

Unveiling the Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth: Exploring Generation Z's Travel Behavior through Perceived Risk in Tourism Destination

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Abstract

This research aimed to investigate the mediating role of electronic word of mouth on the relationship between Generation Z's perceived risk and travel behavior on tourism destinations in the province of Davao Occidental. The study's respondents were three hundred seventy-seven Gen Z drawn out from the total population using stratified random sampling. Three adapted survey questionnaires were administered to measure perceived risk, travel behavior, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). The study's significant findings revealed very high perceived risk and travel behavior among Gen Z tourists. Additionally, the tourists' level of e-WOM was found to be high. Results showed a positive relationship between perceived risks and electronic word-of-mouth, indicating that very high levels of perceived risks are associated with high levels of e-WOM. Similarly, a positive relationship was observed between travel behavior and electronic word-of-mouth, suggesting that very high travel behavior levels are associated with high levels of e-WOM. Furthermore, the study found that perceived risk significantly impacts tourists' travel behavior and e-WOM, emphasizing the importance of travel behavior in the perception of tourists regarding risk and their practice of e-WOM. Lastly, it was revealed that e-WOM mediates the association between perceived risk and travel behavior.

Keywords: Business and management; generation z; travel behavior; perceived risk; electronic word-of-mouth; descriptive-correlational; Davao Occidental, Philippines

1. Introduction

The tourism industry has a significant impact on a country's economy. It is one of the most critical sectors for earning money and contributing to economic development (Marzoor et al., 2019; Lee & Chen, 2020). Various circumstances and factors frequently influence tourists' attitudes toward the places they visit. It is widely acknowledged that word-of-mouth (WOM) communication plays a vital role in developing marketing strategies and communications. The rise of social media and the Internet have given traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) a new electronic dimension, transforming it into electronic WOM (eWOM) (Amin, 2023, p. 29). Even though electronic word of mouth differs from traditional word of mouth in delivery, its ability to influence customers remains unchanged. Several studies have shown the significance of electronic word of mouth and its influence on customer decision-making (Liang et al., 2018; Febrian & Fadly, 2021). Information from various sources, including the Internet and feedback from previous visitors to a specific destination, are the primary indicators supporting visitors' acquisition intentions. For instance, eWOM strongly influences Chinese travelers' intentions to visit Thailand through attitudes, subjective norms, and

perceived behavioral control. (Miao 2015; Liu 2019). Word-of-mouth (eWOM) influences travel decisions in an online travel community, including lodging selection, food and drink recommendations, transportation options, destination safety, budgetary considerations, and itinerary changes.

Visitors are more likely than ever before to use the Internet to research destinations for upcoming trips. Travel and tourism are still among the fastest growing industries, indicating a high travel demand. As a result, tourism destinations must constantly strive to attract visitors and develop new strategies to stay ahead of the competition. Because hospitality and tourism products and services require more interpersonal interaction from customers, electronic word of mouth significantly impacts the hospitality industry more than in other sectors (Cros & McKercher, 2020). As a result, understanding and knowledge of tourist behavior is critical for the successful development of tourism services. Understanding tourist behavior benefits all tourism stakeholders (Oliveira, 2019). The concept of perceived risk contributes to the discipline of consumer behavior by proposing that consumer choice can be expressed in risk-taking or risk-reducing behavior (Bauer, 1960; Zhang & Yu, 2020). Certain types of risk, such as the fear of being kidnapped or becoming involved in a terrorist attack, have been proposed to indicate the possibility of risk; however, the experience of traveling to an unfamiliar destination can be the primary source of uncertainty for consumers (Walsh, 1986; Xue et al., 2020). Furthermore, because services are intangible, which means that consumers cannot try or experience them before purchasing, tourism-related purchase decisions carry a higher level of risk (Laroche, McDougall, Bergeron, & Yang, 2004; Murray & Schlacter, 1990; Huang, Liu, & Kandampully, 2022). When tourists perceive risk or have safety concerns, it can significantly influence their decision to travel (Money & Crotts, 2003; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2006; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998; Sánchez et al., 2021).

Generation Z has a psychological need for vacations to relieve stress from their many responsibilities (Jamil et al., 2022). People, particularly Generation Z, increasingly perceive social media applications as essential to their daily lives because they interact frequently with these virtual platforms (Alalwan et al., 2017), reflecting their attitudes and behaviors toward social media consumption. Gen. Z values the usefulness of social media and uses it to seek knowledge (push factor), which leads to their desire to visit a destination (Nguyen et al., 2021). They enjoy looking for picturesque locations, trying local cuisine, and camping. Generation Z prefers private vehicles like motorcycles or cars for cost-effective and efficient transportation, allowing them to visit multiple locations (Haratikka & Purba, 2023).

There were 806,805 tourist arrivals in the Davao area as of the second quarter of 2023; Davao Occidental accounted for just 7,010 visitors. Davao Occidental ranks last among the five (5) provinces in the Davao Region regarding the number of tourists that arrive (Department of Tourism Davao Region, 2023). The perceived risk has been thought to be a concept that only applies to tourists, presumably because tourists are more likely to lack knowledge/information about the destinations and are exposed to physical-equipment risk, vacation risk, and destination-specific risks (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992; Joo et al., 2021).

In Davao Occidental, this is the first study to examine the mediating role of electronic word of mouth on the relationship between perceived risk in the province, and the travel behavior of Generation Z. Helpful information derived from electronic word of mouth can reduce uncertainty, resulting in lower risk (Xu et al., 2022). This effect of word of mouth on risk reduction was one of the first academic studies on electronic word of mouth (Pourfakhimi et al., 2020). Such simplified illustrations of aggregated ratings, such as star ratings, bars, and simple categorical keywords, are fundamental in facilitating heuristic decision-making about tourism products in a short period within the tourism and hospitality product spectrum (Bravo et al., 2021).

This study is anchored to two theories about how tourists select a destination. These are Social Contagion Theory and Knowledge-Attitude-Behavior (KAB) Theory. Social Contagion Theory explains how an individual level of communication influences risk knowledge (Muter et al., 2013). "The idea of social contagion poses that individuals adopt the attitudes or behaviors of others in the social network with whom they communicate. The theory does not require intent to influence, or even an awareness of influence, only

that communication takes place" (Scherer and Cho, 2003). Social networks are critical channels where people receive, share, and exchange information about risk-related events. This theory explains how electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is related to travel behavior and the tourists' perceived risk in choosing destinations.

The Knowledge-Attitude-Behavior Model categorizes human behavior into three stages: acquiring knowledge, developing beliefs, and forming behavior. This theory holds that attitude is the best predictor of behavior, knowledge is the foundation of attitude changes, and the level of knowledge mastery influences the consistency of attitude and behavior. Thus, tourism knowledge is critical to the development of attitudes and travel behavior; however, this "knowledge" differs from knowledge in the objective sense; rather, it is an abstract perception of knowledge that directly influences tourists' psychology and decision-making practices, such as the arousal of confidence and willingness to act (Quintal et al., 2010; Sharifpour et al., 2014). This theory explains how general knowledge about specific tourism destinations could influence tourists' travel behavior. These theories are supported by Perceived Risk Theory, which is bound to rationality and satisfaction. When consumers make decisions, they seek to minimize the associated risk rather than "maximize utility," as economists refer to it (Bauer, 1960). The perceived risk is one's belief that they will suffer losses. This subjective perspective is significant because if a tourist does not perceive risk, it may not affect their travel decisions; however, even in the absence of objective risk, a tourist's perception of its presence may influence decision-making (Khan et al., 2019).

This study aims to examine the mediating role of electronic word of mouth on the relationship between perceived risk and travel behavior of Generation Z in tourism destinations in Davao Occidental. More explicitly, the study seeks to answer the following objectives: To determine the extent of the mediating role of electronic word of mouth among tourists: Perceived Risk, and Tourist Behavior. To evaluate tourists' perceived risk in terms of: financial risk, service quality risk, political instability risk, petty crime risk, and terrorist attack risk. To evaluate the travel behavior in terms of Attitude Towards Travel, Travel Norms, Perceived Behavioral Control, Hygienic Concern, Destination Knowledge, and Post Pandemic Travel Intention. To determine the relationship between the factors mediating the role of electronic word of mouth and perceived risk. And to determine the relationship between the extent of factors that mediate the role of electronic word of mouth and tourist behavior.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Respondents

The study was conducted via face-to-face survey. The total sample size was 377 respondents, selected using stratified sampling to ensure that only Generation Z answered the research questionnaire.

The study's respondents were members of Generation Z, who are residents of Davao del Sur, the nearest province to Davao Occidental, either male or female and who willingly agreed and gave their consent. Davao Occidental is the youngest province in the Philippines. It is located in the Davao Region, carved from its mother province, Davao del Sur, and is comprised of five municipalities, namely, Sta. Maria, Malita, Don Marcelino, Jose Abad Santos, and the island municipality of Sarangani. Its capital is Malita, two hours away from Digos City, the capital of Davao del Sur. College students from Davao del Sur's Generation Z population are the primary respondents, as this demographic enjoys travel (Ketut et al., 2022). Generation Z prioritizes environmental and mental health, as well as sustainable living. This study differs from (Ketut et al. 2022) in that it was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, when people had more freedom to go outside and were less concerned with health factors and sustainable accommodations than they are today. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Generation Z tourists contributed significantly by visiting destinations via virtual tourism websites (Bilińska et al., 2023). As a result, this study aims to determine Gen Z's perceived risk and travel behavior mediated by electronic word of mouth.

2.2 Materials and Instrument

Three sets of survey questionnaires were used to collect information from 377 respondents. The first section of the questionnaire is an electronic word of mouth survey adapted from Le-Hoang (2020). The impact of electronic word of mouth (ewom) on consumer information adoption. An independent journal of management and production. The second section of the questionnaire, adapted from Galvez and Zuk (2019), is about perceived risk. Tourists perceived risk in Barcelona, an international destination. School of Tourism and Hospitality Management. Ramón Llull University. The third section of the questionnaire is based on travel behavior data from Chansuk, C., Arreeras, Chiangboon, Phonmakham, Chotikool, Buddee, Pumjampa, and Yanasoi (2022). A questionnaire survey—transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives—was used to conduct factor analyses in order to better understand post-pandemic domestic tourism behavior. To meet the research instrument's validity requirements, the researcher adhered to the fidelity of testing the research tool from face validity. According to Field (2005), validity describes how well the collected data covers the actual area of investigation. In this case, the survey questionnaire was sent to a panel of questionnaire construction experts for modification to match the respondents' cultural preferences.

2.3 Design and Procedure

This study used a quantitative research method. To gain a better understanding of ideas and opinions, numerical data must be collected and analyzed in order to place insights in a quantitative framework. It can identify patterns and averages, make predictions, test causal relationships, and extrapolate findings to larger populations. The descriptive correlation method is used in this study's research design. Descriptive correlation is used to investigate the mediating role of electronic word of mouth in the relationship between Generation Z's perceived risk and travel behavior to tourism destinations in Davao Occidental. A questionnaire was developed based on similar research studies, with descriptive questions. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) measures the strength and direction of a linear relationship between two variables; $r = 0$ indicates that there is no linear relationship between them. By learning how to do it, the researcher can make predictions and better understand the data collected.

Initially, the researcher scheduled appointments with her adviser to conceptualize the research framework. Following approval, the adapted survey questionnaire was organized and sent to a panel of examiners for face validation. In addition, the researcher sought permission from the Dean of the Professional School to conduct the current study. Furthermore, the researcher personally distributed the questionnaires and explained the rationale for the research problems. The data was tabulated and analyzed statistically. Following that, statistical results were meticulously analyzed and professionally interpreted in order to produce meaningful findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presented the answers to the questions raised earlier in this paper. The presentation of data is as follows: first, the level of perceived risk; second, the level of travel behavior; third, the level of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM); fourth, correlation between perceived risk and travel behavior, the relationship between perceived risk and electronic word-of-mouth, the relationship between travel behavior and electronic word-of-mouth; lastly, the significance of the mediating effect of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on the relationship between perceived risk and travel behavior of Generation Z on the tourism destination.

The standard deviation in the three descriptive tables, Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3, ranged from 0.47 to 1.00, approximately in a 2:1 ratio, which is the rule of thumb for the maximum and minimum standard

deviation (Yin et al., 2016). This indicates that the ratings of the respondents were close to the mean, indicating consistency of responses among the respondents (Othman et al., 2011).

Table 1 presents the level of perceived risk of the tourists. The overall mean score is 3.76, which is described as high. The respondents' high level of perceived risk can be attributed to their high evaluation of the indicators of this variable.

Table 1. Descriptive summary for perceived risk

	Mean	SD	Descriptive Level
Financial risk	3.97	0.694	high
Service quality risk	3.88	0.671	high
Political instability risk	3.81	0.694	high
Petty crime risk	4.19	0.727	high
Terrorist attack risk	4.14	0.782	high
Overall perception of risk	2.57	0.852	moderate
Overall	3.76	0.462	high

The table further showed that the tourist perceived risk is frequently observed in the items of petty crimes risk with an average of 4.19 or high as the highest, terrorist attack risk with a mean score of 4.14 or high, financial risk with a mean score of 3.97 or high, service quality risk with a mean score of 3.88 or high, political instability risk with a mean score of 3.81 or high. Meanwhile, the tourist perceived risk is slightly observed in the overall perception of risk with a mean score of 3.76 or moderate, which is the lowest.

These findings mean Gen Z tourists have a high perceived risk when visiting tourism destinations. This further implies that they can feel worried about their welfare and safety when visiting tourist destinations. Security of stay and safety of a tourism destination have become essential elements in selecting a destination. That is why it's vital in today's society to analyze the different types of risk and the necessary measures to mitigate the adverse effects that could affect this economic field in the future (Toader & Mocuta, 2020).

Despite the high perceived risk, Davao Occidental tourists still visit the province because of its features. Davao Occidental, a mountainous province, boasts vast agricultural lands, rich fisheries, and marine resources. Its long coastlines offer beautiful beaches and abundant food (Sunnexdesk, 2023). The province is hilly, rugged, and sloping, with 80% consisting of mountains. The eastern shoreline features cliffs and hills. Davao Occidental's rich cultural heritage and colorful traditions are reflected in its festivals, including the "Gaginaway" Festival of Malita, celebrated annually on the full moon of November. Other popular festivals include the "Kap'Yaan" festival in Jose Abad Santos, celebrating the bountiful harvest and blessings received by residents, and the Masbol Cultural Festival in the Municipality of Sarangani, which gathers major tribes and an Indonesian tribe (NEDA Region XI, 2023). These festivals showcase the diverse cultural heritage of Davao Occidental. Perceived Risk does not affect Gen Z Travel Decision (Aryasih et al., 2023). Davao Occidental's tourism activities include surfing and motocross. The province's goal is to demonstrate that adventure exists while being sustainable (Mendoza, 2023).

Table 2 presents data on Gen Z tourists' travel behavior. The overall mean score, equivalent to 4.31, was described as very high, indicating that the respondents are always concerned about the different aspects of selecting ideal tourism destinations.

Table 2. Descriptive summary for travel behavior

	Mean	SD	Descriptive Level
Attitude towards travel	4.44	0.611	very high
Travel norm	4.40	0.592	very high
Perceived behavioral control	4.10	0.855	high
Hygienic concern	4.39	0.604	very high
Destination knowledge	4.33	0.670	very high
Post pandemic travel intention	4.21	0.699	very high
Overall	4.31	0.378	very high

Specifically, Table 2 revealed that Gen Z tourists have very high travel behavior in terms of attitude towards travel (4.44), travel norm (4.40), hygiene concern (4.39), destination knowledge (4.33), and post-pandemic intention (4.21). Moreover, the table also shows that Gen Z tourists have high perceived behavioral control (4.10).

The findings above imply that Gen Z tourists always carefully select tourism destinations. They do this by prioritizing different destination elements, such as considering personal preference, hygienic concerns, knowledge, etc. The comfort of travel for Gen Z releases their stress by visiting natural destinations such as mountains, beaches, and lakes (Agustina & Astari, 2022). They prefer villa lodging with locations near nature when they travel. More importantly, they will prioritize environmental and mental health factors in the future. The study also found that they favor sustainable accommodation. This further implies that they are highly aware of the salient attributes tourism destinations should have to accommodate tourists. Gen Z travelers have a strong and enthusiastic desire to travel. They appear to have a strong desire and incentive to travel, based on their high ratings in attitude toward travel, travel norms, hygiene concern, destination awareness, and post-pandemic intention. Furthermore, their high perceived behavioral control suggests that they are self-assured and capable of efficiently controlling their travel behavior. These results indicate that Gen Z travelers will probably be engaged and passionate about the travel and tourism sector, primarily as the globe works through and beyond the obstacles presented by the COVID-19 epidemic.

Gen Z travelers continue to arrive in significant numbers despite known risks associated with the area, indicating that this group is open to adventure and uncertainty. There's no question that Gen Z is a risk taker, far more than other generations (Walsh, 2023). Their decision to go to places with higher risk factors indicates a mindset that is open to accepting and handling uncertainty and a drive for curiosity, which is changing preconceived ideas about what constitutes appropriate travel behavior.

Table 3 reflects the data on the level of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) of Gen Z tourists. The overall mean, which is equal to 3.61, was described as high, which means that the respondents are highly influenced by different tourism destination sources, whether online, through oral communication or based on personal expertise.

Table 3. Descriptive summary for electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM)

	Mean	SD	Descriptive Level
Trust of e-WOM news source	4.08	0.473	high
Quality of e-WOM	3.49	0.587	high
Quantity of e-WOM	4.17	0.628	high
Consumer expertise	3.25	0.902	moderate
Adoption of e-WOM	3.53	1.044	high
Overall	3.61	0.503	high

Specifically, it was revealed that the respondent's experience in e-WOM is frequently observed in terms of quantity of e-WOM with a mean score of 4.17 or higher, which is the highest, meaning that Gen Z believes that reviews with a high number of comments are more reliable, that reviews of a tourism destination that receive a lot of attention and that are assessed by multiple websites indicate that the information about that destination is more reliable. Trust of e-WOM news source with a mean score of 4.08, Gen Z considers information from trusted sources, including close acquaintances and credible senders. Prioritize recommendations from those who have personally visited the destination and trust websites with clear, visually appealing interfaces and easily accessible information. Seek guidance from popular websites and individuals with similar travel preferences. Adoption of e-WOM with a mean score of 3.53, on its factor that eWOM provides valuable insights and perspectives on tourism destinations, facilitating informed decision-making and enhancing the efficiency of selecting destinations that align with my preferences. The quality of e-WOM has a mean score of 3.49, while they slightly observe consumer expertise with a mean score of 3.25 or moderate.

These findings indicate how e-WOM highly influences the decision-making of Gen Z tourists when selecting tourism destinations. Moreover, they highlight the importance of different platforms where e-WOM can be transmitted. Electronic WOM influences the travel behavior of tourists (Auliya & Pertiwi, 2019), and WOM, in terms of peer influence or sharing experience, can be an effective way of influencing tourists to visit places (Kim et al., 2015).

The results of the relationship between the variables' correlation matrix are presented in Table 4. The analysis revealed that perceived risk and travel behavior have a computed r-value of 0.169 and a corresponding p-value of 0.000, signifying significance at $\alpha = 0.05$ level.

Table 4. Correlation matrix showing the relationship of the variables

	Perceived Risk	Travel Behavior	e-Word-of-Mouth	
Perceived Risk				
	Pearson's r	—		
	df	—		
	p-value	—		
Travel Behavior				
	Pearson's r	0.169***	—	
	df	375	—	
	p-value	<.001	—	
e-Word-of-Mouth				
	Pearson's r	0.168**	0.165**	—
	df	375	375	—
	p-value	0.001	0.001	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Perceived risk was thought to be a concept that only applied to tourists, presumably because tourists are more likely to lack knowledge/information about destinations and are exposed to physical-equipment risk, vacation risk, and destination-specific risks (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992; Joo et al., 2021). When visitors seek destination information for upcoming trips, they are more likely than in the past to use the Internet. Travel and tourism are still among the fastest-growing industries. This implies that there is a great demand for travel. As a result, tourism destinations must constantly strive to attract visitors to their areas. Because the travel and tourism industry has become so concentrated, destinations must find new ways to stay ahead of the curve. Because hospitality and tourism products and services necessitate more interpersonal interaction from

customers, electronic word of mouth has a more significant influence in the hospitality industry than in other sectors (Du Cros & McKercher, 2020). As a result, understanding and knowledge of tourist behavior is critical in tourism development. Understanding tourist behavior benefits all tourism stakeholders (Oliveira, 2019).

The result mentioned above implied that there is a significant relationship between perceived risk and travel behavior. Further, the r -value signifies a weak positive correlation which means that in some instances, high level of perceived risk correlates with very high level of tourist behavior. That is, Gen Z tourists who are concerned about their safety in visiting places are more selective when it comes to making decisions in traveling.

The table further showed that perceived risk and e-WOM have a computed r -value of 0.168 with a p -value of 0.001, while travel behavior and e-WOM have a computed r -value of 0.165 with a corresponding p -value of 0.001. Both correlations are found significant at $\alpha = 0.05$ level. This indicates enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis of no relation between the variables. Hence, a meaningful relationship exists between perceived risk and e-WOM and travel behavior and e-WOM. The R -values further signified a weak positive correlation, which implies that in some cases, a high level of perceived risk and a very high level of tourist behavior correlated to a high level of e-WOM. This means that Gen Z tourists who have a high perception of the danger in visiting places and have a high awareness of destination features are also aware of the different means of e-WOM communication relating to tourism. These results are parallel to the findings of Uslu and Karabulut (2018), who found a significant relationship between perceived risk and e-WOM, highlighting that both perceived risk and perceived value are predictors of e-WOM. Moreover, Wisankosol (2020) revealed that there is a significant relationship between e-WOM and tourist behavioral intentions to visit a place. He posited that e-WOM can influence tourists' decision-making in selecting and visiting a place to stay.

Displayed in Table 5 are the results of the relationship between perceived risk and travel behavior as mediated by electronic word-of-mouth. The independent variable (IV) is perceived risk, the dependent variable (DV) is travel behavior, and the mediating variable (MV) is e-WOM. There were four steps involved in the simple mediation analysis that was conducted: first is the path showing the relationship between perceived risk and e-WOM; second, the path showing the relationship between e-WOM and travel behavior; third is the path showing the relationship between perceived risk and travel behavior, and fourth is the path showing the relationship between perceived risk and travel behavior as mediated by e-WOM.

Table 5. Mediation estimates for the three variables

Effect	Label	Estimate	SE	95% Confidence Interval		Z	p	% Mediation
				Lower	Upper			
Indirect	$a \times b$	0.0194	0.00913	0.00148	0.0373	2.12	0.034	14.0
Direct	c	0.1187	0.04170	0.03699	0.2005	2.85	0.004	86.0
Total	$c + a \times b$	0.1381	0.04152	0.05671	0.2195	3.33	<.001	100.0

It was revealed that there is enough evidence to support the hypothesis that e-WOM significantly mediated the relationship between perceived risk and travel behavior of Gen Z tourists. As seen in Table 5, the indirect effect ($a \times b = 0.0194$) suggests that e-WOM mediates the association between perceived risk and travel behavior with a p -value of 0.034. This indicated that electronic word-of-mouth mediated 14% of the total effect of perceived risk to travel behavior. These findings confirmed the results of numerous research studies that highlighted significant relationships between e-WOM and travel behavior and perceived risk to travel behavior (Nilashi et al., 2022), emphasizing that perceived risk has a higher impact on the decision to travel among tourists. The indirect implications shown in Table 5 highlight the expanding significance of

digital platforms in influencing travel decisions within the Gen Z tourist population. Specifically, the considerable mediation effect of e-WOM between perceived risk and travel behavior is demonstrated. As e-WOM acts as a mediator, it implies that Gen Z travelers value online evaluations, suggestions, and testimonies to reduce perceived risks related to travel locations and eventually shape their travel behavior. This study emphasizes the necessity for destinations and firms in the tourism sector to actively manage their online presence and reputation, as good e-WOM might assuage worries about perceived dangers and encourage Gen Z travelers to participate in vacation activities. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need for targeted marketing tactics that use digital media to successfully share positive narratives and experiences, increasing destination attractiveness and competitiveness among this tech-savvy generation.

Moreover, Table 6 shows the path and the relationship between the variables. It was revealed that perceived risk has a significant relationship with e-WOM ($p < .001$), e-WOM has a substantial relationship with travel behavior ($p = 0.006$), and perceived risk is significantly associated with travel behavior ($p = 0.004$).

Table 6. Path estimates of the mediating effect

	95% Confidence Interval						Z	p
	Label	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper			
Perceived Risk → e-Word-of-Mouth	a	0.183	0.0553	0.0744	0.291	3.3	<.001	
e-Word-of-Mouth → Travel Behavior	b	0.106	0.0383	0.0309	0.181	2.77	0.006	
Perceived Risk → Travel Behavior	c	0.119	0.0417	0.0370	0.200	2.85	0.004	

The findings were consistent with Mitchell's (1992) findings, which argued that perceived risk plays an important role in every stage of the consumer decision-making process. Furthermore, Xiang and Gretzel (2010) emphasized the importance of e-WOM's influence on consumers' decision-making processes in light of the significant relationship between e-WOM and travel behavior. Wu (2013) demonstrated how information accessibility influences the relationship between source credibility and perceived risk. Furthermore, word-of-mouth information is one method of risk reduction, and the level of perceived risk influences tourists' WOM information and decision-making behavior.

Conclusion

A high level of perceived risk and very high tourist behavior were associated with a high level of e-WOM. This means that Gen Z tourists, who are concerned about the dangers of visiting places and are well-versed in destination features, are also aware of the various forms of e-WOM communication related to tourism. This determines the importance of eWOM in shaping the perceptions and behaviors of Generation Z tourists. It emphasizes the critical need for the tourism industry to address safety concerns and effectively communicate risk-reduction measures. This allows destinations to attract better and retain this adventurous yet cautious demographic, ensuring long-term tourism growth.

The results show that Gen Z tourists' perceived risk in Davao Occidental is high. When visiting tourist attractions in Davao Occidental, Gen Z tourists perceive a high level of risk. This implies that they are worried about their safety while visiting places in the province. Moreover, very high levels of travel behavior were observed from the respondents, indicating that they are highly aware of the essential features that tourism destinations should have. Generation Z is always concerned with the various aspects of selecting ideal tourism destinations. This indicates that they are well aware of the critical characteristics that tourism

destinations should have to accommodate tourists and that Gen Z tourists always make careful choices when selecting tourism destinations.

Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) has a significant influence on Gen Z tourists' travel behavior when selecting tourism destinations. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of using various platforms to transmit e-WOM.

The level of electronic word-of-mouth among Gen Z respondents is high, which signifies how heavily they rely on different modes of advertising to promote tourist spots. Clearly, there is a significant relationship between perceived risk and travel behavior, which implies that security efforts shall be reinforced to boost tourism in Davao Occidental.

Recommendation

In light of the preceding findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are offered: Strengthen the security to support Tourism destinations. Davao Occidental can benefit from the tourism destination as Tourism increases economic activity. The influx of tourists drives up local businesses' demand for services and products, creating jobs, increasing revenue, and reducing poverty. Based on the findings of Petty crime risks, we got the highest mean in the perceived risk for Gen Z, implying that the tourists are afraid of getting targeted by theft, robbery, and pickpockets. The Davao Occidental Police Provincial Office must support and collaborate with the Local Authorities and develop comprehensive security plans tailored to the unique needs of each tourism site. Tourism destination owners and administrators should prioritize the deployment of trained security personnel to patrol the premises regularly. These security personnel can serve as a visible deterrent to potential criminals and assist needy visitors. To integrate technology-driven security solutions, such as surveillance cameras and emergency response systems, to augment traditional security measures. These advancements can provide real-time monitoring and rapid response capabilities, further enhancing the safety of tourism destinations. We can create a secure and welcoming environment for tourists visiting Davao Occidental Province by implementing these recommendations. This proactive approach mitigates the perceived risks associated with petty crime and fosters trust and confidence in our tourism industry, ultimately supporting its sustainable growth and development.

Expand tourism destination owners' knowledge of the importance of E-WOM. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) may be a successful commercial technique. Tourism business owners that regularly engage on relevant social media sites where your target audience congregates. Respond to comments and messages quickly and offer helpful material to stimulate conversation and sharing.

Providing exceptional products or services and encouraging happy consumers to post positive reviews and testimonials on social media platforms are the cornerstones of creating positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Owners of tourist destinations also need to keep an eye on comments and reply to them. Use social media monitoring software or tools like Google Alerts to keep an eye out for mentions of your business online. To show your dedication to customer satisfaction and to gather information about potential future clients, you should swiftly and professionally respond to both good and negative comments.

For Future researchers. Future studies might investigate a wide range of other elements that may impact travel behavior among Generation Z, with the goal of improving understanding of the decision-making process when choosing a destination to visit. Examining socioeconomic origins, cultural influences, technology breakthroughs, and environmental concerns may give significant insights into this demographic cohort's diverse preferences and objectives. Furthermore, researching the impact of social media, peer influence, and developing trends in experiential tourism may shed light on the changing dynamics that shape Gen Z's travel preferences. Researchers can gain a deeper understanding of Gen Z's travel behavior and inform targeted strategies for tourism marketing, destination management, and sustainable development by

conducting in-depth qualitative interviews, surveys, and observational studies. By doing so, they can reveal hidden patterns, motivations, and barriers that influence Gen Z's travel decisions.

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