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EXPLORING THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUAL DIGITAL SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (DSR) IN SHAPING EWOM ADOPTION AND TOURIST BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS

EXPLORANDO O PAPEL DA RESPONSABILIDADE SOCIAL DIGITAL INDIVIDUAL (RSD) NA ADOÇÃO DO EWOM E NAS INTENÇÕES DE COMPORTAMENTO TURÍSTICO

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Abstract
This study aims to conceptualise and empirically validate Individual Digital Social Responsibility (DSR), a novel construct reflecting one's ethical awareness and examining its role in shaping electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behaviours within the extended Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework. Adopting an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, the research integrates qualitative insights from expert interviews and content analysis to conceptualise DSR. Next, using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) based on survey data from social media users to test its results. The results of study provide strong empirical support for the reliability and validity of the DSR scale and confirm its theoretical positioning as the Organism (O) in the extended S–O–R model. This study contributes to theory by introducing and validating the DSR construct. Moreover, this study extended the S–O–R paradigm to account for digital moral responsibility. The specific effects of DSR on negative and positive information have not yet been independently evaluated.

Keywords: DSR. Forwarding eWOM. FeWOM. S-O-R. Visual Cues.

Resumo
Este estudo visa conceituar e validar empiricamente a Responsabilidade Social Digital (RSD) individual, um novo construto que reflete a consciência ética de um indivíduo e examina seu papel na formação de comportamentos de boca a boca eletrônico (eWOM) dentro da estrutura ampliada de Estímulo-Organismo-Resposta (E-O-R). Adotando um delineamento exploratório sequencial de métodos mistos, a pesquisa integra insights qualitativos de entrevistas com especialistas e análise de conteúdo para conceituar a RSD. Em seguida, utilizando a Modelagem de Equações Estruturais por Mínimos Quadrados Parciais (PLS-SEM) com base em dados de pesquisa de usuários de mídias sociais para testar seus resultados. Os resultados do estudo fornecem forte suporte empírico para a confiabilidade e validade da escala de RSD e confirmam seu posicionamento teórico como o Organismo (O) no modelo ampliado de E-O-R. Este estudo contribui para a teoria ao introduzir e validar o construto de RSD. Além disso, este estudo ampliou o paradigma de E-O-R para contemplar a responsabilidade moral digital. Os efeitos específicos da RSD sobre informações negativas e positivas ainda não foram avaliados independentemente.

Palavras-chave: *DSR. Encaminhamento de eWOM. FeWOM. S-O-R. Sinais Visuais.*

1 INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of internet-based applications and digital platforms has profoundly transformed existing strategic practices and human behaviors in the contemporary market (Hanna et al., 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Central to this massive shift are Social Networking Sites (SNSs), defined as internet-based applications built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 (Herrero Crespo et al., 2017; Nicole & Boyd Danah, 2013) that enable the broad creation and exchange of User-Generated Content (UGC). This pervasive connectivity has driven the rise of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM), characterized as any positive, neutral, or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, made available to a multitude of people via the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Verma & Yadav, 2021). The tourism industry, characterized by intangible products and inherently high perceived risk that cannot be fully evaluated before consumption (Verma & Yadav, 2021), is highly susceptible to eWOM influence. Consequently, prospective tourists increasingly rely on peer-to-peer recommendations and online reviews, viewing eWOM information as more trustworthy and objective than traditional commercial advertising (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). This reliance demonstrates the critical role eWOM plays in influencing tourists' travel intentions and destination choice (Jalilvand et al., 2012; Zarrad & Debabi, 2015).

In parallel with the digital revolution, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has long been recognized as a crucial strategic imperative for organizations (Carroll, 1979). The communication of CSR initiatives has evolved from traditional, one-way methods to dynamic, bidirectional channels (Hanna et al., 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). This integration of CSR into online platforms is often referred to as Digital Social Responsibility (DSR), which traditionally focused on the efforts undertaken by *firms* via digital channels (Mahapatra & Mishra, 2017). While prior literature acknowledges the link between firm-led DSR and favorable consumer responses, a profound theoretical gap remains concerning the Digital Social Responsibility (DSR) of the individual user in

operating within the social media ecosystem. Consumers today function as active agents in information flow, possessing the means to instantly disseminate content, thereby shaping public narratives (Daugherty et al., 2008). Therefore, the ethical constraints and societal consciousness related to an individual's responsible creation and circulation of content online needs empirical validation, particularly regarding its influence on subsequent consumer behavior in tourism.

Unlike previous studies focusing on firm-led DSR, this study conceptualizes and examines DSR at the individual level, providing novel insights into responsible digital behavior in tourism. To address this oversight, this study focuses on DSR as a new construct defined by the ethical and social responsibility demonstrated by individual users in their utilization of digital platforms and communication (Hajli, 2018). We posit that this individual-centric DSR acts as a potent psychological predictor of behavioral outcomes by promoting careful consideration, morality, and responsible online contributions. This responsibility is particularly relevant for understanding the proliferation of messages, specifically Forwarding eWOM (FeWOM), which is the user's intention to retransmit received online information (Mahapatra & Mishra, 2017; Sun et al., 2006). FeWOM represents a key behavioral intention because its viral nature (Abedi et al., 2020; Mahapatra & Mishra, 2017; Watts et al., 2007) facilitates the rapid, exponential dispersion of messages (Abedi et al., 2020; Mahapatra & Mishra, 2017; Watts et al., 2007). However, the direct antecedents linking this novel construct of individual DSR to subsequent FeWOM and tourism purchase outcomes remain underexplored.

Therefore, this study aims to (1) conceptualize and validate the construct of DSR, focusing on the individual's digital social responsibility, and (2) examine its effect on "Visit Intention" and "Forwarding eWOM" using PLS-SEM. The selection of the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique (Hair et al., 2017; Joseph F. Hair et al., 2022; Joseph F. Hair et al., 2021) is justified by its strength in rigorously validating new latent constructs and estimating complex theoretical models. By establishing the individual's ethical role (DSR) as a critical determinant of tourist decision-making, this research offers significant theoretical contributions and actionable insights for promoting responsible digital engagement.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Related theories

The theoretical framework for this study is built upon several established psychological and information processing models. They were essential for explaining how information characteristics interact with individual ethical dispositions to drive behavioral intentions in a digital environment. The core theories applied are the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model, the Information Adoption Model (IAM), the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), and the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA).

Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model: The S-O-R framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) is highly effective for conceptualizing consumer responses within online contexts (Yadav et al., 2022). This model posits that environmental stimuli (S) influence an individual's internal cognitive and affective states (O), which subsequently determine their behavioral responses (R). In the context of eWOM communication in tourism, the framework is applied as follows:

Stimuli (S): Represents the characteristics of the eWOM message, such as eWOM Quality, Source Credibility, and Visual Cues. These external characteristics trigger cognitive evaluation.

Organism (O): Represents the internal processing variables, crucial to this study, including eWOM Usefulness, Attitude towards eWOM, and the core mediating construct, Individual Digital Social Responsibility (DSR). These psychological states mediate the relationship between the stimulus and the final response.

Response (R): Represents the final behavioral outcomes, such as eWOM Adoption, Forwarding eWOM (FeWOM), and Travel Intention. By viewing DSR as a cognitive and moral filtering mechanism within the Organism stage, we can explain how the perception of incoming eWOM (S) is filtered through an individual's sense of social responsibility (O) before manifesting as specific sharing intentions (R).

Information Adoption Model (IAM): IAM (Sussman & Siegal, 2003) is instrumental in explaining how individuals assess and integrate messages into their decision-making process. The model separates information processing into two routes: the central route (based on Argument Quality/eWOM Quality) and the peripheral route (based on Source Credibility). IAM suggests that information quality and credibility lead

to perceived usefulness, which subsequently drives information adoption. This model fundamentally supports the initial chain of relationships connecting eWOM Quality, Source Credibility, and perceived Usefulness to eWOM Adoption.

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM): ELM (Petty et al., 1986) complements IAM by explaining the dual process of information evaluation. The central route focuses on the substantive quality of the message (e.g., Argument Quality, Content), while the peripheral route relies on external cues (e.g., Source Credibility, Tie Strength, Visual Cues). Given that eWOM often involves low involvement browsing, recipients frequently rely on peripheral cues to heuristically assess credibility and trustworthiness (Mahapatra & Mishra, 2017). The application of ELM is vital for justifying why various characteristics of eWOM (S) impact the perceived usefulness and credibility (O) of the information.

Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA): The TRA (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) asserts that an individual's behavioral intention is principally determined by their attitude toward the behavior. Attitude, defined as an individual's overall evaluation or tendency toward an action, serves as a strong predictor of behavior when the behavior is under volitional control (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). Since Forwarding eWOM (FeWOM) and Travel Intention are volitional behavioral intentions, TRA provides the underpinning for the relationships linking internal psychological states like Attitude towards eWOM and eWOM Adoption to these ultimate intentions.

2.2 Definition of the new construct: individual Digital Social Responsibility (DSR)

Traditionally, Digital Social Responsibility (DSR) has been conceptualized primarily as a strategic action undertaken by organizations or firms (Corporate DSR). This Corporate DSR includes initiatives, endeavors, or activities implemented by an entity regarding the CSR concept via online or digital platforms (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2022). Crucially, it involves the firm engaging stakeholders through social media interactions, such as managing 'likes,' 'shares,' and 'comments' related to their CSR communications (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2022).

However, this research adopts a novel conceptualization of DSR rooted in individual consumer ethics and behavior.

Individual Digital Social Responsibility (DSR) is defined here as the ethical and societal consciousness demonstrated by an individual social media user concerning the creation, consumption, and transmission of information within the digital environment.

This definition diverges significantly from Corporate DSR (which is an external firm stimulus) and positions Individual DSR as an internal psychological factor (Organism/Attitude) derived from social and moral motivations.

Conceptual Distinction: The core distinction lies in the locus of responsibility:

Corporate DSR (Firm-centric): Focuses on the organization's efforts to leverage digital platforms for CSR communication and stakeholder engagement. Its effect is external-to-internal (S → O), impacting consumer attitudes towards the *firm*.

Individual DSR (Consumer-centric): Focuses on the user's inherent moral and ethical disposition toward online interactions. It is rooted in individual factors such as moral obligation (the feeling of duty to share information responsibly), altruism (concern for other consumers in the network), and a generalized tendency to act in an environmentally or socially responsible manner (Environmental Consciousness). It functions internally (O → R), driving the user's intention to forward information that they believe is beneficial or truthful, serving as an intrinsic motivation for honest eWOM behavior.

By focusing on the individual's moral obligation and concern for others, DSR moves beyond simple self-serving motivations (like impression management or economic incentives) to become an influential determinant of highly social behaviors such as FeWOM.

2.3 Hypotheses development

The initial perception of eWOM is fundamentally shaped by how readers evaluate its content and source. These evaluations lead directly to perceived usefulness, a critical input in the IAM.

eWOM quality, also termed Argument Quality in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) framework, represents the **persuasive strength, comprehensiveness, relevance, and accuracy** of a message (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). According to the Information Adoption Model (IAM), high-quality information is more likely to be carefully evaluated via the central processing route, enhancing

perceived usefulness and perceived value for decision-making (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Empirical evidence shows that consumers perceive information as more beneficial when it is accurate and relevant, motivating engagement and adoption behaviors (Olshavsky, 1985). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H1: eWOM Quality (EQ) is positively associated with eWOM Usefulness (EU).

Source credibility, considered a peripheral cue within the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) framework, refers to the extent to which a message source is perceived as trustworthy, knowledgeable, and competent (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). According to the ELM, peripheral cues such as source credibility influence information processing when individuals engage in low-involvement or heuristic evaluation, shaping their perception of the message's value. Empirical evidence demonstrates that information originating from a credible source is generally regarded as more truthful, reliable, and persuasive, thereby enhancing its perceived usefulness for decision-making (Hsu et al., 2013). Consequently, messages from highly credible sources are more likely to be perceived as beneficial and actionable by recipients. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H2: eWOM Source Credibility (EC) is positively associated with eWOM Usefulness.

Visual cues embedded in eWOM messages, such as user-generated images or performance-related visual heuristics, activate the nonverbal cognitive system, complementing the processing of verbal information in line with Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1990). By facilitating mental imagery and enhancing message vividness, visual elements improve information comprehension and reduce uncertainty, particularly in high-risk contexts like travel planning (Choi & Kim, 2019). When visuals effectively communicate diagnostic and symbolic meanings, they increase the perceived clarity, credibility, and diagnosticity of review content, thereby elevating its perceived usefulness (Abbasi et al., 2023; Filieri et al., 2015). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H3: eWOM Visual Cues (EVC) are positively related to eWOM Usefulness.

eWOM Usefulness reflects the extent to which recipients perceive online reviews as valuable for understanding and supporting their purchase decisions (Cheung et al., 2008; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Individual DSR denotes a user's ethical disposition grounded in altruism and moral responsibility toward responsible information sharing in digital environments (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Reimer & Benkenstein, 2016). When individuals perceive eWOM as highly useful, this reinforces their belief that ethical and

accurate information benefits others, thereby strengthening their intrinsic sense of digital responsibility. Thus, perceived informational value serves as a cognitive driver that fosters moral commitment to responsible eWOM behavior. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H4: eWOM Usefulness is positively associated with Individual Digital Social Responsibility (DSR).

eWOM Usefulness (Perceived Usefulness) refers to the extent to which individuals believe that engaging with electronic word-of-mouth information enhances their performance and supports better purchase decisions (Davis, 1989). Attitude towards eWOM represents an individual's overall evaluation or psychological tendency reflecting a favorable or unfavorable appraisal of the behavior or object (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), this relationship posits that perceived usefulness acts as a primary cognitive stimulus for forming a positive attitude toward the use of information. The mechanism implies that recognizing the informational value precedes and drives affective evaluation of eWOM. Empirical findings corroborate this causal sequence, showing that consumers who perceive eWOM as useful, such as for travel planning, develop a more positive attitude toward adopting it (Ayeh, 2015). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H5: eWOM Usefulness is positively related to Attitude towards eWOM (ATT).

eWOM Usefulness (Perceived Usefulness) refers to an individual's subjective belief that online word-of-mouth information enhances their purchase or consumption decision-making (Cheung et al., 2008; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). eWOM Adoption (Information Adoption) describes the psychological process in which consumers integrate received information into their knowledge structure for future decision use. Grounded in the Information Adoption Model (IAM) (Abedi et al., 2020; Khwaja & Zaman, 2020; Sussman & Siegal, 2003), this relationship asserts that perceived usefulness is the primary antecedent and necessary condition for adoption (Davis, 1989; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). When consumers perceive online reviews as informative and relevant, they are more likely to internalize and apply that content in their decision-making. Empirical findings consistently confirm this positive association (Cheung et al., 2008; Erkan & Evans, 2016). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H6: eWOM Usefulness is positively related to eWOM Adoption (EA).

Individual Digital Social Responsibility (DSR) represents an individual's ethical orientation and moral commitment toward responsible information sharing, grounded in

altruism and societal concern (Hajli, 2018; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Forwarding eWOM (FeWOM) refers to a consumer's intention to retransmit online information, facilitating its viral or ripple diffusion (Mahapatra & Mishra, 2017). This relationship is supported by the intrinsic alignment between DSR and prosocial motives underlying eWOM, such as concern for other consumers and the moral duty to assist one's social network (Gruen et al., 2006; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). A strong DSR activates altruistic motivations, encouraging users to forward valuable and reliable content as part of their responsible digital citizenship (Ho & Dempsey, 2010). Empirical evidence confirms altruism as a significant positive driver of eWOM sharing behavior (Ho & Dempsey, 2010; Mahapatra & Mishra, 2017; Reimer & Benkenstein, 2016). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H7: Individual Digital Social Responsibility is positively related to Forwarding eWOM (FeWOM).

Individual Digital Social Responsibility (DSR) represents an individual's ethical orientation and moral commitment toward responsible online information creation and dissemination (Hajli, 2018; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Attitude towards eWOM reflects an individual's overall evaluative tendency toward engaging with electronic word-of-mouth information (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Grounded in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Expectancy–Value Theory (EVT) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), this relationship posits that moral beliefs and prosocial motives, such as altruism and concern for other consumers, shape favorable evaluations of ethically aligned behaviors (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Mahapatra & Mishra, 2017). Hence, individuals with strong DSR are more likely to hold positive attitudes toward eWOM, as such engagement resonates with their intrinsic moral and social values (Gruen et al., 2006; Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2022). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H8: Individual Digital Social Responsibility is positively related to Attitude towards eWOM.

Attitude toward eWOM information (ATT) represents an individual's overall psychological tendency, reflected in a favorable or unfavorable evaluation toward engaging with eWOM behavior. eWOM Adoption (EA) refers to the process through which consumers internalize and utilize received information in their decision-making. Based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), attitude functions as a key antecedent that predicts behavioral intention. When consumers hold a

positive attitude toward eWOM, they are more motivated to accept and apply such information. Empirical evidence across information systems and eWOM contexts confirms this link, showing that attitude is a principal driver of information adoption (Aghakhani et al., 2018; Cheung et al., 2008; Cheung, 2014). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H9: Attitude towards eWOM is positively related to eWOM Adoption.

Attitude towards eWOM reflects an individual's overall evaluation—favorable or unfavorable—toward engaging with electronic word-of-mouth behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Forwarding eWOM (FeWOM) refers to a consumer's willingness to retransmit received information, a critical intention that drives viral diffusion of online content (Dobele et al., 2007; Gershoff et al., 2003; Mahapatra & Mishra, 2017). Grounded in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), this relationship posits that a favorable attitude toward a behavior is the primary determinant of the intention to perform it (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). Accordingly, individuals holding positive attitudes toward eWOM are more motivated to share and forward such information. Empirical findings support this association, showing that favorable attitudes toward eWOM content significantly enhance the intention to forward messages (Abedi et al., 2020; Mahapatra & Mishra, 2017; Phelps et al., 2004). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H10: Attitude towards eWOM is positively related to Forwarding eWOM.

Attitude toward eWOM information represents an individual's overall psychological tendency, reflecting favorable or unfavorable evaluations toward engaging with eWOM behavior. Travel Intention (or Visit Intention) denotes a potential traveler's expressed willingness or plan to visit a destination. Grounded in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), this relationship posits that a favorable attitude toward an object, such as positive perceptions derived from eWOM, enhances motivation and intention to perform the related behavior, namely, traveling. In the tourism context, where decisions involve high perceived risk, a positive attitude toward destinations shaped by credible eWOM serves as a strong predictor of travel intention. Empirical evidence consistently supports this positive association. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H11: Attitude towards eWOM is positively related to Travel Intention/Visit Intention (VI).

eWOM Adoption (Information Adoption or Acceptance of eWOM) refers to the psychological process through which consumers intentionally integrate and utilize received electronic word-of-mouth information in their decision-making (Abedi et al., 2020; Cheung et al., 2008; Mahapatra & Mishra, 2017; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Forwarding eWOM (FeWOM) denotes a consumer's intention to retransmit received information to others within their social network (Gershoff et al., 2003; Mahapatra & Mishra, 2017). Grounded in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Sussman & Siegal, 2003), this relationship posits that users evaluate a message's validity through cognitive processing and are likely to forward it once they have accepted it as reliable and valuable. Prior studies indicate that adoption serves as a cognitive prerequisite for diffusion (Cheung et al., 2008; Huang et al., 2011), although empirical results remain mixed (Abedi et al., 2020; Mahapatra & Mishra, 2017). Accordingly, the positive association between eWOM adoption and forwarding intention is hypothesized.

H12: eWOM Adoption is positively related to Forwarding eWOM.

eWOM Adoption (Information Adoption) refers to the psychological process in which consumers purposefully integrate received electronic word-of-mouth information into their cognitive knowledge structure for subsequent decisions (Cheung et al., 2008; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Travel Intention (Visit Intention) denotes an individual's readiness and willingness to visit a destination, often reflecting rational evaluations derived from external information (Chen et al., 2014; Zarrad & Debabi, 2015). Within the Information Adoption Model (IAM), adoption represents the acceptance of information as reliable and valid, forming cognitive beliefs that guide travel-related decisions (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Given the intangibility and perceived risk of tourism products, adopted eWOM serves as a crucial determinant of destination choice and behavioral intention. Empirical studies confirm that eWOM adoption directly and positively influences travel intention (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Saidani et al., 2023; Silaban et al., 2023; Tapanainen et al., 2021). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H13: eWOM Adoption is positively related to Travel Intention/Visit Intention.

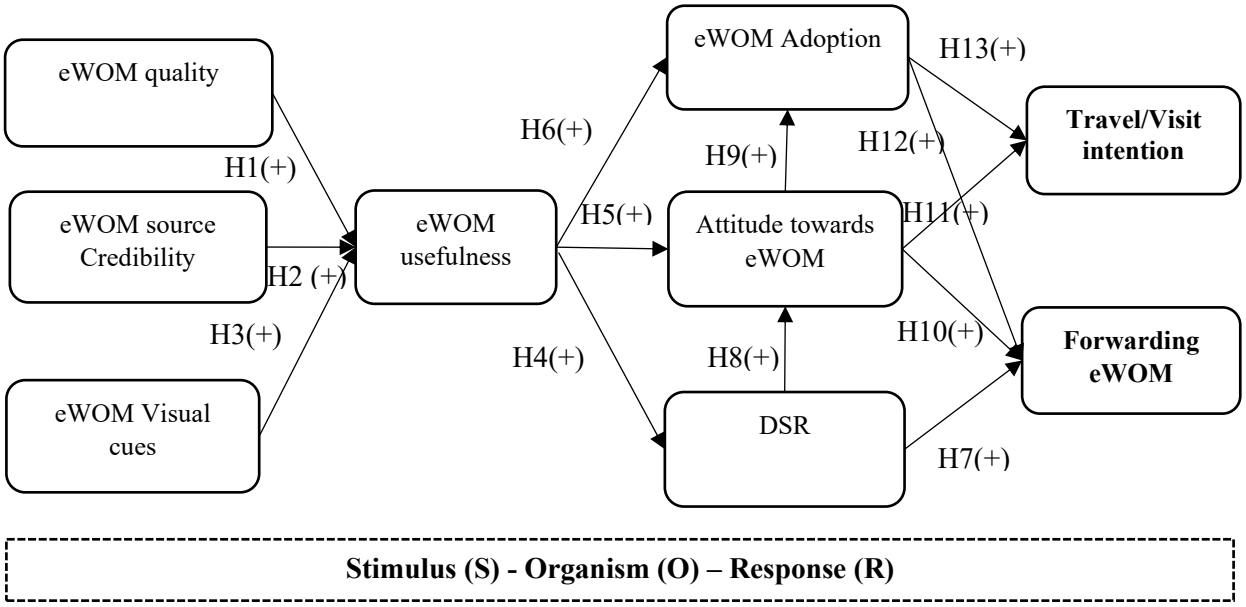
2.4 Research model

The proposed conceptual framework is founded upon the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm and extends the Information Adoption Model (IAM),

postulating that exogenous eWOM characteristics (Quality, Credibility, and Visual Cues) initially determine perceived eWOM Usefulness. Subsequently, Usefulness, in concert with the mediating roles of the novel construct Individual Digital Social Responsibility (DSR) and Attitude towards eWOM, sequentially influences eWOM Adoption. These psychological processes collectively drive the two critical behavioral outcomes: the prosocial information diffusion intention (Forwarding eWOM) and the specific tourism outcome (Visit Intention), positioning DSR as a central determinant of responsible digital behavior.

Figure 1

Research model



Source: Suggest by Authors (2025)

3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research approach

This study adopts an *exploratory sequential mixed-methods design* to develop and validate the new construct, *Individual Digital Social Responsibility (DSR)*, and to empirically test its relationships within the proposed eWOM framework. The mixed approach was deemed appropriate because it integrates qualitative exploration to establish conceptual foundations with quantitative validation to confirm measurement reliability

and structural relationships. Following the recommendations of Creswell and Creswell (2023), the qualitative phase provided conceptual richness and item generation, while the quantitative phase ensured generalizability and statistical rigor through empirical testing.

3.2 Research process

The research was conducted in two sequential phases to ensure both conceptual robustness and empirical validity. The first phase adopted a qualitative exploratory approach aimed at conceptualizing the construct of Individual Digital Social Responsibility (DSR) and generating preliminary measurement indicators through literature synthesis and expert evaluation. The second phase employed a quantitative validation design to examine the reliability and validity of the proposed measurement model and to test the hypothesized structural relationships using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The two phases were methodologically connected, as insights and refined items derived from the qualitative phase informed the design and content of the survey instrument utilized in the quantitative phase.

3.3 Development of the individual Digital Social Responsibility (DSR) construct and scale

The development of the new construct, *Individual Digital Social Responsibility (DSR)*, followed a systematic, multi-stage procedure combining conceptual specification, qualitative exploration, and expert validation. DSR was conceptualized as a multidimensional reflective construct that captures users' ethical awareness, altruistic motivation, and responsible sharing behavior in digital environments. Since no prior scale existed to measure DSR, a formal scale development process was undertaken to ensure theoretical grounding and measurement validity.

The procedure comprised three stages. Stage 1 – Conceptual Specification: A comprehensive literature review identified theoretical foundations in social responsibility, moral obligation, and digital ethics. The conceptual boundaries of DSR were defined through synthesis of existing frameworks and theoretical propositions. Stage 2 – Item Generation and Qualitative Exploration: Semi-structured interviews with domain experts and experienced eWOM users were conducted to explore how moral and

ethical responsibility is perceived and enacted online. Thematic analysis of these interviews yielded recurring dimensions and behavioral indicators, forming the initial pool of measurement items. Stage 3 – Expert Review and Content Validation: A panel of academic and industry experts evaluated the preliminary items for clarity, relevance, and conceptual representativeness. Based on their feedback, redundant or ambiguous items were revised or removed, resulting in a refined scale used in the subsequent quantitative phase. This integrated approach ensured that DSR was developed both conceptually and empirically, aligning with best practices for new construct development (Churchill Jr, 1979).

The results of 03 stages of development of the "DSR" scale are as follows:

The conceptual foundation of Digital Social Responsibility (DSR) originates from the well-established Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) framework, which emphasizes an entity's ethical obligations toward stakeholders, communities, and society (Öberseder et al., 2013; Tingchi Liu et al., 2014). In the digital era, CSR has been extended to encompass socially responsible actions in online environments, as reflected in the notion of Digital Social Responsibility proposed by Puriwat and Tripopsakul (2022). While CSR focuses on organizational initiatives, DSR in this study is redefined at the **individual level**, emphasizing personal ethical awareness and moral responsibility in cyberspace.

Building on Personal and Consumer Social Responsibility concepts (Albinsson & Perera, 2014; Arslan & Wong, 2022; Davis et al., 2021; Reisinger, 2015; Vandenbroucke, 2012), Individual DSR reflects how users consciously act to promote positive, ethical, and community-oriented behavior on digital platforms. The six-item scale was developed to capture these dimensions through responsible communication, moral engagement, and prosocial digital conduct, thus extending the CSR paradigm from corporate actions to individual digital citizenship.

Table 1

Initial Recommended "DSR" Scale

Code	Proposed Measurement Item	Underlying Perspective	Source
DSR1	I always express opinions or share content that adds value to the online community.	Practice of socially conscious individual behavior	Albinsson & Perera (2014)
DSR2	I am always aware of the need to protect a healthy digital community through positive online actions.	Practice of socially conscious individual behavior	Albinsson & Perera (2014)
DSR3	I am consistently aware of the importance of performing ethical actions in the digital environment.	Moral obligation	Vandenbroucke (2012)
DSR4	I constantly remind myself to be responsible toward the online community.	Individual social responsibility	Arslan & Wong (2022); Reisinger (2015); Davis et al. (2021)
DSR5	I often encourage others to share socially beneficial and value-driven information online.	Educational influence on social awareness	Albinsson & Perera (2014)
DSR6	I support opinions and evaluations that contribute to the collective well-being of the online community.	Individual commitment to making the world a better place	Arslan & Wong (2022)

Source: Authors (2025)

Table 2

DSR scale after expert interview

Code	Measurement Item
DSR1	I always express opinions or evaluations that bring benefits to people within the online community.
DSR2	I am always aware of the need to protect a healthy digital community through positive actions on social media.
DSR3	I am always conscious of performing ethical actions in the online environment.
DSR4	I always comply with legal and ethical standards when acting in the digital environment.
DSR5	I always encourage others to share valuable and socially beneficial information on social media.
DSR6	I consistently support opinions or evaluations that contribute to the well-being of the online community.

Source: Authors (2025)

3.4 Qualitative phase (exploration and construct development)

The qualitative phase aimed to conceptualize and delineate the domain of *Individual Digital Social Responsibility (DSR)*, an emergent construct representing users' moral and ethical commitment to responsible online engagement. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine participants, including digital marketing experts, social media managers, and active eWOM contributors. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that participants possessed substantial expertise in ethical and

responsible online communication. Each interview lasted approximately 50–60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' informed consent.

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke (2006) six-step approach. Initial open coding identified recurring ideas associated with moral responsibility, altruism, and information accountability. These codes were subsequently organized into higher-order dimensions that shaped the conceptual structure of the DSR construct. Based on the thematic insights and relevant literature synthesis, an initial pool of six measurement items was developed. A panel of nine academic experts reviewed these items to assess conceptual clarity, content validity, and representativeness, resulting in a refined scale suitable for quantitative validation.

In addition to developing the new DSR scale, expert interviews were also conducted to evaluate and validate the appropriateness of measurement items adopted from prior studies for other constructs in the research model. Specifically, the EQ construct included four items adapted from Silaban et al. (2023) and Saidani et al. (2023); EC comprised four items from Silaban et al. (2023); EVC included four items from Filieri et al. (2021); EU consisted of five items from Saidani et al. (2023); EA included four items from Silaban et al. (2023); ATT comprised five items from Zainal et al. (2017); FeWOM contained five items adapted from Abedi et al. (2020); and VI included six items from (Ran et al., 2021).

3.5 Quantitative phase (validation and hypothesis testing)

The quantitative phase aimed to assess the reliability and validity of the DSR construct and to test the hypothesized relationships among all variables in the proposed model. Data were collected through an online survey targeting social media users who actively read or share electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) content in the tourism context. A purposive sampling approach was used, and 442 valid responses were retained after screening for completeness and response quality. All constructs were measured using multi-item Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Items for DSR were derived from the qualitative phase, whereas other constructs (e.g., eWOM Visual cues, eWOM source Credibility, eWOM quality, eWOM Usefulness, Attitude, Adoption, and Travel Intention, Forwarding eWOM) were adapted from established scales in prior studies.

Data were analyzed using *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)* with SmartPLS 4.0. The analysis involved two stages: (1) evaluating the measurement model to verify internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity; and (2) assessing the structural model to examine hypothesized relationships, path coefficients, and explained variance (R^2), f^2, Q^2 (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2017; Joseph F. Hair et al., 2022). Beyond these two stages, a Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) was also conducted to examine potential differences in the structural relationships between male and female respondents (Chua, 2024; Joseph F. Hair et al., 2017; Joseph F. Hair et al., 2022).

3.6 Measurement and structural model assessment

To ensure the robustness of the constructs and the validity of the proposed model, this study followed a two-step PLS-SEM approach (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2017; Joseph F. Hair et al., 2022). First, the measurement model was assessed in terms of internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), while convergent validity was confirmed via the Average Variance Extracted (AVE > 0.50). Discriminant validity was examined using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (HTMT < 0.85). Common method bias was controlled using Harman's single-factor test and full collinearity VIFs (< 3.3). Second, the structural model was evaluated based on collinearity diagnostics (VIF), path coefficient significance (bootstrapping), and model quality indicators such as R^2, f^2, and Q^2 (Chua, 2024; Joseph F. Hair et al., 2017; Joseph F. Hair et al., 2022). Finally, the Measurement Invariance of Composite Models (MICOM) procedure and Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) were conducted to test whether structural relationships differ across demographic subgroups (Chua, 2024; Henseler et al., 2016; Joseph F. Hair et al., 2022).

4 RESULTS

4.1 Respondents' characteristics

A total of 600 survey responses were initially collected, of which 442 valid cases were retained for analysis after data screening and removal of incomplete or inconsistent entries. Table X presents the demographic characteristics of the final sample. Of the 442 participants, 42.1% were male and 57.9% were female, indicating a slightly higher representation of females in the dataset. In terms of age, the majority of respondents were between 36 and 44 years old (38.0%), followed by those aged 45–53 (24.0%) and 54–62 (14.0%), while younger participants aged 18–26 accounted for 8.8%. Regarding occupation, most respondents were either self-employed (24.9%) or public employees (24.4%), with smaller proportions of students (7.9%) and office staff (5.9%). Overall, the demographic distribution reflects a diverse and balanced representation across gender, age, and occupational categories, supporting the robustness and generalizability of the study findings.

Table 3

Sample Statistics

Profile	Description	Frequence	Percentage
Gender	Male	186	42.1%
	Female	256	57.9%
Age	18-26	39	8.8%
	27-35	53	12.0%
	36-44	168	38.0%
	45-53	106	24.0%
	54-62	62	14.0%
	> 62	14	3.2%
Occupation	Students	35	7.9%
	Office staff	26	5.9%
	Public Employees	108	24.4%
	Self employed	110	24.9%
	Others	163	36.9%

Source: Authors (2025)

4.2 Preliminary results of quantitative study

Before proceeding to the structural model assessment, a comprehensive validation of the measurement model was conducted. The preliminary scale assessment, comprising

Cronbach's Alpha, Pearson correlation, and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), served to refine the initial inventory of 41 observed variables across nine measurement constructs.

Following this process, five items were removed due to not meeting standard psychometric thresholds for reliability or validity, resulting in 36 retained indicators and nine validated constructs. Specifically, three items (VI4, CSR1, FeWOM4) exhibited insufficient item–total correlations (<0.30), indicating poor internal consistency. One pair of items (VI3 and VI6) displayed an excessive inter-item correlation ($r > 0.90$), suggesting redundancy and potential multicollinearity. Finally, one item (EVC5) demonstrated substantial cross-loading across two factors, with a loading difference of only 0.028, compromising discriminant validity.

This rigorous preliminary assessment ensured that the remaining items achieved satisfactory reliability and factorial validity. Accordingly, the nine refined constructs with 36 indicators were subjected to the subsequent PLS-SEM analysis, which is particularly suitable for complex models and tolerant of non-normal data distributions and small to medium sample sizes.

4.3 Measurement model evaluation

The assessment of the measurement properties strictly followed the established criteria for reflective measurement models. The evaluation was conducted in four sequential stages: assessing indicator reliability, examining internal consistency reliability, verifying convergent validity, and determining discriminant validity.

4.3.1 Step 1: indicator reliability assessment

The initial stage focused on assessing indicator reliability. The results confirmed that all outer loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that the indicators shared a substantial proportion of variance with their respective latent constructs. This finding demonstrates that each item effectively explains its corresponding latent variable, thereby confirming that the measurement items are reliable indicators of their intended constructs. These results affirm the scale's ability to reflect the underlying research concepts accurately, establishing a solid foundation for

subsequent reliability and validity assessments in accordance with the recommendations of Joseph F. Hair et al. (2022).

4.3.2 Step 2: internal consistency reliability assessment

The next step evaluated internal consistency reliability (I.C.R.) to ensure that the measurement items consistently represented a single latent construct. The results indicated that all constructs achieved Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha (α) values above 0.70, satisfying the widely accepted psychometric threshold. CR, which accounts for factor loadings, provides a more precise estimate of construct reliability than Cronbach's α. These findings confirm adequate internal consistency reliability, demonstrating that the observed variables within each construct are highly coherent in jointly measuring their corresponding latent concept. Consequently, all measurement scales were retained for further analysis.

4.3.3 Step 3: convergent validity assessment

Convergent validity was assessed to verify the degree to which the indicators of each construct were correlated. The results showed that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all latent constructs were greater than 0.50, meeting the recommended criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Joseph F. Hair et al., 2022). This indicates that more than 50% of the variance in each construct is captured by its respective indicators. Additionally, all outer loadings exceeded 0.70, providing strong evidence that the indicators significantly contribute to their latent variables. Collectively, these results confirm that the constructs possess adequate convergent validity, justifying their inclusion in the structural model analysis.

4.3.4 Step 4: discriminant validity assessment

Finally, discriminant validity was examined using the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations, as recommended by Henseler et al. (2015). Discriminant validity ensures that the constructs are conceptually distinct from one another. The analysis revealed that all HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85,

confirming that the constructs demonstrate clear theoretical differentiation and that measurement overlap or redundancy is not a concern. These results provide strong evidence that the discriminant validity of the measurement model is well established, supporting its suitability for the subsequent structural model evaluation.

In summary, the assessment of the reflective measurement model using PLS-SEM confirmed that all outer loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, demonstrating satisfactory indicator reliability. Both Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) values were above 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency among the measurement items (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2022). Furthermore, all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were greater than 0.50, confirming adequate convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results of the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio test also supported discriminant validity, as all HTMT values were below the conservative cutoff of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). Collectively, these findings provide compelling evidence that the measurement scales exhibit satisfactory reliability and validity, thereby confirming their appropriateness for subsequent structural model analysis.

4.4 Structural model evaluation

Following the recommendations of Joseph F. Hair et al. (2017) and Joseph F. Hair et al. (2022), the structural model was evaluated through a series of sequential steps to ensure its statistical robustness and predictive validity. The assessment involved (1) testing collinearity among constructs, (2) examining the significance and strength of hypothesized relationships, (3) evaluating explanatory power, (4) assessing predictive relevance, and (5) comparing the predictive performance of the proposed PLS model with the LM and IA benchmark models. This comprehensive approach enhances both the methodological rigor and interpretive accuracy of the model evaluation.

4.4.1 Step 1: collinearity assessment

The initial step examined potential collinearity among the predictor constructs. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all independent variables were below 3, well within the acceptable threshold (commonly <3.3 or <5) suggested by Joseph F. Hair et al. (2022). This confirms the absence of multicollinearity issues and indicates that the

estimated path coefficients are stable and reliable. Consequently, the relationships among constructs can be interpreted with confidence.

4.4.2 Step 2: significance and effect size of structural relationships

Next, the hypothesized relationships were assessed for statistical significance and strength. The results revealed that all path coefficients were statistically significant, with $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed test, $t > 1.96$), confirming robust empirical support for all proposed hypotheses (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2022). The standardized path coefficients (β) ranged from 0.164 to 0.590, suggesting moderate to substantial effects across relationships. These findings not only demonstrate statistical significance but also highlight the practical relevance of the structural relationships, thereby reinforcing the model's theoretical soundness.

4.4.3 Step 3: explanatory power of the model

The explanatory capacity of the structural model was evaluated using the Coefficient of Determination (R^2) and effect size (f^2). The R^2 values for the endogenous constructs ranged between 0.307 and 0.482, representing a moderate level of explained variance according to Joseph F. Hair et al. (2017). This indicates that the model accounts for a considerable portion of the variability in the dependent variables.

Meanwhile, the f^2 values ranged from 0.036 to 0.466, corresponding to small (≥0.02), medium (≥0.15), and large (≥0.35) effect sizes. These results demonstrate that the independent constructs exert meaningful contributions to their respective dependent constructs, confirming the model's explanatory adequacy. Collectively, the structural model exhibits satisfactory explanatory strength within the research context.

Table 4

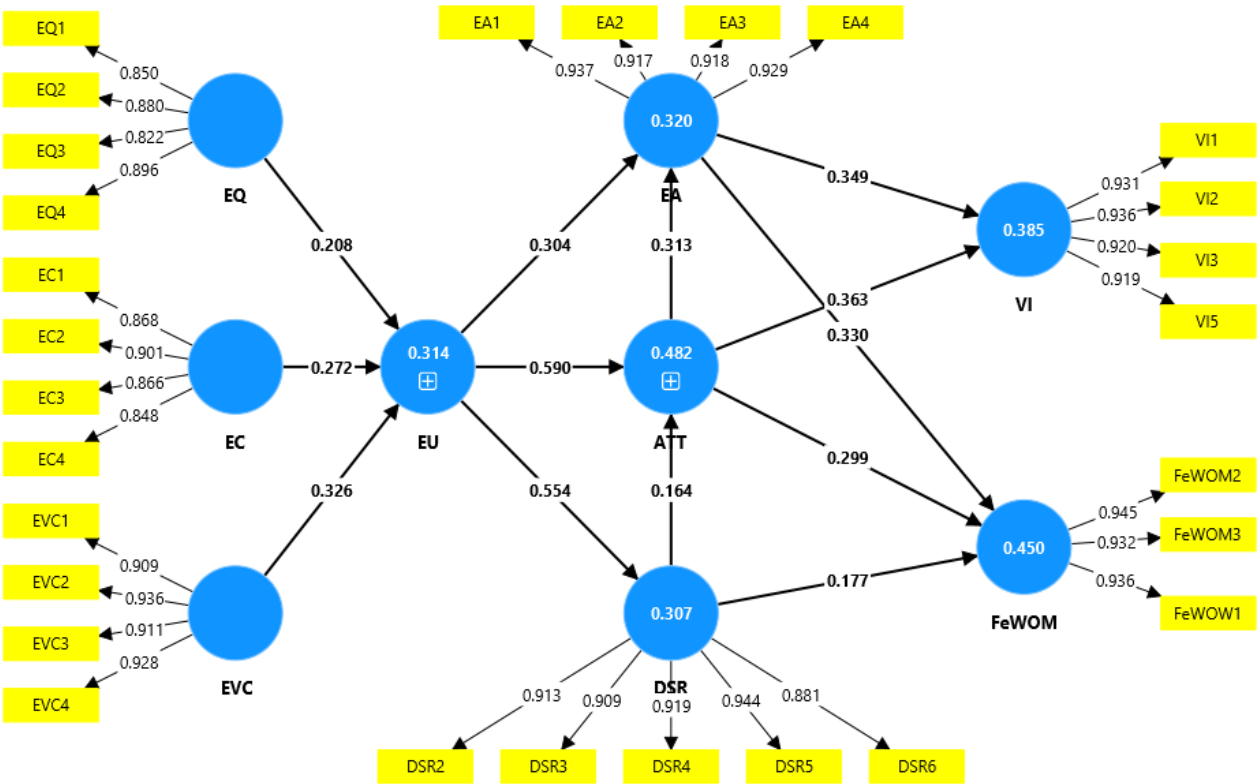
Summary of P value, β, and f^2 results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	f^2	P values	Trạng thái
H1	EQ -> EU	0.208	0.061	0.000	Support
H2	EC -> EU	0.272	0.098	0.000	Support
H3	EVC -> EU	0.326	0.140	0.000	Support
H4	EU -> EA	0.304	0.073	0.000	Support
H5	EU -> ATT	0.590	0.466	0.000	Support
H6	EU -> DSR	0.554	0.444	0.000	Support
H7	DSR -> ATT	0.164	0.036	0.000	Support
H8	ATT -> EA	0.313	0.077	0.000	Support
H9	DSR -> FeWOM	0.177	0.036	0.000	Support
H10	ATT -> FeWOM	0.299	0.110	0.000	Support
H11	ATT -> VI	0.363	0.156	0.000	Support
H12	EA -> FeWOM	0.330	0.119	0.000	Support
H13	EA -> VI	0.349	0.145	0.000	Support

Source: SmartPLS4

Figure 2

Results of PLS-SEM Analysis



Source: SmartPLS4

4.4.4 Step 4: predictive relevance and out-of-sample predictive power

The model's predictive capability was examined through both in-sample and out-of-sample perspectives. The Q^2 values for all endogenous constructs were greater than zero ($Q^2 > 0$), indicating that the model possesses satisfactory in-sample predictive relevance (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2017). This means the model predicts omitted values significantly better than a mere mean-based estimate, affirming its theoretical predictive adequacy.

Furthermore, the Q^2 predict values used to assess out-of-sample predictive power were also greater than zero (Q^2 predict > 0), demonstrating that the model performs effectively when applied to new or unseen data (Chua, 2024; Joseph F. Hair et al., 2022). These findings collectively affirm that the structural model has both statistical and practical predictive validity, meeting the expectations for robust PLS-SEM analysis.

4.4.5 Step 5: comparative evaluation with IA and LM models

To further validate predictive performance, the PLS model was compared with the IA and LM benchmark models. The results indicated that the Average Loss Difference (PLS − IA) was negative for all dependent constructs and for the overall index (Chua, 2024). This means that the PLS model exhibited consistently lower prediction error than the IA model ($p < 0.001$), providing strong statistical evidence for the superior predictive capability of the PLS approach in this context.

However, the comparison with the LM model yielded more nuanced findings. For five dependent constructs (ATT, DRS, EA, FeWOM, VI), the Average Loss Difference was positive, suggesting slightly higher prediction error for the PLS model (PLS loss > LM loss). In contrast, for the EU construct, the difference was negative (−0.004), indicating marginally better predictive accuracy for the PLS model (PLS loss < LM loss). Although the overall difference favored the LM model (0.015), the result was not statistically significant ($p = 0.379 > 0.05$).

This outcome implies that while the PLS model demonstrates strong out-of-sample predictive relevance (Q^2 predict > 0), it does not outperform the LM model in terms of absolute predictive accuracy. Nonetheless, the PLS approach remains appropriate for this study, as it prioritizes variance explanation and theory development

rather than strict prediction objectives that align well with the exploratory and explanatory nature of this research (Chua, 2024).

In sum, the structural model fulfills all essential PLS-SEM evaluation criteria. The absence of multicollinearity, significant and meaningful path relationships, moderate explanatory power, and strong predictive relevance collectively confirm the robustness of the model. Although the LM model achieved marginally better predictive performance, the PLS model remains methodologically and theoretically sound for capturing the complex interrelationships among the constructs under investigation. These findings provide a solid empirical foundation for subsequent hypothesis interpretation and theoretical discussion

4.5 Multi-group analysis (MGA)

The MICOM (Measurement Invariance of Composite Models) procedure confirmed that all latent constructs satisfied the criteria for compositional invariance (Step 2), equality of means (Step 3a), and equality of variances (Step 3b), with non-significant differences across groups (p-values > 0.05). These results provide strong evidence of full measurement invariance, indicating that the measurement scales operate equivalently across gender groups, thereby enabling valid multigroup comparisons (Cheah et al., 2020; Henseler et al., 2016; Joseph F. Hair et al., 2022).

The Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) results revealed statistically significant differences in six hypothesized structural paths between males and females, suggesting that gender functions as a salient moderator within the structural model. The affected relationships include ATT → EA, DSR → ATT, DSR → FeWOM, EQ → EU, EU → ATT, and EVC → EU.

In line with Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998), two distinct mechanisms accounted for these differences: (1) **variations in statistical significance**, where one gender group displayed a non-significant relationship ($p \geq 0.05$) while the other showed significance ($p < 0.05$), and (2) **variations in magnitude**, where both groups exhibited significant paths ($p < 0.05$) but the differences in effect sizes were substantial (Dwyer et al., 2002; Harris & Jenkins, 2006).

For instance, notable discrepancies were observed in ATT → EA ($\Delta\beta = 0.269$), EU → ATT ($\Delta\beta = -0.226$), and EVC → EU ($\Delta\beta = 0.166$), illustrating gender-based

disparities in path strength. These results are consistent with prior research highlighting gender-based distinctions in cognitive and emotional processing—females tend to be more risk-averse and communally oriented, while males exhibit greater agentic orientation (Meyers-Levy & Loken, 2015). Collectively, these findings underscore that gender acts as a pivotal boundary condition shaping the psychological and ethical mechanisms underlying eWOM engagement and Digital Social Responsibility (DSR) perceptions.

The MICOM results confirmed full measurement invariance across gender groups, ensuring that the constructs were measured equivalently. The subsequent MGA revealed significant gender-based differences in six structural paths, demonstrating that gender serves as a key moderating factor within the proposed model.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Theoretical implications

This study yields several important theoretical implications that collectively advance the understanding of consumer behavior in the context of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) and digital responsibility. By introducing the novel construct of Digital Social Responsibility (DSR), validating its measurement, and integrating it within an extended Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, the research enriches existing theory and clarifies several conceptual relationships that have remained fragmented in prior literature.

5.1.1 Addressing a research gap through the introduction of Digital Social Responsibility (DSR)

This study makes a substantial theoretical contribution by addressing the limited attention given to ethical behavior and social responsibility within digital communication environments. The research introduces **Digital Social Responsibility (DSR)** as a new construct that captures consumers' ethical perceptions and socially responsible engagement on digital platforms. While Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication has been widely discussed, incorporating its digital counterpart (DSR)

directly into the eWOM framework represents a distinct conceptual advancement. The validated structural model demonstrates that perceived DSR exerts significant positive effects on both consumer attitude (ATT) ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$) and eWOM ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$). These results empirically establish DSR as a meaningful antecedent in shaping online consumer behavior, offering a new theoretical perspective on how digital responsibility influences user attitudes and communicative actions in social media contexts.

5.1.2 Developing and validating a measurement scale for the DSR construct

A second theoretical contribution lies in the successful development and validation of a measurement scale for the DSR construct. The assessment of the measurement model confirmed that the DSR scale possesses strong psychometric properties, demonstrating acceptable internal consistency (Composite Reliability = 0.842) and convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted (AVE) = 0.695). The establishment of this measurement tool provides a reliable foundation for future studies examining DSR and its effects on key behavioral outcomes such as consumer attitude, purchase intention, and eWOM. The confirmed reliability and validity of the DSR scale also strengthen the methodological basis for exploring ethical dimensions of digital consumer behavior in subsequent research.

5.1.3 Extending the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework

This study extends the classical Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) theoretical model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) by conceptualizing Individual Digital Social Responsibility (DSR) as the Organism (O), representing individuals' internalized ethical cognition and moral awareness toward the online community. Within this extended framework, DSR serves as an organismic state shaped by various digital stimuli, which in turn drives prosocial behavioral responses. The findings reveal that DSR exerts a direct positive effect on Forwarding Electronic Word-of-Mouth (FeWOM) and an indirect effect on Visit Intention (VI). This indicates that individuals with higher levels of digital social responsibility are more inclined to actively share responsible online content, thereby amplifying positive eWOM and ultimately fostering destination visit

intentions. By positioning DSR as a central organismic construct, this study enhances the explanatory capacity of the S–O–R paradigm, underscoring the pivotal role of personal digital ethics in promoting prosocial communication and behavioral engagement within the digital environment.

5.1.4 Reinforcing the relationship between adoption/acceptance and forwarding eWOM (FeWOM)

This study provides robust empirical evidence reinforcing the causal linkage between eWOM Acceptance (EA) and Forwarding eWOM (FeWOM), thereby clarifying an important behavioral mechanism in digital communication. The findings confirm that individuals who cognitively and affectively accept electronic word-of-mouth information are significantly more likely to engage in active forwarding behaviors. This result offers a clear contrast to the nonsignificant outcomes reported by Abedi et al. (2020), while aligning with the statistically significant relationship identified by Mahapatra and Mishra (2017). The structural model further substantiates this linkage, as evidenced by highly significant path coefficient (is 0.330 hypothesized relationship) (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2017; Joseph F. Hair et al., 2022). By demonstrating that acceptance is a critical antecedent of eWOM forwarding behavior, this study resolves prior empirical inconsistencies and strengthens theoretical understanding of how cognitive acceptance evolves into proactive information dissemination within digital environments.

In summary, this research offers integrated theoretical advancements to the eWOM literature. First, it conceptualizes DSR as an individual's *ethical and socially responsible cognition* that shapes attitudes and behaviors in online environments. Second, it establishes a reliable and valid scale for assessing DSR, enabling further empirical examination of this construct. Third, it extends the S-O-R theoretical model by embedding ethical stimuli and demonstrating their mediating processes through consumer attitudes. Finally, it reinforces the behavioral pathway linking acceptance and forwarding intentions, helping to unify fragmented evidence within eWOM research. Collectively, these contributions enrich theoretical discourse and provide a comprehensive foundation for future studies investigating the intersection of digital responsibility, consumer cognition, and online word-of-mouth behavior.

5.2 Practical implications

The empirical validation of Digital Social Responsibility (DSR) as a direct and mediated antecedent of positive consumer attitude (ATT) and Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM), specifically the intention to share or Forwarding eWOM Information (FeWOM), provides several important insights for business practitioners, managers, and policymakers operating in digital environments. These implications translate the study's findings into strategic, managerial, and regulatory actions that enhance digital engagement and promote responsible communication behaviors.

5.2.1 Strategic integration of Digital Social Responsibility (DSR)

The findings highlight the strategic importance of implementing and communicating Digital Social Responsibility initiatives. This is particularly crucial because DSR influences consumer attitudes (ATT), which in turn mediate behavioral responses such as eWOM and FeWOM, consistent with the S-O-R framework discussed in the Theoretical Contributions section.

DSR as an eWOM Catalyst: Businesses should integrate DSR efforts into their overall digital marketing strategies. The field of social media marketing has established that digital platforms represent a "new hybrid element of the promotion mix" (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Therefore, DSR initiatives, when effectively leveraged through these platforms, can stimulate consumer engagement and generate positive word-of-mouth communication. This process supports the creation of a positive brand identity, as FeWOM reinforces the firm's image and strengthens the predictive pathway toward sharing intentions.

Leveraging Data for Strategic Focus: Management should employ advanced analytical tools, such as those used in this study (PLS-SEM), to continuously assess the impact (R^2, f^2) of DSR campaigns on key variables like consumer attitude and sharing intention. A clear understanding of these pathways enables the optimization of resource allocation toward the most influential digital platforms and message strategies.

5.2.2 Management of eWOM sharing and forwarding behavior (FeWOM)

The exponential reach of Forwarding eWOM Information (FeWOM) demands specific managerial attention through both promotion and prevention strategies.

Proactive Monitoring and Crisis Management: Negative experiences can have disproportionately cascading effects, often described as the "broken window theory" in related marketing and consumer behavior contexts. Managers should therefore establish structured protocols for social media monitoring and rapid response to negative eWOM. Negative online reviews require careful examination (Sen & Lerman, 2007). Effective containment and recovery actions, such as “webcare interventions” are critical to mitigate brand damage and rebuild trust (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012).

Encouraging Positive Dissemination: Firms should also focus on fostering positive eWOM by nurturing relationships with influential consumers, or "market mavens". Providing these key individuals with meaningful, engaging content can encourage them to express themselves online (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) and share information further (Phelps et al., 2004). Such actions accelerate the FeWOM process and amplify favorable brand advocacy across digital networks.

5.2.3 Policy and ethical guidelines

Given the strong influence of DSR and eWOM on consumer behavior, policymakers must establish clear ethical and regulatory frameworks to ensure transparency, trust, and fairness within digital marketplaces.

Regulating Incentivized eWOM: Rewarding consumers for posting or forwarding eWOM introduces ethical complexities that can reduce content credibility. Policymakers should therefore enforce strict transparency rules to ensure that audiences are aware of senders’ motivations (Verlegh et al., 2013). Regulatory action should address the use of financial or material incentives to uphold ethical standards in digital communication.

Protecting Vulnerable Populations: The strong persuasive power of digital communication makes certain groups, such as youth and emerging adults, particularly vulnerable to influence. Attitudes and subsequent behaviors (such as purchasing or sharing) are highly susceptible to persuasive cues (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Policymakers must ensure that these groups are not subjected to manipulative practices

exploiting their "need for cognition" or social pressures in online environments (Wilcox & Stephen, 2013).

Collectively, these implications bridge the study's theoretical insights with actionable strategies for organizations and policymakers. By embedding DSR initiatives into digital marketing practices, managing eWOM and FeWOM effectively, and reinforcing ethical standards through policy, stakeholders can build more transparent and responsible digital ecosystems. The findings thus provide a comprehensive roadmap for transforming ethical digital responsibility into sustainable consumer engagement and positive online advocacy.

6 CONCLUSION

This study advances the understanding of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) behavior by empirically validating the structural relationships within the proposed model, emphasizing the pivotal role of Digital Social Responsibility (DSR) in shaping consumer responses in digital environments. The results provide both rigorous theoretical validation and actionable managerial insights for effective brand communication in the digital era.

6.1 Summary of key findings

The structural model assessment confirmed that the proposed model is statistically robust and reliable. No multicollinearity was detected, as all VIF values were below 3 (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2022). All thirteen hypothesized relationships were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), with standardized path coefficients ranging from 0.164 to 0.590, reflecting substantial effects (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2022). The model demonstrated moderate explanatory power, as indicated by R^2 values between 0.307 and 0.482, and effect sizes (f^2) ranging from 0.036 to 0.466 (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2017). Predictive assessment revealed strong theoretical and practical predictive relevance, with both Q^2 and Q^2 *predict* values greater than zero, confirming in-sample and out-of-sample predictive validity (Chua, 2024; Joseph F. Hair et al., 2017; Joseph F. Hair et al., 2022)

Specifically, DSR exerted a significant positive influence on consumer attitude (ATT) ($\beta = 0.408$, $p < 0.001$) and eWOM ($\beta = 0.238$, $p < 0.001$). Mediation analysis further confirmed that ATT partially mediates the relationship between DSR and eWOM,

and fully mediates the relationship between DSR and purchase intention (PI). In addition, the PLS model exhibited statistically superior predictive power compared to the IA model (PLS_loss < IA_loss, $p < 0.001$) (Chua, 2024), affirming its robustness and suitability for modeling digital communication phenomena.

The results confirmed full measurement invariance across gender groups, ensuring that all constructs were assessed equivalently. However, the MGA results identified significant gender-based differences in six structural paths (ATT → EA, DSR → ATT, DSR → FeWOM, EQ → EU, EU → ATT, and EVC → EU), indicating that gender acts as a meaningful moderator within the proposed model. These findings highlight the robustness of the measurement model and underscore the moderating role of gender in shaping eWOM engagement and Digital Social Responsibility (DSR) perceptions.

6.2 Theoretical and practical contributions

From a theoretical perspective, this research makes four key contributions. First, it addresses a clear gap in the eWOM literature by introducing and empirically validating Digital Social Responsibility (DSR) as a novel construct that captures ethical and responsible consumer engagement in digital contexts. Second, it develops and validates a reliable and psychometrically sound measurement scale for the DSR construct. Third, it significantly extends the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework by positioning DSR as an organism (O) factor—reflecting individuals' ethical cognition and socially responsible awareness—that mediates the influence of external stimuli on behavioral responses (R) such as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and visit intention (VI). Finally, the study reinforces the conceptual link between adoption or acceptance constructs (EA) and subsequent sharing behavior (FeWOM), providing clarity on relationships that previous research had found inconclusive.

From a practical standpoint, the findings emphasize that DSR should be viewed not as a cost but as a strategic tool for cultivating positive brand identity and stimulating eWOM and FeWOM, especially within social media contexts. The validated influence of DSR demonstrates that it can serve as an effective marketing initiative requiring relatively low investment in resources while yielding meaningful engagement outcomes. Furthermore, as digital information dissemination accelerates, policymakers are urged to

establish ethical and transparent guidelines for incentivized eWOM to preserve consumer trust and ensure fair marketplace practices.

6.3 Directions for future research

While this study provides substantial theoretical and empirical contributions, several directions for future inquiry remain open.

Scale re-validation and construct extension: Future studies should re-validate the DSR measurement scale across different industries and cultural contexts to confirm its generalizability. Researchers are also encouraged to examine other dependent constructs potentially influenced by DSR, such as customer loyalty, brand equity, and brand image to capture the broader consequences of ethical digital responsibility.

Contextual expansion: Because the present research focused on a specific platform and context (social media within a particular country), future work should test the framework across diverse cultural settings. Comparative analyses between hedonic and utilitarian product categories could further enrich the model's explanatory range.

Methodological advancement: To enhance causal inference, future studies should employ longitudinal or experimental designs rather than relying solely on cross-sectional data. Incorporating a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative evidence may also offer a more comprehensive understanding of how consumers process ethical cues in digital communication environments.

Collectively, these directions will strengthen the external validity, theoretical precision, and methodological rigor of DSR-related research in the field of digital consumer behavior.

In conclusion, this research establishes Digital Social Responsibility (DSR) as a foundational antecedent in explaining consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions within eWOM contexts. By introducing and validating this construct, extending the S-O-R framework, and demonstrating its predictive relevance, the study provides a robust theoretical and empirical foundation for future investigations into ethical digital engagement. Beyond its scholarly significance, the findings offer a roadmap for organizations and policymakers to foster transparent, responsible, and sustainable interactions in the digital ecosystem.

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APPENDIX

Table 5

Measurement Scale

Construct	Measurement Items
eWOM Information Quality (EQ)	I believe that sufficient information is provided to support the opinion. The information provided appears to be objective. The information seems understandable to me. The information is clear to me.
eWOM Source Credibility (EC)	The information presented here is persuasive to me. In my opinion, the information is influential. The information appears to be reliable. I believe that the information is accurate.
eWOM Usefulness (EU)	I find the information on social media useful for my decision to visit. The information on social media is valuable to me. The information on social media helps me resolve doubts when planning a trip. The information on social media helps me organize my trip more effectively.
Attitude toward eWOM (ATT)	I have a positive opinion of the advice or information obtained from social media. I think following the advice or information obtained from social media would be beneficial to me. My attitude toward the advice or information obtained from social media is favorable. I like the advice or information obtained from social media.
eWOM Adoption (EA)	My knowledge about destinations has improved due to the information provided on social media. I have been able to make better decisions after reviewing information on social media. I have been able to make better decisions when visiting destinations. I have been inspired by social media information to decide to visit destinations.
Forwarding eWOM (FeWOM)	I tend to share destination-related information or opinions with my friends on social media when I find them useful. I am likely to share helpful comments about destinations across different social media groups I belong to. When I receive valuable destination-related information from a friend, I share it with others in my social media communities. I am likely to share interesting destination information from one group to another on social media.
Visit Intention (VI)	I intend to visit the destination in the future. I would rather visit this destination than any other. If things go as I expect, I will plan to visit the destination. I will allocate time for the purpose of visiting the destination. I plan to visit the destination with my friends or family in the future. I will schedule my vacation to allow me to visit the destination.
eWOM Visual Cues (EVC)	Tourists' visual content (images or videos) provides me with a realistic view of the destination. Tourists' visual content (images or videos) helps me better understand the destination. Tourists' visual content (images or videos) provides useful information about the destination. Tourists' visual content (images or videos) increases my interest in the destination. Authentic visual content (videos or images) shared by tourists appears more trustworthy.
	I always share opinions or reviews that benefit others in the online community.

	I am aware of the need to protect a healthy online community through positive online behaviors.
Individual Digital Social Responsibility (DSR)	I am aware of the importance of engaging in ethical activities in the online environment.
	I always act in accordance with legal regulations when engaging in online activities.
	I encourage others to share valuable information on social media.
	I support opinions or reviews that bring benefits to the online community.

Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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