



IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON DECISION-MAKING BEHAVIOR OF PUTAOJIU TOURISTS: THE NEGATIVE MODERATING ROLE OF OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract:

With an emphasis on the moderating influence of subjective Putaojiu knowledge, this study uses the Information Adoption Model (IAM) to analyze factors influencing Putaojiu tourists' decision-making intentions. The decision-making intentions of Chinese Putaojiu tourists in the context of social media are ignored by current tourism research, and the importance of Putaojiu knowledge in the decision-making process is not explored. Argument quality, eWOM, perceived usefulness, decision-making intention, subjective and objective knowledge are integrated into the research paradigm. The finding reveals that argument quality and eWOM positively impact perceived usefulness, and perceived usefulness positively affects decision-making intents, mediating the factors influencing wine tourists' decision-making intention, according to a survey of 432 respondents in the Helan Mountain wine area of Ningxia. Interestingly, the relationship between argument quality and perceived usefulness is negatively moderated by objective knowledge. This study offers ramifications for Putaojiu tourism locations and management

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Decision-Making Intention, Information Adoption Model, Perceived Usefulness, Putaojiu Tourism, Subjective and Objective Wine Knowledge



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Introduction

Putaojiu tourism, commonly referred to as wine tourism (hereafter referred to as wine tourism), represents an important component of tourism development in China (Han et al., 2025). It refers to the practice of visiting vineyards, wineries, and wine-related attractions, where wine tasting serves as the primary motivation. Wine tourism combines wine production with leisure and experiential consumption (Hall et al., 2003). While wine production focuses on the manufacturing process, wine tourism emphasizes attracting visitors and promoting direct sales at wineries (Marco-Lajara et al., 2023). With the growing importance of place-based experiences, academic interest in wine tourism has increased substantially (Gómez et al., 2019). Studies in wine tourism research have mainly examined its local economic contributions (E. T. Byrd et al., 2017; Gutsalenko et al., 2020; Maumbe & Brown, 2013), the behavior patterns of wine tourists (Back et al., 2021; Bruwer et al., 2018; Chang et al., 2012; Galloway et al., 2008) the level of satisfaction experienced by tourists (Back et al., 2021; Bruwer & Kelley, 2015; Park et al., 2019).

China has emerged as a rapidly expanding market for wine tourism (Gu et al., 2018). The rise of globalization and the widespread use of the Internet have contributed to the growing popularity of wine tasting and the emergence of Chinese wine tourists (Gu et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the behavior of Chinese wine tourists remains relatively underexplored in the tourism literature (Duan & Hsiao, 2020). Wine tasting and wine tourism require both objective and subjective knowledge, which can significantly influence consumers' decision-making behaviours (Nosi, 2009). Chinese wine consumers typically possess limited wine knowledge and often perceive wine consumption as a high-status, lifestyle-oriented practice symbolizing sophistication and elegance (Duan et al., 2020; Liu & Murphy, 2007). Moreover, Chinese wine consumers demonstrate a stronger preference for imported wines over domestic alternatives,

showing a weaker propensity toward indigenous wines (Liu & Song, 2021; Xu et al., 2014; Ye et al., 2014). Ye et al. (2017) argue that this preference negatively influences perceptions of domestic wine tourism destinations, which in turn affects participation in wine tourism activities. As wine is an experience good and constitutes the core of wine tourism (Ferreira & Hunter, 2017), tourists rely heavily on informational cues to evaluate its quality (Nosi, 2009). Although China possesses abundant high-quality wines, wine-producing areas, and tourism resources (Lei & Tao, 2023), prior empirical research indicates that the effective communication of high-quality information plays a critical role in encouraging participation in domestic wine tourism (Alonso et al., 2015; Kastenholz et al., 2023; Neilson & Madill, 2014). Accordingly, this study focuses on Chinese tourists who visit domestic wineries in order to address this research gap.

The rapid development of digital infrastructure and the widespread adoption of mobile devices have significantly enhanced tourism experiences (Delaplace et al., 2022; Frenzel et al., 2022). In this context, social media plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' purchasing paths, particularly during the online decision-making process, by providing efficient channels for information acquisition and processing (Fiore et al., 2016). Through social media platforms, tourists can access a wide range of information in the form of text, images, and videos generated by destination organizations and other users, which helps them better understand destinations and enhances their intention to visit (Huertas, 2018; Kim et al., 2017; Peralta, 2019). At the same time, tourists actively share their personal travel experiences and electronic word-of-mouth on social media, which has become a significant influence on other tourists' behaviour (Al-Bourini et al., 2021). Social media is therefore an important tool for destination promotion (Jorge et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2017; Pop et al., 2022), and growing scholarly attention has been paid to its role in wine consumption and wine-related business activities (Dixit et al., 2019; Pucci et al., 2019; Szolnoki et al., 2014). However, wineries worldwide have been relatively slow to adopt effective social media marketing strategies, and those that have adopted social media often struggle to integrate it into their overall marketing efforts (Dolan & Goodman, 2017; Pucci et al., 2019). Given that China has more than one billion social media users (China, 2020), social media represents a critical channel through which wineries and wine tourism destinations can support tourists' decision-making and enhance tourism experiences (Roque & Raposo, 2016). Although recent studies have examined the influence of social media on wine tourists' behaviour (Calvo-Porrall et al., 2023; Georgiou & Galbreath, 2023; Pucci et al., 2019; Sottini et al., 2021), further research is required to understand its effects among tourists with lower levels of wine knowledge.

Based on the above discussions on information quality, eWOM, perceived usefulness, subjective and objective wine knowledge, and the decision-making intentions of domestic wine tourists in China, this study has two objectives. The first objective is to develop a theoretical model to examine the impact of social media on wine tourists' behavior. The second objective is to explore the role of wine knowledge in this process. By doing so, this study contributes to research on the application of social media in wine tourism by establishing and empirically testing a theoretical model using a quantitative research method. In addition, the findings provide practical insights into social media operations for wine tourism destinations, travel services, and marketing agencies, enabling wine tourism marketers to refine their social media content and achieve more precise marketing strategies.

Literature Review

Information Adoption Model (IAM)

The Information Adoption Model (IAM) is derived from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Kumar et al., 2023). As proposed by Sussman and Siegal (2003), IAM explains how individuals process information and subsequently form intentions and behaviours in computer-mediated communication environments. Within this framework, argument quality represents the central route of information processing, source quality represents the peripheral route, and perceived information usefulness functions as a key mediating variable. Under the central route, users with higher levels of involvement or expertise focus primarily on the content and quality of information, whereas under the peripheral route, users rely more on cues related to the presentation or source of information rather than its substantive content (Wang, 2016). According to IAM, individuals' perceptions of the usefulness of advice from others significantly influence their willingness to adopt such information (Wang, 2016), indicating that perceived usefulness plays a critical role in information adoption processes (Filiari et al., 2015).

IAM has been widely applied in social media research to examine how online users process and adopt information. Existing applications of IAM have either employed the original model (Christy et al., 2008) or adapted its core constructs to develop context-specific theoretical frameworks (Salehi-Esfahani et al., 2016; Tseng & Wang, 2016; Zhu et al., 2016). Building on this stream of research, the present study adopts IAM as its theoretical foundation. Argument quality is conceptualized as the central route influence factor, while electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is treated as the peripheral route influence factor. Perceived usefulness is retained as the mediating variable linking information cues to decision-making intention, which serves as the dependent variable. Furthermore, subjective and objective wine knowledge are incorporated as moderating variables in the relationship between argument quality and perceived usefulness. Through this framework, the study seeks to explain how wine tourists form decision-making intentions based on social media information.

Argument Quality as Central Route Influence Factor

Argument quality refers to the persuasive strength of information conveyed to users (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Studies operationalize argument quality in terms of informational value, persuasiveness, and relevance (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006; Li, 2013). Within the frameworks of the Elaboration Likelihood Model and the Information Adoption Model, argument quality is commonly conceptualized as a central route influence factor in information processing (Cochrane et al.; Kim et al., 2016; Tseng & Wang, 2016). In social media environments, persuasive characteristics such as argument quality, post popularity, and content attractiveness significantly influence users' evaluations of information and their willingness to engage with it (Chang et al., 2015). Argument quality has therefore been identified as a key predictor of information adoption and user participation (Tyagi et al., 2022). Users tend to perceive high-quality arguments as more useful, as such information is regarded as more credible and informative (Machdar, 2016; Sun et al., 2019). Consistent with this view, argument quality has been shown to exert a positive influence on perceived usefulness (Oh, 2013). Moreover, information that is perceived as accurate, comprehensive, and up-to-date is more

likely to be evaluated as useful by users (Alhemimah, 2019). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Argument quality positively affects perceived usefulness.

Electronic Word-Of-Mouth (Ewom) As Peripheral Route Influence Factor

Word-of-mouth (WOM) refers to informal, interpersonal communication between a non-commercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, product, organization, or service (Harrison-Walker, 2001). With the development of digital technologies, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), including online reviews, recommendations, and opinions, has become increasingly influential in consumer decision-making processes (Serra Cantallops & Salvi, 2014). Compared with traditional WOM, eWOM differs in terms of its broader reach and faster dissemination speed, enabling information to influence a larger number of potential consumers within a shorter time frame (Serra Cantallops & Salvi, 2014). Within the IAM framework, eWOM is commonly conceptualized as a peripheral route influence factor and treated as an informational cue rather than substantive content (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006; Bi et al., 2017). eWOM provides consumers with indirect experiential information that can assist them in evaluating products and services and making travel-related decisions (Brown et al., 2007). The quantity of eWOM, in particular, serves as a signal of product popularity, as more popular products tend to receive a higher volume of online reviews (Park et al., 2007; Serra Cantallops & Salvi, 2014). Prior research suggests that higher volumes of online reviews are associated with increased consumer attention and a greater likelihood of booking travel-related products or services (Le-Hoang, 2020; Matute et al., 2016). In the context of wine tourism, eWOM generated by social media users who have previously consumed wine-related products or services can influence tourists' perceptions of information usefulness and, consequently, their decision-making intentions. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: eWOM positively affects perceived usefulness.

Perceived Usefulness as A Mediator

Perceived usefulness refers to the extent to which individuals believe that using a particular technology or information source will enhance their performance or decision outcomes (Olaleye et al., 2018). In the context of this study, perceived usefulness reflects the degree to which wine tourists evaluate social media information as relevant, informative, valuable, and helpful when searching for wine tourism destinations or wineries. Tourists' decision-making intentions involve the cognitive evaluations and judgments that precede actual tourism-related choices (Smallman & Moore, 2010). Without question, tourist decision-making behavior has been a central topic in tourism management research (Ulker-Demirel & Ciftci, 2020). Prior studies have consistently confirmed a positive relationship between perceived usefulness and decision-making intention across tourism contexts (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Carvalho, 2022; Dolnicar, 2005; González-Rodríguez et al., 2022; Hung & Petrick, 2012). In social media environments, more convincing and useful information is more likely to generate favourable behavioral responses, including stronger purchase and travel intentions (Decrop, 1999; Juvan et al., 2017). Consistent with IAM, when wine tourists perceive social media information as highly useful, they are more likely to form stronger decision-making intentions regarding recommended wine tourism products or services (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Perceived usefulness positively affects decision-making intention.

Moderating Role of Objective and Subjective Wine Knowledge

Knowledge has long been recognized as a key variable influencing purchasing and decision-making behavior (Lee, 2010; Lin & Chen, 2006; Sharifpour, Walters, Ritchie, et al., 2014). In wine-related marketing research, however, the roles of objective and subjective knowledge have received relatively limited attention, particularly in studies examining the relationship between social media use and online wine-related decisions (Pucci et al., 2019). Objective knowledge refers to an individual's actual knowledge about wine, whereas subjective knowledge reflects an individual's perceived level of knowledge (Johnson & Bastian, 2007).

Subjective knowledge is conceptually distinct from objective knowledge and can directly influence decision-making processes, regardless of whether such perceptions accurately reflect actual knowledge levels (Brucks, 1985; Hadar & Sood, 2014). Differences in perceived knowledge can shape tourists' destination evaluations and decision-making behaviours (Sharifpour, Walters, & Ritchie, 2014). From a psychological perspective, higher subjective knowledge may enhance individuals' sense of control and confidence in uncertain decision-making contexts (Park & Jang, 2013). However, excessive subjective knowledge or information overload may reduce decision quality by limiting information search and impairing accurate interpretation (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Mishra & Kumar, 2011; Norton et al., 2007).

Prior research suggests that higher levels of knowledge, whether subjective or objective, can strengthen the influence of social media use on wine-related purchasing behavior (Pucci et al., 2019). Nevertheless, consumers often exhibit overconfidence, resulting in subjective knowledge levels that exceed objective knowledge (Pieniak et al., 2010). While higher subjective knowledge has been associated with stronger consumption intentions, objective knowledge does not always show the same effect (House et al., 2004). Given that wine is the core attraction of wine tourism destinations (Ferreira & Hunter, 2017), social media information related to wine plays a critical role during the information search stage of tourists' decision-making processes (Nosi, 2009, 2012).

Accordingly, this study examines the moderating roles of objective and subjective wine knowledge in shaping the relationship between information cues and perceived usefulness in social media contexts. Based on these arguments, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4a: Subjective wine knowledge moderates the relationship between argument quality and perceived usefulness.

H4b: Objective wine knowledge moderates the relationship between argument quality and perceived usefulness.

Based on the previous arguments, seven direct relationship and moderating hypotheses are proposed in this study. The framework was constructed based on the Information adoption model, as shown in Figure 1.

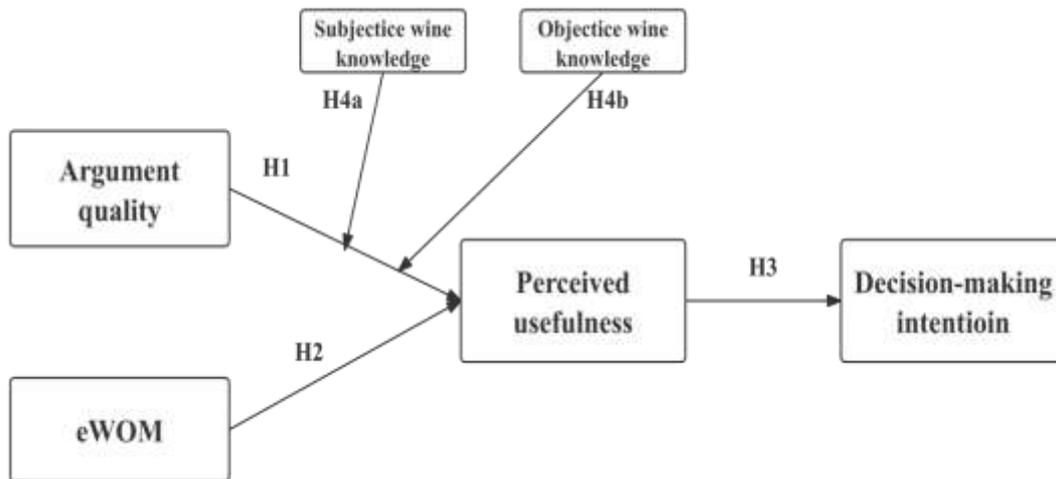


Figure 1 The Research Framework Based On IAM

Source: The Author

Methodology

Study Area: Ningxia Helan Mountain Wine Region

The Helan Mountains in Ningxia are characterized by an arid climate, long sunshine hours, and a large diurnal temperature range, conditions that are highly conducive to grape cultivation and wine production. The unique topography, soil composition, and climatic characteristics of the eastern foothills of the Helan Mountains have contributed to the development of one of the most renowned wine-producing regions in China. As of 2020, Ningxia had a wine grape planting area of 328 km², accounting for approximately 25% of China's total grape planting area. The region hosts 211 wineries, with a comprehensive output value of 2.6 billion yuan, including 36 tourism-oriented wineries that collectively receive more than 600,000 visitors annually (Gu et al., 2021). In September 2021, the Global Wine Tourism Organization awarded Ningxia the title of "Global Wine Tourism Destination," a significant achievement in the development of Ningxia's wine industry tourism (Li, 2021).

The Ningxia Helan Mountain wine region has become an important case study for international scholars studying the wine industry and wine tourism. As with other wine tourism destinations, the region has attracted scholars to study not only the resources of wine tourism destinations (Jiang & Zhang, 2011; Wang et al., 2018; Yong, 2013) but also wine tourism market development (Fountain et al., 2020; Han, 2019; Li & Bardaji de Azcarate, 2016; Song, 2016), sustainable tourism development (Hao et al., 2015; Hao et al., 2016) and other areas. Admittedly, few studies have examined visitor behavior in the region (Gu et al., 2021) compared with that of destinations such as Bordeaux, Moselle, and Napa Valley. Thus, the Ningxia Helan Mountains Eastern Foothills wine region was selected as the case site for this study.

Questionnaire Development

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section included a screening question and respondents' demographic information, while the second section focused on the measurement of latent constructs. All items were designed as closed-ended statements to

reduce respondents' response burden (Sarstedt & Mooi, 2014). The questionnaire was originally developed in English and subsequently translated into Chinese to ensure clarity and comprehensibility for respondents.

Interval-scale measures were employed in the second section to assess the influence of social media on wine tourists' decision-making intentions. Compared with nominal or ordinal scales, interval scales allow for more precise measurement and facilitate statistical analysis of differences among respondents (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Measurement items for argument quality were adapted from previously validated scales (Angst & Agarwal, 2009; Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006). The eWOM items were taken from the Park et al. (2007) questionnaire. Based on studies by Ismagilova et al. (2020) and Sussman and Siegal (2003), the items for perceived usefulness were changed. The references for the items pertaining to subjective and objective wine knowledge were from Dodd et al. (2005) and Vigar-Ellis et al. (2015). The research conducted by Bansal and Voyer (2000), Chowdhury et al. (2015), and (Hovland et al., 1953) provided the items used to measure decision-making intention.

All constructs were measured using previously validated scales that were adapted to the context of wine tourism to enhance measurement accuracy. A five-point Likert scale was employed to rate all items. The questionnaire covered the key constructs of the study, including argument quality, eWOM, perceived usefulness, and decision-making intention. The measurement items and corresponding variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Questionnaire Source

Variables	Coding	Items
Argument Quality	AQ1	informative
	AQ2	helpful
	AQ3	valuable
	AQ4	persuasive
eWOM	QE1	number of eWOM is large
	QE2	quantity of eWOM information is large
	QE3	eWOM gains a lot of attention
	QE4	eWOM has both positive and negative attention
Perceived usefulness	PU1	useful information
	PU2	valuable information
	PU3	helpful information
	PU4	aid in reaching a good decision
	PU5	aid to choose the right place
	PU6	present good directions to reach the right choice
Subjective wine knowledge	SWK1(-)	stick with a wine brand
	SWK2(-)	safer to buy wines familiar with
	SWK3(-)	rarely switch to try something different wine
	SKW4(-)	very cautious in trying new or different wines
	SWK5(-)	buy the same wine each time
Objective wine knowledge	SWK6	buying unfamiliar wines
	OWK1	knowledgeable about wine
	OWK2	one of the "experts" on wine
	OWK3	rarely come across a wine not heard of
	OWK4	know much about wine
	OWK5(-)	do not feel knowledgeable about wine

	OWK6(-)	know less about wine
	OWK7(-)	really do not know a lot of wine
	OWK8	heard about new wines
	DM1	new information for decision
Decision-making intention	DM2	influences the plan that appear in information
	DM3	changed idea or attitude towards traveling
	DM4	of great help to travel decision
	DM5	want to travel ASAP when read information

Note: (-) means revise questions.

Source: The Author

Prior to the main survey, the questionnaire was reviewed by five tourism and hospitality scholars and five wine enthusiasts to assess item clarity and content validity. Based on their feedback, minor revisions were made to improve wording and comprehensibility. Subsequently, a pilot test was conducted with 40 wine tourists recruited through local travel agencies. Reliability analysis of the pilot test data indicated that Cronbach's alpha values for all measurement scales exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, demonstrating satisfactory internal consistency of the measurement items.

Data Collection Method and Data Analysis

The questionnaire survey was conducted between February 12 and March 7, 2023. As this period coincided with the off-season for wine tourism, data collection progressed at a relatively moderate pace. A total of 485 questionnaires were collected with the assistance of local travel agencies. Prior to data analysis, the questionnaires were screened to remove incomplete or invalid responses. After data cleaning, 432 valid questionnaires from domestic tourists were retained for further analysis.

Following the completion of data collection, descriptive statistical analysis was first performed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was then employed to examine the relationships among the study variables. Specifically, partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was conducted using SmartPLS version 4.0.7, which allows multiple latent variables to be analysed simultaneously within a single model. PLS-SEM is suitable for analysing relatively complex models and is effective in addressing issues such as multicollinearity and measurement error (Lenny Koh et al., 2007). Owing to these advantages, PLS-SEM has been widely applied in tourism research (Hair Jr et al., 2021). The proposed research model was assessed using a two-step analytical procedure. First, the measurement model was evaluated to examine the reliability and validity of the constructs. Second, the structural model was analysed to assess the strength and significance of the hypothesized relationships among the variables.

Results And Findings

Sample Profile

Table 2 indicates that the sample comprised an almost equal proportion of men (51.157%, n = 221) and women (48.843%, n = 211). With regard to educational attainment, 176 respondents held a bachelor's degree, accounting for 40.741% of the sample, while 159 respondents had completed college education, representing 36.806%. In addition, 55 respondents possessed a

master's degree (12.731%). A smaller proportion of participants (9.028%, n = 39) reported secondary school education or below, whereas only three respondents had attained a PhD, accounting for approximately 0.694% of the total sample. Overall, the sample was characterised by a relatively high level of educational attainment. In terms of monthly income, the largest proportion of respondents (39.583%) reported earnings ranging from RMB 4,501 to 9,000.

Table 2 Demographic Profile (n=432)

Measure	Items	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender:	Male	221	51.157
	Female	211	48.843
Level of education:	Bachelor	176	40.741
	College	159	36.806
	Master	55	12.731
	Secondary school and below	39	9.028
Income (per month) (CNY: ¥RMB):	PhD	3	0.694
	4501-9000	171	39.583
	4500 and below	125	28.935
	9001-15000	110	25.463
	Above 15000	26	6.019

Source: The Author

Assessment Of Measurement Model

Several rigorous assessments were conducted to evaluate the measurement model, including internal consistency reliability and convergent validity. Internal consistency was examined using Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR). As reported in Table 3, Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.907 to 0.944, while CR values varied between 0.935 and 0.955. All values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), indicating satisfactory internal consistency reliability. In addition, collinearity was assessed using variance inflation factor (VIF) values. All VIF values were below the threshold of 5, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern in this study, consistent with the criteria proposed by Hair Jr et al. (2020) and Becker et al. (2015).

Table 3 Assessment of Reflective Measurement Model

Latent variable	Item	VIF	Mean	Std. deviation	Before deletion loadings	After deletion loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Argument Quality	AQ1	2.762	4.002	1.178	0.888	0.888	0.912	0.9	0.791
	AQ2	3.030	3.799	1.122	0.902	0.902			
	AQ3	2.615	3.891	1.036	0.878	0.878			
	AQ4	2.766	3.896	1.127	0.887	0.887			
eWOM	EW1	2.875	3.961	1.039	0.890	0.890	0.925	0.9	0.817
	EW2	3.854	3.861	1.097	0.925	0.925			
	EW3	3.122	3.780	1.118	0.902	0.902			
	EW4	3.074	4.012	1.079	0.899	0.899			
Perceived Usefulness	PU1	3.171	3.944	1.046	0.881	0.881	0.944	0.9	0.781
	PU2	3.121	3.935	1.141	0.879	0.879			

	PU3	2.891	3.977	1.138	0.866	0.866			
	PU4	3.274	3.778	1.104	0.885	0.885			
	PU5	3.824	3.972	1.168	0.906	0.906			
	PU6	3.294	3.755	1.089	0.885	0.885			
Subjective Wine Knowledge	SWK1	2.808	3.970	1.216	0.866	0.865	0.931	0.9	0.785
	SWK2	3.730	3.817	1.137	0.906	0.912		48	
	SWK3	3.266	3.731	1.059	0.885	0.893			
	SWK4	2.778	3.771	1.116	0.864	0.874			
	SWK5	3.112	3.803	1.106	0.879	0.885			
	SWK6	1.502	3.639	1.443	0.660	D			
Objective Wine Knowledge	OWK1	2.851	3.755	1.043	0.877	0.892	0.907	0.9	0.782
	OWK2	2.650	3.843	1.207	0.874	0.877		35	
	OWK3	2.810	3.914	1.234	0.882	0.890			
	OWK6	1.385	3.549	1.281	0.642	D			
	OWK8	2.559	3.773	1.069	0.862	0.878			
Decision- making intention	DM1	3.381	3.903	1.136	0.901	0.901	0.931	0.9	0.785
	DM2	2.926	3.870	0.982	0.880	0.880		48	
	DM3	2.737	3.870	1.191	0.869	0.869			
	DM4	3.205	3.796	1.067	0.893	0.893			
	DM5	3.074	3.910	1.103	0.886	0.886			

Note: D means the item deleted

Source: The Author

Convergent validity was subsequently evaluated by examining the outer loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) values. The results presented in Table 3 show that all items met the recommended outer loading criterion, with the exception of SWK6 and OWK6, whose outer loadings fell below the accepted threshold of 0.70. These two items were therefore excluded from further analysis. Furthermore, all constructs exhibited AVE values above the threshold of 0.50, indicating that the constructs explained more than half of the variance of their respective indicators. These results demonstrate satisfactory convergent validity. Discriminant validity was assessed using the cross-loadings criterion. The results indicated that all measurement items loaded more strongly on their respective constructs than on other constructs, thereby confirming adequate discriminant validity.

Assessment Of Structural Model

The structural model results supported most of the proposed hypotheses (see Table 4). Specifically, H1 was supported, as argument quality had a positive effect on perceived usefulness ($\beta = 0.305$, $t = 6.876$, $p < 0.001$, $CI = [0.218, 0.390]$). H2 was also supported, indicating that eWOM exerted a significant positive influence on perceived usefulness ($\beta = 0.290$, $t = 5.284$, $p < 0.001$, $CI = [0.181, 0.397]$). In addition, H3 was confirmed, showing that perceived usefulness had a strong positive effect on decision-making intention ($\beta = 0.924$, $t = 98.354$, $p < 0.001$, $CI = [0.903, 0.940]$).

Furthermore, perceived usefulness was found to have a significant mediating effect on the relationship between argument quality and decision-making intention, indicating partial mediation ($\beta = 0.282$, $t = 6.849$, $p < 0.001$, $VAF = 0.500$). A similar partial mediating effect was observed in the relationship between eWOM and decision-making intention via perceived usefulness ($\beta = 0.268$, $t = 5.237$, $p < 0.001$, $VAF = 0.500$). The mediation results are presented in Table 5.

Table 4 Assessment of Structural Model

Path	Beta Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	Confidence Interval	t-value	p-value	Result
H1 AQ→PU	0.305	0.044	(0.218, 0.390)	6.867	<0.001	Supported
H2 EW→PU	0.290	0.055	(0.181, 0.397)	5.284	<0.001	Supported
H3 PU→DM	0.924	0.009	(0.903, 0.940)	98.354	<0.001	Supported

Source: The Author

Table 5 Assessment of Mediating Effect

Path	Beta Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	Confidence Interval	t-value	p-value	Result	VAF	Type
AQ→PU→DM	0.282	0.041	(0.201, 0.361)	6.849	<0.001	Supported	0.500	Partial Mediation
EW→PU→DM	0.268	0.051	(0.166, 0.369)	5.237	<0.001	Supported	0.500	Partial Mediation

Source: The Author

Table 6 Assessment of Moderating Effect

Path coefficient	Beta Coefficient (β)	Std. error	Confidence interval	t-value	p-value	Result
H4a SWK*AQ→PU	0.020	0.037	(-0.051, 0.096)	0.530	0.596	Rejected
H4b OWK*AQ→PU	-0.118	0.039	(-0.118, -0.042)	3.007	0.003	Supported

Source: The Author

The results presented in Table 6 illustrate the moderating effects of subjective and objective wine knowledge. H4a was not supported, as the moderating effect of subjective wine knowledge on the relationship between argument quality and perceived usefulness was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.020$, $t = 0.530$, $p = 0.596$). In contrast, H4b was supported, indicating that objective wine knowledge exerted a significant negative moderating effect on the relationship between argument quality and perceived usefulness ($\beta = -0.118$, $t = 3.007$, $p = 0.003$, $CI = [-0.118, -0.042]$).

Discussion And Conclusions

Conclusion

This study developed and tested an integrated model to examine how social media influences wine tourists' decision-making intentions through argument quality and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) within a social media context. Drawing on the Information Adoption Model (IAM), the model conceptualised argument quality as the central route influence factor, eWOM

as the peripheral route influence factor, perceived usefulness as a mediating variable, and decision-making intention as the outcome variable. The main conclusions are discussed below.

The first conclusion relates to the applicability and explanatory power of IAM in the context of Chinese wine tourism. Consistent with prior research highlighting the growing importance of social media in shaping tourists' behaviour (Erick T Byrd et al., 2017; Jorge et al., 2019; Sigala & Haller, 2019), this study confirms that social media information significantly affects wine tourists' decision-making processes. While previous studies have applied IAM to tourism and social media contexts (Dhaigude et al., 2016; Song et al., 2021; Tseng & Wang, 2016), its application to Chinese wine tourism has remained limited. This study therefore extends existing literature by empirically validating IAM within this specific cultural and experiential context. The results indicate that argument quality, as a central route influence factor, positively enhances perceived usefulness, which is consistent with earlier findings in information processing and persuasion research (Alsheikh et al., 2021; Petty & Cacioppo, 2012). In addition, eWOM was found to positively influence perceived usefulness as a peripheral route factor, supporting prior studies that emphasise the role of social cues and heuristics in online decision-making (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008; Oh et al., 2007). Notably, these findings suggest that, in the context of Chinese wine tourism, tourists tend to process eWOM primarily through the peripheral route rather than the central route. This result contrasts with the argument of Zhu et al. (2014), who proposed that certain characteristics of online reviews, such as review length, may trigger central route processing. The present findings therefore refine existing applications of IAM by highlighting the context-dependent nature of information processing routes in wine tourism.

The second conclusion concerns the moderating role of wine knowledge. The results reveal that objective wine knowledge negatively moderates the relationship between argument quality and perceived usefulness, whereas subjective wine knowledge does not exhibit a significant moderating effect. This finding suggests that tourists with higher levels of objective wine knowledge may rely less on the persuasive strength of social media arguments when evaluating information usefulness. One possible explanation is that individuals with greater factual knowledge may adopt a more critical or sceptical stance towards online information, thereby weakening the influence of argument quality. This interpretation aligns with research on information processing and overconfidence, which suggests that increased knowledge can sometimes reduce reliance on external information cues

Furthermore, perceived usefulness was found to play a strong mediating role between social media information cues and decision-making intention. The substantial path coefficient between perceived usefulness and decision-making intention underscores the critical importance of information utility in shaping tourists' behavioural intentions. This finding reinforces the view that, in experience-based tourism products such as wine tourism, tourists rely heavily on their evaluation of information usefulness when making travel-related decisions.

(Chen & Phou, 2013; Chiu et al., 2016), the results show that perceived utility functions as a mediator between argument quality, eWOM, and decision-making intention. It is noteworthy to notice that there is a strong path coefficient ($\beta=0.924$) between perceived usefulness and decision-making intention, suggesting that perceived usefulness influences decision-making intention (Norton et al., 2007).

Interestingly, the absence of a significant moderating effect for subjective knowledge indicates that perceived self-knowledge alone does not substantially alter how tourists process argument quality in social media contexts. This distinction between objective and subjective knowledge contributes to a more nuanced understanding of knowledge effects in wine tourism decision-making. In line with previous studies highlighting the distinctive behavioural patterns of Chinese wine tourists Wu and Liang (2020), the findings suggest that objective wine knowledge may reduce perceived information credibility, particularly among tourists with relatively low overall wine expertise. This insight provides a deeper understanding of how knowledge shapes information processing and behavioural responses in emerging wine tourism markets.

Theoretical Implications

This study offers several theoretical implications for the literature on wine tourism and social media-based decision-making. First, it extends the application of the Information Adoption Model (IAM) by empirically validating its relevance within the context of wine tourism in China. While IAM has been widely applied in studies of online information adoption, its use in explaining wine tourists' decision-making behaviour in emerging wine markets has remained limited. By incorporating argument quality and eWOM as central and peripheral route influence factors, respectively, this study demonstrates the applicability of IAM to experience-based tourism products characterised by information asymmetry and low consumer expertise. More importantly, the findings refine existing IAM and ELM-based assumptions by revealing a differentiated information processing structure among Chinese wine tourists. The results indicate that tourists with relatively higher levels of knowledge or cognitive engagement tend to process social media information through the central route, relying primarily on argument quality, whereas those with lower levels of involvement or knowledge are more likely to adopt the peripheral route, focusing on eWOM cues. However, irrespective of the route through which information is processed, perceived usefulness emerges as a necessary condition for decision-making. This finding highlights perceived usefulness as a convergent cognitive mechanism that bridges both central and peripheral processing routes, thereby extending IAM by emphasising its role as a cross-route determinant of behavioural intention in wine tourism contexts.

Second, this study contributes to the literature by uncovering the negative moderating role of objective wine knowledge in the relationship between argument quality and perceived usefulness. While prior research has generally suggested that knowledge enhances information usage and decision quality (Lee, 2010; Lin & Chen, 2006; Sharifpour, Walters, Ritchie, et al., 2014) the present findings challenge this assumption by demonstrating that higher levels of objective wine knowledge can weaken the influence of argument quality on perceived usefulness. This result suggests that knowledgeable tourists may adopt a more critical or sceptical stance towards persuasive social media content, thereby reducing its perceived utility. By identifying this adverse moderating effect, the study advances existing wine tourism literature, which has largely overlooked the potentially inhibiting role of objective knowledge in social media-based information processing.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for social media marketing strategies in the wine tourism sector. These implications are relevant not only for wineries and wine tourism destinations but also for hospitality and tourism organisations seeking to influence tourists' decision-making through social media platforms.

First, the results highlight the importance of tailoring social media content to different information processing routes adopted by wine tourists. The findings indicate that tourists with relatively lower levels of wine knowledge are more likely to rely on peripheral cues, such as eWOM, whereas those with higher levels of engagement or knowledge place greater emphasis on the quality of arguments presented in social media content. Given that most wine tourists in China are non-experts, wineries and destination marketing organisations should prioritise the provision of clear, accessible, and easy-to-understand information. Rather than relying on highly technical descriptions, social media content should translate professional wine knowledge into simple narratives that enhance tourists' understanding and facilitate information processing, thereby increasing the perceived usefulness of the information.

Second, the study underscores the critical role of information quality in shaping wine tourists' decision-making intentions. As argument quality was found to significantly influence perceived usefulness, social media actors—including wineries, travel agencies, destination management organisations, and official wine tourism bodies—should focus on improving the depth, accuracy, and relevance of the information they disseminate. This can be achieved by offering well-structured content that combines textual explanations with visual elements such as images and videos, as well as by actively engaging with users through comments and interactive features. Encouraging positive eWOM and fostering user participation can further amplify information visibility and credibility. In addition, collaboration with influential and professional social media accounts, such as wine experts or opinion leaders, may enhance the perceived professionalism and trustworthiness of the information shared, thereby strengthening its persuasive impact.

Finally, the findings emphasise perceived usefulness as a key driver of wine tourists' decision-making intentions. Regardless of the information processing route, tourists are unlikely to form behavioural intentions unless they perceive social media information to be useful. Accordingly, wine tourism destinations should ensure that their social media communications accurately and comprehensively represent destination attributes that tourists value. This includes presenting wine culture, winery experiences, hospitality facilities, scenic landscapes, themed events, and local atmosphere in a coherent and informative manner. By aligning social media content with tourists' informational needs and expectations, destinations can enhance perceived usefulness and, in turn, increase the likelihood of visit intentions.

Limitations And Recommendations for Future Research

Despite the contributions of this study, several limitations should be acknowledged, which also provide directions for future research. First, this research focused on the wine region located at the eastern foothills of the Helan Mountains in China, and all respondents were domestic Chinese tourists. As wine tourism markets and social media environments differ across cultural and institutional contexts, the findings may not be directly generalisable to Western countries with more mature wine tourism industries and established social (Ingrassia et al., 2022;

Obermayer et al., 2022). Future studies could extend the proposed model to other wine tourism destinations or conduct cross-cultural comparisons to examine the robustness of the findings across different contexts.

Second, data collection was conducted during the off-peak season for wine tourism, and the survey primarily targeted tourists travelling in organised groups. Although this approach facilitated access to respondents, it may limit the representativeness of the sample, particularly with regard to independent or repeat visitors. Future research may consider collecting data during peak tourism periods and incorporating a more diverse range of visitor types to enhance the generalisability of the results.

Finally, while the proposed model captures key mechanisms through which social media influences wine tourists' decision-making intentions, it does not account for all possible influencing factors. Future research could build on the present findings by incorporating additional variables, such as emotional responses, destination image, or platform-specific characteristics, to further enrich the understanding of social media-based decision-making processes in wine tourism.

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