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Green tourism intentions driven by social media: The influence of electronic word-of-mouth and environmental awareness

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to examine the influence of information sharing on social media on the green tourism intentions of the young. It examines the mediating roles of electronic word-of-mouth and environmental awareness in the relationship between social media information sharing (SMIS) and green tourism intentions (GTIs). Data were collected online from 412 respondents from South India aged between 18 to 35 Findings portrayed that social media information sharing positively impacts green tourism intentions both directly and indirectly via electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and environmental awareness. Electronic word-of-mouth demonstrated a stronger mediating effect than environmental awareness (EA), underlining its significance in shaping sustainable tourism behaviour. Results provide valuable insights for tourism organizations to optimize green tourism marketing strategies by leveraging social media platforms. The study fills a critical research gap by exploring how digital interactions foster sustainable tourism goals among young social media users.

KEYWORDS

social media information sharing, green tourism intention, electronic word-of-mouth, environmental awareness, sustainable tourism, digital marketing, mediating effects

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1. Introduction

Green tourism upholds environmentally-friendly travel plans aiming to reduce the negative impact of tourism on our ecosystems and foster sustainable development. Research emphasizes its role in reducing environmental damage and preserving biodiversity through eco-friendly practices (Holden, 2013). Green tourism also supports the development of the community by providing incentives that encourage conservation efforts (Wunder, 2000). Tourists' positive responses toward green tourism have also been found to enhance environmentally responsible behaviour and promote sustainable practices (Ibnou-Laaroussi et al., 2020).

Travel plans and activities affect social media. Oliveira et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of social media for sharing their travels online for fun and privacy, and this behaviour affects their network

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of friends and acquaintances. Paul et al. (2019) added that social media determine holiday destinations, their research showing that social media posts of travel experiences, photographs, videos and other content influenced potential customers' location choices. Social media use affects willingness to try new things and where to go next. Tham et al. (2020) note that how much social media influence vacation destinations depends on factors like platform involvement, destination uniqueness and decision complexity. According to Liu et al. (2020), social media play four functions in tourists' trip choices: need generator, supporter, guider and approver, thus illustrating social media's complex trip-planning effects. Karatsoli and Nathanail (2020) found that men used social media less than women to plan large-scale trips but women were more affected by pictures and videos than men. Sustainable travel intentions on social media are growing and a meta-analysis by Ao et al. (2023) summarized social media interaction parameters related to customer engagement and purchase intentions finding a correlation between sustainable travel aspirations and these parameters. Social media play an important role in promoting green tourism by enabling information sharing and elevating tourists' awareness of sustainable tourism practices. According to Hysa et al. (2022), social media enable tourists to share eco-friendly travel practices and influence the decision-making of other travellers. Interactive social media campaigns stimulate travellers to practice environmentally responsible behaviour thereby supporting the sustainable tourism industry (Khatoon & Choudhary, 2024).

In their meta-analysis, Hung and Khoa (2022) examined the structural relationships between electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), attitude toward location, intention to go, destination satisfaction and commitment. The study found that e-WOM communication improves a location's image, visitor attitude and trip intentions. Cam et al. (2019) examined the interaction between traditional and digital word-of-mouth in travel intention research with findings showing that e-WOM strongly influences attitudes/travel intention, emphasizing its importance in travel planning. Tourism today values the environment while sharing knowledge and connecting sustainable visitors on social media help encourage eco-tourism. Social media indirectly promote eco-tourism by encouraging potential tourists to follow suit and was crucial to sustainable tourism recovery, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Hysa et al. (2022). They emphasized how social media encourage eco-friendly travel and communities and Kumar's (2021) conceptual work analyses social media promotion showing how these platforms promote green tourism through user content and participation. Ummar et al. (2023) study green tourism social media marketing and customer attitudes, and believe effective advertising may boost eco-tourism. According to Khatoon and Choudhary (2024), social media build a sustainable tourism destination's green image with the hotspots promoted. Such media have also changed travel planning and decision-making, and, along with e-WOM and environmental awareness (EA) marketing, drive tourism. Since social media influence travel intentions, destination choices and sustainability, academics and practitioners must comprehend its use in tourism. The above research reminds us how tourist sector social networks affect travel. Intentions towards green tourism are influenced by several factors such as environmental knowledge, social value and perceived green value. Research even indicates that knowledge about the environment positively impacts the intention to visit eco-friendly destinations mediated by social and emotional values (Sukawati et al., 2019). Further, it is found that younger tourists' environmentally responsible behaviour is driven by their attitude towards green practices and subjective norms which favourably impact their intention to engage in green tourism (Fenitra et al., 2021). Kızıldağ and Yıldız (2024) suggested that environmental concerns significantly influence attitudes toward green tourism which in turn foster the intention to participate in such activities. Thus, the findings highlight the importance of green values and awareness among travellers and uphold the practice of sustainable tourism.

Considering the current significance of social media and related interactions, we provide a conceptual model (Figure 1) to address the many nuances of information sharing, intention to travel green, e-WOM and environmental consciousness. Our suggested model can be related to several theories, including the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Paul et al., 2016), social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), diffusion of innovation theory (Goldsmith & Goldsmith, 2011), information adoption model (Fulk et al., 1987), dual coding theory (Kim et al., 2016), elaboration likelihood models (Teng et al., 2015), and so on. The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) looks at how young people's intentions to travel sustainably are shaped by social media content, subjective norms created by e-WOM, and perceived behavioural control over sustainable practices. Conversely, when we shift to green tourism, social cognitive theory describes how habits formed from observing 'friends type' on social media impact each of us individually. The diffusion of innovation theory can also be used to understand how ideas of green tourism spread and take root among social media users. The information adoption model can also be incorporated into our study as it shows how users process and accept information from social media, influencing intentions. As for dual coding theory, verbal and visual information affects individuals' cognitive processes and, in turn, their intentions concerning

green tourism. The elaboration likelihood model can be integrated into our model as well which explains how persuasive communication (such as e-WOM) influences attitudes and behavioural intentions according to the individual's level of motivation or ability to process information.

Figure 1. Total effect
Source: authors

We chose TPB for our study because it provides a robust theoretical framework for analysing the impact of psychological factors on individuals' intentions and subsequent behaviour. The theory of planned behaviour claims that action is the direct result of behavioural intention, which is in turn determined by attitudes to behaviour, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. This theory is particularly appropriate for green tourism because it offers a means of examining how tourists form their attitudes towards environmentally responsible travel through three environmental forces: personal beliefs, social pressure exercised by those around them, and how easy or difficult it is for them to practice such behaviour. By adding e-WOM and EA as mediating factors, we can then examine further how online platforms alter or amplify these relationships. Social media frequently serve to amplify subjective norms and can shift attitudes by presenting new norms and role models for individuals to copy successfully. In addition, TPB clarifies the role of perceived behavioural control in the context of online interactions where ease of information access and community support possibly increase an individual's sense that they can engage in green tourism activities. Therefore, TPB offers a holistic approach to analysing how social media influence intentions and behaviour in green tourism, making it the ideal model for this research.

Despite the growing connection between social media and tourism, the mechanism through which social media information sharing (SMIS) impacts green tourism intentions (GTI) remains unclear. Very limited information exists on how e-WOM mediates SMIS and GTI, and similarly environmental awareness (EA), as a mediation in the relationship between SMIS and GTI. Earlier studies have touched e-WOM and EA separately but their combined influence on green tourism has not been carried out so far. Thus, there is a significant gap in understanding how SMIS fosters e-WOM, enhances EA, and ultimately influences travellers' intentions to adopt green tourism practices. Hence the following research questions are formulated:

1. To assess the association of information sharing on social media platforms on GTI.
2. To evaluate the association of information sharing on social media platforms with e-WOM.
3. To investigate the relationship of e-WOM on GTI.
4. To examine the relationship of information sharing on social media platforms on EA.
5. To explore the association of EA with GTI.
6. To determine the mediating role of e-WOM in the relationship between SMIS and GTI.
7. To analyse the mediating role of EA in the relationship between SMIS and GTI.

2. Theoretical framework, literature review and hypotheses development

The theoretical model used in this research is underpinned by TPB. According to TPB, behaviour is directly influenced by a person's intention to perform the behaviour, and that intention is itself influenced by their attitude to performing it, subjective norms (perceived social pressures), and perceived control over the performance of this action (degrees of freedom [*df*]). The theory of planned behaviour has been widely applied to reveal the predictors of environmental behaviour, including green purchasing and environmental tourism. Mancha and Yoder (2015) extended the TPB model to include identity dimensions and found that self-concept has a substantial impact on intentions for environmental protection. A scoping review by Yuriev et al. (2020) notes the use of TPB in studies of individual green behaviour, adding that variables that affect behaviour via indirect reinforcements (belief) are often overlooked. Paul et. al. (2016) demonstrate that TPB, especially consumer attitudes and perceived behavioural control, predict that people will buy green products when given the chance to do so showing that environmental concern mediates this relationship. Yadav and Pathak (2016) used TPB to understand young Indian consumers' intended purchase of green products, finding that incorporating both environmental concern and knowledge can improve model predictivity. Based on this comprehensive analysis, Dieste et al. (2019) have emphasized that TPB is often applied in areas such as waste management, green consumption and sustainable transportation. The TPB model has five constructs: attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, moral norm and environmental concern; explaining green behaviour well. These studies together indicate that TPB is a powerful model for understanding and directing tourist intentions in this environmentally friendly way appropriate to concerns about pollution.

We can relate each component of our conceptual model using TPB with beliefs and judgements of anticipated behaviour determining attitudes. In our model, the influence of SMIS on e-WOM may show how positive

information and sharing influence green tourism sentiments. The direct influence of EA on GTI may indicate that green tourism benefits the environment. The theory of planned behaviour subjective norms involve whether key individuals approve or disapprove the activity and our model suggests that SMIS affects EA due to social constraints and norms. Electronic word-of-mouth mediates the relationship between SMIS and GTI, showing how subjective standards like social endorsements affect GTIs. Perceived personal efficacy and control attitudes affect behavioural control, which is how easy or hard the behaviour is. In our model, environmental understanding directly affects GTI, suggesting a greater sense of control or efficacy in eco-friendly conduct. Environmental knowledge mediates the association between SMIS and GTI, suggesting that others' perceptions of control affect intentions to participate in green tourism. Behavioural intention, TBP's motivating factor, predicts behaviour and precedes it. In our model, attitudes (influenced by SMIS and EA), subjective norms (shaped by e-WOM), and perceived behavioural control (also shaped by EA) cumulatively affect GTI. Thus it is pointed out that in our model, SMIS may alter attitude and subjective norms, whereas EA affects perceived behavioural control and attitudes. According to TPB, attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control influence intentions, and e-WOM and EA mediate the indirect effects of SMIS on GTI. Thus our conceptual model links SMIS, e-WOM, EA and travel intentions in green tourism.

2.1. Sharing of information on social media platforms

Information-sharing, communication and interaction on social media have been a matter of research in recent works. Individuals benefit from social media through constant communication among their contacts, thereby maximizing a sense of kinship (Mohanan & Shekhar, 2021). The entertainment value and reliability of social media content have also been investigated in some topical research on SMIS with many studies examining company and individual users' viewpoints (Greer & Ferguson, 2011). Social media information sharing can be knowledgeable and amusing for users, a prominent channel of communication through which they connect by creating self-expressive content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Internet users may post content on their daily lives on blogs for pleasure or emotional development while reinforcing their social connections by sharing their content and connecting and also by reading what other users post (Shao, 2009).

Social media users participate in this process as information disseminators and beneficiaries (Peters et al., 2013) with information sharing improving browsing and communication, making it crucial for modern life, improving marketing and corporate communication (Greer & Ferguson, 2011). Famous social media promote brands, goods and business philosophies through knowledge sharing. Positive information sharing on social media has a positive societal association (Shao, 2009) and previous research in green marketing has supported the beneficial effect of SMIS on environmentally friendly consumption (Bedard & Tolmie, 2018; Pop et al., 2020). Social media posts about the environment help users assess how desirable green products and services are and may also aid in evaluating that, the more desirable they perceive them to be, the stronger their urge to consume them (Sun & Xing, 2022). Likewise, social media may impact the intention toward green tourism favourably. Thus a hypothesis is formulated as:

H_T: Sharing of information on social media platforms would have a very significant favourable association on GTI.

2.2. Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM)

Electronic word-of-mouth acceptance is the decision to visit a tourist site based on the responses, opinions and recommendations made by other visitors and communicated via social media (Chavez et al., 2020). Social media e-WOM play a significant role in how consumers select travel locations (Luo & Zhong, 2015) and in the context of tourism, word-of-mouth behaviour is an iterative procedure initiated by travel experiences (Loureiro et al., 2021). While travelling, tourists frequently share their experiences on social media and collaborate with other travellers or service providers to create value (Chavez et al., 2020). Travellers who opt for and benefit from specific journeys like social travel, leisure and adventure recommend those trips to others (Mehran et al., 2020); travelling for social bonding and seeking new experiences, pleasure and leisure is greatly associated with visitors' intention to promote particular tourist attractions. Social media help travel enthusiasts perceive and evaluate different aspects of prospective trips and further, may also facilitate acquainting them with benefits like travel tips and recommendations. Social media users who adopt green tourism may share their experiences which may positively associate the GTI of other users (Mehran et al., 2020). Studies have shown that there has been a significant positive association between e-WOM on green behaviour. As a result, the following hypotheses are proposed in the study:

H_1: Sharing of information on social media platforms would have a very significant favourable association on e-WOM.

H_2: E-WOM would have a very significant favourable association with GTI.

2.3. Environmental awareness (EA)

The concern about environmental sustainability and the urge to preserve and promote environmental quality is exponentially growing (Severo et al., 2018). Environmental awareness may be a crucial factor in the incredible growth of green products or green service promotion among individuals (Yang & Xiao, 2017). This is associated with thoughts, behaviour and responses toward environmental issues and how, by actively engaging in ecological issues, it can be exemplified (Vergragt et al., 2016). Through social media channels, individual users can access and share content related to environmental sustainability (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011). From the point of environmental sustainability, people must be conscious of the environment, protect natural resources and practice sustainable environmental behaviour, implementing new consumption patterns and socially responsible attitudes due to EA. The more known about environmental sustainability, the more environmentally conscious one becomes (Heiskanen et al., 2014; Schroeder & Anantharaman, 2017). Due to growing consumer EA, businesses are encouraged to develop more eco-friendly goods and services, and implement sustainability initiatives (Yang & Xiao, 2017). Environmental awareness among travellers can be significantly associated with the likelihood of responsible travelling (Han et al., 2016) and their ecological knowledge prevents environmentally irresponsible behaviour at the tourist destination (Karmoker & Ahmed, 2021). Environmental awareness is associated with GTI, according to several studies examined by the authors. Subsequently, the hypotheses that follow are:

H_3: Sharing of information on social media platforms would have a very significant favourable association on EA.

H_4: EA would have a significant favourable positive association with GTI.

2.4. Green tourism intentions (GTIs)

The term "green tourism" refers to sustainable methods that consider the requirements of local inhabitants, businesses, the environment and tourists which may be helpful for the management and development of present and future environments. Perspectives have changed due to newer aspects of tourism operations, including energy use, biotic exchange, dispersion of disease, and changes in perception and understanding of the environment's fragility (Gössling, 2002). People who choose green products or services do so out of a feeling of compassion that either directly or indirectly supports environmental protection and sustainable development (Lee, 2008). These techniques aim to create a governance structure that minimizes the adverse social and environmental effects of tourist activities in both urban and rural settings (Azam & Sarker, 2011). Social media users who post images of the green products they utilize, and share opinions about their usage may inspire and motivate others toward green purchase intentions (Van Boven et al., 2010). Green tourism is essential for any nature-based itinerary's continued quality and sustainability. Vacationers have also exhibited a high level of confidence in the attainability of green tourism (Karmoker & Ahmed, 2021). Green tourists are more likely to practice green habits than people indifferent to the environment (Thao & Trang, 2018) hence it is imperative to explore whether tourists have intentions towards green tourism initiatives. The study aimed to examine whether e-WOM and EA act as mediators between SMIS and GTI. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are suggested:

H_5: E-WOM would act as a mediator in the interaction between the sharing of information on social media platforms and the intention to engage in green tourism.

H_6: EA would act as a mediator in the interaction between sharing information on social media platforms and the intention to engage in green tourism.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research design

The survey was conducted among 412 young people between 18 and 35 from South India (Table 1) with data collected from August to September 2024. The study population was considered appropriate because a significant percentage of the target respondents are on social media and prospective eco-friendly travellers are from this age group. The target population is infinite as it extends to all young adults between 18 and 35 who are social media users so we sourced our respondents online targeting young adult users from a platform that incorporated individuals focusing on travel and environmental issues. The sample was selected using a convenient sampling method to ensure diverse representation across regions within South India, chosen to reduce selection bias and enhance the generalizability of our findings. The method of convenient sampling was considered effective because it was affordable and time-saving, unlike other methods convenient sampling ensured that more respondents were reached on various aspects. Since the study was exploratory and required a specific characteristic of the target group, the method was effective and executed through an online questionnaire distributed through various electronic mail routes and on social media. The survey was shared using a link on several platforms

to access as many respondents as possible; thus, the research had structural validation through e-WOM. The findings may not represent the general population, especially young people who may not be active in social media and environmentalism, therefore the survey undertaken through the sampling frame might not represent the general population of young adults because it may not yield a 100% sample response, and could draw biases from young people on social media. Hence this creates a limitation for our study on how social behaviour influences pro-environmental values in tourism due to sampling bias.

Table 1. Profile of demographics (n = 412)

Variables		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Female	140	34
	Male	272	66
Age group	20–23	255	62
	24–27	37	9
	28–31	74	18
	32–35	46	11

Source: authors.

3.2. Measures

Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) scale: Chavez et al. (2020)'s four-item scale was modified without changing its purpose, optimizing e-WOM in green tourism. The question "Information from online reviews contributed to my understanding of the tourism destination" was changed to "Sharing of information on social media platforms contributed to my knowledge of green tourism". The Likert scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Environmental awareness (EA) scale: the young were assessed using a five-point scale from Severo et al. (2019). In the study, the EA measure was used unchanged. The model question was "I sort recyclable and organic waste at home". The Likert scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Green tourism intention (GTI) scale: Sultan et al. (2021) modified a four-item intention measure without modifying its fundamental notion and the researchers adjusted the measure to meet green tourism goals. For instance, "I aim to assist environmental initiatives about sustainable destination" became "I plan to help environmental initiatives towards green tourism". The Likert scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

SPSS version 21 was used for data analysis while SPSS analysis of moment structures (AMOS) was also used. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to determine the relationship between SMIS, e-WOM, GTI and EA (Figures 1 and 2). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to assess how well the variables reflected the components. The model's fit was assessed using Hu and Bentler (1999) criteria while data reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α) as a statistical indicator. Data validity was assessed using average variance extracted (AVE), data dependability using composite reliability (*CR*) and data validity using discriminant validity (DV). The study also used average factor loading (AFL) to evaluate data dependability and validity. The results were reported using standardized regression weights. To study the indirect effect of e-WOM and EA, bootstrapping with 5000 samples and a 95% confidence interval was used (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

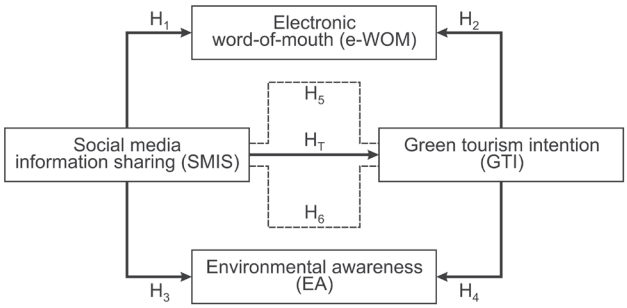

Figure 2. Direct and indirect effects. The conceptual model for the current study

Source: authors

4. Results

The mean scores of SMIS, GTI, EA and e-WOM are shown in Table 2. The table indicates that the four components ranged from minimum to maximum, eliminating variable outliers. The standard deviations of SMIS, GTI, EA and e-WOM were also acceptable. Data fluctuated little, but data sufficiency was confirmed.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics (n = 412)

Variables	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation (*SD*)
Social media information sharing (SMIS)	7.00	20.00	16.2015	2.53936
Green tourism intention (GTI)	10.00	20.00	17.6553	2.51277
Environmental awareness (EA)	8.00	25.00	20.2184	3.56665
Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM)	6.00	20.00	16.5024	3.10051

Source: authors.

4.1. Reliability and validity analysis

Cronbach's alpha was computed to examine the reliability of the scales employed in the study and the values for *CR*, AVE and DV were also calculated. Results indicated good validity and reliability scores. The values for Cronbach's alpha and *CR* were above 0.7 for the constructs used for the study, indicating good reliability but values (Table 3) were above 0.7 for all four categories which shows that the scale is reliable (Amirrudin et al., 2020). The AVE for the four constructs was above 0.5 (Table 3) which was an indication of good convergent validity (Kim et al., 2013). Values that were not on the diagonal (Table 4) showed a link between the concepts because they were smaller than the diagonal components. This showed that the discriminant validity was true (Voorhees et al., 2016).

Table 3. Reliability and validity values of various constructs

Dimensions	Cronbach's alpha values	Average variance	Factor loadings	Composite reliability (*CR*)
Social media information sharing (SMIS)	0.817	0.815	0.813	0.714
Green tourism intention (GTI)	0.812	0.826	0.832	0.881
Environmental awareness (EA)	0.881	0.897	0.812	0.792
Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM)	0.915	0.714	0.853	0.764

Source: authors.

Table 4. Dimensions and their discriminant validity

Dimensions	SMIS	GTI	EA	e-WOM
Social media information sharing (SMIS)	0.816	–	–	–
Green tourism intention (GTI)	0.713	0.873	–	–
Environmental awareness (EA)	0.627	0.712	0.832	–
Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM)	0.543	0.621	0.701	0.743

Note: The off-diagonal components show how the constructs are correlated.

Source: authors.

4.2. Structural equation modelling

A full structural equation model fits the data well. According to the guidelines provided by Hu and Bentler (1999), all fit indices were at the accepted levels. The χ^2/df was found to be 2.14 while the GFI and TLI were found to be 0.935 and 0.951 respectively. The comparative fit index (CFI) value of 0.932 and the RMSEA value of 0.038 were at an acceptable level. Therefore, the hypotheses were tested using the entire structural model.

Social media information sharing had a direct, very significant favourable association (Figure 3 and Table 5) on GTI, according to the findings ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$). Hypothesis T was therefore approved. Social media information sharing demonstrated a direct, very significant favourable association (Figure 4 and Table 5) on e-WOM ($\beta = 0.67$, $p < 0.01$). Hypothesis 1 (H_1) was also approved. Additionally, it was found that e-WOM had a direct and very positive association on GTI ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$). Figure 4 and Table 5 show that. Hypothesis 1 (H_2) was also accepted. Furthermore, it was observed that SMIS had a direct and positive effect on EA ($\beta = 0.491$, $p < 0.01$), as a result, H_3 was approved – Figure 4 and Table 5 show the details. Finally, it was found that EA had a direct and very positive effect on GTI ($\beta = 0.241$, $p < 0.01$), thus, H_4 was approved (Figure 4 and Table 5).

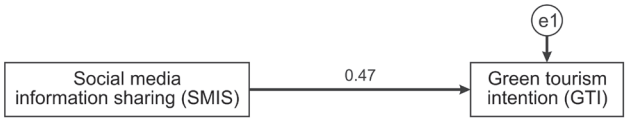

Figure 3. Model of the total effect ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$)

Source: authors

Table 5. Paths and effects

Paths		Standardized estimates	*p*-value	Result
Direct effects	SMIS → GTI	0.159	0.008	Significant*
	SMIS → e-WOM	0.667	0.000	Significant**
	SMIS → EA	0.494	0.000	Significant**
	e-WOM → GTI	0.294	0.000	Significant**
	EA → GTI	0.238	0.000	Significant**
Total effect	SMIS → GTI	0.471	0.000	Significant**

Note: SMIS – social media information sharing, GTI – green tourism intention, e-WOM – electronic word-of-mouth, EA – environmental awareness; * significantly different from zero at the 0.01 level (two-tailed), ** significantly different from zero at the 0.001 level (two-tailed).

Source: authors.

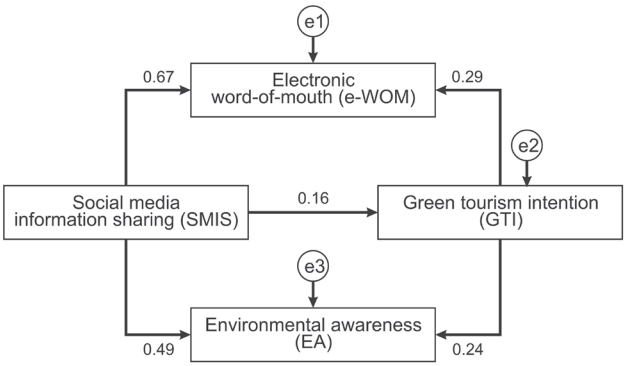

Figure 4. The direct and indirect effects of full structural modelling

Source: authors

To determine how e-WOM and EA indirectly affect SMIS and GTI, process macro model 4 was used to examine each mediating path (H_5 and H_6). In parallel mediation (Table 6), e-WOM ($\beta = 0.1907$) had an indirect association above zero (0.1058 to 0.2792), holding all other mediators constant. The indirect effect via EA ($\beta = 0.1146$) was also substantially different from zero (0.0622 to 0.1740), therefore, H_5 and H_6 were accepted. Thus, it implies that e-WOM and EA assisted in mediating the connection between SMIS and GTI. Examination of Table 6 also revealed that e-WOM had a more significant association than EA on the connection between SMIS and GTI.

Table 6. Standardized indirect effects of social media information sharing (SMIS) on green tourism intention (GTI)

Parameters	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Total	0.3053	0.0430	0.2255	0.3911
Environmental awareness (EA)	0.1146	0.0285	0.0622	0.1740
Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM)	0.1907	0.0441	0.1058	0.2792

Note: SE – standard error, LLCI – lower level confidence interval, ULCI – upper level confidence interval; * to determine the significance level, performance bootstrap and bias-corrected confidence intervals (95%) were used with a sample size of 5000.

Source: authors.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical implications

The younger generation, 'digital natives' with high proficiency in social networking, is proposed to benefit from the virtual environments of social media platforms (Lissitsa & Kol, 2016) and travel enthusiasts have shown widespread acceptance and use of Web 2.0, significantly influencing their behaviour (Hysa et al., 2022). In recent years, academic research in the field of tourism has been keen on investigating the changing preferences of social media users (Peighambari et al., 2016), they have also shown interest in understanding the transformation in tourism enterprise marketing and managerial practices (Peighambari et al., 2016). The current study focuses on SMIS and its association with young travellers' intentions toward green tourism.

Our research examined whether green tourism benefits SMIS and it has also tried to address the question of whether e-WOM and EA mediate the relationship between SMIS and GTI. It was undertaken by carrying out empirical research to bridge this gap in line with previous work indicating the significant effect of SMIS on green behaviour or green purchase intentions (Cheunkamon et al., 2020; Javed et al., 2020; Stiakakis & Vlachopoulou, 2017; Yuan et al., 2021). In addition, the current study investigated the effect of SMIS on GTI using a parallel mediation methodology, with e-WOM and EA finding favourable associations between SMIS, GTI, e-WOM and EA, with e-WOM and EA partially mediating SMIS and GTI.

Initially, we investigated the relationship between SMIS and GTI in young travel enthusiasts and, according to our findings, SMIS had a direct and favourable effect on GTI, e-WOM and EA. This was in line with many previous works, stating that social media are significantly associated with the behavioural intention of young travel enthusiasts (Anuar et al., 2021; Cheunkamon et al., 2020; Yuan et al., 2021). Therefore, it can be inferred that social media and content sharing are associated with users travel behaviour (Javed et al., 2020; Stiakakis & Vlachopoulou, 2017). The greater the information sharing on green tourism through social media, the higher the intention to opt for it (Hysa et al., 2022). Hence, it can be inferred that SMIS affects young travellers' intentions toward green tourism in a positive way. Numerous tourism experts and scholars have studied e-WOM (Fine et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 2020) since the emergence of digital and social media, and sustainability advocates encourage tourists to share green travel experiences there (Polit & Beck, 2010). Tourism researchers and academics who want to explore e-WOM's favourable association on youth GTI and its mediating role between SMIS and GTI may be interested in this research. Hospitality and tourism professionals have ignored e-WOM's role in mediating SMIS and GTI and this work may be the first to extend the notion of green and social media environments to examine how e-WOM may significantly affect GTI.

According to research, the young who are presented with environmental information are more likely to gain awareness of it as a social issue (Severo et al., 2018). This statement is supported by the findings of our

Table 7. Comparison of results with earlier literature

Study reference	Focus of study	Key findings	Contribution of current study
Lissitsa and Kol (2016)	Impact of digital environments on young users	Highlighted the proficiency of 'digital natives' in using social media	Emphasizes the use of social media to promote green tourism among these proficient users
Hysa et al. (2022)	Influence of Web 2.0 on young travellers	Showed significant influence of Web 2.0 on the behaviour of young travel enthusiast	Links this influence specifically to green tourism intentions (GTIs) through SMIS
Peighambari et al. (2016)	Changing preferences of social media users and marketing practices in tourism	Investigated changes in user preferences and business practices due to social media	Focuses on the specific aspect of green tourism and its promotion through SMIS
Stiakakis and Vlachopoulou (2017), Cheunkamon et al. (2020), Javed et al. (2020), Yuan et al. (2021)	Association of social media on green behaviour or purchase intention	Varied findings on social media's impact on environmentally friendly behaviour and intentions	Provides empirical evidence linking SMIS to GTI and investigates e-WOM and EA as mediators
Fine et al. (2017), Zhou et al. (2020)	Study of e-WOM in digital and social media environments	Explored how e-WOM influences consumer behaviours broadly	Examines the specific role of e-WOM in mediating the relationship between SMIS and GTI in green tourism
Severo et al. (2019)	Impact of environmental information on youth awareness	Found that exposure to environmental information enhances awareness of social issues	Confirms and extends these findings by demonstrating how SMIS increases EA, which then impacts GTI

Note: GTI – green tourism intention, SMIS – social media information sharing, e-WOM – electronic word-of-mouth, EA – environmental awareness.

Source: authors.

study, indicating SMIS has a favourable association with EA. Social media allow users to communicate with one another, share information, and unite ideas of common interests and beliefs (Kadushin et al., 1994; Rauniar et al., 2014). Therefore, those exposed to informative content like photos or videos on the environment and sustainability are more likely to develop community awareness and, consequently, EA (Severo et al., 2019). The outcomes of our work indicate that SMIS has a significant positive relationship with EA, and EA has a good association with GTI. This relationship demonstrates that EA mediates SMIS and GTI. We summarize the theoretical contributions of our research in Table 7, which shows how our work correlates with past research and sheds light on the relationships between SMIS, e-WOM, EA and green tourism goals. This table also shows our research's new contributions, places it in the context of existing literature, and explains its significance to tourism and the EA debate.

Thus the research is marked out by arguing that e-WOM and EA are mediators of the connection between SMIS and GTI. This is in contrast to earlier work that mainly looked at the direct effects of SMIS rather than how it links through these mediators. Searching into them, the research not only shows how information circulating in social media shapes sustainable tourism behaviour but is far more complex than prior models which often fail to record these subtle interrelations. It differs from broader research into green behaviour or sustainable consumption in that GTIs are the focus. This is especially important considering that tourism has a unique environmental impact. In the area of GTI, the research provides targeted insights that could bring about specific strategies for tourist attractions to carry out effective acts of environmental protection, and so it is of real relevance to the operation of the tourism sector. Utilizing process macro model 4 for mediation analysis means that we can delve deeply into how SMIS affects GTI. This advanced statistical approach allows a more detailed and robust analysis compared with previous studies; many of which resorted to simplistic statistical tests. The rigor of the methodology enhances confidence in results and demonstrates with very clear visualizations of how inter-relationships between subject variables can be pictured. By incorporating, testing and verifying complex patterns that take into account such factors as e-WOM and EA, the study deepens theoretical models applied in the area of social media and tourism. It challenges once again the conventional wisdom that SMIS has only direct effects by showing how there are also indirect impacts via factors that make sustainable tourism more feasible. The result for tourism marketers is to show how they can use social media more effectively in their efforts toward sustainable tourism. Understanding the role played by e-WOM and EA in shaping tourist destination

intentions can help travel agents devise social network strategies that are more effective both at promoting the characteristics of their destination and also assisting tourists in enjoying themselves in an environmentally friendly manner. Each of these presentations underscores the major theoretical significance of this study and places it in line with earlier work, making a useful guide for those engaged in tourism enterprises who want to develop sustainability through making greater use of social media.

5.2. Managerial implications

Social media not only expose wrongdoings in society but often acts as catalysts for societal change (Mohanan & Shekhar, 2021) therefore policymakers and stakeholders can powerfully utilize them to promote sustainability and green behaviour. For example, social media marketing could highlight eco-friendly practices and service content specifically for younger generations around the benefits of eco-friendly travel. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and environmental groups can use digital platforms to organize green initiatives, while institutions and businesses could increase offerings of green tours for both leisure and nature excursions that would raise awareness of green tourism. In addition, awarding and rewarding young people for their contribution can stimulate participation in environmental activities. As such, incentives such as discounts or free meals for tourists engaged in environmentally-friendly practices could help encourage sustainable tourism (Karmoker & Ahmed, 2021). Seeing as how both educational institutions and government departments could create competitions aimed at young audiences highlighting innovative ideas for green living, parents too must play an important role. By adopting environmental habits that set a good example to young minds and involving them in these changes, parents can implant such thinking from early on in their children's lives to create an environment that treads altogether more lightly on what sustains us all.

Our research findings offer strong evidence that SMIS is directly linked to GTI. Therefore, tour operators in the industry might have to develop online content for social media and share it, potentially influencing intended destinations before tourists start their journeys. Meanwhile, actively soliciting satisfied customers to share first-hand experiences online could amplify e-WOM. This, our study demonstrates, has a substantial mediating effect indeed on GTIs, more than EA does. Hence marketing tactics should not just stress overt advertisement but also develop an atmosphere that is kind to both information sharing and love of nature. Monitoring tools make it possible to identify those influential social media users who are most likely to persuade others toward green tourism. Our approach, in sum, streamlines action and utilizes its strength to effectively promote EA and green tourism.

5.3. Limitations

Due to its sample, the study has limitations. The research relied entirely on participants' questionnaire responses, not their social media accounts or online behaviour. User perceptions toward social media sites relating to green tourism aspirations were not examined. We ignored specific social media activity including photo-sharing, content uploading and tweeting. Another downside is that the statistics may show typical response biases with education, nationality and income affecting their green tourism preferences. The current study did not assess these. Choosing samples and regions was another disadvantage because the results may not apply to the whole of society.

5.4. Future research implications

More longitudinal research in this subject may reinforce our findings. Pre- and post-response assessments can evaluate the suggested framework in future investigations while research from different countries may be applicable to more situations. Since the topic area is current, academia may find this study interesting; growing a child's sustainability and environmental consciousness is crucial. Sharing green tourism and sustainability knowledge on social media for the benefit of society is important as well. Sadly, our research outcomes were limited, new research on social media sharing and green tourism intentions is currently unknown. To accurately portray the subject, future research should focus on more complete and dynamic outcomes.

6. Conclusion

The study investigated the relationships between social media information sharing (SMIS), green tourism intention (GTI), electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and environmental awareness (EA) while examining the mediating role of e-WOM and EA. Significant and positive relationships among all of them were confirmed thereby supporting all hypotheses. SMIS had a strong positive impact on GTI and e-WOM confirming H_1 and H_2, furthermore e-WOM positively influenced GTI, validating H_3. It was also found to have a positive impact on EA supporting H_4. EA also demonstrated positive influence on GTI and with regard to mediation effects, both e-WOM and EA mediated the relationship

between SMIS and GTI supporting H_5 and H_6. Notably, e-WOM exhibited a stronger mediating effect than EA, emphasizing its critical role in influencing GTI.

This study examined green tourism statistics from social media, therefore it fills research gaps and broadens knowledge that might be utilized to investigate the efficacy of social media as a tourism data repository used to identify younger generation tourism locations. It first examined youthful social media users' green tourism objectives theoretically, which guided this empirical research, and second it incorporates SMIS, e-WOM and EA into GTI theory. The work is significant because SMIS and GTI have been barely studied. These insights will help tourist companies implement green travel and hospitality initiatives and can also encourage green travel.

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