PhD Dragan Vukolić,
Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, University of Kragujevac, Vrnjačka Banja, Serbia; University of Business Studies, Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management, Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina; Ekonomska škola 9. maj, Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia; vukolicd@yahoo.com
ORCID 0000-0002-6364-9849

PhD Tamara Gajić,
Geographical Institute *Jovan Cvijić* SASA, Belgrade, Serbia; Swiss School of Business and Management, Geneva, Switzerland; tamara.gajic.1977@gmail.com
ORCID 0000-0003-3016-8368

PhD Srđan Milošević,
College of Organizational Studies – EDUKA, Belgrade, Serbia, srdjan.milosevic@educons.edu.rs
ORCID 0000-0002-3045-5810

FROM TASTE TO RECOMMENDATION: AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS SHAPING EWOM AT GASTRONOMIC EVENTS IN VOJVODINA (R. SERBIA)

ОД УКУСА ДО ПРЕПОРУКЕ: АНАЛИЗА ФАКТОРА КОЈИ ОБЛИКУЈУ EWOM НА ГАСТРОНОМСКИМ ДОГАЂАЈИМА У ВОЈВОДИНИ (Р. СРБИЈА)

Abstract. Gastronomy is increasingly recognised as a compelling motive for tourist visits, especially in regional and rural areas where local cuisine serves as a cultural and experiential asset.This study examines the impact of gastronomic offerings on the visibility of tourist destinations through eWOM, focusing on selected gastronomic events in Vojvodina (R. Serbia). The research employed a quantitative methodology, utilising a structured survey designed to assess five distinct factors: gastronomic motivation (authenticity and locality), social and emotional experience, pre-visit information-seeking behaviour, post-visit evaluation, and behavioural outcome (eWOM intention). The survey was conducted among 312 visitors to four major gastronomic events in Vojvodina. Data were analysed using factor and regression analysis. The findings indicate a positive

Апстракт. Гастрономија се све више препознаје као снажан мотив за туристичке посете, нарочито у регионалним и руралним подручјима где локална кухиња представља културни и искуствени ресурс. Ова студија испитује утицај гастрономске понуде на видљивост туристичких дестинација путем eWOM-а, са фокусом на одабране гастрономске манифестације у Војводини (Р. Србија). Истраживање је спроведено применом квантитативне методологије, користећи структурирану анкету дизајнирану за процену пет специфичних фактора: гастрономска мотивација (аутентичност и локалитет), социјално и емотивно искуство, понашање у трагању за информацијама пре посете, евалуација након посете и понашајни исход (намера eWOM-а). Анкета је спроведена међу 312 посетилаца на четири значајне гастрономске манифестације у Војводи-

correlation between various factors, including gastronomic motivation, social and emotional experiences, pre-visit information-seeking behaviour, post-visit evaluation, and behavioural outcomes related to eWOM. These insights suggest that gastronomic events can effectively contribute to digital promotion strategies.

ни. Подаци су анализирани применом факторске и регресионе анализе. Резултати указују на позитивну корелацију између различитих фактора, укључујући гастрономску мотивацију, социјално и емотивно искуство, понашање у трагању за информацијама пре посете, евалуацију након посете и понашајне исходе у вези са eWOM-ом. Ови увиди сугеришу да гастрономске манифестације могу ефикасно допринети стратегијама дигиталне промоције.

Keywords: *gastronomic tourism, eWOM, tourist motivation, Vojvodina, gastronomic events, digital promotion.*

Кључне речи: *гастрономски туризам, eWOM, туристичка мотивација, Војводина, гастрономске манифестације, дигитална промоција.*

Introduction

Gastronomic tourism has emerged as a significant segment of the tourism industry, particularly in regions that emphasize authentic local cuisine, traditional food products, and gastronomic events (Privitera et al., 2018; Rachão et al., 2019). Contemporary tourists increasingly seek experiences that extend beyond conventional leisure activities, with gastronomy serving as a compelling motive for destination choice and a critical component of the overall travel experience (Gregana & Ylagan, 2024). Tourist destinations increasingly utilize gastronomic events not only as a means of attracting visitors but also as a strategy for reinforcing local identity and boosting the local economy. In this context, gastronomic offerings acquire a new role, functioning not merely as a service component but as a strategic tool for positioning destinations within the competitive tourism market (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020; Vukolić et al., 2023).

The development of digital technologies has further amplified the impact of gastronomic experiences, particularly through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which has become one of the most influential forms of destination promotion (Verma & Yadav, 2021). Tourists increasingly base their travel decisions on online reviews, recommendations, and shared experiences from other travellers, positioning gastronomy as a key driver of positive digital feedback. The impact of gastronomy on tourist satisfaction is effectively transferred to the digital realm, where eWOM plays a pivotal role in raising destination awareness and shaping visitor perceptions (Kim & Hwang, 2022).

In this study, the focus is placed on the region of Vojvodina, a region known for its diverse and culturally rich gastronomy. The unique culinary heritage of Vojvodina presents an opportunity to examine how gastronomic events contribute to the digital visibility of destinations through eWOM. The subject of this research is the examination of the influence of specific factors – gastronomic motivation (authenticity and locality), social and emotional experience, pre-visit information-seeking behaviour, post-visit evaluation, and behavioural outcome (eWOM intention) – on the visibility of tourist destinations through eWOM in the context of selected gastronomic events in Vojvodina. The objective of the research is to assess the impact of five distinct factors – gastronomic motivation, social and emotional experience, pre-visit information-seeking behaviour, post-visit evaluation, and behavioural outcome (eWOM intention) – on tourists' propensity to recommend the destination through eWOM.

To achieve this objective, the research tasks include identifying and categorizing

five key factors influencing eWOM activity: Gastronomic motivation – authenticity and locality (primary motivator), Social and emotional experience (secondary motivator), Pre-visit information-seeking behaviour (informative factor), Post-visit evaluation (evaluative factor), and Behavioural outcome – eWOM intention. Each factor is examined in relation to its influence on tourists' willingness to recommend the destination through eWOM.

Literature review

Gastronomy has become one of the most important segments of the tourism offer, not only as a means of meeting basic needs, but also as a cultural and experiential element that significantly influences the perception of a destination (Kovalenko et al., 2023). In contemporary tourism, food is increasingly treated as a cultural asset that symbolises the tradition, history, customs, and lifestyle of the local population. Tourists expect to gain an authentic experience through gastronomy and to feel the spirit of the place they are visiting (Souza et al., 2020). In this context, gastronomic offerings represent a powerful tool for destination differentiation and identity-building in an increasingly competitive tourism market (Lequeux-Dincă et al., 2024).

Especially in rural regions such as Vojvodina, local gastronomy can serve as a driver of tourism development policy. The richness of national cuisines, ethnic diversity, and traditional recipes allows for the creation of products with high cultural and economic potential (Čavić et al., 2020). In addition to food, this includes beverages, local products with geographical indications, seasonal specialities, and handmade items related to food preparation. Organising gastronomic events such as festivals, fairs, or tastings becomes a means of promoting destinations, as well as a mechanism for preserving cultural heritage and supporting local producers (Nesterchuk et al., 2021; Solunoglu & Orgun, 2024).

Moreover, gastronomy has a significant impact on the economic aspect of tourism (Bertan, 2020). It contributes to job creation, revitalisation of agriculture, and increased consumption of local products. A perceived quality gastronomic offer encourages longer stays, higher spending per visitor, and often influences repeat visitation (Bichler et al., 2021; Gajić et al., 2024). Precisely because of these characteristics, gastronomy is positioned as a key component of sustainable tourism development in regional destinations such as Vojvodina (Grubor et al., 2022; Čavić et al., 2023).

Tourist motivation represents a complex psychological process that drives certain forms of behaviour aimed at satisfying specific needs and desires (Kim et al., 2021). When it comes to gastronomic events, motivation is often based on multiple levels: the desire to enjoy taste and aroma, the need to discover new cultural and culinary values, the pursuit of social interaction, as well as interest in educational and entertaining content (Villagómez-Buele et al., 2020). Gastronomy provides an intense experience involving multiple senses—taste, smell, appearance, texture, and the atmosphere in which food is consumed (Spence, 2022).

Tourists who attend gastronomic events are often driven by personal curiosity, a desire to get acquainted with local cuisine, or the wish to experience something authentic and unique (Sthapit et al., 2020). Such events include traditional food festivals, wine events, culinary shows, tastings of local specialities, and other forms of gastronomic activities (Vukolić et al., 2021). These experiences not only satisfy individual preferences but also connect tourists with the local culture, encourage emotional engagement, and facilitate the formation of positive impressions of the destination (Yin et al., 2023).

Participants in gastronomic events often report high levels of satisfaction that go beyond food itself—including socialising, atmosphere, music, venue, host hospitality, and visual impressions. All of these factors influence their perception of the destination and increase the likelihood of a return visit or a recommendation to others (Ba-

du-Baiden et al., 2022). Understanding the motivational factors of tourists is therefore key to effectively designing a gastronomic offer that is competitive, authentic, and appealing to diverse visitor profiles (Richards, 2021).

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is a process in which individuals share their experiences, opinions, and recommendations about tourism products and destinations via the internet (Aprilia & Kusumawati, 2021). It encompasses all forms of communication - from social media posts and comments on tourism websites to blogs, video content, and reviews. Unlike traditional marketing, eWOM relies on users' authentic experiences and therefore carries a high level of credibility and influence on the behaviour of potential tourists (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021).

In the context of gastronomic tourism, eWOM holds particular importance as food and gastronomic experiences are intuitively linked to visual and emotional communication (Richards, 2021). Tourists often share photos of meals, taste descriptions, impressions of restaurants or events, which creates content that can reach a wide audience (Kim et al., 2021). This type of content not only promotes individual products or locations but contributes to building the overall image of the destination. The more positive and unique the experience, the more likely it is to be shared in the digital space (Xiao et al., 2022).

Additionally, eWOM allows destinations to receive feedback from visitors and improve their offerings based on real user expectations and satisfaction. Through the analysis of online comments, it is possible to identify which aspects of the gastronomic offer are most valued by tourists and where there is room for improvement (Cassar et al., 2020; Vukolić et al., 2022). Successful integration of gastronomy and eWOM promotional strategies can significantly increase the visibility and attractiveness of a destination on a global level, particularly in the case of lesser-known regions such as Vojvodina (Vukolić et al., 2024; Herstanti et al., 2024).

Methodology

The study was conducted in 2024 at four selected gastronomic events in the region of Vojvodina which is located in the north of the Republic of Serbia: the Sausage Festival in Turija, the Grape Harvest Days in Vršac, the Kulenijada in Erdevik, and the Golden Cauldron of Vojvodina Festival in Apatin. These events were selected because they are important manifestations that attract both domestic and international visitors, where gastronomy is at the centre of the tourist experience.

The sample consisted of a total of 312 visitors who participated in the survey during the events. Data were collected through fieldwork using a standardised and structured questionnaire, which was pre-tested in a pilot study conducted with 30 respondents. Based on the pilot study results, the formulation and order of some questions were modified to improve clarity and respondent understanding. The questionnaire was created in accordance with similar studies in the field of gastronomic tourism and eWOM communication, and it contained three main sections: socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (gender, age, education level, place of residence); and motivational factors and interests related to gastronomy (importance of local food, interaction with hosts, interest in tradition and culinary techniques, and intention to recommend the destination online). The sample was selected using a random sampling method, encompassing all visitors present at the four selected gastronomic events in Vojvodina during the data collection period. This approach ensured a diverse and representative sample, capturing a wide range of tourist profiles.

The survey was conducted at different times during the events in order to ensure sample representativeness and to capture a diverse spectrum of visitors. The questionnaire included closed questions, as well as items rated using a five-point Likert scale (from 1 – not important at all to 5 – very important). The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics and methods of factor and regression analysis in order to identify key

motivational factors that influence tourists' willingness to recommend the destination through eWOM (Jalilvand et al., 2012; Bu et al., 2021; Milin, 2023; Akhi et al., 2023).

The questionnaire was specifically constructed for the purposes of this study, drawing upon previous research by Cordova-Buiza et al. (2021) and Vukolić et al. (2024) who investigated similar aspects of gastronomic motivation, social interaction, and digital behaviour in the context of gastronomic tourism and eWOM communication. The internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire were tested using Cronbach's alpha, with a coefficient of 0.855, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

Results

The study included visitors of different age groups, educational backgrounds, and economic status, ensuring sample diversity and greater relevance of the results. Regarding gender, 177 respondents (56.73%) were male, while 135 (43.27%) were female. The most represented age group was 31 to 60 years, accounting for 133 participants (42.63%). Participants aged 18 to 30 made up 105 respondents (33.65%), while 74 participants (23.72%) were over 61 years old. In terms of educational background, most respondents had completed secondary school – a total of 126 participants (40.38%). A further 121 respondents (38.78%) held a university or college degree, while 65 respondents (20.83%) had a master's or doctoral degree. Regarding monthly income, 29 respondents (9.29%) reported having a low average income, while the largest number, 136 respondents (43.59%), declared earning a medium average income. High average income was reported by 110 respondents (35.26%), and 37 respondents (11.86%) belonged to the very high income category.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient is a measure of internal consistency, indicating how closely related a set of items are as a group. This coefficient is considered an indicator of scale reliability and is most commonly used when multiple questionnaire items are rated using a Likert scale. In this study, the reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's alpha, and the obtained value was 0.855. This value indicates a high level of internal reliability, confirming that the selected items are consistent in measuring motivational factors and attitudes related to gastronomic experiences and the intention to engage in eWOM activity.

The results of the analysis (Table 1) of the five identified factors in this study provide insight into tourist attitudes, motivations, and behaviours in the context of gastronomic events in Vojvodina, as well as their willingness to engage in electronic recommendation (eWOM).

Factor 1: Gastronomic Motivation – Authenticity and Locality had a mean value of M = 3.25, indicating a moderately expressed motivation to visit destinations for traditional food experiences. The highest-rated item in this factor was "Authentic gastronomy is, for me, an important part of the cultural experience" (M = 4.81), clearly indicating that the cultural value of food is a strong motivator for tourists. Preference for local over industrial products was also highly rated (M = 3.99), whereas less emphasis was placed on attending events as a way of learning about traditions (M = 3.05).

Factor 2: Social and Emotional Experience (Secondary Motivational Factor) recorded a mean value of M = 3.33, reflecting a generally positive visitor experience. The standout item was "Gastronomic events provide an unforgettable tourist experience" (M = 4.12), suggesting a significant emotional connection to such events. Other items received relatively consistent ratings, indicating that aspects such as interaction with hosts (M = 3.35), live tastings (M = 3.25), and the visual appeal of the event (M = 3.22) were moderately important to the overall experience.

Factor 3: Pre-Visit Information-Seeking Behaviour (Informative Factor) had one of the highest average values (M = 3.62), indicating the importance of online information prior to attending gastronomic events. Res-

pondents highly valued the ability to search online for information about local gastronomy (M = 3.85) and to follow gastronomic pages and profiles on social media (M = 3.89). However, the influence of social media content on the decision to attend received slightly lower ratings (M = 3.15), suggesting that while digital content is relevant, it is not the dominant motivator.

Factor 4: Post-Visit Evaluation (Evaluative Factor) recorded a mean of M = 3.15, indicating a moderately positive perception of the post-visit experience. The highest-rated item within this factor was "Sharing impressions about food with other visitors is interesting to me" (M = 3.89), suggesting that the social component of the gastronomic experience is important for tourists. Similarly, the statement "Food is a way for me to connect with other people" received a relatively high

rating (M = 3.80), further emphasizing the social dimension of gastronomic tourism.

Factor 5: Behavioural Outcome – eWOM Intention (Outcome Factor) had the highest overall mean value (M = 3.88), clearly confirming a strong willingness to recommend gastronomic destinations through digital platforms. The highest-rated items were "I recommend gastronomic destinations to friends via digital platforms" (M = 4.55) and "I enjoy posting photos of food and events on social media" (M = 4.25), reflecting a strong link between satisfaction with gastronomic experiences and the willingness to engage in eWOM. Interestingly, the item "After a good gastronomic experience, I gladly leave a review online" received the lowest score within this factor (M = 2.15), indicating that tourists are more inclined to share visual content and informal impressions rather than writing formal reviews.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Factors and Statements in the Analysis of eWOM Behaviour at Gastronomic Events*

Factor	m*	SD*		m*	SD*
Factor 1: Gastronomic Motivation – Authenticity and Locality (Motivational Factor)	3.25	0.858	When choosing a destination, the taste of traditional, local food is important to me.	3.66	0.885
			I always want to try dishes that are characteristic of the region I am visiting.	3.15	0.751
			Authentic gastronomy is, for me, an important part of the cultural experience.	4.81	0.855
			I prefer local products over industrial or imported ones.	3.99	0.852
			Attending a gastronomic event is a way for me to learn about the traditions of a place.	3.05	0.873
Factor 2: Social and Emotional Experience (Secondary Motivational Factor)	3.33	0.562	The atmosphere at gastronomic events influences my overall satisfaction.	3.15	0.751
			Interaction with hosts and chefs is important to me during a gastronomic event.	3.35	0.793
			I enjoy live tastings and food presentations.	3.25	0.713
			Good organisation and the visual appeal of the event affect my impression.	3.22	0.859
			Gastronomic events provide an unforgettable tourist experience.	4.12	0.788

	M	SD		M	SD
Factor 3: Pre-Visit Information-Seeking Behaviour (Informative Factor)	3.62	0.776	Before visiting a destination, I always search online for information about the local gastronomy.	3.85	0.571
			I read reviews and comments from other visitors before deciding to attend a gastronomic event.	3.26	0.854
			Information on social media influences my decision to attend an event.	3.15	0.566
			Viewing photos of food and ambience motivates me to visit a destination.	3.55	0.856
			I follow gastronomic pages and profiles on social media.	3.89	0.698
Factor 4: Post-Visit Evaluation (Evaluative Factor)	3.15	0.665	I enjoy attending gastronomic events with friends or family.	3.45	0.710
			Food is, for me, a way to connect with other people.	3.80	0.677
			Participating in gastronomic activities together is important to me.	3.55	0.660
			Enjoying local specialities connects me to the culture of the place.	3.22	0.850
			Sharing impressions about food with other visitors is interesting to me.	3.89	0.651
Factor 5: Behavioural Outcome – eWOM Intention (Outcome Factor)	3.88	0.788	After a good gastronomic experience, I gladly leave a review online.	2.15	0.735
			I enjoy posting photos of food and events on social media.	4.25	0.798
			I recommend gastronomic destinations to friends via digital platforms.	4.55	0.799
			My positive experience motivates me to share impressions online.	3.90	0.887
			I believe that eWOM can help other tourists when choosing a destination.	4.02	0.843

*M=mean; SD= standard deviation

Source: *Author's research*

Before conducting the factor analysis, the adequacy of the data was assessed using the KMO measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) sampling adequacy coefficient was 0.812, indicating a good level of inter-variable correlation and the appropriateness of the data for factor analysis (values above 0.8 are considered very good). Bartlett's test of sphericity showed statistical significance (χ^2 = 1456.237; df = 276; p < 0.001), suggesting a sufficient number of significant correlations among the items in the questionnaire. These results confirm that the application of factor analysis is methodologically justified and valid based on the obtained data.

Table 2 presents the results of the factor analysis, indicating the eigenvalues, the percentage of explained variance, and the cumulative percentage of variance for each extracted factor. Based on the Kaiser criterion (retaining factors with eigenvalues greater than 1), five factors were extracted, collectively explaining 74.5% of the total

variance in respondents' answers. The first factor, Gastronomic Motivation – Authenticity and Locality, has an eigenvalue of 4.58 and independently accounts for 25.4% of the variance, indicating that it carries the largest portion of information from the dataset and is the dominant factor representing tourists' motivation to experience authentic and culturally significant local food. The second factor, Social and Emotional Experience, with an eigenvalue of 3.14, explains an additional 18.6% of the variance, highlighting the importance of the social and emotional aspects of gastronomic events, such as interaction with hosts and the overall atmosphere. The third factor, Pre-Visit Information-Seeking Behaviour, contributes 13.2% of the variance, with an eigenvalue of 2.1, indicating the relevance of online searches, social media influence, and information-seeking behaviour prior to visiting a gastronomic event.

The fourth factor, Post-Visit Evaluation, with an eigenvalue of 1.55, explains 9.8% of the variance. This factor captures how visitors reflect on their gastronomic experiences and how these reflections influence their perceptions of the destination. The fifth factor, Behavioural Outcome – eWOM Intention, accounts for 7.5% of the variance, with an eigenvalue of 1.22, representing the tourists' willingness to engage in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) through sharing their experiences and recommending the destination via digital platforms. Cumulatively, these five factors explain a substantial proportion of the total variance (74.5%), suggesting that the factor structure effectively summarises the variability in responses and provides a robust framework for analysing the key dimensions of gastronomic experiences and their influence on eWOM intention.

**Table 2.** *Eigenvalues and Total Explained Variance*

Factor	Eigenvalue	% of Explained Variance	Cumulative %
F1: Gastronomic Motivation – Authenticity and Locality	4.58	25.4	25.4
F2: Social and Emotional Experience	3.14	18.6	44.0
F3: Pre -Visit Information-Seeking Behaviour	2.1	13.2	57.2
F4: Post -Visit Evaluation	1.55	9.8	67.0
F5: Behavioural Outcome – eWOM Intention	1.22	7.5	74.5

Source*: Author's research*

Figure 1 presents the scree plot, which graphically displays the eigenvalues in order of the factors extracted in the factor analysis. As can be observed, there is a clear inflection point ("elbow") after the fifth factor, after which the curve sharply declines and the values level off. This shape of the curve indicates that the first five factors have significantly higher eigenvalues compared to the others, supporting their retention in the subsequent

analysis. After the fifth factor, the eigenvalues drop below 1.0, which is consistent with Kaiser's criterion, according to which only factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 are retained. The scree plot, therefore, visually confirms the results of the explained variance table and demonstrates that the five-factor model most appropriately describes the data structure in this study.

Figure 1. *Scree Plot of Extracted Factors*
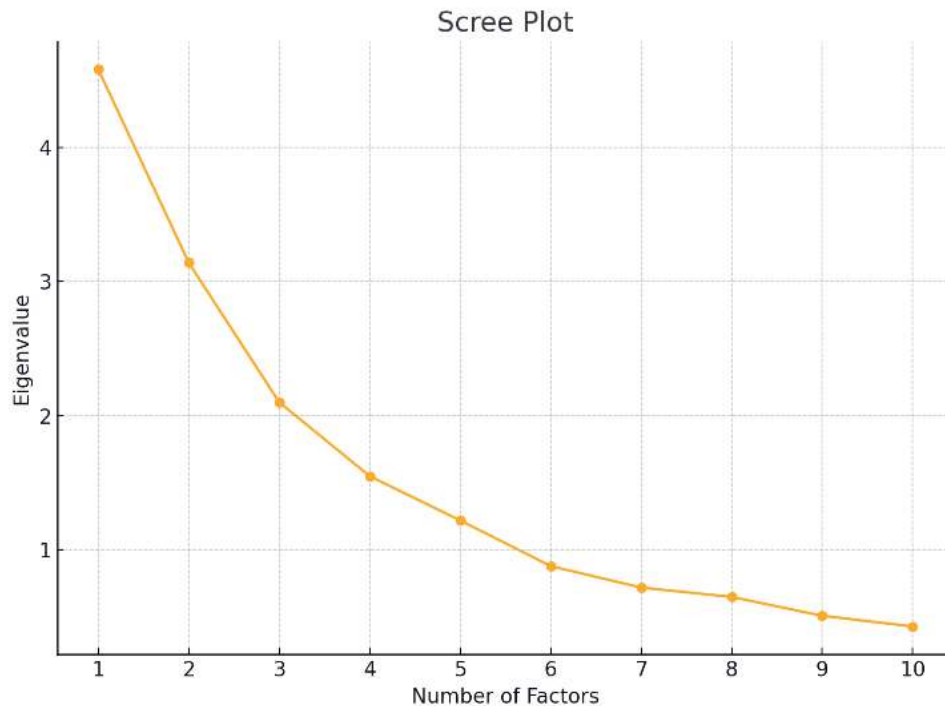
Source*: Author's research*

Table 3 presents the results of the multiple linear regression analysis, indicating the impact of the four identified factors on the dependent variable – eWOM Intention. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.612$) suggests that the model explains 61.2% of the variance in eWOM intention based on the examined factors. The most influential factor in predicting eWOM intention is F3 – Pre-Visit Information-Seeking Behaviour (Informative Factor), with a standardised coefficient $\beta = 0.47$ ($p < 0.001$). This result indicates that tourists who actively seek information about gastronomic events prior to their visit, particularly through online platforms and social media, are significantly more likely to engage in eWOM. The second most significant predictor is F1 – Gastronomic Motivation – Authenticity and Locality (Motivational Factor), with $\beta = 0.29$ ($p = 0.002$). This finding confirms that tourists motivated by the authenticity and cultural value of local gastronomy are also more inclined to share their experiences online. F4 – Post-Visit Evaluation (Evaluative Factor) had a positive but non-significant effect on eWOM intention, with $\beta = 0.11$ ($p = 0.175$). Although this factor captures tourists' reflections on their experiences and their potential impact on eWOM, the influence was not statistically significant in the current model. F2 – Social and Emotional Experience (Secondary Motivational Factor) demonstrated the lowest impact, with $\beta = 0.08$ ($p = 0.295$), indicating that the emotional and social dimensions of the gastronomic experience do not play a statistically significant role in predicting eWOM intention in this study. Overall, the findings suggest that pre-visit information-seeking behaviour and gastronomic motivation are the strongest predictors of eWOM intention, emphasising the importance of digital engagement and perceived authenticity in shaping tourists' online recommendations.

Table 3. *Results of the Multiple Linear Regression Analysis*

Independent Variable (Factor)	β (Standardised Coefficient)	t-value	p-value
F1 – Gastronomic Motivation – Authenticity and Locality (Motivational Factor)	0.29	3.12	0.002
F2 – Social and Emotional Experience (Secondary Motivational Factor)	0.08	1.05	0.295
F3 – Pre-Visit Information-Seeking Behaviour (Informative Factor)	0.47	5.43	< 0.001
F4 – Post-Visit Evaluation (Evaluative Factor)	0.11	1.36	0.175
Coefficient of Determination (R²): 0.612			

Source: *Author's research*

Discusion

In this study, which explored the relationship between various aspects of the gastronomic experience and tourists' intention to recommend a destination through electronic eWOM, the regression analysis results indicate a significant connection between specific motivational and behavioural factors and eWOM behaviour. Specifically, the results show that the greatest influence on the intention for eWOM is exerted by the factor "Awareness and Digital Behaviour Prior to the Visit" ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that tourists who actively seek information online, read reviews, and follow gastronomic content on social media are more likely to leave a digital trace in the form of a recommendation after their visit. The second most significant predictor is the factor "Gastronomic Motivation – Authenticity and Locality" ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$), supporting the notion that tourists motivated by the cultural value of local food and traditional flavours are also more inclined to share their positive experiences online.

These findings can be interpreted within the context of current trends in tourism, where gastronomy has become a central component of the destination experience and digital communication plays a key role in disseminating recommendations and shaping the destination's image. However, while these results are statistically significant, it is important to emphasise that regression analysis only reveals the presence of linear relationships and does not necessarily imply causality. Other factors, such as personal value systems, experiences with service staff, visual presentation of food, or social influences, may further modify eWOM behaviour but were not included in this model. Furthermore, although the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homogeneity of variance were satisfied, it is worth noting that the analysis does not account for potential non-linear relationships or interactions between factors, which could be a direction for future research. The study is limited to gastronomic events in Vojvodina, and the results should therefore be interpreted in the context of the specific local culture, gastronomic offerings, and the tourist profile of the participants.

Conclusions

This study aimed to examine the impact of various aspects of the gastronomic experience on tourists' willingness to recommend a destination through electronic eWOM, with a specific focus on gastronomic events in Vojvodina. Based on the analysis of the collected data, five factors were identified that explain tourists' motivations and behaviours in the context of gastronomic tourism. Using factor and regression analysis, it was determined that the greatest influence on eWOM is exerted by the factor "Awareness and Digital Behaviour Prior to the Visit," indicating that tourists who actively seek infor-

mation, follow gastronomic content on social media, and read reviews prior to arriving at a destination are more likely to share their experiences online. The factor " Perception of gastronomic motivation - Authenticity and locality" was also identified as a significant predictor, reaffirming the importance of traditional and local food in forming a positive experience and recommendation.

These findings indicate a strong connection between the perception of gastronomic offer and digital communication in tourism. Gastronomy is no longer merely an accompanying element of the tourism offer but has become a central travel motivation and a tool for building a destination's image in the digital space. The study confirms that well-designed gastronomic events that combine high-quality food, authenticity, social interaction, and digital visibility have great potential in creating positive tourist experiences and encouraging eWOM.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this research contribute to the theoretical understanding of gastronomic tourism as a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses tourist motivations, behaviours, and digital habits. The study shows that eWOM is not an isolated activity that occurs after the trip but a process that begins prior to the visit during the information-seeking phase. These results support existing theoretical models in which gastronomy is interpreted as a means of communicating the cultural identity and values of a destination. At the same time, the study expands the existing literature by linking elements of online behaviour with gastronomic motivation, indicating new directions in the study of digital tourism.

From a practical perspective, the results have important implications for designing tourism marketing strategies and developing gastronomic events. Tourism organisations, local communities, and event organisers should place greater emphasis on digital visibility before, during, and after the event. Promoting authentic gastronomy through social media, collaborating with food bloggers, and creating interactive content can significantly influence eWOM activity. By investing in well-designed gastronomic programmes that combine tradition, social experience, and visual appeal, destinations can significantly enhance their recognition, competitiveness, and reputation in the digital environment.

References

Akhi, M. T. J., Sarker, M. A. H., & Fakir, M. K. J. (2023). Factors' influence of E-WOM on travel intentions of tourists: A study on tourist places located in Bangladesh. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism and Entrepreneurship*, *4*(3), 223-239.

Aprilia, F., & Kusumawati, A. (2021). Influence of electronic word of mouth on visitor's interest to tourism destinations. *The Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*, *8*(2), 993-1003.

Badu-Baiden, F., Correia, A., & Kim, S. (2022). How do tourists' memorable local gastronomy experiences and their personal gastronomic traits influence destination loyalty? A fuzzy set approach. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, *39*(5), 501-515.

Bertan, S. (2020). Impact of restaurants in the development of gastronomic tourism. *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science*, *21*, 100232.

Bichler, B. F., Pikkemaat, B., & Peters, M. (2021). Exploring the role of service quality, atmosphere and food for revisits in restaurants by using a e-mystery guest approach. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, *4*(3), 351-369.

Bu, Y., Parkinson, J., & Thaichon, P. (2021). Digital content marketing as a catalyst for e-WOM in food tourism. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, *29*(2), 142-154.

Cassar, M. L., Caruana, A., & Konietzny, J. (2020). Wine and satisfaction with fine dining restaurants: an analysis of tourist experiences from user generated content on TripAdvisor. *Journal of Wine Research*, *31*(2), 85-100.

Cordova-Buiza, F., Gabriel-Campos, E., Castaño-Prieto, L., & García-García, L. (2021). The gastronomic experience: motivation and satisfaction of the gastronomic tourist—the case of Puno city (Peru). *Sustainability*, *13*(16), 9170.

Čavić, D., Radojković, M., & Vujanović, M. (2020). Innovative food products as a basis for the development of rural tourism in Vojvodina. *Economics of Agriculture*, *67*(4), 1283-1295.

Čavić, S., Ćurčić, N., & Radivojević, N. (2023). The quality of gastronomic manifestations in strengthening tourist destination brand equity: A case study of Vojvodina. *Ekonomija-teorija i praksa*, *16*(4), 28-53.

Gajić, T., Vukolić, D., Đoković, F., & Dávid, L. D. (2024). A conceptual study on the choice of tourist destination among young people in the Republic of Serbia. TEME: Journal for Social Sciences, 48(4), 937–957.

Gregana, M. J. V., & Ylagan, A. D. (2024). Tourist gastronomic engagement: Assessing travel motivation, food experiences, and post-visit outcomes in Central Luzon's culinary destinations. *International Journal of Research*, *12*(10), 99-124.

Grubor, B., Kalenjuk Pivarski, B., Đerčan, B., Tešanović, D., Banjac, M., Lukić, T., ... & Ćirić, I. (2022). Traditional and authentic food of ethnic groups of Vojvodina (northern Serbia)—preservation and potential for tourism development. *Sustainability*, *14*(3), 1805.

Herstanti, G., Suhud, U., & Handaru, A. W. (2024). Analyzing the Impact of Publicity and e-WOM on Indonesian Tourists' Visit Intention to Seoul through Destination Awareness and Preference: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach. *Journal of Applied Data Sciences*, *5*(4), 2143-2158.

Jalilvand, M. R., Samiei, N., Dini, B., & Manzari, P. Y. (2012). Examining the structural relationships of electronic word of mouth, destination image, tourist attitude toward destination and travel intention: An integrated approach. *Journal of destination marketing & management*, *1*(1-2), 134-143.

Kim, J. S., Lee, T. J., & Kim, N. J. (2021). What motivates people to visit an unknown tourist destination? Applying an extended model of goal-directed behavior. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, *23*(1), 13-25.

Kim, J. Y., & Hwang, J. (2022). Who is an evangelist? Food tourists' positive and negative eWOM behavior. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *34*(2), 555-577.

Kim, S. S., Choe, J. Y., & Lee, S. (2021). How are food value video clips effective in promoting food tourism? Generation Y versus non–Generation Y. In *Visual media and tourism* (pp. 3-19). Routledge.

Kovalenko, A., Dias, Á., Pereira, L., & Simões, A. (2023). Gastronomic experience and consumer behavior: Analyzing the influence on destination image. *Foods*, *12*(2), 315.

Lequeux-Dincă, A. I., Preda, M., & Vijulie, I. (2024). Authentic romanian gastronomy—A landmark of Bucharest's City Center. *Tourism and Hospitality*, *5*(2), 251-275.

Milin, M. (2023). *Gastronomski događaji i utjecaj na destinaciju Istre* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Rijeka. Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management. Tourism).

Nesterchuk, I., Balabanyts, A., Pivnova, L., Matsuka, V., Skarha, O., & Kondratenko, I. (2021). Gastronomic tourism: Features and development tools. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, *5*(S4), 1871-1885.

Privitera, D., Nedelcu, A., & Nicula, V. (2018). Gastronomic and food tourism as an economic local resource: Case studies from Romania and Italy. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, *21*(1), 143-157.

Rachão, S., Breda, Z., Fernandes, C., & Joukes, V. (2019). Food tourism and regional development: A systematic literature review. *European Journal of Tourism Research*, *21*(1), 33-49.

Rasoolimanesh, S. M., Seyfi, S., Hall, C. M., & Hatamifar, P. (2021). Understanding memorable tourism experiences and behavioural intentions of heritage tourists. *Jo-*

urnal of Destination Marketing & Management, *21*, 100621.

Richards, G. (2021). Evolving research perspectives on food and gastronomic experiences in tourism. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *33*(3), 1037-1058.

Seyitoğlu, F., & Ivanov, S. (2020). A conceptual study of the strategic role of gastronomy in tourism destinations. *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science*, *21*, 100230.

Solunoglu, A., & Orgun, E. (2024). Gastronomy festivals in the development of event tourism and the current situation in Turkey. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, *16*(4), 464-473.

Souza, L. H., Kastenholz, E., Barbosa, M. D. L. A., & Carvalho, M. S. E. S. C. (2020). Tourist experience, perceived authenticity, place attachment and loyalty when staying in a peer-to-peer accommodation. *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, *6*(1), 27-52.

Spence, C. (2022). On the use of ambient odours to influence the multisensory experience of dining. *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science*, *27*, 100444.

Sthapit, E., Piramanayayagam, S., & Björk, P. (2020). Tourists' motivations, emotions, and memorable local food experiences. *Gastronomy and Tourism*, *5*(1), 17-32.

Verma, S., & Yadav, N. (2021). Past, present, and future of electronic word of mouth (EWOM). *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *53*(1), 111-128.

Villagómez-Buele, C., Carvache-Franco, M., Carvache-Franco, O., Carvache-Franco, W., & Villavicencio-Párraga, M. (2020). Gastronomic experience as a factor of motivation and satisfaction in coastal destinations. *Journal of Environmental Management & Tourism*, *11*(6), 1328-1337.

Vukolić, D., Gajić, T., & Penić, M. (2022). The effect of social networks on the development of gastronomy - the way forward to the development of gastronomy tourism in Serbia. Journal of Tourism Futures, (ahead-of-print).

Vukolić, D., Gajić, T., & Popović, A. (2021). The impact of the name of dishes in the menu on the choice of dishes in Serbian restaurants. Bizinfo, 13(1), 25-32.

Vukolić, D., Gajić, T., Knežević, M. (2023). Attitudes of Gastronomy Tourists Towards the Development of Gastronomy Tourism - A Case Study from Banja Luka. Poslovne studije, 29-30, 11-21.

Vukolić, D., Gajić, T., Popović, A., & Cilić, M. (2024). Analyzing tourist motivation for destination promotion through eWOM: Focus on gastronomic events. *Turističko poslovanje*, (34).

Xiao, X., Fang, C., Lin, H., & Chen, J. (2022). A framework for quantitative analysis and differentiated marketing of tourism destination image based on visual content of photos. *Tourism Management*, *93*, 104585.

Yin, J., Qu, X., & Ni, Y. (2023). The power of culture: How it shapes tourists' online engagement with destinations. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, *40*(3), 242-259.