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Analyzing the Impact of Publicity and e-WOM on Indonesian Tourists' Visit Intention to Seoul through Destination Awareness and Preference: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach

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Abstract

This research explores the role of digital publicity and electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) in shaping Indonesian tourists' intentions to visit Seoul. By integrating destination awareness and preference as mediating variables, the study provides a holistic view of how publicity and E-WOM interact to influence visit intentions. Digital publicity, including news coverage and promotional content on social media, raises initial awareness of Seoul by highlighting its attractions, culture, and experiences. E-WOM, expressed through online reviews, travel blogs, and social media shares, further enhances the perception of Seoul by providing authentic, peer-driven narratives. These user-generated insights are particularly impactful, as they foster trust and add an emotional dimension to tourists' perception of the destination. Using a structural equation modeling approach, the study analyzes survey responses from Indonesian tourists to validate six core hypotheses, examining the direct and indirect effects of publicity and E-WOM on destination awareness, preference, and visit intention. Results indicate that both digital publicity and E-WOM significantly contribute to tourists' awareness and preference for Seoul, with preference being a particularly strong predictor of visit intention. The findings underscore the importance of aligning digital publicity efforts with targeted E-WOM strategies, enabling tourism marketers to build both cognitive awareness and emotional appeal, which ultimately drive visit intention. These insights are valuable for tourism stakeholders aiming to enhance destination marketing strategies, as they suggest that a combined approach—leveraging both structured publicity and organic E-WOM—can effectively increase a destination's appeal. By focusing on creating authentic, accessible content and fostering positive online word of mouth, tourism authorities can better attract tourists and establish Seoul as a top choice for Indonesian travelers.

Keywords: Digital Publicity, E-WOM, Destination Awareness, Destination Preference, Visit Intention

1. Introduction

The global tourism industry has evolved into a highly competitive landscape, where destinations increasingly rely on sophisticated digital strategies, including traditional online advertising and social media engagement, to capture and influence travelers' choices. In Southeast Asia, Seoul has emerged as a popular destination, largely attributed to the "Korean Wave" or Hallyu—a cultural movement encompassing South Korea's entertainment, beauty, and fashion industries. This phenomenon has resonated strongly in Indonesia, where Korean pop music (K-pop), dramas, and cultural products have cultivated a robust fanbase and fostered a desire to experience these elements firsthand. Many Indonesian tourists are motivated to visit iconic locations featured in their favorite dramas and concerts or immerse themselves in Korea's broader cultural scene, as reflected by the approximately 250,000 Indonesian tourists who visited Korea in 2023 [1], [2]. Digital publicity (PC) and electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) are key channels driving Seoul's appeal, shaping perceptions through news articles, digital advertising, and peer-influenced social media content. Publicity efforts, including appointing K-pop star Choi Siwon as Korea's tourism ambassador for Indonesia, portray Seoul as an accessible, vibrant, and culturally rich destination, deepening Indonesian travelers' interest. Similarly, E-WOM, facilitated by social media platforms like Instagram and travel blogs, provides authentic, peer-generated impressions that tourists trust and value, offering practical information and visual content that reinforce Seoul's image and increase visit intention (VI) among Indonesian audiences [3], [4]. In addition, sentiment analysis techniques, as explored by [5], [6], [7] and [8], have demonstrated the value of understanding consumer behavior, while studies on

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decentralized networks and immersive virtual experiences [9], [10], [11] and [12] highlight innovative approaches that amplify E-WOM's influence. These insights collectively emphasize the potential of digital publicity and E-WOM to shape Indonesian tourists' attitudes and intentions to visit Seoul, providing a robust foundation for analyzing their impact.

Previous research has examined the roles of PC and E-WOM in shaping tourists' choices but often treated them as separate influences rather than interconnected elements. PC uses mass media to build broad appeal, while E-WOM relies on peer recommendations to shape individual perceptions, highlighting their complementary effects. However, the mediating roles of DA and DPF—key drivers of VI for culturally rich destinations like Seoul—are often overlooked. This omission limits understanding of the cognitive and emotional processes that guide VI [3], [4]. An integrated model is needed to explore how DA establishes familiarity and DPF deepens emotional connections, ultimately shaping VI. Seoul's cultural appeal and peer-driven insights reinforce the importance of examining the combined impact of PC and E-WOM on DA and DPF to improve destination marketing strategies [2]. This study develops an integrated model to investigate how PC and E-WOM collectively influence Indonesian tourists' VIs to Seoul through cognitive and emotional pathways. With rising interest in Korean culture, it analyzes how digital interactions shape tourist perceptions and decisions, aligning with modern shifts in tourism marketing where publicity and user-generated content are pivotal. Specifically, the study explores the combined impact of PC and E-WOM on DA and DPF, providing insights into how these mediators shape perceptions and decisions. It further evaluates how DA and DPF influence VI, emphasizing their sequential and interconnected roles in motivating travel. By addressing the simultaneous effects of PC and E-WOM, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of digital strategies in fostering favorable travel intentions, contributing both theoretical insights and actionable strategies for effectively promoting Seoul as a preferred international destination.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Role of Digital Publicity (PC) in Shaping Tourism Destinations

PC plays a pivotal role in shaping tourists' perceptions and influencing their travel intentions. Unlike direct advertising, PC involves non-commercial information dissemination, where positive stories about destinations are shared through media channels, often enhancing trust through credible outlets and third-party endorsements [13], [14]. PC focuses on engaging audiences through digital platforms, utilizing mass media to deliver messages perceived as authentic, such as news stories or editorial content, rather than paid advertisements [15], [16]. This approach helps destinations build appealing narratives, maintain a positive image, and mitigate negative coverage. As emphasized by [17], [18] PC serves a crucial public relations function, safeguarding reputations and managing perceptions.

2.2. The Impact of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM) on Tourism

E-WOM has become a transformative marketing strategy in tourism, influencing consumer perceptions and travel decisions. Defined as digital communication that transmits impressions and opinions about products or services, E-WOM enables users to share experiences widely through online platforms [19], [20]. Unlike traditional word of mouth, which depends on face-to-face interactions, E-WOM leverages digital channels such as TripAdvisor, Instagram, and Facebook to provide peer-generated reviews, recommendations, and feedback. This content builds trust and credibility by offering firsthand insights from previous visitors, giving potential tourists an informal and relatable perspective [21]. E-WOM acts as both an informational and emotional driver in tourism, providing data about destinations while fostering anticipation and engagement. Its dual dimensions—informational, offering detailed insights, and emotional, influencing preferences—are critical [22]. Positive reviews on cultural experiences or scenic beauty enhance emotional connections and preferences, while negative feedback discourages potential visitors, highlighting its impact on DA and DPF [23].

2.3. The Role of Destination Awareness (DA) in Shaping Tourist Intentions

DA refers to a tourist's familiarity with a destination, including its ability to come to mind during travel planning. It represents the initial stage of destination knowledge, influencing decision-making by positioning destinations in tourists' mental landscapes [24]. Similar to brand awareness in consumer markets, DA enables tourists to recall and consider a destination as a viable option. Destinations with higher awareness levels achieve a stronger presence in

potential tourists' minds, increasing the likelihood of being chosen [25]. Beyond recognition, DA reduces uncertainty, fostering comfort and familiarity with a destination. Research highlights its role as a strategic advantage in competitive tourism markets, laying the foundation for positive DPF and enhancing evaluations in later decision stages [26].

2.4. Influence of Destination Preference (DPF) on Tourist Decision-Making

DPF reflects a tourist's emotional and attitudinal inclination toward a specific destination, shaped by personal beliefs, past experiences, and information gathered from various sources. It plays a crucial role in the tourism decision-making process as it directly precedes the final destination choice [27]. Like brand preference in consumer behavior, DPF involves awareness, familiarity, and emotional attachment, driving tourists to favor one destination over others. This emotional bond enhances selection likelihood, as tourists tend to choose destinations that resonate with their preferences and values [28], [29]. Beyond its role in narrowing travel choices, DPF also reflects the emotional and symbolic appeal of a destination. Tourists evaluate locations based on personal memories, cultural appeal, and emotional satisfaction, making DPF a strong predictor of loyalty and repeat visits. This highlights the deeper psychological motivations behind tourist behavior, where choices extend beyond transactions to become personal and experiential.

2.5. Understanding Visit Intention in Tourism

VI in tourism reflects the likelihood or motivation of a tourist to visit a specific destination, driven by cognitive and emotional factors. It captures the perceived probability of making a trip within a certain timeframe, exemplified by statements like "I can imagine spending my holiday in Slovakia" [30]. Similar to purchase intention in consumer behavior, VI represents a mental commitment shaped by favorable perceptions, preferences, and evaluations. Tourists' VI is influenced by both cognitive (information-based) and affective (emotion-based) dimensions, leading them to choose destinations aligned with their values and expectations, making VI a cornerstone in tourism marketing and destination branding strategies [31]. Beyond initial travel planning, VI predicts future behaviors, such as revisits or destination advocacy. Studies show that strong VI fosters repeat visits, positive recommendations, and word-of-mouth promotion, enhancing a destination's competitiveness. Digital strategies, including social media campaigns and influencer marketing, significantly influence VI by shaping tourists' perceptions and planning behaviors. Influencers, in particular, align destination promotions with travelers' values, making destinations more appealing and increasing visitation likelihood [32], [33]. Understanding VI as a blend of cognitive and emotional factors provides marketers with actionable insights into bridging tourist perceptions and actual travel behavior, ensuring effective destination promotion.

2.6. Hypotheses Development

Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesized relationships among PC, E-WOM, DA, DPF, and VI in the context of Indonesian tourists' intentions to visit Seoul. The model highlights key pathways, where each arrow represents a specific hypothesis. H1 and H3 propose that PC and E-WOM enhance DA by fostering greater familiarity and recognition of Seoul as a destination. H2 and H4 suggest that PC and E-WOM directly influence DPF, showing how promotional content and user-generated reviews shape tourists' preferences. Furthermore, H5 and H6 hypothesize that increased DA and DPF directly contribute to a stronger VI. This sequential framework underscores the critical role of digital influence in building DA and DPF, which are pivotal in transforming initial interest into actionable travel intentions.

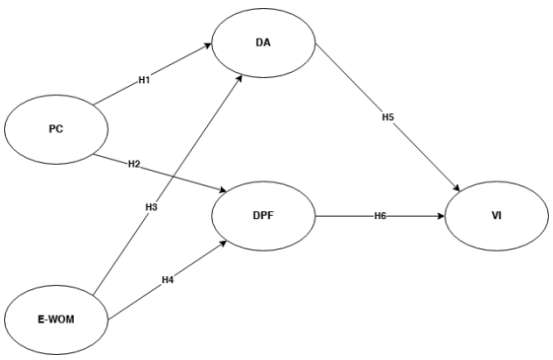

Figure 1. Research Framework

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H1: PC affects DA

PC enhances DA by increasing visibility and familiarity with the location, enabling potential tourists to gain a comprehensive understanding of a destination through exposure to digital content like news articles, social media posts, and user-generated media. Studies highlight that consistent PC significantly impacts DA and DPF by fostering recognition and recall, even without direct experience [34], [35]. Frequent online exposure to information about a destination improves tourists' cognitive understanding, making it more likely for them to consider the destination for future visits. This hypothesis posits that increased PC around Seoul enhances Indonesian tourists' awareness of the city, strengthening their likelihood of choosing it as a travel destination.

H2: PC affects DPF

PC significantly influences DPF by shaping tourists' attitudes and inclinations toward a destination. Well-crafted publicity strengthens positive perceptions and emotional attachment, as highlighted in studies emphasizing the importance of brand attributes and marketing efforts in fostering preference [36]. In tourism, PC enhances appeal through favorable media exposure, shared experiences, and relatable narratives, which emotionally engage potential visitors and reinforce their preferences. Frequent encounters with positive and appealing digital content about Seoul increase the likelihood of Indonesian tourists developing a strong preference for the city. This hypothesis underscores PC as a powerful tool in destination marketing, creating emotional connections that elevate Seoul's desirability as a preferred travel destination.

H3: E-WOM affects DA

E-WOM plays a pivotal role in enhancing DA by fostering familiarity and recognition through user-generated content and social sharing. Studies indicate that E-WOM positively impacts awareness by spreading information widely across platforms like Instagram, blogs, and travel forums, enabling potential tourists to gain indirect yet credible insights about destinations [37], [38]. This peer-driven content provides practical information and personal narratives that guide destination decisions, making E-WOM both relatable and trustworthy. By bridging informational gaps and enhancing engagement, E-WOM strengthens Indonesian tourists' cognitive awareness of Seoul, solidifying its position as a prominent and attractive travel option.

H4: E-WOM affects DPF

E-WOM significantly influences DPF by shaping travelers' emotional connections to a destination through authentic user-generated content. Digital advertising, including E-WOM and online reviews, plays a crucial role in establishing trust and fostering preference and loyalty. In tourism, E-WOM provides access to real experiences shared by others, offering valuable insights that influence destination preferences. Positive reviews and ratings create trust and desirability, making destinations appear engaging and worthwhile. Furthermore, E-WOM builds familiarity and approval among prospective visitors, reinforcing favorable attitudes and increasing the likelihood of destination selection [39], [40]. Indonesian tourists exposed to favorable E-WOM about Seoul are likely to develop stronger preferences for visiting, as this content amplifies Seoul's appeal by highlighting unique and desirable qualities shared by other travelers.

H5: DA affects VI

DA is a key cognitive factor influencing tourists' VI by establishing familiarity and recognition. Studies show that increased awareness significantly boosts consumers' engagement intentions, especially when disseminated through effective social media marketing [41]. Familiarity with a destination's unique features reduces uncertainty and strengthens the intent to visit. DA helps tourists associate specific attributes or benefits with a destination, enhancing its appeal over alternatives [42]. For Indonesian tourists, heightened DA—enhanced through publicity and digital content—can positively impact their decision to visit Seoul by presenting a compelling and vivid picture of the city's cultural and social attractions. This hypothesis asserts that DA directly influences VI, fostering informed and confident travel decisions.

H6: DPF affects VI

DPF, representing tourists' emotional or attitudinal inclination toward a destination, significantly influences their VI by fostering favorable perceptions and personal connections. Research highlights that brand preference in social media marketing positively impacts consumer purchase intention, illustrating how strong preferences drive decision-making [43]. In tourism, a preference for a destination often translates into an intent to visit, driven by emotional resonance and familiarity. Moreover, studies suggest that DPF mediates VI by enhancing a destination's perceived appeal, reinforcing the connection between preference and travel plans. As tourists' preference for a destination strengthens, their likelihood of planning visits increases, positioning DPF as a critical determinant of VI. This underscores its importance for marketers seeking to boost tourist engagement and influence travel decisions.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study uses a quantitative research design to examine the causal relationships between PC, E-WOM, DA, DPF, and VI. It aims to quantify how PC and E-WOM influence Indonesian tourists VI to Seoul, with DA and DPF as mediators. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is applied to analyze these relationships, as it effectively handles latent variables and evaluates the fit of theoretical models with empirical data. This cross-sectional study targets Indonesian tourists in Jakarta who have never visited Seoul, focusing on their susceptibility to online publicity and word-of-mouth in shaping travel decisions.

3.2. Sample and Data Collection

This study targets Indonesian tourists in Jakarta who have yet to visit Seoul, chosen for their potential interest in the destination and exposure to PC and E-WOM. As the total number of such individuals is unknown, the population is considered "infinite" [44], [45]. A non-probability convenience sampling method was employed, as it enables easy access to participants willing to meet the criteria. This approach, highlighted by [46], [47], aligns with the online survey format, making it suitable for identifying and engaging respondents fitting the required profile. The sample size was determined based on SEM recommendations, which suggest 155 to 500 respondents for robust analyses, with a minimum of 155 [48]. To ensure reliability, this study collected 383 responses, exceeding the minimum requirement. Data were gathered through a two-week online survey in September 2024, allowing respondents to participate conveniently. The survey captured attitudes toward PC, E-WOM, and perceptions of Seoul, focusing on variables like DA, DPF, and VI. Primary data from these responses supported SEM analysis, while secondary data enriched and validated the findings, as guided by [45].

3.3. Measurement and Instrumentation

The study measured key constructs—PC, E-WOM, DA, DPF, and VI—using scales adapted from prior research. PC was assessed using items from [49], [50] to reflect Indonesian tourists' exposure to Seoul's digital promotional efforts. E-WOM was measured using statements adapted from [51], [52], emphasizing the role of online reviews and positive social media discussions in shaping travel decisions. DA was evaluated with items adapted from [53], [54], focusing on respondents' familiarity with Seoul as a travel destination. These items captured cognitive awareness and top-of-mind recognition, aligning with [55], [56]. For DPF, items from [27], [28] measured tourists' priority and interest in Seoul, reflecting the influence of both functional and emotional benefits. Finally, VI was assessed with items from [30], [57], reflecting respondents' readiness to actualize travel plans. Constructs were measured on a 6-point Likert scale [58], [59], ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 6 ("Strongly Agree").

3.4. Data Analysis

This study utilized SEM with the PLS approach to examine hypotheses and evaluate the model fit, chosen for its capability to analyze complex interrelated constructs and accommodate smaller sample sizes, aligning with the study's exploratory objectives [60]. Preliminary analyses, including EFA and CFA, were performed using SPSS version 26 and AMOS version 26. EFA grouped questionnaire items into underlying dimensions, reducing the data into manageable factors as suggested by [61]. CFA followed to validate the measurement model, ensuring observed variables reliably represented the latent constructs and enhancing the robustness of the structural model [62]. Model fit

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was assessed through multiple indices. Absolute fit measures such as Chi-Square (CMIN), CMIN/DF, and RMSEA indicated overall fit, with CMIN/DF below 5 and RMSEA below 0.08 deemed acceptable. Incremental fit measures, including TLI and CFI, required values exceeding 0.90 for satisfactory fit, while GFI values near 1 reflected good model alignment with the data. Parsimonious fit measures ensured the model avoided overfitting. Path coefficients were analyzed using CR values in AMOS, with CRs above 2 indicating significant relationships. This rigorous evaluation ensured reliable SEM results, providing robust insights into the interrelationships among PC, E-WOM, DA, DPF, and VI.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

The demographic profile of respondents in this study provided insights into the characteristics of Indonesian tourists interested in visiting Seoul, South Korea, as shown in table 1. The age distribution was diverse, with the majority (38.1%) falling within the 25-29 age group, followed by those aged 20-24 (25.6%) and 30-34 (18%). Smaller percentages represented older age groups, including 35-39 (6.3%), 40-44 (4.2%), 45-49 (2.9%), and 50 years or older (2.3%). Regarding travel history, 94.5% of respondents had traveled out of town within the past three months, while 5.5% had yet to venture beyond their local areas. A significant finding was that 99.2% of respondents were familiar with Seoul as a city in South Korea, highlighting strong awareness of the destination. However, none of the respondents had visited Seoul, as the study specifically targeted individuals who had yet to experience the city firsthand. This ensured the sample's relevance to the study's focus on VI.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Aspect	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	<20	10	2.6
	20-24	98	25.6
	25-29	146	38.1
	30-34	69	18
	35-39	24	6.3
	40-44	16	4.2
	45-49	11	2.9
	50 and above	9	2.3
Travel History	Traveled out of town (past 3 months)	362	94.5
	Did not travel out of town	21	5.5
Familiarity with Seoul	Aware of Seoul	380	99.2
	Not aware of Seoul	3	0.8
Visited Seoul	Have visited Seoul	0	0
	Have not visited Seoul	383	100
Gender	Male	180	47
	Female	203	53
Education	Less than High School	6	1.6
	High School	128	33.4
	Diploma	85	22.2
	Undergraduate	144	37.6
	Master’s	17	4.4
	Doctorate	3	0.8
Employment Status	Working	243	63.4
	Self-employed	61	15.9
	Unemployed	48	12.5
	Retired	8	2.1

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	Not working	23	6
Marital Status	Married	191	49.9
	Single	183	47.8
	Divorced	5	1.3
	Widowed	4	1

4.2. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Table 2 summarizes the outcomes of the EFA, presenting the indicators, loading factors, alpha scores, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct in the study. The dimensions include Publicity (PC), E-WOM1, E-WOM2, DA, DPF, and VI. All dimensions demonstrate strong internal consistency and reliability, as indicated by high alpha scores and satisfactory AVE values. This EFA result establishes a solid foundation for the constructs used in the analysis, confirming that each dimension is well-represented by its respective indicators. These findings provide initial support for the model's validity, with more detailed explanations provided in the following section.

Table 2. Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis

Construct	Indicator	Loading Factor	Alpha Score	AVE
PC	PC1	0.933	0.898	0.736
	PC3	0.884		
	PC4	0.757		
	PC5	0.908		
	PC6	0.876		
	PC7	0.636		
	PC8	0.967		
E-WOM1	EWM1	0.991	0.963	0.861
	EWM2	0.92		
	EWM3	0.814		
	EWM5	0.932		
	EWM6	0.974		
E-WOM2	EWM4	0.891	0.761	0.584
	EWM7	0.776		
	EWM8	0.597		
DA	DA1	0.952	0.944	0.78
	DA2	0.876		
	DA3	0.517		
	DA4	0.922		
	DA5	0.892		
	DA7	0.954		
	DA8	0.984		
DPF	DPF1	0.938	0.963	0.79
	DPF2	0.908		
	DPF3	0.748		
	DPF4	0.951		
	DPF5	0.922		
	DPF6	0.825		
	DPF7	0.865		
	DPF8	0.935		
VI	VI1	0.948	0.961	0.794

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	VI2	0.845
	VI3	0.939
	VI4	0.847
	VI5	0.968
	VI6	0.79
	VI7	0.891
	VI8	0.89

Note: PC: Digital Publicity; E-WOM: Electronic Word of Mouth; DA: Destination Awareness; DPF: Destination Preference; VI: Visit Intention

The EFA results validate the robustness of the constructs in measuring their respective dimensions. The publicity construct exhibited a single-dimensional structure with seven valid indicators (loadings: 0.636–0.967, AVE: 0.736, Cronbach's alpha: 0.898), reflecting the impact of digital media exposure on tourists' perceptions of Seoul, with one indicator excluded for low loading (<0.5). For E-WOM, two dimensions emerged: E-WOM1 (positive reviews/social media influence, five indicators, Cronbach's alpha: 0.963) and E-WOM2 (practical aspects like travel convenience, three indicators, Cronbach's alpha: 0.761), with loadings ranging from 0.597 to 0.991. DA retained seven indicators (loadings: 0.517–0.984, AVE: 0.780, Cronbach's alpha: 0.944), capturing tourists' familiarity with Seoul. The DPF construct, with eight indicators (loadings: 0.748–0.951, AVE: 0.790, Cronbach's alpha: 0.960), highlighted Seoul's emotional appeal and preference. Finally, the VI construct showed strong intent to visit, with eight indicators (loadings: 0.790–0.968, AVE: 0.794, Cronbach's alpha: 0.961). These findings confirm the constructs' validity and reliability in the study.

4.3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Table 3 presents the results of the CFA, which examined the factor loadings and error terms for the indicators across various dimensions. The CFA model retained multiple indicators for each construct, such as PC, E-WOM1, E-WOM2, DA, DPF, and VI. Each indicator showed a strong loading factor, indicating its contribution to the associated construct, with values typically close to or above 0.9, underscoring their reliability and relevance in measuring the intended dimensions.

Table 3. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Construct	Indicator	Loading Factor	Error Term
PC	PC1	0.97	e40 (0.01)
	PC3	0.92	e42 (0.04)
	PC4	0.88	e44 (0.08)
	PC6	0.88	e43 (0.04)
	PC8	1	e39 (0.00)
E-WOM1	EWM2	1	e4 (0.02)
	EWM5	1.01	e3 (0.01)
	EWM6	1	e2 (0.02)
E-WOM2	EWM4	1	e6 (0.03)
	EWM7	1.35	e7 (-0.02)
DA	DA1	0.99	e11 (0.01)
	DA2	0.51	e14 (0.03)
	DA3	0.9	e15 (0.11)
	DA4	0.96	e12 (0.02)

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Construct	Indicator	Loading Factor	Error Term
	DA5	0.9	e13 (0.03)
	DA7	1	e10 (0.01)
	DA8	1	e9 (0.00)
DPF	DPF1	1.17	e37 (0.02)
	DPF2	1.15	e34 (0.03)
	DPF3	1	e31 (0.07)
	DPF4	1.15	e38 (0.01)
	DPF6	1.05	e32 (0.05)
	DPF7	1.11	e33 (0.03)
VI	VI4	0.88	e58 (0.04)
	VI7	1	e56 (0.03)
	VI8	0.88	e57 (0.03)

Note: PC: Digital Publicity; E-WOM: Electronic Word of Mouth; DA: Destination Awareness; DPF: Destination Preference; VI: Visit Intention

The CFA results confirm the constructs' validity and alignment with the study's objectives. The publicity construct retained five indicators (p = 0.484, CMIN/DF = 0.893), reflecting digital media's role in shaping DA and VI, while excluding two items with insufficient loadings to ensure unidimensionality. For E-WOM, a two-factor structure emerged: E-WOM1 (positive online reviews/social media influence) and E-WOM2 (practical aspects like travel logistics), with five retained indicators (p = 0.388, CMIN/DF = 1.033) and three excluded for weaker relevance. DA retained all seven indicators (p = 0.409, CMIN/DF = 1.04), capturing tourists' familiarity, recognition, and mental imagery of Seoul as a reputable destination. The DPF construct retained six indicators (p = 0.503, CMIN/DF = 0.923), emphasizing tourists' strong preference for Seoul over competitors, with two items excluded for low loadings. Lastly, the VI construct retained three indicators (p = 0.091, CMIN/DF = 2.852), focusing on actionable visit intentions. These results validate the constructs' robustness in measuring Indonesian tourists' perceptions and intentions regarding Seoul.

4.4. Structural Modeling

In the final structural model, depicted in figure 2, several key relationships among the variables were examined to determine the impact of publicity and E-WOM on DA, DPF, and VI.

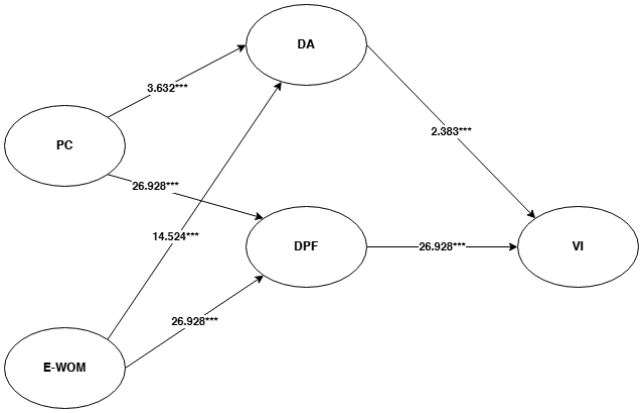

Figure 2. Inner Model Results

Note: PC: Digital Publicity; E-WOM: Electronic Word of Mouth; DA: Destination Awareness; DPF: Destination Preference; VI: Visit Intention

The structural model testing demonstrated excellent fit indices (P = 0.088, CMIN/DF = 1.198, TLI = 0.997, CFI = 0.998, RMSEA = 0.023), confirming the model's validity and alignment with observed data. Hypothesis testing revealed significant relationships across all paths. H1, linking publicity to DA, was supported with a CR of 3.632, aligning with findings on publicity's role in enhancing awareness [36], [63]. Similarly, H2, examining publicity's impact on DPF, showed a highly significant CR of 26.928, consistent with prior research on publicity shaping consumer preferences. H3 and H4, addressing E-WOM's influence on DA and DPF, demonstrated strong significance with CRs of 14.524 and 26.928, respectively, corroborating studies on E-WOM's critical role in shaping perceptions [64]. Positive E-WOM enhances tourists' DA of Seoul and strengthens their preference for it as a destination. H5 and H6 confirmed the influence of DA and DPF on VI, with DA significantly impacting VI (CR = 2.383) and DPF showing an even stronger effect (CR = 26.928), supporting findings on the centrality of preference in travel intentions [65]. These results highlight the interplay between PC and E-WOM in building DA and DPF, which are essential drivers of VI's. Table 4 summarizes these outcomes, demonstrating the robust significance of all pathways in shaping Indonesian tourists' intentions to visit Seoul.

Table 4. Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypotheses	Path	T-value (C.R.)	Conclusion
H1	PC → DA	3.632	Accepted
H2	PC → DPF	26.928	Accepted
H3	EWOM → DA	14.524	Accepted
H4	EWOM → DPF	26.928	Accepted
H5	DA → VI	2.383	Accepted
H6	DPF → VI	26.928	Accepted

The model fit for this study was assessed using several key indices, confirming the adequacy of the structural equation model in representing the data. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) index was calculated to evaluate the difference between observed and predicted correlations, with values closer to zero indicating better model fit. In this study, the SRMR values for the saturated and estimated models were 0.053 and 0.072, respectively, falling within the acceptable range of 0.06 to 0.08, supporting the model's strong alignment with the observed data. Other indices, such as CMIN/DF, TLI, CFI, and RMSEA, all met the recommended cut-off values, reinforcing the model's reliability in effectively capturing the variables' relationships.

4.5. Mediation Effects

The mediation effects observed in this study illustrate the sequential process where DA significantly influences preference, affecting VI. Table 5 provides an in-depth analysis of the indirect effects of PC and E-WOM on VI through mediating constructs—DA and DPF. Each construct relationship shows the path, T-value, T statistics, and p-value, concluding each hypothesis is accepted.

Table 5. Testing of Mediation Effects Results

Construct	Construct Relationship	T-value (C.R.)	T Statistics	P Values	Conclusion
PC → DA → VI	PC → DA	3.632	2.495	0.013	Accepted
	DA → VI	2.383			Accepted
PC → DPF → VI	PC → DPF	26.928	3.557	0.000	Accepted
	DPF → VI	26.928			Accepted
EWOM → DA → VI	EWOM → DA	14.524	2.265	0.024	Accepted
	DA → VI	2.383			Accepted
EWOM → DPF → VI	EWOM → DPF	26.928	4.010	0.000	Accepted

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Construct	Construct Relationship	T-value (C.R.)	T Statistics	P Values	Conclusion
	DPF → VI	26.928			Accepted

The DA-DPF-VI pathway highlights the sequential progression in shaping tourists' decision-making, starting with DA, which provides a foundational understanding of Seoul's unique offerings and attributes. This awareness fosters a positive DPF, as tourists develop a preference for Seoul over other destinations, transitioning from general curiosity to a concrete VI. The pathway underscores the importance of emotional engagement, where factual knowledge transforms into a personal connection, enhancing the likelihood of actual visitation. This mediated progression from DA to DPF and finally to VI emphasizes that awareness alone is insufficient; cultivating an emotional link through preference significantly strengthens tourists' intent to visit. For marketers, this underscores the need for campaigns that not only inform but also evoke emotional resonance by emphasizing Seoul's appealing attributes. By aligning cognitive and emotional factors, marketers can effectively transition awareness into intent, validating the study's findings that emotional engagement through DA and DPF is a powerful predictor of VI.

4.6. Novel Contributions and Implications

This research confirms pathways through which PC and E-WOM influence Indonesian tourists' VIs to Seoul, offering novel insights by integrating these dual predictors within a structural model. It reveals the compounded effects of publicity and E-WOM on intermediary constructs like DA and DPF, advancing literature beyond single-predictor approaches. Employing the SRMR index for model evaluation ensures robust insights into model alignment. Findings underscore DA's foundational role in shaping both DPF and VI, with DA fostering familiarity and knowledge, which transitions into stronger preferences and higher VIs. Publicity enhances Seoul's visibility through controlled narratives, while E-WOM fosters credibility and emotional connections via user-generated content. These results emphasize the need for tailored marketing strategies leveraging either PC or E-WOM based on audience characteristics and destination attributes. The integrated model offers a fresh theoretical perspective by combining cognitive and emotional factors to explain tourist decision-making. DA builds foundational awareness, while DPF solidifies emotional connections, forming a sequential process that leads to VI. This unified framework extends beyond traditional knowledge-based models by highlighting the interplay between awareness and emotional appeal, paving the way for future research in different contexts. Practically, tourism marketers should implement integrated strategies that blend PC and E-WOM to foster both cognitive and emotional engagement. Publicity campaigns must highlight Seoul's unique cultural experiences to build DA, while E-WOM strategies encourage authentic user-generated content to strengthen DPF.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of cognitive and emotional factors in shaping Indonesian tourists' intentions to visit Seoul. Awareness serves as the foundation, familiarizing tourists with the destination, while preference strengthens their emotional connection, leading to concrete visit intentions. Publicity and E-WOM play complementary roles, with publicity creating initial exposure and E-WOM fostering trust and deeper engagement through authentic peer-generated content. By integrating these elements, the study offers a holistic framework that progresses from awareness to preference and intent, providing valuable insights into digital-era tourist behavior. While the findings are insightful, the study's focus on Indonesian tourists and Seoul limits generalizability to other demographics or destinations. Future research should apply the model to diverse groups and explore variations in cognitive and emotional influences across cultures. For marketers, the findings emphasize combining publicity to build awareness with E-WOM to nurture preference. Campaigns should prioritize authentic, engaging content that transitions tourists from initial interest to firm intentions, leveraging digital platforms to maximize effectiveness.

6. Declarations

6.1. Author Contributions

Conceptualization: G.H., U.S., and A.W.H.; Methodology: U.S.; Software: G.H.; Validation: G.H., U.S., and A.W.H.; Formal Analysis: G.H., U.S., and A.W.H.; Investigation: G.H.; Resources: U.S.; Data Curation: U.S.; Writing Original

Draft Preparation: G.H., U.S., and A.W.H.; Writing Review and Editing: U.S., G.H., and A.W.H.; Visualization: G.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

6.2. Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

6.3. Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

6.4. Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

6.5. Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

6.6. Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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