Leveraging Social Media for Strategic Business Excellence in Wine Tourism: Insights from China's Helan Mountains

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to fill the research gap regarding the factors influencing the decision-making intentions of wine tourists through social media and explore the mediating effect of emotional attitude in this relationship.The study was conducted in two stages. First, significant social media factors influencing the 'decision-making intention' among wine tourists were identified. Then, the mediating role of 'emotional attitude' between social media influence and 'decision-making intention' was explored.The study found that 'ource credibility', 'opinion leaders', 'number of electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)', and 'information attractiveness' have a considerable impact on the 'decision-making intention' through the mediating effect of 'emotional attitude'. Additionally, it was noted that the 'number of eWOM' is the most significant factor.This study is the first to integrate all these constructs into a single model and empirically test it, providing valuable insights for the application of social media in the wine tourism sector. It also highlights the managerial, social, and academic implications of the research.

Keywords: *Business Excellence, Social Media Influence, Emotional Attitude, Wine Tourism, Strategic Marketing, Consumer Decision-Making.*

Introduction

Wine tourism is a subset of food tourism that includes the amalgamation of wine-production and travelling to wine areas for leisure (Gómez et al., 2019; Sparks, 2007). It is centered on wine-related experiences, and people who identify as wine tourists frequently have a positive attitude toward wine tourism, which makes them more likely to travel to wine regions (Wu and Liang, 2020). It is acknowledged as a type of cultural and special interest tourism and is a travel that is motivated by the appeal of vineyards and wine areas (Crespi-Vallbona and Mascarilla-Miró, 2020). It is regarded as a specialty marketing tactic that aids in the growth of travel destinations and presents chances for the wine industry to engage in direct marketing and sales activities (Quintal et al., 2017).

Wineries work as regional attractions that draw tourists by providing chances for them to sample wines and immerse themselves in the distinctive features of wine areas. Wine, food, travel, and art combine to create the essential components of wine tourism products. These components offer a lifestyle package that wine tourists aspire to and want to experience (Carlsen, 2004). As per the report compiled by Allied Market Research, in 2020 the market size of wine tourism globally was valued at $ 8,653.4 million which is expected to reach $ 29,593.4 million by 2030 (Allied Market Research, 2021). Over the past few decades, China has emerged as a significant global market for wine products. With an import value of € 100 million, China currently ranks as the fifth largest wine import market worldwide (Hu et al., 2023). China is now one of the largest domestic wine tourism markets in the world due to the nation's rising prosperity, growing leisure tourism, and a higher percentage of urban household income devoted to leisure and recreational activities. These elements, when combined with a relatively high demand for travel, support the potential growth of wine tourism (Zhang et al., 2013).

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Tourists all over the world use the Internet for a variety of tourist-related tasks, including information gathering, planning trips, pre-booking, tourist consumption, social sharing, and satisfaction surveys. Social media now plays a vital role in people's life before, during, and after their travels, with 1 billion social media users in China (China, 2020). However, wineries around the world have typically had difficulty using social media for marketing objectives. The adoption of social media marketing methods by wineries has been rather sluggish, and those who do use it frequently struggle to successfully incorporate the platform into their entire marketing strategy (Obermayer et al., 2022; Szolnoki et al., 2018).

Though wine tourism has been in trend in recent years this sector faces challenges like inadequate infrastructure, insignificant market share, poor accessibility, and governance issues which impede the growth of revenue in the field of enotourism (Figueroa and Rotarou, 2018). Less knowledgeable tourists, unfamiliar with wine, face challenges finding useful information on social media. they rely on cues like prior user feedback, images, and expert endorsements to simplify decision-making (Cyr et al., 2018; Lee and Koo, 2016). The quality of information on social media has always been a controversial topic, it has also grown to be a significant concern for tourists (Carlson, 2018; Meneses, 2021). Online information can be created from amateur sources (such as self-publishing, social platforms, short videos, etc.) that are posted on personal websites or news sites (Valtysson, 2010). Influential factors impact the attitudes of wine tourists which, in turn, influence their decision-making intentions (Meng and Choi, 2019; Zhang et al., 2018).

It may be noted that consumer attitudes are formed through the accumulation of beliefs or perceptions about an object. Thus, opinions about a travel experience determine whether a person has a positive or negative attitude towards tourism (Gardiner et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2017; Marchiori and Cantoni, 2015). Numerous studies examined the relationship between social media influence factors and decision-making intention of tourists, but no study has yet looked at how social media influences decision-making intention of wine tourists.

The growing trends of wine tourism in China are also influenced by the distinctive geographical features of the Helan Mountains and this study aims to explore the significance of the distinct characteristics of these mountains as an exotic destination in influencing the decision-making intention amongst tourists. Moreover, it becomes imperative to investigate social media's relevance as a prevalent information source in shaping perceptions consequently influencing the decision-making intention among enotourists. The research objectives which this study aims to achieve are given below:

RO1: To identify the social media influential factors that impact the 'decision-making intention' of tourists.

RO2: To understand impact of 'Emotional attitude' mediator between the social media factors and the 'decision-making intention'.

RO3: To offer social, managerial, and academic implications of the study.

The structure of this research article is as follows- Theoretical background of the research is covered in Section 2 followed by methodology in Section 3. Empirical analysis is covered in Section 4 and the results and discussion section is highlighted in Section 5. Lastly, Section 6 covers conclusion which comprises concluding remarks, managerial, academic, and social implications. Also, limitations and future scope of the study are discussed in conclusion.

Theoretical Background

This section of the article discusses the research articles on wine tourism business research and identifies the research gaps based on the extant literature.

Research Articles Focusing on the Wine Tourism Business Research

This subsection focuses on the brief extracts from the research articles that are related to the wine tourism business which mainly covers the methodology or approach used and the findings offered by the study.

To explore the experiential value attributes for wine tourists, Gao et al. (2022) developed a framework employing deep neural networks, it was highlighted that 'education and sensory-related attributes are very significant value creators in the Australian context of wine tourism. Sousa et al. (2024) explored the impact of Virtual Reality (VR) on the decision-making of the wine tourists by offering an experimental VR experience. It was found that the VR experience positively influenced the tourists in making wine tourism decisions. In another study, to analyse the influence of prior knowledge and motivation on the decision-making of wine consumers in the South Korean context, Lee et al. (2024) employed an extended model of goal directed behaviour. It was highlighted that 'enjoyment motivations' and 'social life' played a considerable role in influencing consumer attitudes.

To explore the impact of expertise and emotionality on online wine reviews, Qi et al. (2024) used SEM. The results of the study highlighted that emotionality and online wine reviews are positively correlated. Whereas expertise indicated a bell-shaped association with both online reviews and emotionality. In another study, to study the impact of wine tourism experience, Gómez-Carmona et al. (2023) examined the consumption behavior of current and potential tourists, wine characteristics, and attitudinal perception using ANOVA. The results highlighted that wine tourism experience and attitudinal evaluations go hand in hand. Also, it was concluded that aroma and taste are the critical elements that enhance the tourism experience. Santos et al. (2022) developed a framework for the international wine tourism system using the systematic mapping study. The findings of the study highlighted that the 4 dimensions that influence the wine tourism framework were-behavioral intentions, the dimensions of wine tourism experience, innovation ecosystem, and support features.

To study the impact of personality traits on the winery visit experience, Leri and Theodoridis (2021) conducted path analysis. The results of the study showed that visitors who received higher scores for 'conscientiousness', 'agreeableness', 'extraversion', and 'openness' and lower magnitudes for 'neuroticism' have stronger revisit intentions. To understand the experience of wine tourism, Gu et al. (2020) developed a model which considered constraints and facilitators and analysed the moderating influence of involvement. It was concluded that local attractions and interpersonal facilitator positively impacted the experience, whereas winery fame negatively impacted. Using the Netnography method, Thanh and Kirova (2018) developed 4Es model for examining the experience of the wine tourists which may be utilised as a destination management tool. It was highlighted that experience pertaining to the education and entertainment aspects are significant and the Netnography approach has significant relevance to the wine tourism experience analysis.

In the context of Chile, Torres et al. (2021) identified drivers of wine tourism and evaluated the influence of these drivers on the adoption of wine tourism using the system dynamics approach. It was concluded that tourism services and tour operators are crucial driving forces to improve the wine tourism business. Goncharuk and Lazareva (2017) studied winemaking efficiency using the data envelopment analysis and benchmarking of international performance and found ways to improve it. It was highlighted that the most efficient wine companies belong to New Zealand, USA, and Germany. In another study, to differentiate the roles of the wine tourism within winery strategies, Hojman and Hunter-Jones (2012) carried out an exploratory investigation by analysing empirical data. The two primary strategies were identified. The first one viewed wine tourism as a critical element to strengthen and foster international marketing relationships; whereas, the second one considered wine tourism as a crucial means for the winery's success.

To explore the impact of online and offline personification integration on wine purchase intent, Wen and Leung (2021) carried out a lab tasting experiment. It was concluded that VR wine tour video enhanced wine purchase intent than the traditional video. To analyse the impact of cultural product involvement on the decision of tourists to visit wineries, Wu and Liang (2020) proposed a model in the Chinese context. For the evaluation purpose the multiple mediation analysis and PLS technique were employed. It was concluded

that the involvement of the wine product indirectly influenced the travel intention. To compare the impact of emotions produced by the wine news, winery visit, and wine on the purchase intention of wine, Borondo et al. (2019) employed Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). It was concluded that emotions formed by offering wine had the significant impact as compared to the winery visit. It was also highlighted that wine news had a marginal influence on the purchase intention.

To assess the nature of motivations of wine tourists in the Australian context, Bruwer and Rueger-Muck (2019) adopted a hedonic view of tourism consumption. Also, the influence of destination factors was studied. It was concluded that the most influential destination attribute was the regional scenic beauty. To focus on the consumer behaviour perspective in the Portugal's wine tourism context, Dias et al. (2023) used SEM and Importance Performance Matrix Analysis (IPMA). It was found that 'wine involvement' and 'brand love' are positively associated to 'word-of-mouth', 'evaluative satisfaction', and 'emotional satisfaction'.

In another study, Gaetjens et al. (2023) employed the concept of customer engagement focusing on behavioural, emotional, and psychological aspects using the SEM. The results of the study highlighted that motivations of wine tourists directly influence customer engagement and wine involvement impacts motivations for the consumption of wine. In another study, to compare the impact of emotions produced by the winery visit and wine on the wine's purchase intention, Pelegrín-Borondo et al. (2020) employed a quantitative approach across 2 different wineries (Spain, and Mexico). The results of the study highlighted those emotions formed by the product (wine) had a substantial impact than those formed by the environment (winery).

Research Gaps

It may be inferred from the subsection 2.1 that extant literature focused on the several aspects of wine tourism and the influence of the social media individually and significant research gaps remain unaddressed, such as latest research activities often did not take into account constructs like 'eWOM', 'Opinion leaders', or 'Source credibility'. This investigation uniquely combined these factors into a holistic model, presenting a comprehensive view of how these constructs collectively influence the decision-making intentions. In addition, although emotional responses are considered vital in consumer behaviour research, their mediating role in the decisions pertaining to wine tourism, influenced by social media, remained unexplored. This research addresses this gap by empirically testing emotional attitude as a mediator. Further, most research on wine tourism emphasizes on Western countries, whereas this investigation offers novel insights into the growing Chinese wine tourism market, especially in the Helan Mountains, showcasing the unique cultural and social factors at play.

It may be noted that this study represents the first attempt to integrate source credibility, opinion leaders, the number of eWOM, information attractiveness, emotional attitude, and decision-making intention into a single model and empirically test it, providing valuable insights into the application of social media in wine tourism.

Methodology

This section of the article focuses on the constructs considered for the analysis, conceptual model and hypotheses development.

Constructs Considered for the Analysis

This investigation measures 6 constructs, namely 'Source credibility (SC)', 'Opinion leaders (OL)', 'Number of eWOM (NE)', 'Information attractiveness (IA)', 'Emotional attitude (EA)', and 'Decision-making intention (DMI)'. 'Source credibility' includes 4 items from Bhattacherjee and Sanford (2006), and Cheung and Thadani (2012). The factor 'Opinion leaders' is supported by 6 items validated by Ki and Kim (2019), and Nefiratika et al. (2020). 'Number of eWOM' consists of 4 items from Park et al. (2007). The

'Information attractiveness' construct comprises 5 items validated by Gupta et al. (2017), Teng et al. (2014), and Verhagen et al. (2012). 'Emotional attitude' is based on 12 items validated by Jordan et al. (2019). Finally, 'Decision-making intention' comprises five items validated by Chowdhury et al. (2015).

Utilizing a five-point Likert scale, each item was evaluated, the scale ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree on a scale from 1 to 5. Respondents were instructed to provide ratings ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The list of all the factors and the corresponding items is tabulated in Annexure I.

Conceptual Model and Hypotheses Development

The conceptual model proposed by this study is shown in Figure 1. The model consists the fundamental psychological process of human being, namely cognition-affection-intention (Zhang et al., 2018). The "hierarchy of effects" or "cognitive, affective, and behavior" (CAB) model introduced by Lavidge and Steiner (1961), has been used by many subsequent studies of tourist behavior (Padhi and Pati, 2017; Zheng et al., 2022). The present study employed PLS-SEM to explore the influence of the four constructs on the 'Emotional attitude' and the impact of EA on the 'Decision-making intention'. Also, the mediating effect of EA has been considered.

Source Credibility

This factor takes into account the trustworthiness of the information source. In the case of low-credibility sources, an individual's decision-making is guided by attitude-consistent content. However, when the source credibility is high, prior attitudes do not influence decision-making as the content itself influences the course of action (Schweiger and Cress, 2019). Individuals tend to consider information from the reliable sources for making effective decisions (Jennings and Russell, 2019). In this study, source credibility refers to how tourists view the credibility of travel-related social media. When consumers lack the motivation and cognitive capacity to evaluate the arguments of travel websites, their perception of social media's credibility is likely to influence their behavior. The existing research on the theoretical framework of Elaboration Likelihood Model (O'Keefe, 2013) and Social Judgment Theory (Xu et al., 2022) focus on the communication and persuasion state which tends to influence the individuals through exposure to information from credible sources. Professional information sources can provide more unbiased data, allowing consumers to have a positive emotional experience with the products they recommend. In the context of this study, the knowledge level of wine tourists is limited, and relatively reliable information will promote their recognition of the information, resulting in changes in emotional attitude. This posits the first hypothesis:

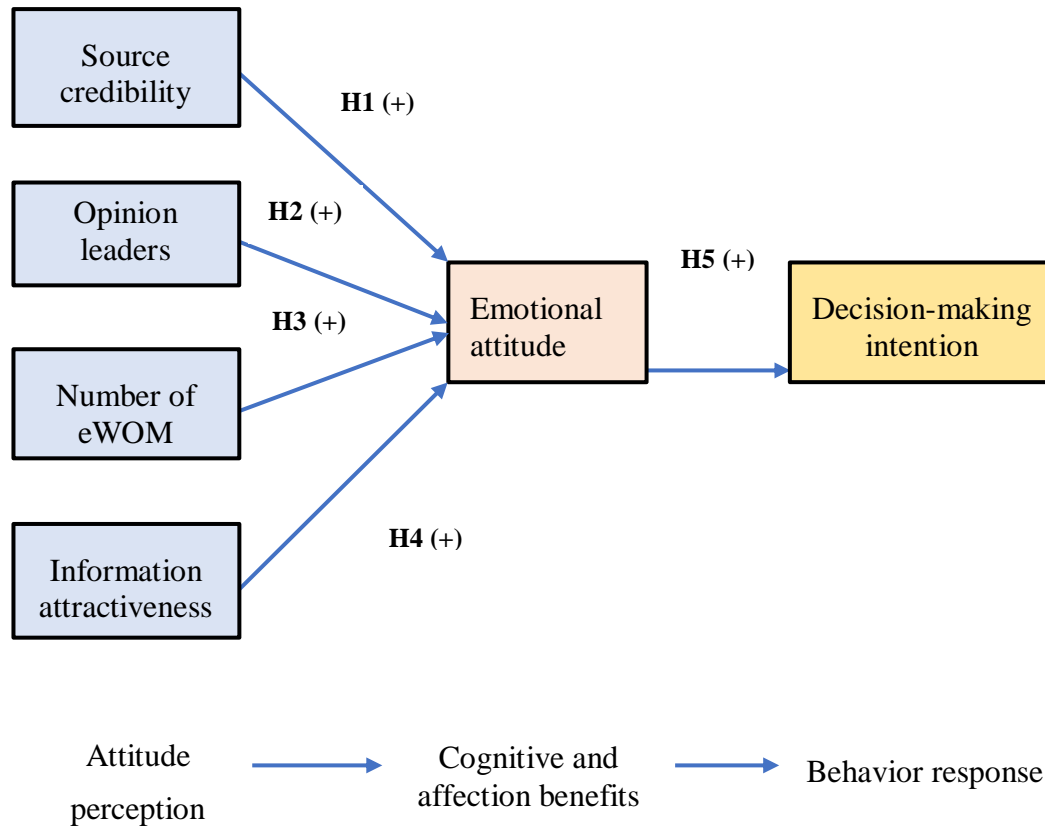*H1: Source credibility positively influences emotional attitude*

Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework of the Study

Opinion Leaders

Opinion leaders provide valuable information and opinions about products and services by sharing their insights. Also, they exert influence on the purchasing decisions of individuals, making them a valuable target for marketers (Sarathy and Patro, 2013). In this regard, opinion leaders differ from source credibility in which individuals or organizations of an expert nature are recruited to post authoritative information on social media platforms, whereas source credibility places greater emphasis on the social media platform itself. According to Palmer et al. (2013), people tend to make the same or similar decisions based on the choices they observe others making. Opinion leaders play a crucial role in shaping the circulation and reach of tourism information within a community (Sun et al., 2006).

In the contemporary era, the digital platforms have augmented the role of opinion leaders as their endorsements and recommendations for shaping attitudes among digital communities. Since wine is the foundation of wine tourism, opinion leaders have a substantial impact on the decisions of professional wine seekers, because they have a wealth of wine knowledge and trust their own judgment (Moorman et al., 2004). This posits the second hypothesis:

H2: Opinion leaders positively influence emotional attitude.

Number of eWOM

Several studies have revealed that WOM is nine times more effective than formal advertising at transforming neutral or unfavorable attitudes into positive ones (Mazzarol et al., 2007). Positive eWOM of a product or service will increase consumers' evaluation of the product, whereas negative eWOM will cause consumers to directly skip the choice of brand (Agarwal et al., 2024; De Hooge, 2014), eWOM can provide consumers with indirect experience that can assist them in making travel decisions (Brown et al., 2007). Number of eWOM communicates the existence of a product, which can have a cognitive effect and result in conforming behavior (Saleem and Ellahi, 2017). Consumers generally only submit evaluations after making a purchase, indicating that the volume of word-of-mouth is highly correlated with product sales (Marchand et al., 2017). Also, the number of eWOM represents a product's popularity; the greater the number of online reviews, the greater the product or service's attention and popularity (Lin et al., 2013).

The American wineries (such as Kendall-Jackson Winery, Silver Oak Cellars, Opus One Winery, etc.) are increasingly adopting social media strategies, such as establishing Facebook fan pages and Twitter accounts, in order to participate in current and potential wine tours and to promote eWOM (Olsen and Hermsmeyer, 2009; Thach and Bruwer, 2012). According to a number of studies on wine destinations, word of mouth is the most appealing factor (Bruwer et al., 2012; Harris, 2019; Thach and Bruwer, 2012). This posits the third hypothesis

H3: Number of eWOM positively influence emotional attitude.

Information Attractiveness

Information attractiveness is characterized by its novelty, complexity, and reliability. In e-commerce, online communication is vital for marketing (Hudak et al., 2017). Different online information types, like various ads, engage consumers on travel websites (No and Kim, 2015). Emotions significantly influence purchase decisions; attractive ads foster positive attitudes and loyalty (Ladhari et al., 2017). Consumers, especially without professional knowledge, rely on contextual cues rather than content details, making them susceptible to source attractiveness. In situations where the quality of online travel websites is uncertain, online advertising becomes instrumental (Ketelaar et al., 2015). In wine tourism, it affects emotional attitudes by utilizing visual appeal, storytelling, social proof, and personalization, fostering positive emotions, connections, and trust (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008; Neuhofer et al., 2015; Xiang et al., 2017). Additionally, credit source attraction influences positively the brand attitudes of consumers. Attraction greatly influences the formation of interpersonal relationships (Choi and Lee, 2019). In the case of wine tourism, the attractiveness of the information in social media determines the user's initial impression of the wine tourism destination, which in turn generates positive sentiments such as love and appreciation. This posits the fourth hypothesis:

H4: Information attractiveness positively affects emotional attitude.

Emotional Attitude

Many social psychological theories (e.g., Affective Choice Model and Affective Disposition Theory) acknowledge the importance of attitudes in determining behavioral intention (Ayeh, 2015). The consumers who feel positively about a product or service are more likely to make a purchase decision, especially travel and hospitality products. In the context of social media, when users perceive that social media information is comprehensive and accurate or that advertisements are appealing, they frequently have a favorable impression of the information, which leads to purchase intent. Additionally, the behavior of the user is readily influenced by other participants (Subba and Rao, 2017; Yu et al., 2017). Users of social media can assess the attitudes of other participants toward wine tourism products based on the comments and purchases of other users (Canovi and Pucciarelli, 2019). The positive attitudes of co-participants will influence the attitudes of existing users toward social media information, thereby encouraging existing users to engage in comparable feedback behaviors. This posits the fifth hypothesis:

H5: The emotional attitude positively affects decision-making intention.

Empirical Analysis

Data Gathering

A survey conducted in Ningxia Helan Mountain wine region, renowned for its favorable grape cultivation conditions, was carried out from February 12 to March 7, 2023. The region, known for its unique topography and climate, accounts for 25 % of China's grape planting area and is home to 211 wineries (Lei & Tao, 2023). The survey, aimed at evaluating wine tourism, achieved an 46.6 % validity from 432 valid responses out of 927. Respondents, majorly comprised of males (51.16 %) and individuals with a bachelor's degree (40.74 %), had an average age of 34 years. The pre-test involved screening by tourist scholars and wine practitioners to ensure clarity and relevance, yielding a Cronbach α greater than 0.7 for all questions. Ningxia's notable wine tourism resources and visitors' enthusiasm underscore the representativeness of this investigation.

Data Analysis

Using SPSS 19.0 software, descriptive statistical analysis, missing value treatment, and a common method bias test were conducted. All skewness values ranged between -1.305 and 1.238, indicating a normal distribution. Similarly, the kurtosis values for sixty-four out of seventy-three indicators were between -1 and 1, indicating a normal distribution (Annexure I). The assumption of normality was therefore generally not violated, except for five indicators that displayed deviations.

Using SmartPLS 4.0, PLS-SEM was used to analyze the latent constructs and test the hypotheses. PLS-SEM is more adept than CB-SEM at handling intricate models, small sample sizes, non-normal data distributions, formative measures, and exploratory and predictive research (Alnoor, 2020; Dubey et al., 2024; Islam et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024; Zolfaghari et al., 2020). Hence, in this study PLS-SEM was used.

Results and Discussion

Measurement Model

The reliability, discriminant, and convergent validity of 6 constructs were evaluated. It may be noted that one item was eliminated (Annexure I) due to loading intensity less than 0.7. The composite reliability and Cronbach's α values have exceeded the threshold of 0.7. Also, the AVE values exceeded 0.5. This highlights the constructs' reliability and convergent validity. Further, the discriminant validity was checked using cross-loading which showed that each item loaded considerably on its own factor than other constructs which meets the criterion for discriminant validity.

Moreover, the collinearity was evaluated using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) method (Becker et al., 2015). The calculated VIF values fell within the range of 2.737 to 4.214, which were all below the threshold of 5. This suggests that there were no significant issues with collinearity among the variables.

Structural Model

The results of hypotheses test are shown in Table 1. The standardized path coefficient between SC and EA was found to be 0.116 (P = 0.000), indicating a significant positive impact of SC on EA. Likewise, the standardized path coefficient between OL and EA was 0.294 (P = 0.000), indicating a significant positive impact of OL on EA. Similarly, the number of eWOM was found to have a significant direct influence on EA with a path coefficient value of 0.313 (P = 0.000). The standardized path coefficient between IA and EA was 0.297 (P = 0.000), indicating a positive and significant effect of IA on EA. Finally, the path coefficient between EA and DMI was 0.946 (P = 0.005), suggesting that EA has a significant direct effect on DMI. This implies that all the five hypotheses (H1 to H5) are supported.

The relationships between various constructs and the mediating effect of EA were analyzed, revealing both direct and indirect effects on explanatory and explained variables (Table 2). SC had a direct effect on EA (0.116, P = 0.005) and an indirect effect via DMI (0.109, P = 0.000), with a total effect of 0.219 and a VAF of 0.502, denoting partial mediation. OL, NE, and IA all exhibited similar patterns of direct, indirect, and total effects with a VAF of 0.5, pointing to their partial mediation of EA between the constructs and DMI.

Table 1. Hypotheses Test

Hypotheses	Path coefficient	t-value	P value	R^2	f^2	Result
H1: SC→EA	0.116	2.819	0.000	0.935	0.026	Supported
H2: OL→EA	0.294	6.454	0.000		0.116	Supported
H3: NE→EA	0.313	7.130	0.000		0.197	Supported
H4: IA→EA	0.279	8.546	0.000		0.165	Supported
H5: EA→DMI	0.946	123.781	0.005	0.895	8.551	Supported

Table 1 shows R^2 values, with EA having a value of 0.935, indicating that SC, OL, NE, and IA account for 93.5 % of EA's variance. DMI's R^2 value is 0.895, with EA explaining 89.5 % of its variance. All R^2 values surpassed the 0.10 threshold which are acceptable (Jang and Feng, 2007). Effect sizes, measured as per Cohen (2013), showed NE's significant medium impact on EA (f^2 = 0.197). SC and IA also had medium effects, while OL showed a small effect. EA had a large effect on DMI (f^2 = 8.551), underscoring its importance as a precursor for DMI. These findings underscore the proposed model's robustness, spotlighting SC, OL, NE, IA, EA, and DMI's significant roles in influencing emotional attitudes and decision-making intentions of wine tourists.

Table 2. Assessment of Mediating Effect

Path	t-value	P value	Indirect effect	Total effect	VAF	Type
SC→EA→DMI	2.816	0.005	0.109	0.219	0.502	Partial
OL→EA→DMI	8.587	0.000	0.278	0.556	0.500	Partial
NE→EA→DMI	7.141	0.000	0.296	0.592	0.500	Partial
IA→EA→DMI	8.587	0.000	0.264	0.528	0.500	Partial

The examination of the mediating effect of 'Emotional attitude' between antecedents and decision-making intention, this study obtained similar findings in comparison with previous studies. The 'Emotional attitude' acted as a partial mediator between 'Source credibility' and 'Decision-making intention' (Kim and Ko, 2012); it also mediated the relationship between 'Opinion leaders' and 'Decision-making intention' (Hsu et al., 2013; Liu and Shrum, 2002); and between the 'Number of eWOM' and 'Decision-making intention' (Henning-Thurau et al., 2004; Kim and Ko, 2012); and lastly, it mediated the 'Information attractiveness' on 'Decision-making intention' (Laroche et al., 2013). All the VAFs of above four mediating effects were greater than 0.5, indicating partial mediation.

As mentioned earlier, wine knowledge is an essential requirement for professional wine tourists. Limited knowledge levels notwithstanding, emotional attitudes serve as a significant precondition for tourists to modify their perceptions, leading to subsequent decision-making behaviors (Stylos et al., 2016). In contrast, for general tourists who lack extensive wine knowledge, a crucial mediator in their decision-making process is how they assess the information provided through social media and subsequently form their intentions.

Also, this investigation has determined the antecedents of 'Decision-making intention'. It has enriched the theoretical basis for the developing research field of wine tourism by providing an empirical study in this sector, with the underpinning theory of CAB. Similarly, tourists without extensive wine knowledge may rely more on the format of information rather than its content when making judgments.

This study verified the role of 'Source credibility', 'Opinion leaders', 'Number of eWOM' and 'Information

attractiveness' as influencing factors of social media on wine tourists' decision intention. The findings of the study reveal that 'Number of eWOM' ($\beta = 0.313$) is the most influential factor on tourists' emotional attitude, indicating that tourists are more inclined to pay attention to information comments. The possible reason is that tourists generally perceive that the number of eWOM represents credibility and public opinion, and at another level, it signifies diverse perspectives. Moreover, tourism is an activity that involves seeking popular destinations within a specific timeframe. Further, 'Opinion leaders' and 'Information attractiveness' were the two secondary influencing factors (the value of β was 0.294 and 0.279, respectively), indicating that the views of opinion leaders in the industry was trusted, and they were equally concerned about whether the information looked attractive; source reliability is the factor that has the least impact on EA, with β value of 0.116.

This empirical study provides strong support for the causal model of "influence factors-emotional attitude-decision-making intention", as well as the CAB model in the wine tourism industry. The study found that emotional attitude acts as a mediator between influence factors and decision-making intention. Specifically, the study identified source credibility, opinion leaders, the number of eWOM, and information attractiveness as antecedents of the emotional attitude of wine tourists when using social media.

Conclusion

As stated earlier, limited research has focused on the application of social media in wine tourism and the factors influencing social media usage in this context. Building on previous research findings, this study empirically examined the influence factors and emotional attitude towards decision-making intention through social media. The construction and testing of the model contributed to a better understanding of the Cognitive-Affective-Behavioral (CAB) theory and the relationship between decision-making intention and its antecedents. The results demonstrated the robustness of the proposed model, explaining 93.5 % of the variance in emotional attitude as a mediator and 87.5 % of the variance in decision-making intention. Also, it may be noted that all the proposed hypotheses were tested and supported. Further, the research objectives highlighted in the introduction section have been successfully achieved.

Managerial Implications

This study offers several important implications for the practitioners.

- The Social media publishers in the wine tourism industry should focus on engaging with readers to increase eWOM, as this can enhance the emotional impact on wine tourists while reading. Paying attention to the number of reviews and the length of each review is also crucial, as wine tourists value genuine reviews and avoid fake or purchased ones.

Incorporating thought-provoking questions into the content can stimulate readers' interest and prompt them to leave comments. For example, make a question subtitle, such as "Your most memorable wine trip?" Stimulate personal experience. Anonymous comments are allowed but contact details are required to verify identity. The editors may recommend high quality reviews, and positively evaluate the depth of thought and language expression, actively respond to user queries, answer concerns, and provide suggestions.

- Encourage users to communicate with each other and form a small online forum atmosphere. Additionally, actively responding to existing comments and engaging with readers is important for fostering interaction.

- Social media publishers can collaborate with well-known institutions or individuals in the wine industry to publish informative content (such as graphic messages, vlogs, or short videos) about winery tourism products and new wines from their unique perspectives. Storytelling techniques, such as incorporating information into a narrative or personal experience, can make the content more engaging and resonate with readers emotionally, thus increasing the memorability and impact of the information.

It is recommended that social media publishers consistently assess the effectiveness of their content using analytics tools, enabling them to optimize their strategies based on audience preferences and engagement patterns. It is worth noting that expanding these collaborations will inevitably increase the influence of the destination or winery, but in the process, the authenticity and credibility of the information needs to be always maintained.

- The professionals involved with the management of wineries including cultivation, production, and sales must optimize their social media strategies and leverage social media platforms to amplify their online visibility and offer immersive online spaces for engaging potential wine tourists. This may involve intensive social media campaigns and the involvement of social media influencers to highlight and promote the unique and exotic experiences available within the viniculture site of Helan Mountains.

- The wineries and agencies operating in the region focus on building credibility by generating credible cultural narratives effective for influencing positive attitudes and intentions among aspiring wine tourists. This may involve efforts in producing authentic and informative content that reflects on the cultural wine-making processes, distinctive characteristics of wineries, and the associated heritage. Such practices will be significant in cultivating the desired emotional attitude among potential wine tourists in the region.

- The professionals dealing with social media marketing of the enotourism in Helan must embrace the advancing immersive features and technical affordances of social media platforms. Such practice should involve substantial use of platform characteristics in creating engaging digital environments to help visitors and aspiring tourists visualize the vinicultural site of Helan in the most impressive and immersive way possible.

- Technical efforts in this direction would involve developing features for e-tours and story-telling strategies to enhance the visitor experience in the region.

These practices will substantially help the industry professionals, wineries, and tourism agencies in the Helan region to effectively leverage digital technology for marketing strategy to influence positive decision-making among aspiring wine tourists.

Academic Implications

- This investigation enhances the academic literature by offering detailed insights into Chinese wine tourism sector, a domain that is less explored in international tourism research.

- This study highlights the crucial role of emotional responses in the process of decision-making, which contributes to the broader field of marketing strategy and consumer behavior.

- The 6 constructs considered in this research advances the theoretical understanding of social media's role in influencing tourist decisions.

Using SEM for testing the model offers a robust methodological framework which can be replicated in other tourism contexts, improving the validity and reliability of tourism decision-making research works.

Social Implications

By focusing on the unique attributes of the Helan Mountains, this study may guide in the process of promotion of cultural heritage and contribute to the economic growth of the region through increased tourism.

The findings of this research offer guidance to marketers in the wine tourism domain to leverage credible

sources, engage opinion leaders, and utilize eWOM to influence potential tourists.

Research insights from this investigation may help wine regions, particularly emerging markets like China's Helan Mountains, in effectively employing social media for attracting tourists and enhancing business performance.

Comprehending how social media influences decisions of tourists may help destinations tailor their marketing strategies which would improve tourist satisfaction and engagement.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research Directions

- This investigation primarily uses quantitative approaches. Considering qualitative methods, such as interviews could enhance the understanding of underlying perceptions and motivations.

- The findings of this study are tailored to wine tourism. Applying this model to other sectors of tourism could validate its broader applicability.

- This research framework does not differentiate between several social media platforms. Future research work could focus on how various platforms uniquely contribute to the factors influencing decision-making.

- This research uses cross-sectional data; however, longitudinal studies could offer deeper insights into how these influences evolve and effect decision-making over time.

- This study is geographically limited to China's Helan Mountains. Future research could focus on other regions and compare the findings across different market and cultural contexts.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest associated with this research.

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Annexure I

Assessment of measurement model and descriptive statistics.

Items	Mean	Skewness	Kurtosis	Loading	Cronbach α	CR	AVE
Source credibility (SC)					0.924	0.924	0.
Whoever published of social media posting is knowledgeable.	3.824	-1.019	0.517	0.913			
Whoever published of social media posting is trustworthy.	3.833	-0.999	0.059	0.912			
Whoever published of social media posting is credible.	3.780	-0.898	0.204	0.882			
Whoever published of social media posting is an expert on this topic.	3.847	-1.017	0.218	0.903			
Opinion leaders (OL)					0.946	0.946	0.786
He/She shares a great deal of information via his/her social media account.	4.021	-1.198	0.534	0.884			
He/She often gives his/her followers advice and suggestions via social media account.	3.775	-1.031	0.706	0.876			
I trust the experts on social media.	3.782	-1.075	0.544	0.888			
I like to get experts' opinion on the social media before I do purchase decision.	3.845	-1.093	0.429	0.893			
When I consider new wineries to go, I will seek on the social media for advice from experts.	3.843	-1.058	0.610	0.893			
I feel more comfortable choosing the wine destinations when I have gotten experts' opinions on them.	3.887	-1.175	0.614	0.886			
Number of eWOM (NE)					0.925	0.926	0.817
The number of eWOM is large.	3.961	-1.002	0.384	0.890			
The quantity of eWOM information is large.	3.861	-1.222	0.996	0.925			
The eWOM gains a lot of attention.	3.780	-1.044	0.513	0.902			
The eWOM has both positive and negative aspects.	4.012	-1.210	0.865	0.899			
Information attractiveness (IA)					0.904	0.905	0.840

Wine tourism information on social media is appealing.	3.926	-1.089	0.598	0.918			
Wine information on social media is aesthetically pleasing.	3.817	-1.252	1.079	0.912			
I don't like the information on social media. *	2.067	1.238	0.320				
The information catches my attention.	4.100	-1.103	0.220	0.918			
Emotional attitude (EA)					0.971	0.971	0.757
Using social media in wine tourism is a good idea.	4.113	-1.168	0.388	0.866			
Using social media in wine tourism is a wise idea.	3.796	-1.230	1.252	0.859			
Using social media in wine tourism is a pleasant idea.	3.852	-0.971	0.476	0.865			
Using social media in wine tourism is an active idea.	3.863	-1.237	0.826	0.884			
Using social media in wine tourism is a determined idea.	3.965	-1.116	0.827	0.870			
Using social media in wine tourism is an enthusiastic idea.	3.819	-1.175	0.674	0.853			
Using social media in wine tourism is an excited idea.	3.933	-0.935	0.465	0.890			
Using social media in wine tourism is a happy idea.	4.095	-1.264	0.918	0.886			
Using social media in wine tourism is an inspired idea.	3.822	-1.224	0.568	0.853			
Using social media in wine tourism is an interested idea.	3.843	-1.305	1.498	0.853			
Using social media in wine tourism can make me proud.	3.917	-0.924	0.291	0.884			
Overall, I like the idea of using social media in wine tourism.	3.965	-1.241	1.001	0.875			
Decision-making intention (DMI)					0.931	0.932	0.785
The information of social media provides new information for my travel decision.	3.903	-1.290	1.053	0.899			
The information of social media influences whether I choose to make the plan of the wineries in it.	3.870	-0.973	0.502	0.880			
The information of social media has changed my idea or attitude towards travelling to this winery.	3.870	-1.035	0.331	0.870			
Social media information is of great help to my travel decision.	3.796	-1.088	0.760	0.892			
I wanted to travel as soon as possible when I read the information through social media.	3.910	-1.119	0.692	0.887			

* Represents the items deleted in measurement model test.