

KE XU

**EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF ONLINE REPUTATION ON
ZIBO'S COMPETITIVENESS IN CHINA**



UNIVERSIDADE DO ALGARVE
FACULDADE DE ECONOMIA

2024

KE XU

**EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF ONLINE REPUTATION ON
ZIBO'S COMPETITIVENESS IN CHINA**

Masters in Tourism Organization Management

Dissertation made under the supervision of:
Professora Doutora Célia Ramos
Professora Doutora Dora Agapito



UNIVERSIDADE DO ALGARVE

FACULDADE DE ECONOMIA

2024

AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

Exploring the Impact of Online Reputation on Zibo's Competitiveness in China

I declare to be the author of this work, which is unique and unprecedented. Authors and works consulted are properly cited in the text and are included in the listing of references.

(Ke Xu)

.....

COPYRIGHT

© Copyright: (Ke Xu).

The University of Algarve reserves the right, in accordance with the provisions of the Portuguese Copyright and Related Rights Code, to archive, reproduce and make public this work, regardless of means used, as well as to broadcast it through scientific repositories and allow its copy and distribution with merely educational or research purposes and noncommercial purposes, provided that credit is given to the respective author and Publisher.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the impact of social media on the popularity of travel destinations, with a particular focus on the case study of Zibo, China. The research employs the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model to examine the influence of online reviews and user-generated content on tourist perceptions and behaviours. The findings indicate that Zibo's recent increase in popularity can be attributed to its comprehensive online presence, characterised by highly positive reviews and engaging content that resonates with potential visitors. The study demonstrates the efficacy of strategic online reputation management in enhancing destination appeal and highlights the pivotal role of social media as a marketing tool for destinations. By identifying the key factors contributing to Zibo's success, including its culinary appeal and vibrant social media narratives, this research provides valuable insights for tourism professionals aiming to leverage digital platforms to boost competitiveness and attract more visitors. The conclusions offer strategic recommendations for enhancing the online visibility and appeal of tourism destinations in the increasingly digital travel market.

Keywords: Social Media Impact, Tourist Perceptions, Destination Marketing, Online Reviews, User-Generated Content, Zibo Tourism.

RESUMO

Esta dissertação investiga o impacto das redes sociais na popularidade dos destinos turísticos, com um estudo de caso focado em Zibo, na China. A pesquisa utiliza o modelo Estímulo-Organismo-Resposta (S-O-R) para explorar como o conteúdo gerado por utilizadores (User-Generated Content - UGC) e as avaliações online influenciam as percepções e comportamentos dos turistas. A popularidade de Zibo recentemente aumentou, em grande parte devido à sua presença digital mais abrangente. O estudo demonstra que o apelo deste destino turístico é fortemente moldado por avaliações positivas e um conteúdo envolvente, fatores que ressoam com os potenciais visitantes e reforçam a competitividade de Zibo no mercado turístico global.

Uma parte fundamental do sucesso de Zibo pode ser atribuída à gestão estratégica da sua reputação online, que tem se mostrado eficaz na amplificação do apelo da cidade como destino turístico. Este trabalho destaca o papel crucial das redes sociais como uma ferramenta de marketing poderoso para os destinos turísticos. Num mercado global cada vez mais digital, as redes sociais são centrais para a disseminação de informações e a criação de uma imagem positiva do destino, permitindo que cidades como Zibo capturem a atenção de uma audiência ampla e diversa. As conclusões deste estudo sublinham a importância de estratégias digitais bem executadas para aumentar a visibilidade de destinos turísticos, atrair novos visitantes e fortalecer a competitividade no setor de turismo.

O estudo identificou diversos fatores que contribuem para o sucesso de Zibo como destino turístico, sendo os principais: o apelo culinário da cidade, suas tradições culturais únicas e a forma como essas características são retratadas nas redes sociais. A gastronomia, em particular, desempenha um papel essencial na construção da imagem de Zibo, especialmente com o crescente destaque da cultura do churrasco de Zibo BBQ (Zibo Barbecue) nas plataformas de *social media*. A viralidade do conteúdo relacionado

ao Zibo BBQ em redes como TikTok e Weibo tem atraído a atenção de um público jovem, especialmente estudantes universitários, transformando a cidade em um destino de moda.

O modelo S-O-R utilizado nesta pesquisa oferece uma estrutura analítica eficaz para entender o impacto das redes sociais nas percepções e decisões dos turistas. De acordo com este modelo, o conteúdo nas redes sociais atua como um estímulo (S), influenciando o organismo (O) – que, neste caso, são as percepções e emoções dos turistas – e levando a uma resposta (R), que são os comportamentos resultantes, como a escolha de visitar Zibo. Este modelo permite uma análise estruturada de como as avaliações e os conteúdos online afetam os potenciais turistas, facilitando a formulação de estratégias de marketing digital mais eficazes.

O conteúdo gerado por usuários (UGC) nas redes sociais é um dos fatores mais influentes no processo de tomada de decisão dos turistas. As avaliações autênticas de outros viajantes, particularmente em plataformas de *social media*, são percebidas como mais confiáveis do que campanhas de marketing tradicionais. Como resultado, destinos turísticos que conseguem gerar uma quantidade significativa de avaliações positivas e histórias autênticas têm uma vantagem competitiva no mercado. Zibo soube capitalizar essa tendência, com muitos turistas compartilhando suas experiências positivas nas redes sociais, o que, por sua vez, aumentou o apelo do destino para novos visitantes.

Outro fator crítico identificado nesta pesquisa é o papel da confiança e da credibilidade nas avaliações online. Os turistas tendem a confiar mais nas avaliações que parecem autênticas e imparciais. Neste sentido, a credibilidade das plataformas de *social media* onde as avaliações são postadas também desempenha um papel importante. Por exemplo, a confiança nas avaliações presentes em plataformas como TripAdvisor, Weibo e TikTok é maior em comparação com sites menos conhecidos. Este aspecto sublinha a importância de manter a integridade das avaliações online e assegurar que os turistas possam confiar nas informações que estão recebendo.

A viralidade é outro fenômeno explorado neste estudo. O caso de Zibo exemplifica como o conteúdo viral pode impulsionar rapidamente a popularidade de um destino turístico. O sucesso do Zibo BBQ nas redes sociais gerou uma explosão de interesse na cidade, especialmente entre o público jovem. Isso mostra como um único aspecto da oferta turística de uma cidade, quando bem promovido, pode ter um impacto substancial na sua atratividade geral. A viralidade, no entanto, é um fenômeno volátil e exige uma gestão cuidadosa para ser sustentada a longo prazo.

Em termos de implicações práticas, este estudo oferece uma série de recomendações estratégicas para gestores de destinos turísticos. Primeiramente, destaca-se a importância de desenvolver uma forte presença digital, assegurando que os aspectos mais atraentes do destino sejam visíveis e acessíveis nas redes sociais. Isso inclui o uso estratégico de influenciadores digitais e campanhas de marketing que incentivem os turistas a compartilhar suas experiências online. Além disso, recomenda-se que os gestores de turismo invistam em programas de fidelidade e promoções que incentivem avaliações positivas, uma vez que essas avaliações desempenham um papel crucial na formação da imagem do destino.

Outra recomendação importante é a necessidade de manter a autenticidade e a qualidade nas comunicações digitais. A manipulação de avaliações ou a promoção excessiva pode resultar em perda de credibilidade, o que pode ter um impacto negativo no apelo do destino. Em vez disso, os destinos devem focar-se em encorajar a geração de conteúdo autêntico e genuíno, garantindo que as experiências compartilhadas pelos turistas reflitam a realidade.

Do ponto de vista acadêmico, esta pesquisa também abre caminho para futuros estudos sobre o impacto das redes sociais no turismo. Uma área de investigação promissora seria a análise de como diferentes demografias respondem a diferentes tipos de conteúdo em redes sociais. Por exemplo, uma comparação entre como turistas mais jovens e mais velhos reagem a campanhas de marketing nas redes sociais poderia

fornecer insights valiosos para a segmentação de mercado. Além disso, o estudo do impacto de crises de reputação online – como críticas negativas ou escândalos nas redes sociais – também seria uma área frutífera de pesquisa, particularmente em relação às estratégias de gerenciamento de crises em turismo.

Por fim, este estudo conclui que as redes sociais desempenham um papel essencial na construção da reputação e popularidade de destinos turísticos. A capacidade de Zibo de alavancar sua presença online, através de avaliações positivas e conteúdo autêntico, serve como um exemplo valioso para outros destinos turísticos que buscam aumentar sua visibilidade e atratividade no mercado global. Ao continuar a investir em uma estratégia digital robusta e autêntica, destinos como Zibo poderão não apenas aumentar o número de visitantes, mas também criar uma base de turistas leais e recorrentes.

Keywords: Impacto das Mídias Sociais, Percepções dos Turistas, Marketing de Destino, Avaliações Online, Conteúdo Gerado pelo Usuário, Turismo de Zibo.

General Index

ABSTRACT	iv
RESUMO	v
General Index	ix
Index of Figures	x
Index of Tables	xi
Abreviation List	xii
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Context and Importance of the Study	1
1.2. Objectives of the study	2
1.3. Summary of the chapters	3
2. Literature Review	5
2.1. Competitiveness of destinations and the importance of social networks 5	
2.2. Zibo's Online Reputation Model	8
3. Methodology	12
3.1. Research Context	12
3.2. Instrument	13
3.3. Population and Sample	15
3.4. Data collection process	16
3.5. Data Analysis	17
3.6. Ethical considerations	17
4. Data Analysis	18
4.1. Characterization of the Sample	18
4.2. Structural Equation Modeling	20
5. Discussion	28
6. Conclusions	32
Bibliography	34

Index of Figures

<i>Figure 2.1 - Zibo Research Conceptual Model.</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Figure 3.1 - Map of Shandong China.</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Figure 4.1 - Social Media Preference.....</i>	<i>19</i>

Index of Tables

<i>Table 3.1 - A survey on the relationship between travelers' perceptions of destinations and E-WOM.</i>	13
<i>Table 3.2 - Technical Datasheet.</i>	16
<i>Table 4.1 - Overview of respondents' demographics.</i>	18
<i>Table 4.2 - Assessment of Model Adjustment Measures.</i>	21
<i>Table 4.3 - Construct Reliability and Validity.</i>	22
<i>Table 4.4 - Discriminant Validity-Fornell-Larcker Criterion.</i>	22
<i>Table 4.5 - Discriminant Validity - Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio.</i>	23
<i>Table 4.6 - Structural Model Evaluation Tests.</i>	24
<i>Table 4.7 - Significance of correlations and regressions of the model.</i>	25
<i>Table 4.8 - Results of the F² (Cohen indicator): used to assess the effect of the construct on model adjustment.</i>	26
<i>Table 4.9 - Results of the R².</i>	27

Abreviation List

AVE - Average Variance Extracted

BBQ – Barbecue

CE - Consumer Engagement

CEN - Consumer Engagement

CI - Consumer Involvement

CIN - Consumer Involvement

CNNIC - China Internet Network Information Center

CR - Composite Reliability

CRE - Credibility

ENT - Entertainment

eWOM - Electronic Word of Mouth

IM - Image

IN - Informativeness

INC - Incentives

IRR - Irritation

MCT - Ministry of Culture and Tourism (China)

PE - Personalization

PER - Personalization

PLS - Partial Least Squares

R² - Coefficient of Determination

SM - Social Media

SMI - Social Media Image

S-O-R - Stimulus-Organism-Response

SPSS - Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

UNWTO - United Nations World Tourism Organization

ZBI - Zibo Brand Image

1. Introduction

1.1. Context and Importance of the Study

A reliance on traditional advertising mediums like television, radio, and print marked the fledgling years of the travel industry. With the rise of social media, the paradigm has shifted, enabling tourists to broadcast and evaluate their travel encounters on a global scale (Oliveira et al., 2020). The influx of such user-generated content has significantly altered the course of travel planning, converting once concrete destinations into ephemeral digital entities within the vast online expanse (Narangajavana et al., 2017). The craft of shaping these digital portrayals, however, is intricate, as online reviews have become critical in steering the promotional success and reputation of travel destinations, subsequently drawing travelers in search of genuine experiences.

Online reputation, reflecting true traveler stories and adventures, acts as a magnet, pulling visitors toward top-tier destinations. Stellar reviews shine as indicators of exceptional service and unforgettable experiences, fostering trust among travelers and guiding their destination choices (de Rojas & Camarero, 2008). The dynamic of word-of-mouth now spreads swiftly across social media, further enhancing these places' appeal and rapid ascent in popularity.

Zibo, a city in China's Shandong province renowned for its rich cultural history and distinctive barbecue cuisine, garnered significant national attention in March 2023 (Liu, 2023). Buzzworthy content like "College students convene for a barbecue in Zibo" went viral on platforms such as Weibo and TIKTOK (Ng & Wang, 2023), capturing the national collegiate imagination and spotlighting Zibo as a viral destination. This study

aims to dissect and analyze the various elements contributing to Zibo's burgeoning online stature, examining their complex webs of influence. It intends to address pressing debates and devise actionable strategies to bolster Zibo's digital influence, enhancing its market appeal and drawing more significant tourist numbers. This academic investigation aims to provide the tourism sector with critical insights into online reputation management, presenting an in-depth case study that furthers scholarly dialogue and the practical tactics of destination marketing.

Furthermore, this inquiry will incorporate the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model (Abbasi et al., 2023) to decipher the effects of online reviews as stimuli affecting tourist perceptions and subsequent behaviors towards Zibo as a travel destination. This model will facilitate a systematic exploration of Zibo's online reputation and its consequential impact on traveler engagement, paving the way for informed strategic initiatives in destination management.

1.2. Objectives of the study

In light of the noteworthy expansion of Zibo as a tourist destination in China, the present study concentrates on the principal elements that contribute to Zibo's success in the tourism sector. These include Zibo's exemplary online reputation and reviews, as well as its distinctive gastronomic appeal.

Taking into account the above, it is necessary to carry out an analysis of the reputation and review ratings of Zibo on the internet, with particular attention paid to the characteristics and highlights that receive positive evaluations from tourists. Therefore, the objectives of the present investigation are:

1. Analyze what influences Zibo's Online Reputation.

2. Determine the influencers of Zibo's tourism popularity on social media.
3. Determine the influence of comments made on social media on consumer engagement and consumer involvement.
4. Determine the influence of eWOM on the Zibo brand Image and consequently on its online reputation

1.3. Summary of the chapters

The dissertation comprises six chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Results, Discussion and Conclusions.

Chapter 1 – Introduction contextualizes the topic and introduces the study's context and objectives.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review delves into the competitiveness of travel destinations, emphasising the critical role of social networks in shaping public perception and destination choice. It reviews theoretical frameworks like the S-O-R model that link social media content features to consumer behavior, providing a foundation for analyzing Zibo's online reputation.

Chapter 3 – Methodology outlines the research context, instruments, and methods for gathering and analysing data. It explains how various constructs—entertainment, informativeness, credibility, and others—are measured using a Likert scale to assess their impact on tourists' perceptions and engagement with Zibo. This section also describes the procedures for collecting and analyzing data to validate the research hypotheses formulated from the literature review.

Chapter 4 – Results present the findings from the data analysis, highlighting how different factors of social media influence tourists' perceptions and contribute to the online reputation of Zibo.

Chapter 5 – Discussion presents the implications of the findings, comparing them with existing literature and exploring their significance in destination marketing and online reputation management.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions summarizes the key insights from the research, emphasizing how the study contributes to academic knowledge and practical applications in tourism marketing. It also suggests directions for future research.

This structured summary provides a clear roadmap of the dissertation, detailing each chapter's focus and how they contribute to understanding the impact of online reputation on destination competitiveness, specifically through the case study of Zibo.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Competitiveness of destinations and the importance of social networks

As we navigate through the modern era, where information traverses borders with unprecedented ease, network media—born from the synergy of computer and internet innovations—has taken center stage with its rapid propagation and expansive reach, offering novel pathways for the exchange of ideas (IAB/PwC, 2014). Tourism, reflecting societal shifts, has emerged as a leading avenue for leisure, capturing a significant share of global interest. The ascension of network media has been instrumental in forging a robust infrastructure for the tourism sector, championing the spread of information and fostering global connectivity (Christodoulides, 2009; Ivar-Baidal et., 2024; Simmons, 2008).

The allure of a destination, a cornerstone of its competitiveness, is a multifaceted construct that influences a traveler's choice—it encompasses not only the destination's profitability and capacity to attract visitors but also its potential to deliver fulfilling experiences that reverberate through time and contribute to local prosperity (Cronjé & du Plessis, 2020; Ritchie & Crouch, 1993).

Social networks stand at the forefront of this information revolution, playing a pivotal role in enhancing the visibility of destinations (Pavon-Jordan, 2019). The power of social media to disseminate personal travel narratives, complete with vivid photographs and candid reviews, has an unparalleled global reach, swaying the travel plans of prospective adventurers. A destination's popularity is further bolstered by its positive endorsements across these digital platforms (Hlee et al., 2016). As reported by the 52nd China Internet Development Status Report by China Internet Network Information

Center (CNNIC, 2023), the exponential growth in China's social media user base is a testament to this trend. Platforms that host such rich exchanges, ranging from social networking sites to microblogs and short video apps, have become the virtual town squares of our time. They are where public opinion is shaped and where the cultural zeitgeist is captured. The domestic travel statistics of 2023, as released by China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MCT), and the global tourism insights from the World Tourism Organization's Barometer for the same year affirm the burgeoning role of online interactions in shaping the travel industry (UNWTO, 2023; MCT, 2023).

The influence of Internet platforms on disseminating tourism knowledge cannot be overstated. They align with the evolving lifestyle choices and consumption patterns that prioritize quality of life and increasingly emphasize travel as a preferred leisure activity. In this dynamic environment, network media remains vital in communicating tourism offerings to a worldwide audience (Akrimi & Khemakhem, 2012; Liu et al., 2023; Roziqin et al., 2023).

Local tourism development hinges on destination competitiveness — a concept of significant import shaped by the recognition and esteem travelers hold for their experiences at a destination. It is through these experiences that we can distill traveler needs and expectations, ultimately leading to enhanced service quality and heightened satisfaction (Oriade & Schofield, 2019). As the tourism sector globalizes, the competition becomes fiercer, with destinations jockeying for attention through their online profiles and culinary delights to attract a more significant influx of visitors (Martin et al., 2021). This study contributes to this arena, providing stakeholders with fresh insights to refine service quality and boost the appeal of their destinations (Ahn & Bessiere, 2023; Perles-Ribes et al., 2019).

Online reputations destinations

As the globalization of the travel industry becomes increasingly competitive, different destinations compete with each other on online reputation and gastronomic appeal to attract more tourists (Martin et al., 2021). Stakeholders can define new strategies from the results that tourists recognize and respect the tourism experience, and further optimize service quality and enhance tourism attraction (Perles-Ribes et al., 2019).

As a tourist destination, Zibo's successful experience can be a reference for similar destinations. Zibo's destination competitiveness is of great significance to local tourism development. The popularity of Zibo's unique culinary offerings, specifically Zibo BBQ, illustrates how local attractions can significantly enhance a destination's appeal (Li et al., 2024). Detailed research on tourists' recognition and respect for the Zibo tourism experience highlights how understanding tourist needs and expectations is essential for improving service quality and increasing tourist satisfaction. Such targeted improvements are key to sustaining tourism growth and ensuring competitive advantage (Li et al., 2024).

Additionally, the significant sway of social media over travelers' perceptions and the competitiveness of destinations has been highlighted by scholars such as Leung et al. (2013) and Si and Leou, (2024). In the context of Zibo, understanding and engaging with the digital dialogue of tourists across various platforms is crucial. Innovative decision support frameworks like that suggested by Nave et al. (2018) could be transformative if implemented in Zibo, enabling swift identification of areas for improvement and prompt redressal of grievances. As shown in Philander and Zhong's (2016) research, the viability of sentiment analysis can provide valuable insights into public sentiment towards tourism spots. When applied to assess Zibo's attractions, such an approach could offer rich analytical dividends. Perles-Ribes et al. (2019) and the methods developed by Ramos et al. (2017) reinforce the significance of online reputation in determining a destination's competitiveness.

Understanding the key drivers of Zibo's reputation can catalyze the advancement of its tourism sector and foster sustainable development, which aligns with Inversini's (2020) insights into the critical role of tourism reputation. Amidst the benefits, however, debates around the authenticity and credibility of online reviews persist, as the potential for misleading reviews poses a risk to a destination's image (Banerjee & Chua, 2017; Banerjee, 2022). This study aims to address these concerns, elucidating the influence of online reputation and assisting Zibo's tourism stakeholders in informed decision-making to enhance the area's image and tourist draw. This will, in turn, feed into the destination's sustainable growth and development.

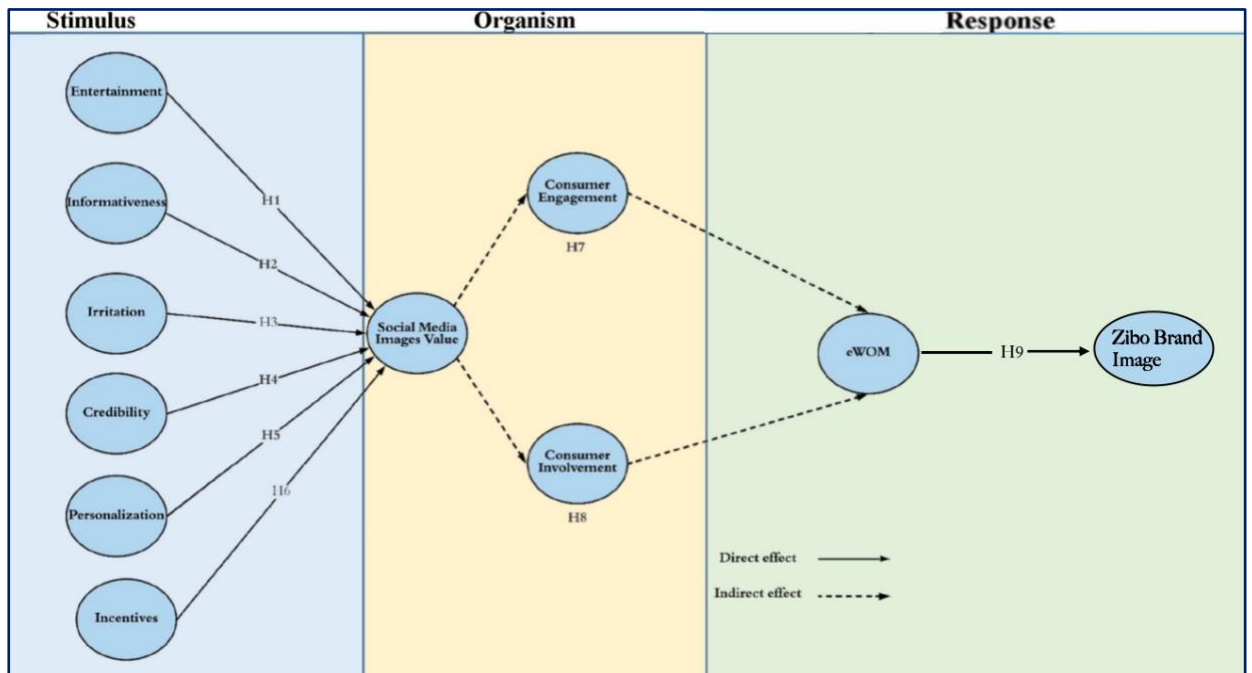
While the impact of online reputation on tourism is well-documented, there remains a niche for in-depth research into Zibo's specific context. Investigations into the factors that sculpt Zibo's online reputation (Wang et al., 2021) and how they influence local tourism development (Uyar et al., 2022) are essential. A comprehensive understanding of tourists' perceptions and appreciation for the Zibo tourism experience is essential for improving service quality and increasing tourist satisfaction. Previous studies have shown that a positive online reputation, combined with effective community engagement and marketing strategies, can significantly enhance a destination's competitiveness (Wang et al., 2021; Uyar et al., 2022). This aligns with broader research suggesting that destinations with unique cultural or culinary offerings, such as Zibo BBQ, can leverage these attractions to differentiate themselves in a competitive market (Oriade & Schofield, 2019).

2.2. Zibo's Online Reputation Model

For Zibo as a tourist destination, online reputation is significant in affecting the destination's competitiveness (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018). Based on the S-O-R framework depicted in Figure 2.1, individuals assess the attractiveness and value of

Zibo City through social media content features such as entertainment, informativeness, and credibility (Abbasi et al., 2021). High elaboration cues such as personalization and incentivization likely deeply influence social media users, prompting them to evaluate Zibo critically. Conversely, low elaboration cues like stimulation and entertainment serve as peripheral cues, guiding consumer engagement and involvement, thus fostering more positive word-of-mouth behavior (Abbasi et al., 2023). The success of Zibo's case reflects the roles of both central and peripheral cues in the S-O-R framework, encouraging consumers to make favorable assessments of its social media content and stimulating increased tourism to Zibo. This analysis delves into the impact of social media content features on consumer psychological processes and behaviors. In the context of Zibo's fame and explosion in popularity due to social media promotion, understanding the process of eWOM among consumers regarding destinations and services becomes paramount.

Figure 2.1 - Zibo Research Conceptual Model.



Source: Own elaboration adapted from Abbasi et al. (2023, p. 5).

The burgeoning domain of online reputation in tourism has witnessed destinations transforming from tangible locales to intangible virtual images within the digital expanse. This study is anchored in the S-O-R model (Abbasi et al., 2023) to dissect and comprehend the multifaceted impact of online reviews on tourist behavior, particularly examining Zibo's emergence as a popular destination among young people.

Stimulus: In our framework, stimuli encompass the diverse online reviews and user-generated content that tourists encounter on social media platforms (Abbasi et al., 2023). The dimensions of this stimulus are categorized into entertainment, informativeness, irritation, credibility, personalization, and incentives. These stimuli represent the initial touchpoints for tourists in their online journey, offering insights into Zibo's virtual image as shaped by the genuine experiences shared by fellow travelers.

Organism: The organism in this study refers to the tourists' internal cognition and affective states, specifically their perceptions of the value of social media images (Abbasi et al., 2023). This reflects the internal assessment that guides their decision-making process.

Response: The response is the actual behavior resulting from the organism's internal state, focusing on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) as a critical outcome (Abbasi et al., 2023). Positive eWOM will likely enhance Zibo's reputation and attractiveness, potentially leading to an increase in visitation.

Based on the literature review, we will explore the following hypotheses:

H₁: Entertainment content about Zibo on social media increases tourists' perceived value of the destination.

H₂: The informativeness of social media content about Zibo correlates with a higher perceived value of the destination.

H₃: Irritation from social media content about Zibo negatively affects tourists' perception of the destination's value.

H4: Credibility from social media content about Zibo negatively affects tourists' perception of the destination's value.

H5: Personalized social media content increases the perceived value of Zibo for tourists.

H6: Incentives provided in social media content increase tourists' interest and involvement with Zibo.

H7: Tourists' engagement with social media content enhances their positive eWOM for the destination.

H8: Tourists' involvement with social media content positively influences their eWOM, enhancing the destination's online reputation.

H9: Interactive activities on social media increase the generation of positive eWOM about Zibo by enhancing the frequency of information sharing and expanding the audience reach.

By applying the S-O-R model, this study provides a structured approach to understanding the dynamics of online reputation and its influence on tourist behavior. It aims to contribute to academic discourse and inform practical strategies for destination marketing and promotion, particularly for emerging destinations like Zibo.

This research framework captures the complex interplay between online content and tourist behavior, aiming to contribute valuable insights to the field of online reputation management in tourism.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Context

As a tourist destination, Zibo's competitiveness is of great significance to local tourism development (Uyar et al., 2022). Through research on tourists' recognition and respect for the Zibo tourism experience, it is possible to gain an in-depth understanding of their needs and expectations, thereby improving service quality and increasing tourist satisfaction in a targeted manner (Oriade & Schofield, 2019). Figure 3.1 presents the map of China, where the Zibo tourist destination can be identified.

Figure 3.1 - Map of Shandong China.



Source: Muchong (2013).

This research will explore the impact of online reputation on the competitiveness of Zibo tourism destination based on the research of Abbasi et al. (2023).

3.2. Instrument

This study considers Zibo tourism destination to provide knowledge and strategies for the development of Zibo tourism in terms of social media reputation. Considering the work of Abbasi et al. (2023), a survey was prepared to collect data considering an adaptation for the tourist destination Zibo, where the questions were answered on a Likert scale (1 – Strongly disagree, 2- Disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Agree, 5 Strongly agree), without considering those that characterize the profile of the investigation. Table 3.1 presents the questions to each construct considered in this research.

Table 3.1 - A survey on the relationship between travelers' perceptions of destinations and E-WOM.

Construct Name (Acronym)	Description	Questions
Entertainment (ENT)	What aspects of following content about tourism destinations on social media are primarily for entertainment?	ENT1-Following content about tourism destinations on social media is mainly for entertainment purposes. ENT2: Browsing images and stories about tourism destinations on social media makes me happy. ENT3: I enjoy sharing interesting tourism destination content from social media with others.
Informativeness (IN)	How important is the role of social media as a source of information for tourism destinations?	INF1: I consider social media an important source for obtaining information about tourism destinations. INF2: I rely on social media content to plan my travels. INF3: Detailed information about tourism destinations on social media is very valuable to me.

Construct Name (Acronym)	Description	Questions
Irritation (IRR)	To what extent do advertisements and excessive promotions of tourism destinations on social media cause annoyance or disinterest?	IRR1: I find the abundance of tourism advertisements on social media annoying. IRR2: Excessive promotion of tourism destinations on social media makes me lose interest. IRR3: I usually ignore overly promotional tourism information on social media.
Credibility (CR)	How reliable and trustworthy do you find the recommendations and information about tourism destinations on social media?	CRE1: I trust the tourism destination recommendations on social media. CRE2: The tourism information on social media is usually accurate and reliable. CRE3: I check multiple sources to verify the authenticity of tourism information on social media.
Personalization (PE)	How well do the tourism recommendations and content on social media align with your personal interests and preferences?	PER1: I appreciate tourism content on social media that is customized based on my interests and behavior. PER2: The tourism destinations that social media platforms show me usually align with my preferences. PER3: I believe personalized tourism recommendations enrich my social media experience.
Incentives (IN)	How do special deals and promotions on social media influence your decision to choose a tourism destination?	INC1: Special travel deals and promotions on social media attract me. INC2: I am more likely to choose a tourism destination because of discounts and offers on social media. INC3: Social media promotions greatly influence my travel decisions.
Social Media Image Value (SM)	What most attracts you to images of a tourism destination on social media?	SMI1: The aesthetic appeal of the images is important to add value. SMI2: The amount of information in the images is an important factor in increasing their value. SMI3: Originality in the images increases their value. SMI4: Interactivity (e.g., comments, likes) increases engagement with the images.
Consumer Engagement (CE)	How often do you engage with content about tourism destinations on social media through activities like sharing, commenting, or liking?	CEN1: I often share content about tourism destinations I visit on social media CEN2: I actively participate in discussions about tourism destinations on social media by commenting, liking, or sharing. CEN3: I value the opportunity to engage with others about their travel experiences on social media.

Construct Name (Acronym)	Description	Questions
Consumer Involvement (CI)	How deeply do you engage with and research tourism destinations on social media before making travel plans?	CIN1: I thoroughly research tourism destinations on social media before making travel plans. CIN2: Information found on social media significantly influences my travel destination decisions. CIN3: I feel more confident in my travel choices after consulting social media.
Electronic-Word of Mouth (eWOM)	How much do recommendations from friends and family on social media influence your choice of tourism destinations?	EWM1: Recommendations from friends and family on social media influence my choice of tourism destinations. EWM2: I have chosen to visit a tourism destination based on positive reviews I read on social media. EWM3: I consider the opinions shared on social media about tourism destinations to be trustworthy. EWM4: Seeing many people talk positively about a tourism destination on social media increases my interest in visiting it.
Zibo Brand image (ZBI)	How do Zibo's social media interactions and promotions impact your view and impression of Zibo as a tourism destination?	ZBI1: I trust the information and messages conveyed by Zibo on online platforms. ZBI2: I am satisfied with Zibo's performance on social media. Their interactions can effectively increase my participation and favorable impression of Zibo city. ZBI3: I am motivated to share Zibo's content with others due to the incentives and personal value I receive from their online presence.

Source: Own elaboration based on the work of Abbasi et al. (2023).

3.3. Population and Sample

This online questionnaire was conducted through Questionnaire Star. This questionnaire was shared with WeChat and Facebook from April 1 to May 21, 2024, targeting tourists who traveled in Zibo City, Shandong Province, China, after April 2023. A total of 229 questionnaires were collected, with 210 valid questionnaires, as presented in Table 3.2.

The survey targets mainly the public who use social media, paying special attention to users who frequently use platforms such as Weibo and TIKTOK, Facebook, and

Instagram. The target group of this study is mainly people between the ages of 18 and 50 who are interested in travel and often obtain travel information through social media.

Table 3.2 - Technical Datasheet.

Universe of Research	Tourists who traveled to Zibo, Shandong, China after April 2023
Sample size	210 questionnaires
Method of obtaining data	Online questionnaire applied on social networks (Wechat, Facebook)
Sample procedure	Convenience sample
Program used	WJX
Software for data analysis	SmartPLS (version 3.3.3) for Windows, PowerBI (Version: 2.94.921.0 64-bit (June 2021) and IBM SPSS Statistics Version: 28.0.0.0
Start of the inquiry	01/05/2024
End of inquiry	01/04/2024

Source: Own elaboration.

3.4. Data collection process

Data was collected via email, and links to the online questionnaire were shared on social media platforms. The research team conducted data collection between April and May 2024. Participants voluntarily filled out the questionnaire based on fully informed consent, and all data were processed anonymously to ensure participant privacy.

3.5. Data Analysis

The collected data was imported into statistical software (SPSS) for quantitative analysis. Analytical methods included descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and structural equation modeling. For structural equation modeling, the Smart-PLS 4.0 software was used.

3.6. Ethical considerations

All participants were informed of the purpose of the study, that their participation was voluntary, and that they had the right to withdraw at any time. In addition, all data collected strictly adhere to data protection regulations to ensure the security and confidentiality of participant information.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Characterization of the Sample

The sample in Table 4.1 includes 210 respondents, mainly aged between 25-34 years old, accounting for 41.9% of the total. Females make up the majority, accounting for 69%, and most respondents are salaried employees (39%) and students (18.6%).

Table 4.1 - Overview of respondents' demographics.

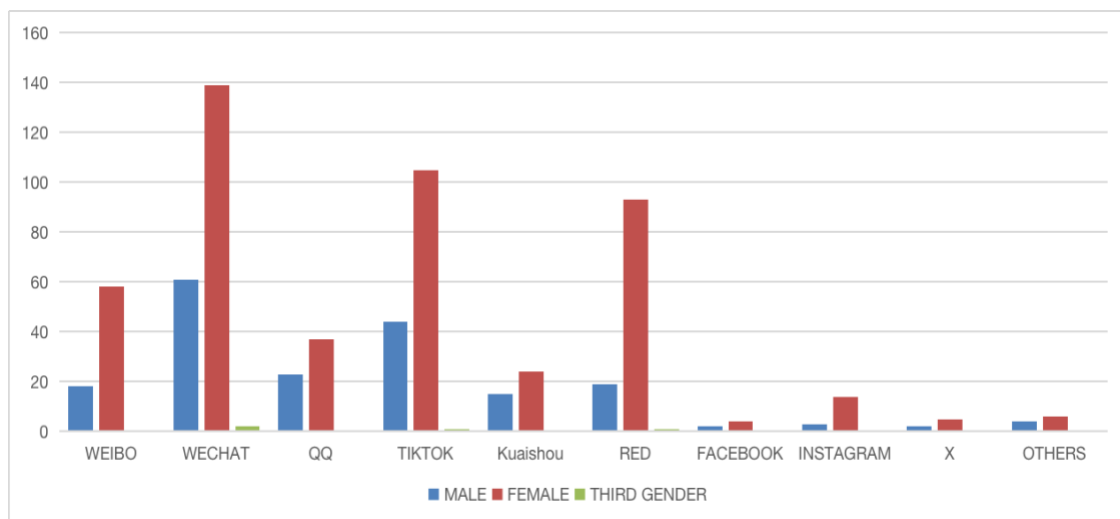
Respondents' Demographic		Frequency	Percent
Total		210	100%
Age	Under 18	4	1.9
	18-24	35	16.7
	25-34	88	41.9
	35-44	28	13.3
	45-54	44	21.0
	55 and above		
Gender	Male	63	30.0
	Female	145	69.0
	Others	2	1.0
Occupation	Self-Employed	30	14.3
	Salaried Employee	82	39.0
	Unemployed	11	5.2
	Retired	17	8.1
	Student	39	18.6
	Others	31	14.8
Social media use	WeChat	204	97.1
	QQ	62	29.5
	Tiktok	150	71.4
	Kuaishou	39	18.6
	RED	113	53.8
	Facebook	6	2.9
	Instagram	19	9.0
	X	7	3.3
Others	10	4.7	

Source: Own elaboration.

Social media usage is high, with WeChat being the most popular platform, used by 97.1% of the sample. TikTok and RED are also widely used, accounting for 71.4% and 53.8% respectively, highlighting the preference of the younger population for these platforms.

By analyzing the data presented in Figure 4.1, we can identify the preferences of users of different genders when using various social media platforms. The chart shows the preferences of male, female and third-gender users about platforms including Weibo, WeChat, QQ, TikTok, KUAISHOU, RED, Facebook, Instagram and others.

Figure 4.1 - Social Media Preference.



Source: Own Elaboration.

It is clear from the charts that TikTok and WeChat are extremely popular among female users, with the number of female users on TikTok far exceeding the other genders at 105, while the number of male and third-gender users is about 45 and very few, respectively. Usage of the WeChat platform showed a similar trend, with about 140

female users, much higher than about 60 for males and a very small number for the third gender.

Additionally, QQ and Weibo usage is more balanced between males and females, but there are slightly more male users on QQ, reflecting the subtle differences between the genders. Facebook and Instagram have relatively low usage numbers across all gender categories, and these platforms are less appealing to the groups of Chinese people surveyed.

Overall, Figure 4.1 provides a clear perspective on understanding the preferences and behavioral patterns of users of different genders on social media platforms, which is valuable for marketing strategy development and analysis of social media trends.

4.2. Structural Equation Modeling

Initially, a confirmatory analysis was performed on the measurement model to define the suggested relationships between the observed variables and the underlying constructs, allowing all constructs to inter-correlate freely. Before evaluating the overall measurement model, each construct within the model was examined individually. The alignment of the indicators with the construct, along with the construct's reliability and validity, were assessed.

This first phase is called the assessment of model adjustment measures, followed by the second phase, called the assessment of the structural model, which aims to evaluate the structural model (Hair et al., 2014).

a) Assessment of model adjustment measures

To evaluate the model adjustment measures, it is necessary to carry out a set of tests, presented in Table 4.2, to determine whether the measures considered in the model are adequate.

Table 4.2 - Assessment of Model Adjustment Measures.

Steps	Measurement criterion	Values considered appropriate	References
Convergent Validity	AVE (average variance extracted)	> 0.5	Henseler, et al. (2009)
Internal Consistency	Alpha Cronbach´s	> 0.6 (acceptable) > 0.7 (desirable)	Hair et al. (2014)
	Rho A	> 0.7 (desirable) > 0.9 (desirable)	Hair et al. (2014)
Discriminant Validity	Cross Loadings	An indicator should have the highest correlation with its latent variable.	Henseler et al. (2009)
	Fornell-Larcker Criterion	The square root of the AVE of each construct must be greater than the correlation with another construct.	Fornell and Larcker (1981)
	Rácio Heterotrait-Monotrait	< 1 < 0.9 (Satisfactory)	Hair et al. (2014)

Source: Pontes and Ramos (2023, p. 129)

Table 4.2 presents the Assessment of Model Adjustment Measures, and Table 4.3 lists the results of the PLS algorithm for the present research. Nearly all constructs exhibit average variance extracted (AVE) values above 0.5, indicating good convergent validity. Most constructs meet Cronbach's Alpha and rho_A thresholds, ensuring high internal consistency. Notably, the Credibility (CR) for Consumer Engagement (CEN) e-WOM approaches the ideal values, demonstrating high reliability. Irritation (IRR) did not pass the convergent validity test; it was not included in the final model.

Regarding internal consistency, Table 4.3 shows the measurement criteria of Cronbach's Alpha, which verifies that this internal consistency step was desirable (greater than 0.7). The values of Rho A in the columns are also greater than 0.7, reaching the desirable criterion.

Table 4.3 - Construct Reliability and Validity.

Latent Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Composite (Rho_a)	reliability	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
CE	0.832	0.844		0.899	0.747
CI	0.740	0.779		0.850	0.655
CR	0.713	0.713		0.874	0.777
ENT	0.725	0.727		0.845	0.646
IM	0.770	0.779		0.866	0.684
IN	0.747	0.834		0.848	0.653
PE	0.756	0.773		0.858	0.669
SM	0.854	0.855		0.901	0.696
ZBI	0.838	0.838		0.903	0.755
eWOM	0.834	0.837		0.890	0.670

Source: Own Elaboration.

For the Fornell-Larcker criterion (1981) to be satisfied, the square root of the AVE (Average Variance Extracted) for each construct should be higher than its correlations with all other constructs. Reviewing Table 4.4, we can confirm this is the case; the largest value in each column, which represents the square root of the AVE, consistently exceeds all other values, confirming the discriminant validity of our model.

Table 4.4 - Discriminant Validity-Fornell-Larcker Criterion.

	CE	CI	CR	ENT	IM	IN	PE	SM	ZBI	eWOM
CE	0.865									
CI	0.519	0.809								
CR	0.409	0.446	0.881							
ENT	0.406	0.425	0.315	0.804						
IM	0.225	0.496	0.272	0.572	0.827					
IN	0.340	0.483	0.477	0.353	0.408	0.808				
PE	0.420	0.565	0.484	0.475	0.429	0.511	0.818			
SM	0.363	0.628	0.386	0.408	0.561	0.497	0.622	0.834		
ZBI	0.488	0.606	0.398	0.455	0.443	0.389	0.521	0.612	0.869	
eWOM	0.467	0.524	0.374	0.440	0.396	0.407	0.449	0.481	0.690	0.818

Source: Own Elaboration.

Table 4.5 is the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio. This value must be less than 1 to be valid, and a value less than 0.9 is satisfactory. All values shown in the table are less than 0.9, so it is valid and satisfactory.

Table 4.5 - Discriminant Validity - Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio.

	CE	CI	CR	ENT	IM	IN	PE	SM	ZBI	eWOM
CE										
CI	0.668									
CR	0.533	0.595								
ENT	0.524	0.570	0.438							
IM	0.276	0.635	0.366	0.764						
IN	0.434	0.597	0.667	0.453	0.485					
PE	0.527	0.732	0.659	0.638	0.546	0.652				
SM	0.424	0.765	0.494	0.518	0.684	0.578	0.760			
ZBI	0.574	0.758	0.513	0.585	0.548	0.472	0.651	0.721		
eWOM	0.556	0.657	0.484	0.566	0.495	0.534	0.575	0.568	0.823	

Source: Own Elaboration.

b) Structural Model Assessment

In the second phase, to assess the structural model, it is essential to perform tests on the overall fit of the model, the significance of correlations and regressions, and the quality of a construct for model fit (Cohen's Indicator), in accordance with the methodology of Hair et al. (2014), which tests are presented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 - Structural Model Evaluation Tests.

Model fit quality indicators	Measurement criterion	Values considered appropriate	References
General model adjustment indicator	R ²	Ranges from 0 to 1 (20% in the area of consumer behaviour is considered high)	Hair et al. (2014)
Test of the significance of correlations and regressions	t-test	T ≥ 1.96	Hair et al. (2014)
Cohen indicator (evaluates the quality of a construct for model adjustment)	F ²	Values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 are considered small, medium and large.	Hair et al. (2014)

Source: Adapted from Pontes and Ramos (2023, p. 131)

In Table 4.6 lists several structural equation model (SEM) model fit quality indicators and their measurement standards. These indicators include:

R² (General model adjustment indicator): indicates the degree of variability in model interpretation with values ranging from 0 to 1, where 20.0% has been considered high in the field of consumer behavior research.

t-test (Test of the significance of correlations and regressions): used to test the significance of correlations and regression coefficients in the model, with a standard threshold of 1.96.

Q² (Predictive validity): Stone-Geisser indicator for assessing the model's predictive validity, with a validity value greater than zero.

F² (Cohen indicator): used to assess the effect of the construct on model adjustment, where 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 are considered small, medium and large effect sizes, respectively.

Considering *t*-statistics (*t-value* for the test of significance), the *t-value* should be greater than 1.96 to prove statistical significance. In Table 4.7, most of the hypotheses are supported, and the null hypothesis is rejected, except CR → SM (H₁) and ENT → SM (H₄). For example, the *t-value* of 4.839 for CI → EWM is well above the threshold of 1.96, indicating that CI significantly positively affects eWOM.

Table 4.7 - Significance of correlations and regressions of the model.

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
CE -> eWOM	0.268	0.273	0.092	2.917	0.0040
CI -> eWOM	0.385	0.385	0.080	4.839	0.0000
CR -> SM	0.043	0.044	0.058	0.738	0.4600
ENT -> SM	-0.044	-0.041	0.069	0.636	0.5250
IM -> SM	0.343	0.342	0.059	5.777	0.0000
IN -> SM	0.149	0.151	0.058	2.552	0.0110
PE -> SM	0.398	0.398	0.068	5.821	0.0000
SM -> CE	0.363	0.369	0.075	4.826	0.0000
SM -> CI	0.628	0.633	0.051	12.404	0.0000
eWOM -> ZBI	0.690	0.694	0.046	14.956	0.0000

Source: Own Elaboration.

Considering the results in Table 4.7, the hypotheses regarding the positive influence of Entertainment content about Zibo on social media increase tourists' perceived value of the destination (H₁) and the Credibility of social media content about Zibo negatively affects tourists' perception were not supported by the target value (H₄). Considering the p-values, the *p-value* should be less than 0.05 to prove the statistical significance of the result, which is in line with the results obtained for the *t statistic*.

In terms of the original sample and sample mean, these two columns show the path coefficients and sample mean for the original sample, respectively, which helps to verify the consistency of the model. The robustness of a model is usually assessed by the closeness of the sample means, and the sample means in Table 4.7 are very close to the original sample, indicating good consistency of the model results.

Table 4.8 presents the results of the F² (Cohen indicator): used to assess the effect of the construct on model adjustment, where 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 are considered small, medium and large effect sizes, respectively (Hair et al., 2014), where the f² value of

eWOM on ZBI reaches 0.911, which indicates that the other variables have a large effect. The effects of CR, ENT, IN on SM and CE on eWOM are small. However, the effect of PE and IM on SM, SM on CE and CI on eWOM are considered with a medium effect size. The effect of SM on CI and eWOM on ZBI are considered an effect with a large size.

Table 4.8 - Results of the F² (Cohen indicator): used to assess the effect of the construct on model adjustment.

	CE	CI	SM	ZBI	eWOM
CE					0.078
CI					0.161
CR			0.003		
ENT			0.002		
IM			0.149		
IN			0.029		
PE			0.189		
SM	0.152	0.653			
eWOM				0.911	

Source: Own Elaboration.

Regarding the results of the General model adjustment indicator, which results are presented in Table 4.9, the R² values and adjusted R² values for each construct in our research model are used to measure the explanatory power of these constructs for the target variables. Consumer Engagement (CE) has a weak explanatory power with an R² value of only 0.132, suggesting that our model may need further optimisation. In contrast, Social Media Use (SM) and Brand Influence (ZBI) have higher R² values of 0.513 and 0.477, respectively, showing the model's strong explanatory power in these areas. Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) also performed well, with an R² value of 0.326, indicating that the model could explain changes in eWOM relatively well.

Table 4.9 - Results of the R².

	R-square	R-square adjusted
CE	0.132	0.128
CI	0.395	0.392
SM	0.513	0.501
ZBI	0.477	0.474
eWOM	0.326	0.320

Source: Own Elaboration.

5. Discussion

In the conducted research analysis, we first revealed how active different gender groups are on specific platforms by analyzing the gender distribution of social media platform usage preferences. Significantly, women use TikTok and WeChat far more frequently than the other genders, while men have higher activity on QQ and Weibo. This finding provides essential gender insights for targeted marketing strategies.

Further, in the structural model evaluation, we confirmed the accuracy and predictive power of the model by evaluating the model quality metrics. The analysis of the R^2 values showed that specific social media usage (e.g., **SM** and eWOM) could explain the variability of user behavior to a greater extent, suggesting that our model effectively captures and explains the changes in the targeted variables. Notably, in the case of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), its R^2 value reaches 0.326, which indicates that the model can explain its variations better.

Meanwhile, the significance tests (*t-statistic* value and *p-value*) for each path further validate the reliability of the model and the statistical significance of the findings. For example, the effect of CI on eWOM (*p-value* of 0.0000) and the strong effect of SM on CI (*p-value* of 0.0000) indicate a significant positive relationship between these variables.

Overall, this comprehensive analysis not only highlights the differences in social media preferences among users of different genders, but also validates the influence of social media use on user behavior through structural equation modeling. These insights are crucial for developing more effective marketing strategies, optimizing user experience, and enhancing brand impact.

From the research hypothesis, the hypotheses of H₁-H₉ have been analysed. H₂ (Informativeness) shows that the increase in information content has a positive impact on improving the image value on social media. H₃ (Irritation) shows that excessive stimulation or advertising can have a negative impact on the value of social media images. H₅ (Personalization) means that personalized content has a positive effect on improving the value of social media images. H₆ (Incentives) shows that incentives (such as discounts and promotions) can effectively increase the value of social media images. H₇ (Impact on Consumer Engagement) shows that the improvement of social media image value can increase consumer engagement. H₈ (Impact on Consumer Involvement) increases consumers' in-depth engagement with social media content. H₉ (eWOM on Zibo Brand Image) Effective eWOM can significantly improve Zibo's brand image.

However, two hypotheses were not supported: H₁ (Entertainment) and H₄ (Credibility). H₁, which proposed that entertainment content would positively enhance the value of social media images, did not show significant effects in the analysis. Similarly, H₄, which hypothesized that content with high credibility would significantly improve the value of social media images, was not supported by the data.

In light of the substantial findings yielded by this study, it is recommended that government entities engaged in the promotion of tourism and the marketing of destinations within the Zibo region prioritize the enhancement of the city's digital presence through the implementation of targeted social media strategies. The research findings indicate that the perceived value of a destination's online image is significantly influenced by the informativeness, personalization, and incentives presented in social media content. It is therefore recommended that government marketing efforts prioritize the creation of informative and personalized content that highlights Zibo's unique cultural and recreational opportunities, complemented by strategic incentives such as discounts or special event promotions. Furthermore, it is of paramount importance to guarantee the veracity of online content, as trustworthiness has been

demonstrated to exert a pronounced positive influence on the value of social media images, which in turn fosters enhanced consumer engagement and involvement.

As a result of this investigation, the following implications for the management of the Zibo destination are identified:

1. Continue expanding on Zibo's tourism competitiveness, as positive online reputation enhances tourist attraction. Zibo's favorable online reputation, as evidenced by online reviews and social media feedback, considerably enhances its appeal as a tourist destination. This aspect underlines the pivotal role that digital presence plays in shaping the perceptions and choices of potential tourists, improving Zibo's profile as a desirable destination.

2. Define a strategic approach that involves all components that constitute Zibo's tourism product, as diverse factors contribute to high tourism ratings. The tourism ratings of Zibo are significantly influenced by a variety of factors, including service quality, accessibility, cultural richness, and proactive social media promotions. These elements further bolster Zibo's tourism appeal, highlighting the importance of a comprehensive and strategic approach to destination marketing.

3. Develop new tourist gastronomy offerings specific to the Zibo region, as unique culinary offerings attract more tourists. Zibo's unique culinary offerings, especially Zibo BBQ, have a significant impact on tourist decision-making, serving as a key differentiator for the region's tourism. This proposition augments the broader narrative that unique dining experiences can drive tourist traffic and differentiate destinations in a competitive market.

4. Increase Local Government and Community Engagement to increase the popularity of Zibo BBQ. The involvement of local government and the community in promoting Zibo BBQ has been crucial in its rapid rise in popularity,

underscoring the effectiveness of collaborative promotional efforts in enhancing a destination's reputation and appeal.

This thesis paves the way for further academic research into the impact of social media on tourism marketing. First, an investigation into the specific elements of personalization that most resonate with different demographic segments could yield insights into more effective targeted marketing strategies. Secondly, a comparative study across different cities or regions using a similar framework could assist in understanding the influence of cultural, geographical, and economic factors on the efficacy of social media strategies in tourism. Finally, it would be advantageous to investigate the long-term consequences of continuous social media campaigns on destination loyalty and repeat visitation. In particular, it would be insightful to examine how initial perceptions shaped by social media evolve over time and influence tourists' actual experiences and satisfaction levels. Such studies could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the strategic utilization of social media in enhancing the appeal and competitiveness of travel destinations.

6. Conclusions

Exploring the vast digital landscape of social media interactions and their influence on tourist decision-making in Zibo, this dissertation has illuminated the nuanced ways in which digital dialogues shape tourist perceptions and actions. While our investigation confirmed most hypotheses, H₁ and H₄ were not fully supported. This suggests that although social media content plays a critical role in influencing tourists' decision-making, other factors may mediate the effects of entertainment content and credibility, which require further exploration. Our analysis still highlights the significant impact of testimonials and user reviews in shaping potential tourists' decisions.

Our analysis shows that testimonials and user reviews on social media greatly influence potential tourists' decisions, making them a key tool for promoting Zibo. Real, positive reviews from past visitors significantly boost the city's appeal, indicating that authentic experiences shared online can sway the choices of future travelers.

Furthermore, the role of social media promotions in fostering tourist interest cannot be overstated. These platforms serve not just as bulletin boards but as dynamic arenas where compelling content can directly influence the travel planning process. Our analysis suggests that when promotions are paired with engaging and relevant content, they effectively capture the imagination of travelers, translating into increased interest and visitation intent.

However, the path from digital engagement to actual visitation is not direct. The study revealed that specific hypothesized direct impacts of electronic word-of-mouth on immediate booking decisions were not substantiated within the Zibo context. This indicates a potential disconnect between online engagement and immediate action,

pointing towards a more complex interplay of factors influencing a tourist's decision-making process.

While this study offers significant insights, it also opens avenues for future research, particularly in exploring the long-term impacts of online reputation on tourism sustainability. Further studies could also examine the effects of negative reviews and strategies for effective crisis management in digital spaces.

This study acknowledges limitations, such as the sample may not be representative and more extensive data collection is needed to verify and extend these findings. Subsequent research may extend this paper to investigate the application of sentiment analysis to enhance comprehension of the disparate impacts of social media content on tourists' perceptions. This approach entails the utilisation of natural language processing tools to examine the emotional nuances embedded in user comments, thereby facilitating a more nuanced assessment of the impact of sentiment on the popularity and image of tourist destinations such as Zibo.

In future work, sentiment analysis can be combined with demographic and geographic data, which can provide insights into how Zibo is perceived by different groups of tourists. This will facilitate the refinement of marketing strategies to make them more targeted and effective. Furthermore, extending this analysis to real-time social media data could provide dynamic insights into changes in tourist preferences, leading to the optimization of promotional content in a timely manner. This will contribute to the efficiency of social media campaigns aimed at promoting tourism.

Bibliography

Abbasi, A. Z., Schultz, C. D., Ting, D. H., Ali, F., & Hussain, K. (2021). Advertising value of vlogs on destination visit intention: the mediating role of place attachment among Pakistani tourists. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 13(5), 816–834. Doi:10.1108/JHTT-07-2021-0204.

Abbasi, A. Z., Tsiotsou, R. H., Hussain, K., Rather, R. A., & Ting, D. H. (2023). Investigating the impact of social media images' value, consumer engagement, and involvement on eWOM of a tourism destination: A transmittal mediation approach. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 71, 103231. Doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2022.103231

Ahn, Y.-j., & Bessiere, J. (2023). The relationships between tourism destination competitiveness, empowerment, and supportive actions for tourism. *Sustainability*, 15(1), 626. Doi:10.3390/su15010626

Akrimi, Y., & Khemakhem, R. (2012). What drives consumers to spread a word in social media? *Journal of Marketing Research (Online)*, 8(14), 1-14. Doi:10.5171/2012.969979

Banerjee, S. (2022). Exaggeration in fake vs. authentic online reviews for luxury and budget hotels. *International Journal of Information Management*, 62, 102416. Doi:10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2021.102416.

Banerjee, S., & Chua, A. Y. K. (2017). Theorizing the textual differences between authentic and fictitious reviews: Validation across positive, negative and moderate polarities. *Internet Research*, 27(2), 321–337. Doi:10.1108/IntR-11-2015-0309.

Bhandari, M., & Rodgers, S. (2018). What does the brand say? Effects of brand feedback to negative eWOM on brand trust and purchase intentions. *International Journal of Advertising*, 37(1), 125–141. Doi:10.1080/02650487.2017.1349030.

Chen, Y., & Ning, Q. (2023, April 21). China's Zibo Fiscal Revenue Gains in First Quarter After Night Market Barbecue Goes Viral. YICA. Retrieved from <https://www.yicaiglobal.com/news/china-zibo-fiscal-revenue-gains-in-first-quarter-after-night-market-barbecue-goes-viral>

CNNIC. (2023, August). *The 52nd Statistical Report on China's Internet Development*. China Internet Network Information Center [CNNIC]. Retrieved from <https://www.cnnic.com.cn/IDR/ReportDownloads/202311/P020231121355042476714.pdf>

Christodoulides, G. (2009). Branding in the post-internet era. *Marketing Theory*, 9(1), 141—144. Doi:10.1177/1470593108100071

de Rojas, C., & Camarero, C. (2008). Visitors' experience, mood and satisfaction in a heritage context: Evidence from an interpretation center. *Tourism Management*, 29(3), 525–537. Doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2007.06.004

Cronjé, D.F., & du Plessis, E. (2020). A review on tourism destination competitiveness. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 45, 256-265. Doi:10.1016/j.jhtm.2020.06.012

Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18(1), 39-50. Doi:10.1177/002224378101800104

Hair, J., Sarstedt, M., Hopkins, L., & G. Kuppelwieser, V. (2014). Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) An emerging tool in business research. *European business review*, 26(2), 106-121. Doi:10.1108/EBR-10-2013-0128

Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sinkovics, R. R. (2009). The use of partial least squares path modeling in international marketing. In *New challenges to international marketing* (pp. 277-319). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. Doi:10.1108/S1474-7979(2009)0000020014

- Hlee, S., Lee, J., Yang, S. B., & Koo, C. (2016). An empirical examination of online restaurant reviews (Yelp. com): moderating roles of restaurant type and self-image disclosure. In *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2016: Proceedings of the International Conference in Bilbao, Spain, February 2-5, 2016* (pp. 339-353). Springer International Publishing. Doi:10.1007/978-3-319-28231-2_25
- IAB/PwC. (2014). *Internet advertising revenue report: 2013 full year results*. Retrieved August 31, 2015, from http://www.iab.net/media/file/IAB_Internet_Advertising_Revenue_Report_FY_2013.pdf
- Inversini, A. (2020). Reputation in travel and tourism: a perspective article. *Tourism Review*, 75(1), 310-313. Doi:10.1108/TR-04-2019-0127
- Ivars-Baidal, J., Casado-Díaz, A. B., Navarro-Ruiz, S., & Fuster-Uguet, M. (2024). Smart tourism city governance: exploring the impact on stakeholder networks. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 36(2), 582-601. Doi:10.1108/IJCHM-03-2022-0322
- Leung, D., Law, R., Van Hoof, H., & Buhalis, D. (2013). Social media in tourism and hospitality: A literature review. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(1-2), 3-22. Doi:10.1080/10548408.2013.750919
- Li, D., Wang, F., Jing, X., Tang, J., Ding, Y., & Liu, Z. (2024). Tourism destination loyalty in “rushing to Zibo for barbecue” from the perspective of scales. *Progress in Geography*, 43(1), 63-79. Doi:10.18306/dlkxjz.2024.01.005
- Liu, J., Wang, Y., & Chang, L. (2023). How do short videos influence users’ tourism intention? A study of key factors. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. Doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1036570
- Martin, C.A., Izquierdo, C.C., & Laguna-Garcia, M. (2021). Culinary tourism experiences: The effect of iconic food on tourist intentions. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 40, 100911. Doi:10.1016/j.tmp.2021.100911

MCT. (2024, February 10). Domestic Tourism Data in 2023. Ministry of Culture and Tourism [MCT] of the People's Republic of China. Retrieved from https://www.gov.cn/lianbo/bumen/202402/content_6931178.htm.

Muchong (2013). *Map of Zibo*. Retrieved from https://muchongimg.xmcimg.com/data/bcs/12013/1230/w147h1534623_1388398431_841.gif

Narangajavana, Y., Callarisa Fiol, L.J., Moliner Tena, M.Á., Rodríguez Artola, R.M., & Sánchez García, J. (2017). The influence of social media in creating expectations: An empirical study for a tourist destination. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 65, 60-70. Doi:10.1016/j.annals.2017.05.002.

Nave, M., Rita, P., & Guerreiro, J. (2018). A decision support system framework to track consumer sentiments in social media. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 27(6), 693-710. Doi:10.1080/19368623.2018.1435327

Ng, K., & Wang, F. (2023, May 15). *Zibo barbecue: Millions bring sudden fame to industrial Chinese city*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-65478638>

Oliveira, T., Araujo, B., & Tam, C. (2020). Why do people share their travel experiences on social media?. *Tourism Management*, 78, 104041. Doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2019.104041.

Oriade, A., & Schofield, P. (2019). An examination of the role of service quality and perceived value in visitor attraction experience. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 11, 1-9. Doi:10.1016/j.jdmm.2018.10.002

Pavon-Jordan, M. (2019). Promoting destination brands on Instagram: *Lessons from visit Finland*. Retrieved from <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2019052612034>.

Perles-Ribes, J.F., Ramón-Rodríguez, A.B., Moreno-Izquierdo, L., & Such-Devesa, M.J. (2019). Online reputation and destination competitiveness: The case of Spain. *Tourism Analysis*, 24(2), 161-176. Doi:10.3727/108354219X15525055915518

- Philander, K., & Zhong, Y. (2016). Twitter sentiment analysis: Capturing sentiment from integrated resort tweets. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 55, 16–24. Doi:10.1016/j.ijhm.2016.02.001
- Pontes, A., & Ramos, C. (2023). How does social media influence the behaviour of hotel consumers? *Journal of Tourism, Sustainability and Well-Being*, 11(2), 116–135. Doi:10.34623/784k-qg19
- Ramos, C. M., Casado-Molina, A. M., & Peláez, J. I. (2017). Measuring air and terrestrial transport company reputation: Tourism intangibles expressed in the digital environment. *Journal of Spatial and Organizational Dynamics*, 5(4), 443-462.
- Ritchie, J. B., & Crouch, G. I. (1993). *Competitiveness in international tourism: A framework for understanding and analysis*. World Tourism Education and Research Centre, University of Calgary.
- Roziqin, A., Kurniawan, A.S., Hijri, Y.S., & Kismartini, K.(2023). Research trends of digital tourism: a bibliometric analysis. *Tourism Critiques*, 4(1/2), 28-47. Doi:10.1108/TRC-11-2022-0028
- Si, C., & Leou, E. C. (2024). Exploring the Impact of Social Media on Tourists' Travel Behavior: A Study of Xiaohongshu in Macau. In V. Katsoni & G. Cassar (Eds.), *Recent Advancements in Tourism Business, Technology and Social Sciences: IACuDiT 2023*. Springer, Cham. Doi:10.1007/978-3-031-54338-8_20
- Simmons, G. (2008). Marketing to post-modern consumers: Introducing the internet chameleon. *European Journal of Marketing*, 32(3/4), 299—310. Doi:10.1108/03090560810852940
- Uyar, A., Kuzey, C., & Karaman, A. S. (2022). ESG performance and CSR awards: Does consistency matter?. *Finance Research Letters*, 50, 103276. Doi:10.1016/j.frl.2022.103276
- UNWTO. (2023). *World Tourism Barometer*, 21(4). World Tourism Organization [UNWTO]. Retrieved from <https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs->

public/2023-

11/UNWTO_Barom23_04_November_EXCERPT_v2.pdf?VersionId=Q3i27HkRVs
yU9gSP6yV4NCgxZiPdHirE

Wang, Z., Yang, P., & Li, D. (2021). The Influence of Heritage Tourism Destination Reputation on Tourist Consumption Behavior: A Case Study of World Cultural Heritage Shaolin Temple. *SAGE Open*, 11(3), 21582440211030275. Doi:10.1177/21582440211030275