effect of the destination brand love on eWOM intention of tourists; and (3) to ascertain the mediating role of destination brand love in explaining the relationship between TTE and eWOM intention.

Theoretical Underpinning of the Study

The study's framework is based on the SOR model developed by Mehrabian & Russell (1974), which emphasises the critical role of internal psychological factors in consumer behaviour. He stated that the environment (S) causes changes in people's internal or biological states (O) that cause approach or avoidance responses (R). Their study concluded that environmental stimulus (S) triggers an emotional response (O) in the individual, which then leads to a behavioural response (R) from the consumer. The SOR model is widely applied in different fields of research. Prominent studies that use the SOR model include research on purchase intention from video advertisements (Yu et al., 2024), brand love and purchase intentions toward local food distribution (Kumar et al., 2021), customer experience, satisfaction, and brand loyalty toward electronic home appliances (Uzir et al., 2021), traveller adoption of the Airbnb platform (Tamilmani et al., 2020), the effects of environmental advertising and green attitudes on frugality in the Malaysian hotel industry (Sadom et al., 2020), and the relationship between restaurant food quality, revisit intention, and word-of-mouth intentions (Konuk, 2019). The SOR framework has been widely acknowledged as a pivotal theoretical model in tourism research (Asyraff et al., 2023).

The present study formulates a research model grounded in the SOR framework within the context of the wellness tourism sector. Schouten et al. (2007) described transcendent customer experience as a break from the usual perception of time, a sense of detachment from everyday life, and a connection to deep and meaningful experience. Transcendent customer experience has two aspects: flow experience and peak experience (Hwang & Seo, 2016; Privette, 1983; Schouten et al., 2007; Sukhu et al., 2018). Flow experience is characterised as an enjoyment, an intrinsically rewarding, or autotelic, experience, and peak experience is denoted as the "pleasurable, fleeting, unexpected, rare, valuable, and unusual characteristics, often seeming to derive from a natural source" (Privette, 1983). Existing H&T literature has conceptualised flow experience as a stimulus to consumption intention (Yang et al., 2022). Likewise, spiritual experience (Tan et al., 2021) and memorable tourism experiences (Chen et al., 2020; Guleria et al., 2023) were treated as stimuli in prior literature. Therefore, the present study conceptualised TTE as a stimulus. Previous literature also indicates that destination brand love is perceived as an organism due to the emotional responses elicited by stimulus factors (Atsiz et al., 2024; Kareem & Venugopal, 2023). eWOM, which is a behavioural intention in terms of consumption,

is considered a response towards an organism and pointed out in earlier works in the H&T sector (Abbasi et al., 2022; Fan et al., 2023; Kareem & Venugopal, 2023; Roy et al., 2020; Souki et al., 2023). With prior support from past studies, the transcendent tourist experience (TTE) has been identified as a stimulus (S) for this study, leading to an organism (O) of Destination Brand Love (DBL) due to an emotional reaction, which ultimately influences the behaviour of the tourists in response to eWOM intention as a response (R).

Literature Review

Wellness Tourism

The global wellness institute defines wellness tourism as “travel to maintain or improve one’s personal well-being”. (Global Wellness Institute, 2021). Wellness tourism, as a distinct sub-category of health tourism, differs from medical tourism, which emphasises preventive interventions and the enhancement of holistic well-being, comprising the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of health (Weerakit & Tkachuk, 2024). Andreu et al. (2021) and Zeng et al. (2021) mentioned in their study that it is essential to focus on health and safety as tourism recovers after COVID-19. Aebli et al. (2021) found that mental health and well-being are significant yet often underemphasised motivational themes in tourism, particularly in the face of global health crises. Recreational, aesthetic, and escapist experiences of wellness tourism can positively affect tourists’ hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Liu et al., 2023). Apart from relieving stress and restoring people’s physical and mental health, wellness tourism can also elevate their sense of happiness (Kazakov & Oyner, 2020). Tourists who are more satisfied with a wellness destination provide more positive evaluations for each determinant of a wellness destination’s attractiveness (Medina-Muñoz & Medina-Muñoz, 2013).

Wellness tourism in Kerala

Destinations develop genuinely distinctive, location-specific wellness tourism offerings and a well-distinguished brand. The state of Kerala in India, which branded itself as the “Land of Ayurveda”, promotes wellness tourism experiences linking wellness with yoga, Ayurveda, meditation, spirituality, pilgrimage, indigenous medicine, faith healing and happiness (Global Wellness Institute, 2018). Kerala has won the Asia Spa India award for best wellness destination 2019 (Government of Kerala, Department of Tourism, 2019). After the COVID-19 pandemic, Kerala’s tourism industry is in its renewal phase. Kerala received 2.25 crore tourist visits in 2023, which is much higher than the pre-COVID level of 1.96 crore in 2019 (The Hindu Business Line, 2023), and the revenue thus generated is a major contributor to the state’s total GDP. Ayurveda, a traditional medicine system of India, is the main attraction of Kerala’s wellness tourism. Backed by numerous wellness centres across the state, popular ayurvedic services include detoxification, rejuvenation, stress relief, weight loss, anti-ageing, and skin and hair care (Ramesh & Kurian, 2012). Accredited Ayurveda wellness centres are unevenly distributed: 80% of the centres are spread across five of Kerala’s districts, which are Thiruvananthapuram, Pathanamthitta, Thrissur, Kottayam and Kollam (Romão et al., 2021). Based on recent trends and future implications, Kerala’s wellness tourism combines ayurveda, yoga, medical tourism, backwater tourism, spiritual tourism, and cultural tourism (Nair, 2019).

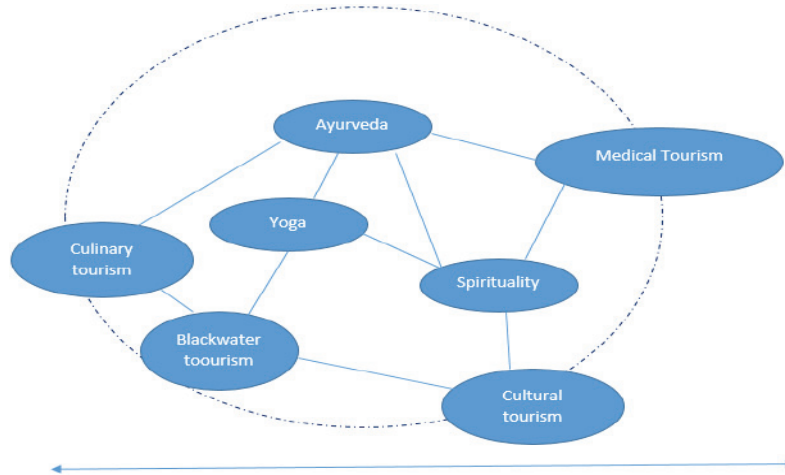


Figure 1: Proposed model of wellness tourism in Kerala
Source: Nair (2019)

Focusing on the concept of escape, wellness treatments in Kerala offer rejuvenation and rejuvenation packages aimed at enhancing the well-being of mind, body and spirit. By combining health, hospitality, and tourism, Kerala has positioned itself as a leading wellness tourism destination (Nair, 2019). Parakkal et al. (2024) underscored the significance of balancing mental and physical well-being in Kerala's wellness tourism. Focusing on culinary experiences and the mind-body connection could help differentiate Kerala from other wellness destinations globally.

Transcendent Tourist Experience (TTE)

Schouten et al. (2007) defined transcendent customer experience as the “temporary suspension of reality, a sense of detachment from the mundane and a sense of union with some higher plane experience”. The previously mentioned author stated that transcendent tourism experiences are extraordinary moments in tourism where individuals experience heightened emotions such as awe, wonder, and profound personal transformation (Schouten et al., 2007). It was elucidated that flow and peak experience are the distinct subsets of transcendent customer experience. A flow experience occurs when a person is fully immersed in a task, combining focused performance and enjoyment. It is a state of deep concentration in which time seems to fade away, and the individual feels detached from everyday life. A peak experience is more natural and emotional. It is a defining and meaningful moment that feels transformative and often comes from outside the individual, like an epiphany. Both lead to a sense of transcendence (Schouten et al., 2007). The discussion of customer experience in H&T research was first discussed by Clawson and Knetsch (1963). Cohen (1979) was the first to coin the term “tourist experience”, similar to customer experience from a tourism perspective. Therefore, in this research, transcendent customer experience is renamed transcendent tourist experience, as the study focuses on tourists' transcendent experience in wellness tourism destinations.

Destination Brand Love (DBL)

Destination brand love has emerged from the concept 'brand love' (Batra et al., 2011; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Brand love is the strong emotional bond a satisfied customer feels toward a brand. DBL refers to the deep affection and emotional connection individuals have with a particular travel destination or location when the brand helps them express or shape their identity, evokes meaningful memories, and creates happiness and excitement (Huang, 2018). It is when people feel a strong, positive attachment and loyalty to a place, often driven by their positive experiences, memories, and a genuine fondness for that destination (Seyyedamiri et al., 2021). Previous research by Amarao et al. (2021) and Aro et al. (2018) found that emotional connections can lead to repeat visits, positive word-of-mouth recommendations, and a strong desire to advocate for and promote the destination. Lv and Wu (2021) revealed that an extraordinary positive sensory tourism experience is a powerful means of enabling destination brand love. The study conducted by Ghorbanzadeh (2023) in six cities in Iran found that memorable city tourism experiences lead to DBL. In the work of Kim et al. (2024), among Chinese tourists in Thailand, it was found that wellness tourism experiences can lead to DBL.

eWOM Intention

According to Litvin et al. (2008), eWOM can be defined as "all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers". eWOM has been demonstrated to offer a reliable source of product information. The research done by Trusov et al. (2009) provides a powerful impetus for an improved utilisation of the eWOM communication medium. Modern tourists increasingly rely on recommendations and travel reviews when purchasing services or experiences that are difficult to evaluate without firsthand experience (Sparks & Browning, 2011). Post-purchase behaviour and experiences of tourists contribute to the creation of tourist-generated travel reviews and recommendations on digital platforms (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2015; Shi et al., 2018). The readiness to leave comments, whether positive or negative, reflects a greater dynamic approach to engaging with the organisation or brand (Kannan & Li, 2017). Bilro et al. (2018) found that engagement and hedonic experience significantly affect tourism consumers' review activities and that they are more inclined to engage in positive advocacy. In the tourism context, post-experience behaviour denotes the tourist's satisfaction, quality holiday travel experience, attitude, and recommendation intentions (Singh et al., 2024). The present research conceptualises eWOM intention as the online sharing of experiences, reviews, and recommendations through Web 2.0 platforms by foreign and domestic tourists who have experienced wellness tourism destinations in Kerala.

Previous studies on eWOM

Previous studies have primarily conceptualised electronic word of mouth (eWOM) as a source of destination information and a key determinant of destination selection (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Anannukul & Yoopetch, 2022; Aprilia & Kusumawati, 2021; Doosti et al., 2016; Goh, 2015; González-Rodríguez et al., 2022; Hashemi et al., 2019; Kanwel et al., 2019; Manero et al., 2019; Nguyen & Hsu, 2022, 2023; Lin et al., 2024; Popy & Bappy, 2020; Ran et al., 2021; Salah et al., 2021; Setiawan et al., 2021; Seyitoğlu & Davras, 2021; Sharma et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2024).

This body of literature primarily emphasises the informational and persuasive functions of eWOM in tourists' decision-making processes. Whereas, research examining eWOM as an outcome variable within the hospitality and tourism sector remains limited. Existing studies in this stream suggest that tourists' experiential, emotional, and cognitive evaluations play a critical role in shaping eWOM intentions. For instance, Fan et al. (2023) demonstrated the significant mediating effects of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being on the relationship between tourist experience and eWOM intention. Similarly, Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021) found that destination image and memorable tourism experiences positively influence tourists' eWOM intentions. Pandey and Sahu (2020) further reported that destination service quality significantly enhances destination attachment, which subsequently leads to stronger eWOM intentions among foreign tourists visiting heritage destinations. Moreover, individual and relational factors have also been identified as important antecedents of eWOM. Hisham et al. (2020) empirically established altruism as a major determinant of eWOM intention among Generation Z tourists. Chu et al. (2018), in their study of WeChat users, revealed a partial positive relationship between consumer engagement and eWOM intention, highlighting users' dedication to the platform as a key driver. Likewise, Rizal et al. (2018) found that information quality and e-service quality significantly enhance customer satisfaction, which in turn promotes eWOM intention among homestay lodgers in Malaysia.

Building on these the present study conceptualises eWOM as an outcome variable shaped by tourists' emotional engagement and self-reflection.

Proposed Research Framework and Hypotheses for the Study

TTE and eWOM intention

Customer experience is an inevitable facet of the tourism industry. A transcendent tourist experience is a customer-centred outcome of the post-consumption phase of tourism activity (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). A transcendent customer experience indicates that consumers experience extreme enjoyment, attention, self-transformation, freshness of experience, and emotional intensity from shopping and service experiences (Schouten et al., 2007). A transcendent customer experience can mould customers' attitudes and behaviours. It can intensify an individual's connection to a brand community (Schouten et al., 2007). Previous literature emphasises that consumer commitment (Wei et al., 2016), customer delight (Ball & Barnes, 2017), and emotional intelligence (Sukhu et al., 2018) are strong antecedents of a transcendent customer experience. Tourist happiness, customer loyalty, and customer word-of-mouth intentions are outcomes of TTE (Tsaur et al., 2012). Transcendent experiences elicit robust emotional responses that are conducive to the long-term well-being of pilgrimage tourists (Rahtz et al., 2021). Past literature shows that positive transcendent customer experiences lead to word-of-mouth intentions to spread word of mouth (Hartline & Jones, 1996; Klein et al., 2016; Sukhu et al., 2018). Recent literature has noted that self-transcendent emotions among tourists facilitate value co-creation in sustainable tourism (Assiouras & Bayer, 2025). Therefore, the tourists who have better experiences with wellness tourism destinations are more satisfied; those who are more satisfied are more inclined to actively engage in eWOM (Seow et al., 2024). The memorable tourism experiences of the tourists will also lead to eWOM intention (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Therefore, the study hypothesises that 'TTE has a significant and positive effect on eWOM intention.'

TTE and DBL

DBL is a form of anthropomorphism, which means attributing human emotions to a non-humanistic thing. Tourist-dependent factors act as antecedents to DBL (Aro et al., 2018). Previous literature shows that tourist experiences lead to the development of DBL (Chen et al., 2020; Swanson, 2017). Lv and Wu (2021) emphasised that extraordinary sensory tourism experiences naturally evoke immediate positive emotions and momentary happiness in tourists, ultimately leading to the development of DBL. Amaro et al. (2020) likened the Erasmus experience (an academic exchange that offers students the chance to study in another European Union nation) to a transcendent consumer experience, in which participants undergo a personal transformation, escape the routine, and feel connected to something greater. It was underscored that these intense and memorable moments create an emotional depth akin to that of tourist experiences, fostering loyalty and a desire to revisit. Therefore, this paper hypothesises that ‘transcendent experiences of tourist from their wellness tourism experiences have a significant and positive effect on DBL.’

DBL and eWOM intention

Word of mouth (WOM) has taken on a new form, eWOM, in which people can express their views about brands online and on social media (Erkan & Evans, 2016). This enables much faster communication and reaches a larger audience than ever. There is a remarkable relationship between brand love and positive word of mouth (Batra et al., 2011). Loureiro et al. (2017) empirically proved that brand love is more effective than simple satisfaction in boosting positive eWOM. The emotional connection, excitement, and fear of losing the brand drive consumers to advocate for the brand and recommend and share it online and offline. Previous literature proves that eWOM is an outcome of DBL (Amaro et al., 2020). Hence, this research hypothesises that DBL significantly and positively influences eWOM intentions among tourists who visited wellness tourism destinations in Kerala.

H1: TTE has a direct and positive relationship with eWOM intention

H2: TTE has a direct and positive relationship with DBL

H3: TTE has a direct and positive relationship with eWOM intention

PROPOSED MODEL

Drawing on the literature review and formulated hypotheses, the study presents a theoretical model linking TTE, DBL, and eWOM intention within the framework of wellness tourism, as illustrated in Fig. 2. The model concurrently assesses the interrelationships among three latent variables: TTE, DBL, and eWOM intention. The primary objectives of the study are (a) to investigate the relationship between TTE, DBL and eWOM intention, (b) to analyse the relationship between TTE and eWOM intention, and (c) to validate the research model.

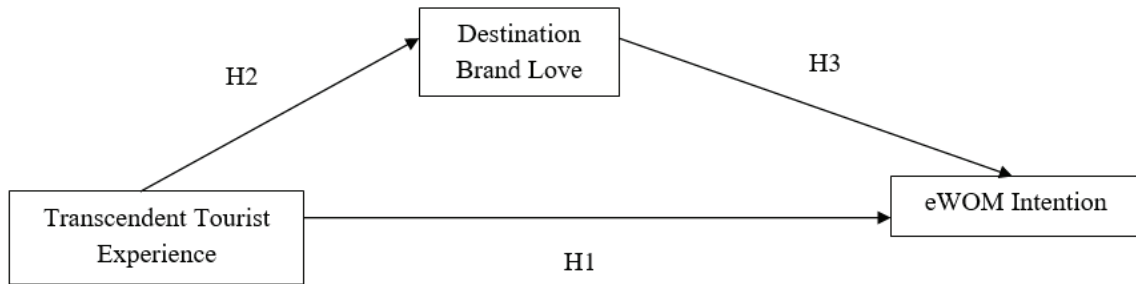


Figure 2: Direct and Indirect Effects of TTE on eWOM Intention

Source: Author's work

Research Methodology

Sample and Procedure

The study follows a quantitative research design and was conducted among domestic and international tourists visiting 82 ayurvedic wellness tourism destinations in districts such as Thiruvananthapuram, Pathanamthitta, Thrissur, Kottayam and Kollam in Kerala (Romão et al., 2021), which provide not only Ayurvedic treatment but also the experiences of cuisine, yoga, spirituality and culture. (Nair, 2019). Twenty-five (25) locations from Thiruvananthapuram, seventeen (17) from Pathanamthitta, sixteen (16) from Thrissur, thirteen (13) from Kottayam, and eleven (11) from Kollam were selected (Kerala tourism statistics, 2019). The respondents were approached for the study with assurances regarding the confidentiality of the data collected. A total of 404 tourists who were involved in eWOM activities, such as disseminating tourism experiences on social media or posting comments online, were considered for the study using a convenience sampling method. Among the tourists, 287 were domestic, and 117 were foreign. Tourists were approached and asked to complete surveys at parking areas, rest zones, and places where they were found free and available. The research aimed to test hypotheses, confirm existing theories, and employ empirical research. Of these 404 respondents, 57.42% were men, and 42.58% were women. Prior to participating, all individuals were provided with a consent form that explained the study's objective, its confidential nature, and the ethical considerations, and informed consent was secured from all respondents.

Instruments

TTE was measured by using 10 items adapted from Schouten et al. (2007). DBL was measured using 7 items adapted from Carroll & Ahuvia (2006), and eWOM intention using 3 items adapted from Amaro & Duarte (2015). Variables were measured by using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Covariates include age, gender and destination image. Destination image was measured using 5 items adapted from Lee & Lockshin (2011).

Statistical Methods

IBM SPSS software was used to analyse the data. Cronbach’s alpha was used to evaluate the internal consistency of the measurement scales. There is no significant multicollinearity among the independent variables, as the tolerance value (.446) is above .1, and the VIF (2.241) is below 5. The PROCESS macro version 3.4 (Hayes, 2019) was used to check the direct and indirect effects of TTE on eWOM intention. The bootstrap estimation approach assessed the significance of the indirect effect.

Analysis and Results

Table 1 presents summary statistics for all variables and covariates. Respondents had an average TTE score of 1.92 out of 3.20. Their destination brand love score averaged 2.26 out of 3.29, and their eWOM intention score averaged 2.60 out of 5.

Table 1. Summary Statistics

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
TTE	1.9252	.49714	1.00	3.20
DBL	2.2634	.53372	1.00	3.29
eWOM Intention	2.6073	1.04821	1.00	5.00
Destination Image	1.8619	.51905	1.00	3.40
Gender	232 (57.4)			
Male, n (%)				
Age	68 (16.8)			
>30, n (%)				

Table 2 shows the reliability analysis of the variables. Cronbach’s alpha estimates the internal consistency of the items in each variable among the target respondents. Table 2 shows that Cronbach’s Alpha ranges from 0.777 to 0.901, indicating that all variables are reliable, as they exceed the recommended value of 0.7.

Table 2. Reliability Analysis

Factors	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
TTE	10	.901
DBL	7	.777
eWOM intention	3	.895
Destination Image	5	.829

Table 3 presents Pearson and partial correlations among TTE, DBL, and eWOM intention. TTE exhibit a positive and significant relationship with DBL and eWOM intention. The relationship between DBL and eWOM intention is also positive and significant. The research indicates that, after controlling for covariates, all the relationships remain significant.

Table 3 Correlation coefficients between TTE, DBL and eWOM intention

	Transcendent Tourist Experience	Destination brand love	eWOM intention
Pearson correlations			
TTE	1		
DBL	.744**	1	
eWOM intention	.459**	.495**	1
Partial correlations (Controlling for covariates)			
TTE	1		
DBL	.603**	1	
eWOM intention	.329**	.377**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4: Summary of total, direct, and indirect effects

Paths	Coefficients	SE	T	P-VALUE
Path c: DV-eWOM intention				
$R^2 = .2747, F(4,399) = 37.7848, p = .0000$				
TTE	.7768	.1115	6.9636	.0000
Gender	.4287	.0906	4.7328	.0000
Age	-.1158	.0830	-1.3949	.1638
Destination Image	.3464	.1071	3.2336	.0013
Path a: DV – Destination Brand Love				
$R^2 = .5938, F(4,399) = 145.8414, p = .0000$				
TTE	.6409	.0425	15.0792	.0000
Gender	-.0123	.0345	-.3568	.7215
Age	.0018	.0316	.0579	.9539
Destination Image	.2548	.0408	6.2407	.0000
Path b and c': DV-eWOM intention				
$R^2 = .3153, F(5,398) = 36.6600, p = .0000$				
DBL (b)	.6209	.1278	4.8580	.0000
TTE (c')	.3788	.1360	2.7861	.0056
Gender	.4364	.0881	4.9510	.0000
Age	-.1169	.0807	-1.4479	.1484
Destination Image	.1882	.1092	1.7240	.0855
Total effect			(Path c)	
Direct effect			(Path c')	
Indirect effect (Path a * Path b)			Effect = .3980 SE = .0908 Confidence interval: .2251 to .5832	

The study found that TTE is indirectly related to eWOM intention through its effect on DBL, using ordinary least squares path analysis. The findings indicated that the regression coefficient between TTE and DBL was statistically significant (Path 'a'), as was the regression coefficient between DBL and eWOM intention (Path 'b'). The respondents exhibiting positive and satisfactory TTE tend to have DBL ($a' = .6409$), as demonstrated in Table 4. A bootstrap confidence range for the indirect effect ($ab' = 0.3980$), derived from 5000 bootstrap samples, was totally above zero (0.0594 to 0.1458). These results demonstrate a link between TTE and eWOM intention, explained by DBL. TTE remained a substantial predictor of eWOM intention after accounting for DBL (path 'c'). In other terms, positive TTE is associated with eWOM intention irrespective of its influence on DBL ($c' = .3788$). These observations and outcomes validate the hypotheses H2 and H3; therefore, both hypotheses are accepted. The total effect of TTE on eWOM intention was found to be significant (Path 'c'); therefore, H1 is accepted.

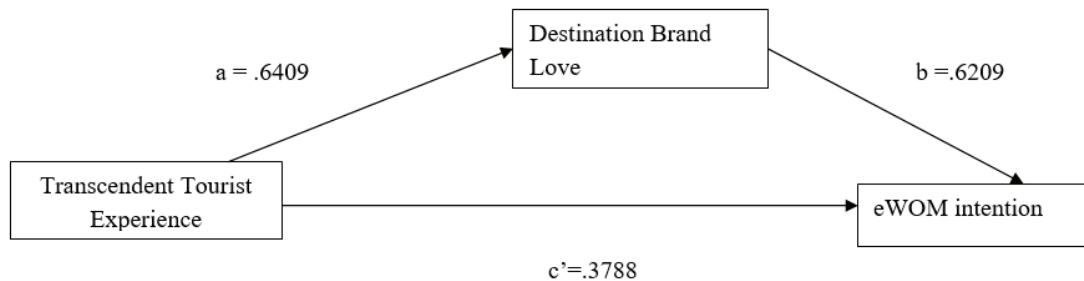


Figure 3. Various paths and their coefficients
Source: Author's work

The study found a direct link between TTE and eWOM intention, via the direct effect of TTE on eWOM intention. This suggests that tourists visiting wellness tourism destinations in Kerala have idealised and cherished experiences and are inclined to be satisfied with the destination. The indirect effect indicates that tourists who visited wellness tourism destinations were more attached to the destination and were fond of tourism experiences, thereby disseminating eWOM. Specifically, TTE is related to eWOM intention through DBL. In other words, destination image is positively related to destination brand love, and DBL is positively related to eWOM intention.

Discussion

The study confirmed the proposed research model and examined the effects of DBL and eWOM intention by using the S-O-R framework. Findings revealed that TTE significantly and positively relates to DBL and eWOM intention. Furthermore, it was proven that TTE has an indirect effect on eWOM intention through DBL. Finally, DBL has emerged as a predictor of eWOM intention. The present study underscores that TTE significantly and positively affects DBL and eWOM intention, as tested in the first hypothesis (H1). This relationship has been empirically validated, marking the first exploration of its kind within the context of domestic and international wellness tourists, supported by past literature (Chen et al., 2020; Lv & Wu, 2021; Swanson, 2017). The second hypothesis (H2 and H3) was also consistent with prior stud-

ies (Amaro et al., 2020), which showed that DBL has a significant impact on eWOM intention. The study also reveals that TTE has an indirect effect on eWOM intention through DBL. From the perspectives of marketing and management, it is recognised that a key to surviving and thriving in the increasingly competitive tourism market is to offer unique, differentiated products and services that create memorable experiences that add value for visitors (Tussyadiah, 2013). As tourists increasingly rely on online communication channels, their engagement in electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has also grown substantially. This study highlights that tourists use these online platforms to share their perceptions and experiences of their visits. Despite the growing importance of eWOM, it is worth noting that tourists' affection for a destination's brand has an even more significant impact on their eWOM behaviour. This suggests that online channels are viewed as secure spaces for expressing feelings and experiences about destinations that evoke strong emotions. Tourists' dissemination of eWOM may be attributed to focus-related utility, the intention to help other members of the particular online environment by sharing valuable information about a product or brand, or to approval utility or self-enhancement (Khan & Khan, 2016). This eWOM dispersion can be used by tourism marketers as a no-cost promotional tool to nurture their business by attracting new tourists. Positive eWOM from wellness tourists can support sustainable tourism development by promoting mindful, high-value travel experiences rather than mass tourism. Therefore, the habit of giving eWOM on online platforms should be cultivated as part of the feedback received to gauge the pulse of tourists, which helps detect deficiencies. Positive reviews from satisfied tourists about a destination encourage other tourists to choose it for their upcoming trips.

Implications of the study

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the field of TTE in wellness tourism, destination brand love and eWOM intention. Past literature has examined destination image, destination experience, satisfaction, hedonism, place attachment, destination personality, place dependence, and uniqueness as antecedents of destination brand love (Amaro et al., 2020). The present research seeks to broaden the theory to the wellness tourism concept and to explore the effect of TTE on DBL and eWOM intention. Past research on transcendent customer experience in the H&T industry focused on adventure tourism (Tsaur et al., 2012), concerts (Ball & Barnes, 2017), and forest environments (Williams & Harvey, 2001). The current research highlighted a substantial positive correlation among TTE, DBL, and eWOM intention among domestic and foreign tourists within the framework of wellness tourism. The path analysis shows that TTE directly and indirectly affects eWOM intention. A notable outcome of this research is that DBL mediates between TTE and eWOM intention.

Practical Implications

This research emphasises that TTE and DBL are the antecedents of eWOM intention of foreign and domestic tourists exploring wellness tourism destinations. Negative eWOM generated by dissatisfied customers may affect online users' attitudes, thereby affecting the brand's reputation (Shangreputation et al., 2006). Negative eWOM shared by a disgruntled customer

on the Internet can reach thousands of potential customers (Beneke et al., 2015). Negative eWOM has a more detrimental impact on a destination's image than positive eWOM, due to the hedonic and experiential nature of tourism products (Ishida et al., 2016). Tourism service providers, as well as other tourism stakeholders, should rely on these matters by overseeing aspects related to accountability for such conduct among tourists. This research identified TTE as a significant determinant of eWOM intention among domestic and foreign tourists visiting wellness tourism destinations. The finding suggests that tourism stakeholders prioritise enhancing the tourism experience for tourists by improving services at destinations. thereby fostering transcendence. Moreover, for instance, encouraging peak and flow experiences by offering a multitude of products, such as yoga combined with ayurvedic treatments and culinary cuisines with backwater cruising, could captivate and appease tourists. Creating love with a destination can be the best strategy to maintain emotional connectivity with tourists, encouraging them to recommend and revisit the destination. Personally, rejuvenating and mentally gratifying experiences which yield organisational growth (Schouten et al., 2007). Tourists are motivated to visit wellness tourism destinations for pleasure, spiritual happiness and meaningful experiences (Smith & Diekmann, 2017). Consequently, tourism service providers and stakeholders must understand the individual differences that either facilitate or obstruct perceptions of transcendent experiences and subsequently tailor their experience-centric services to tourists' traits and inclinations.

Conclusion

The present research emphasised the significant role of transcendent tourist experience on eWOM intention and destination brand love within the context of wellness tourist destinations in Kerala. Despite these contributions, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other tourist destinations in Kerala, such as hills, backwaters, and beaches. Additionally, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to capture the changes in the experiences and behavioural intentions of domestic and foreign travellers over time. Therefore, future research is recommended to replicate the model in different geographical and tourism settings and to use longitudinal designs. Furthermore, future studies can incorporate additional mediating variables, such as destination brand attachment, tourist satisfaction, and perceived value, and additional moderators, such as personality traits, tourist involvement, and social media usage intensity, to gain deeper insights into the mechanisms driving eWOM intention.

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