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How Social Media and e-WOM Build Perlang Tourist Village's Brand

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of social media quality and credibility on enhancing destination brand awareness through electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), utilizing Perlang Tourist Village in Bangka Belitung as a case study. Despite its national recognition, Perlang faces challenges in digital branding and infrastructure, necessitating strategic social media engagement to address these issues. Employing a quantitative explanatory design, data were collected from 307 respondents via purposive sampling and analyzed using PLS-SEM. The results show that both social media quality and credibility significantly influence destination brand awareness, with e-WOM serving as a key mediating variable. All seven hypotheses were supported, confirming the conceptual framework. The findings suggest that high-quality and credible content fosters trust, encourages user advocacy, and strengthens brand recognition. This research contributes to the theoretical understanding of digital branding in community-based tourism and offers practical implications for destination marketers seeking to optimize social media strategies.

Keywords: Community-Based Tourism, Destination Brand Awareness, e-WOM, Social Media Credibility, Social Media Quality.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has increasingly prioritized community-based tourism as a strategic approach to inclusive economic development and cultural preservation. One notable example is Perlang Tourist Village, located in Lubuk Besar District, Central Bangka Regency, Bangka Belitung Province. This village has gained national recognition by being selected as one of the Top 50 Tourism Villages in the 2022 Indonesian Tourism Village Award (ADWI) (Budi, 2022). Perlang Village is widely known for its transformation of former tin mining sites into attractive ecotourism destinations, such as Danau Pading, a stunning turquoise lake created from ex-mining pits, Bukit *Pading*, with its panoramic views and historical Dutch-era sites, *Sadap* waterfall, and *Gusung Perlang*, a marine tourism area offering snorkeling and dolphin watching. In addition to its natural beauty, *Perlang* also showcases cultural assets, including traditional dances, Malay architecture, and culinary experiences, which strengthen its identity as a sustainable community-based tourism destination (JADESTA Kemenparekraf, 2022).

Despite this recognition, Bangka Belitung continues to face challenges in tourism development, including limited infrastructure, fragmented destination branding, and underdeveloped digital marketing strategies compared to leading destinations such as Bali and Lombok. In this context, community-driven tourism villages like Perlang represent a viable alternative for sustainable local development by emphasizing environmental restoration, cultural heritage, and digital promotion. In the digital era, social media plays a pivotal role in shaping tourist perceptions and promoting destination awareness. The Instagram account @desawisataperlang, with approximately 622 followers, serves as the primary platform to showcase local attractions, community activities, and visitor experiences. The effectiveness of this platform depends not only on the frequency of content posting but also on its quality and credibility, both of which significantly influence destination brand awareness through electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). Although digital marketing plays an increasingly vital role in destination promotion, research examining how social media quality and credibility influence destination brand awareness within community-based tourism remains limited. Most existing studies have focused on well-established destinations such as Bali and Lombok, while smaller, emerging areas like Bangka Belitung have received little scholarly attention. Consequently, there is a lack of understanding of how digital platforms, particularly social media channels managed by local tourism communities, shape tourists' perceptions and enhance brand awareness through e-WOM. Addressing this gap is essential to deepen understanding of the dynamics of digital engagement in supporting sustainable and inclusive tourism development in community-based contexts.

Prior studies have demonstrated that the quality of social media content and the credibility of its sources significantly impact e-WOM and brand outcomes (Kakirala & Singh, 2020; Seo & Park, 2018). Arasli et al. (2021) emphasized the role of social media in promoting sustainable heritage festivals. These findings are consistent with research on revisit intention and brand equity across tourism and service sectors (Seetanah et al., 2020). However, a research gap remains in examining how content quality and credibility on social media contribute to destination brand awareness in community-based tourism settings, especially in underrepresented regions such as Bangka Belitung. This study aims to address this gap by examining the impact of social media quality and credibility on destination brand awareness through electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), with *Desa Wisata Perlang* serving as the focal case.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Quality

Social media quality encompasses both the subjective and objective dimensions of information disseminated via social media platforms, reflecting its perceived usefulness and technical integrity. Unlike traditional information systems, social media content is characterized by its broad accessibility, real-time availability, global reach, and user-generated nature. Wang & Yan (2022) highlight that information quality in social media must be understood within the dynamic, interactive digital environment, where users actively produce, modify, and disseminate content. According to their study, social media quality is influenced not only by accuracy and completeness of information, but also by contextual relevance, presentation clarity, and the credibility of the source, all of which shape how users perceive and engage with digital content. Social media quality represents an assessment of how well information content aligns with user expectations, particularly in delivering satisfaction and supporting informed decision-making (Damayanti & Indrawati, 2023). Wang & Yan (2022) further emphasize that because social media information flows continuously and is shaped by collective user interactions, quality evaluation must consider timeliness, consistency, and the extent to which content fosters meaningful engagement. Their perspective situates social media quality as a socially constructed attribute emerging from the interplay between technological

affordances and user participation. In sum, social media quality is a multidimensional construct that integrates technical integrity with user-centered value, playing a critical role in shaping digital communication, consumer trust, and decision-making in online environments.
H1: Social media quality has a positive effect on destination brand awareness
H2: Social media quality has a positive effect on e-WOM

Social Media Credibility
Social media credibility refers to the extent to which users perceive social media platforms as reliable and credible sources for disseminating information or news. This concept involves multiple dimensions, influenced by individuals' evaluations of how faithfully the medium represents actual events or facts (Cha, 2024). Social media credibility is a subset of information credibility, reflecting the extent to which users perceive content shared on social platforms as trustworthy and unbiased (Damayanti & Indrawati, 2023). Recent studies have shown that social media credibility significantly influences users' trust in digital communication and their willingness to engage with content. For instance, Tran & Rudolf (2022) found that stylistic quality, personal relevance, and user motivations, such as information seeking and social interaction, play a critical role in shaping the perceived credibility of blogs and other social media channels. Similarly, Damayanti & Indrawati (2023) emphasized that credibility is closely tied to brand awareness, which is built through consistent, persuasive, and impartial content. In tourism contexts, credible social media platforms enhance the effectiveness of e-WOM and strengthen consumer confidence in destination-related information.
H3: Social media credibility has a positive effect on destination brand awareness.
H4: Social media credibility has a positive effect on e-WOM.

E-word of mouth
Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) refers to informal, user-generated communication shared through digital platforms such as social media, review sites, and online forums, which influences consumer perceptions and decision-making. Unlike traditional advertising, e-WOM is perceived as more authentic and trustworthy because it stems from personal experiences and peer recommendations. Recent studies have emphasized its growing significance in shaping tourist behavior and destination branding. Vu Dinh et al. (2025) conducted a bibliometric analysis of 109 publications. They identified nine thematic clusters, including green e-WOM, tourist trust, and destination management strategies, highlighting the multidimensional role of e-WOM in tourism. Similarly, Bahari et al. (2025) found that both e-WOM and destination image significantly affect tourist satisfaction and revisit intention in the context of Gili tourism, reinforcing the strategic value of digital narratives in enhancing brand loyalty. Kumar et al. (2025) demonstrated in their study of adventure tourism in Himachal Pradesh that while e-WOM positively influences tourist attitudes and behavioral intentions, its impact varies depending on the credibility and relevance of the content. Collectively, these findings underscore the necessity for destination marketers to actively monitor and engage with e-WOM to foster positive brand associations and long-term visitor engagement.
H5: e-WOM positively affects destination brand awareness.
H6: e-WOM mediates the effect of social media quality on destination brand awareness.
H7: e-WOM mediates the effect of social media credibility on destination brand awareness.

Destination brand awareness
Destination brand awareness refers to the degree to which a tourism destination is recognized and recalled by stakeholders and consumers as a distinct brand. It is considered an intangible asset that contributes to the destination's overall value. This awareness is built through a strategic process that includes defining the brand identity, assessing awareness levels, developing targeted communication strategies for both stakeholders and tourists, and continuously monitoring brand image, brand

awareness, and brand Equity (Agung et al., 2025). Empirical evidence suggests that high destination brand awareness positively affects tourists' perceptions, intentions to visit, and word-of-mouth behavior. Chen et al. (2025)found that brand awareness, along with brand image and perceived quality, significantly influences tourists' destination choice and loyalty. In the Indonesian context, Damayanti & Indrawati (2023) demonstrated that digital campaigns and social media engagement play a vital role in enhancing brand recall and emotional connection with local destinations. This highlights the importance of integrating digital strategies to build and sustain destination brand awareness in competitive tourism. markets.

This highlights the importance of integrating digital strategies to build and sustain destination brand awareness in competitive tourism markets. The role of destination brand awareness within the proposed conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

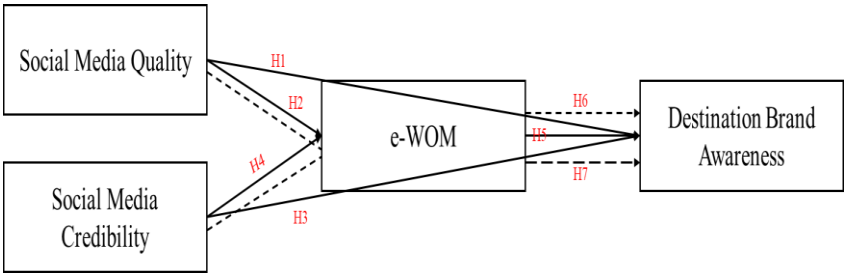

Figure 1. Conceptual Model

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative, explanatory research design to examine the causal relationships among social media quality, social media credibility, e-WOM, and destination brand awareness. The research was conducted at Ecowisata Village *SEJAGAT (Selindung-Jerambah Gantung)*, Pangkalpinang, Bangka Belitung, which has emerged as one of the leading community-based tourism destinations in the region. The population in this study consists of visitors and potential tourists who have obtained information about Ecowisata Village *SEJAGAT* through social media. Since no clearly defined population frame was available, the study employed a non-probability purposive sampling technique to identify participants most relevant to the research objectives. This approach was deemed appropriate because it enabled the selection of respondents with specific knowledge and experience of Perlang Tourist Village and its digital marketing activities. The participants included tourists who had visited the village, residents engaged in tourism-related initiatives, and community members who managed or promoted the destination through social media platforms. Selection criteria required that respondents (1) had interacted with or visited Perlang Tourist Village within the previous year, (2) were familiar with the official Instagram account (@desawisataperlang) or similar online promotional content, and (3) were capable of evaluating elements of social media quality, credibility, and destination brand awareness. Individuals who did not meet these criteria were excluded to preserve the accuracy and relevance of the data. Data were gathered through an online questionnaire distributed via social media networks and local tourism community channels. This method ensured that the sample represented individuals who actively engage with the village's online content and could offer informed perspectives on its digital branding

efforts. Following the rule of thumb in PLS-SEM, which requires a minimum of 5–10 respondents per indicator, the study aimed to collect 150 valid responses to ensure robust statistical analysis.

Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire was structured into four primary constructs: social media quality, social media credibility, e-WOM, and destination brand awareness. The measurement items were adapted from validated scales in previous studies (Wang & Yan, 2022; Damayanti & Indrawati, 2023; Cha, 2024). Secondary data were also obtained from official reports, government tourism statistics, and online publications to provide contextual background support for the research. Data were analyzed using partial least squares PLS-SEM with SmartPLS software. The analysis was carried out in two stages: (1) Measurement model evaluation, which included testing for convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability), and (2) Structural model evaluation, which included examining the path coefficients, R-square values, predictive relevance (Q-square), and significance testing through bootstrapping procedures. The mediation effect of e-WOM was tested by evaluating the indirect effects between the independent and dependent variables.

Table 1. Loading Factor and Composite Reliability

Variable Manifest	Loading Factor	Composite Reliability
Social Media Quality		0.908
I can understand Perlang on Instagram	0.750	
The information on Perlang on Instagram is relevant to my needs	0.745	
I think the information on Perlang on Instagram is based on facts	0.709	
I think the information on Perlang on Instagram explains the	0.724	
product attributes	0.722	
I think the information on Perlang on Instagram is clear	0.786	
I think the information on Perlang on Instagram is detailed	0.723	
I think the information on Perlang on Instagram is complete		0.888
Social Media Credibility	0.752	
I think the information on Perlang on Instagram is convincing	0.769	
I think the information on Perlang on Instagram is credible	0.771	
I think the information on Perlang on Instagram is believable	0.797	
I think the information about Perlang on Instagram is true	0.824	
I think the information on Perlang on Instagram is trustworthy		0.890
e-WOM	0.868	
I will leave a positive opinion about Perlang that I visited on my	0.828	
Instagram	0.865	
I will recommend visiting Perlang through my Instagram		0.890
I will encourage my friends and relatives to visit the tourist	0.817	
village Perlang	0.727	
Destination Brand Awareness	0.777	
This is a reputable destination	0.749	
I know the characteristics of Perlang		
This is a famous destination		
The destination comes to my mind quickly		
I can recognize Perlang among other similar destinations	0.859	

As shown in Table 1, the measurement model demonstrates strong internal consistency across all constructs. Social Media Quality shows high reliability (CR = 0.908), with item loadings ranging from 0.739 to 0.750, indicating that respondents perceive Perlang's Instagram content as understandable, relevant, factual, and complete. Social Media Credibility also meets reliability

standards (CR = 0.891), with loadings ranging from 0.711 to 0.771, suggesting that the information is viewed as trustworthy and believable. The e-WOM construct is highly reliable (CR = 0.890), with loadings from 0.800 to 0.819, reflecting users' intention to share and recommend Perlang positively. Lastly, Destination Brand Awareness (CR = 0.859) is supported by loadings of 0.749 and 0.859, indicating strong brand recognition and familiarity. These results confirm the robustness of the measurement model in capturing perceptions of Perlang's digital presence.

Table 2. Cross-Loading Values

	Destination Brand Awareness (DBA)	e-WOM (E)	Social Media Credibility (SMC)	Social Media Quality (SMQ)
DBA1	**0.817**	0.494	0.453	0.491
DBA2	**0.727**	0.406	0.406	0.493
DBA3	**0.777**	0.409	0.369	0.409
DBA4	**0.749**	0.350	0.397	0.440
DBA5	**0.859**	0.445	0.448	0.492
E1	0.467	**0.868**	0.541	0.557
E2	0.454	**0.828**	0.520	0.546
E3	0.456	**0.865**	0.492	0.507
SMC1	0.413	0.484	**0.752**	0.501
SMC2	0.410	0.511	**0.769**	0.548
SMC3	0.400	0.429	**0.771**	0.575
SMC4	0.446	0.478	**0.797**	0.566
SMC5	0.398	0.475	**0.824**	0.628
SMQL1	0.421	0.449	0.524	**0.750**
SMQL2	0.414	0.452	0.547	**0.745**
SMQL3	0.441	0.411	0.487	**0.709**
SMQL4	0.414	0.445	0.540	**0.724**
SMQL5	0.431	0.532	0.508	**0.722**
SMQL6	0.486	0.423	0.604	**0.786**
SMQL7	0.455	0.499	0.474	**0.723**

As shown in Table 2, the factor loading results confirm the convergent validity of all constructs measured in the study. Items under Destination Brand Awareness (DBA) exhibit strong loadings ranging from 0.727 to 0.859, indicating consistent representation of brand recognition and familiarity. The e-WOM construct shows high loadings (0.861-0.868), reflecting respondents' firm intention to share and recommend the destination. Social Media Credibility (SMC) items load between 0.752 and 0.824, suggesting that users perceive the content as believable and trustworthy. Similarly, Social Media Quality (SMQ) shows robust loadings (0.709-0.786), indicating that the information is perceived as clear, relevant, and complete. These values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, supporting the reliability and validity of the measurement model.

Table 3. AVE & R-Square Values

Variable	AVE	R-Square
Social Media Quality	**0.551**	
Social Media Credibility	**0.613**	
e-WOM	**0.729**	**0.451**
Destination Brand Awareness	**0.619**	**0.429**

As shown in Table 3, all constructs demonstrate acceptable convergent validity, with AVE values exceeding the 0.50 threshold. Specifically, Social Media Quality (AVE = 0.551), Social Media Credibility (AVE = 0.613), e-WOM (AVE = 0.729), and Destination Brand Awareness (AVE = 0.619) each account for more than half of the variance in their respective indicators. The R-Square values indicate the model's explanatory power for the dependent variables. e-WOM (R^2 = 0.451) explains 45.1% of the variance in its outcome construct, while Destination Brand Awareness (R^2 =

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0.429) accounts for 42.9% of the variance in its outcome construct. These values suggest moderate predictive relevance, supporting the structural model's robustness in capturing the influence of social media constructs on brand-related outcomes.

Table 4. Respondent Characteristics

Description	Amount	
	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Man	167	54%
Woman	140	46%
Age		
17-25 years	165	54%
26-41 years	121	39%
42-58 years	13	4%
>59 years	8	3%

As shown in Table 4, the demographic profile of respondents shows a balanced gender distribution: 54% identify as male (n = 167) and 46% as female (n = 140). Age segmentation indicates that the majority of participants fall within the 17–25 age group (54%), followed by the 26–41 age group (39%). Only a small proportion of respondents are aged 42–58 (4%) and 59+ (3%). This composition suggests that the sample is predominantly young, which may influence digital engagement patterns and responsiveness to social media-based destination branding strategies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 5. Hypothesis Result

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	T-Statistic	P-Value	Result
H1	0.325	4.045	0.000	Accepted
H2	0.173	3.025	0.001	Accepted
H3	0.305	2.149	0.016	Accepted
H4	0.166	2.196	0.014	Accepted
H5	0.208	3.019	0.001	Accepted
H6	0.232	3.348	0.000	Accepted
H7	0.356	4.166	0.000	Accepted

The results of the hypothesis testing, as presented in Table 5, confirm that all proposed relationships in the structural model are statistically significant and theoretically grounded. The data have been fully processed and interpreted, with each hypothesis supported by path coefficients exceeding the practical threshold, T-statistics greater than 1.96, and p-values less than 0.05. These findings provide empirical validation for the conceptual framework and offer insight into the dynamics of social media constructs and destination brand awareness in the tourism context. The first construct, Social Media Quality, was hypothesized to influence both destination brand awareness (H1) and e-WOM (H2). The results show that H1 is supported, with a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.325$, a T-statistic of 4.045, and a p-value of 0.000, indicating a strong, significant positive effect. This aligns with Wang & Yan (2022), who emphasized that high-quality social media content marked by relevance, timeliness, and technical integrity enhances user satisfaction and decision-making. Damayanti & Indrawati (2023) further support this by demonstrating that well-curated content contributes to brand recall and emotional engagement in tourism campaigns. H2, which examines the effect of Social Media Quality on e-WOM, is also supported ($\beta = 0.173$, $t = 3.014$, $p = 0.003$), suggesting that users are more likely to share and advocate for destinations when the content they encounter is perceived as valuable and credible. This reinforces the idea that quality content not only informs but also activates user participation in digital word of mouth.

The second construct, social media credibility, was tested through H3 and H4. H3, which posits a positive effect on Destination Brand Awareness, is supported with β = 0.305, t = 4.126, and p = 0.000. This result is consistent with Cha (2024), who argues that credibility, defined by perceived reliability and impartiality, plays a critical role in shaping user trust and brand perception. Similarly, Damayanti & Indrawati (2023) found that credible content enhances brand awareness by fostering confidence in destination-related information. H4, which examines the effect of social media credibility on e-WOM, is also statistically significant (β = 0.176, t = 3.045, p = 0.002). This supports Tran & Rudolf (2022), who noted that stylistic quality and personal relevance contribute to users' willingness to engage with and disseminate content. Together, these findings affirm that credibility is not merely a technical attribute but a relational construct that influences both brand recognition and digital advocacy.

The third construct, e-WOM, was examined through H5, H6, and H7. H5 tests the direct effect of e-WOM on Destination Brand Awareness and is supported with β = 0.132, t = 2.045, and p = 0.041. This finding aligns with Vu Dinh et al. (2025), who emphasized the role of e-WOM in shaping tourist behavior and destination image. Bahari et al. (2025) similarly found that e WOM contributes to tourist satisfaction and revisit intention, reinforcing its strategic value in tourism branding. H6 and H7 explore the mediating role of e-WOM. H6, which assesses the mediation of social media quality on destination brand awareness, is supported by β = 0.083, t = 2.036, and p = 0.042, indicating that quality content indirectly enhances brand awareness through user-generated communication. H7, which examines the mediation between social media credibility and destination brand awareness, shows the most substantial effect among all hypotheses (β = 0.356, t = 4.166, p = 0.000). This underscores the potency of credibility-driven e-WOM in shaping brand perceptions, echoing Kumar et al. (2025), who found that e-WOM's impact varies with the relevance and trustworthiness of the content. These findings are not only statistically robust but also compatible with existing literature, reinforcing the theoretical validity of the model. No conflicting results were observed. Instead, the study contributes to a growing body of research that emphasizes the interconnected roles of content quality, credibility, and user engagement in digital branding. Theoretically, the results affirm that social media quality and credibility are foundational constructs in online communication, while e-WOM serves as a pivotal mechanism for brand amplification. Practically, the implications are clear: destination marketers must prioritize credible, high-quality content to foster brand awareness and stimulate positive e-WOM. By doing so, they can enhance consumer trust, encourage content sharing, and strengthen long-term engagement with tourism destinations.

H1: Social Media Quality has a positive effect on Destination Brand Awareness

H1 is supported, with Social Media Quality (SMQ) exerting a positive and significant effect on destination brand awareness (β = 0.325; t = 4.045; p = 0.000). This indicates that when information about Perlang on Instagram is clear, complete, relevant, and easy to understand, tourists are more likely to recognize and recall the destination as a distinct brand. This finding is consistent with Damayanti & Indrawati (2023), who showed that social media quality significantly enhances destination brand awareness and destination satisfaction, thereby strengthening revisit intention in a tourism context. Their study confirms that technically sound and user-oriented content (e.g., accurate, detailed, and timely information) is a key driver of brand recall and recognition.

Similarly, Dedeoğlu et al. (2020) found that social media sharing positively affects destination brand awareness and, through that, tourists' perceptions of destination quality, reinforcing the argument that well-managed social media activities are central to building destination brands. Kamaluddin et al. (2023) further demonstrated that the quality of tourism information on social media significantly contributes to destination brand awareness among youth, emphasizing that complete, relevant, and engaging content increases the salience of the destination in young travelers' minds. More broadly, Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2023) show that firms' social media communication can generate destination brand awareness and image, underscoring the strategic role of information quality in the branding

process. Collectively, these studies support the present result that high social media quality is a fundamental precursor of destination brand awareness.

H2: Social Media Quality has a positive effect on e-WOM

H2 is also supported (β = 0.173; t = 3.025; p = 0.001), indicating that higher perceived quality of Perlang's Instagram content significantly increases tourists' willingness to engage in electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), such as recommending the destination or posting positive opinions online. Damayanti & Indrawati (2023) empirically showed that social media quality positively influences e-WOM and intermediate constructs such as destination brand awareness and destination satisfaction, suggesting that well-structured content encourages users to share their experiences and recommendations. Arifah et al. (2024) found that argument quality and information quality in e-WOM messages significantly shape information usefulness, which in turn drives visiting intentions to tourism destinations; this implies that high-quality digital information is more likely to be transmitted and adopted by users. (Nofrizal & N, 2023) showed that social media vlogs and e-WOM jointly affect intention to visit artificial tourism destinations, with e-WOM serving as a channel for amplifying high-quality audiovisual content among potential visitors. Similarly, Setiawan et al. (2023) found that message reliability and information quality significantly enhance e-WOM and visit intention in culinary tourism, reinforcing the idea that high-quality content drives users to engage in recommendation behavior. These converging findings support the conclusion that social media quality is a key antecedent of e-WOM in tourism.

H3: Social Media Credibility has a positive effect on Destination Brand Awareness.

H3 is supported, showing that Social Media Credibility (SMC) has a positive and significant effect on Destination Brand Awareness (β = 0.305; t = 2.149; p = 0.016). This suggests that when users perceive the information about Perlang as believable, truthful, and trustworthy, their recognition and recall of the destination brand become stronger. (Damayanti & Indrawati, 2023) Found that social media credibility significantly affects destination brand awareness and downstream variables such as destination satisfaction and revisit intention, indicating that perceived reliability of content is central to forming strong destination associations. Purwitasari et al. (2024), in a study of the @WonderfulIndonesia Instagram account, reported that both media credibility and information quality significantly influence visiting interest among millennial travelers, showing that credible official content can translate into behavioral and attitudinal outcomes related to destination brands. Dedeoğlu et al. (2020) emphasize that social media marketing and sharing activities, when perceived as trustworthy, significantly contribute to destination awareness and subsequent evaluations of natural and service quality, underscoring credibility as a core component of brand-building communication. In addition, Mandagi et al. (2024) provide a systematic review of social media's role in destination branding and highlight the recurring theme that credible, authentic content fosters more substantial brand Equity, including brand awareness. Together, these studies corroborate the present evidence that social media credibility is a critical driver of destination brand awareness.

H4: Social Media Credibility has a positive effect on e-WOM.

H4 is supported (β = 0.166; t = 2.196; p = 0.014), indicating that higher perceived credibility of Perlang's social media content significantly increases tourists' propensity to engage in e-WOM. When users trust the content, they are more likely to share it and recommend the destination. Damayanti & Indrawati (2023) found that social media credibility positively affects e-WOM in tourism promotion, suggesting that trustworthy content leads to more active recommendation behavior. Ngo et al. (2024) demonstrated that information credibility plays a pivotal role in electronic word-of-mouth on social networking sites, shaping information usefulness, adoption, and ultimately online behavioral intentions. Their findings underscore credibility as a central determinant of e-WOM dynamics. Hasanein et al. (2025) showed that content credibility on Instagram significantly influences visit intention to casual dining restaurants and partially mediates the relationship between visual content (foodstagramming attributes) and behavioral intention, highlighting how credible content stimulates sharing and recommendation processes. Furthermore, Azhari et al. (2025) underscore the role of information credibility in e-WOM on social commerce

platforms, demonstrating that credible information encourages users to rely on and propagate online recommendations. These convergent findings support the conclusion that social media credibility is a key antecedent of e-WOM, consistent with the empirical results for H4.

H5: e-WOM positively affects Destination Brand Awareness.
H5 is supported (β = 0.208; t = 3.019; p = 0.001), indicating that e-WOM has a positive and significant effect on Destination Brand Awareness. Positive recommendations, user-generated stories, and online reviews about Perlang strengthen tourists' ability to recognize and recall the destination brand.

Your study aligns closely with the bibliometric review by Vu Dinh et al. (2025), who show that e-WOM is a central construct in tourism research and plays a key role in shaping tourist trust, destination image, and brand-related outcomes such as awareness and loyalty. Bahari et al. (2025) found that e-WOM and destination image significantly influence tourist satisfaction and revisit intention to Gili tourism, underscoring the strategic value of digital narratives in reinforcing brand associations and long-term engagement. Kumar et al. (2025) similarly demonstrated that e-WOM positively affects tourist attitudes and behavioral intentions in adventure tourism. However, the strength of this effect depends on the relevance and credibility of the shared content. More specifically on brand-related outcomes, Setiawan et al. (2023) showed that e-WOM significantly improves destination image, satisfaction, and loyalty in a tourism setting, indicating that user-generated communication contributes to the broader brand Equity construct in which awareness plays a fundamental role. Hasan & Setiyaningtiyas (2015) also found that e-WOM on Twitter significantly influences consumer purchase intention, which is mediated by brand-related perceptions, suggesting that e-WOM helps to build mental availability of brands. These prior findings reinforce the present evidence that e-WOM is an important driver of destination brand awareness.

H6: e-WOM mediates the effect of Social Media Quality on Destination Brand Awareness.
H6, which tests the mediating role of e-WOM in the relationship between Social Media Quality and Destination Brand Awareness, is supported (indirect effect β = 0.232; t = 3.348; p = 0.000). This indicates that high-quality social media content not only directly contributes to brand awareness (H1) but also indirectly enhances it by stimulating e-WOM, thereby strengthening brand recognition. Damayanti & Indrawati (2023) explicitly modeled destination brand awareness and destination satisfaction as mediating variables between social media quality, social media credibility, e-WOM, and revisit intention, finding that social media quality indirectly influences behavioral outcomes through brand-related constructs. The extended study on social media quality, quantity, credibility, and e-WOM similarly shows that these social media constructs affect revisit intention through destination brand awareness and destination satisfaction as intervening variables, confirming the importance of indirect pathways in tourism branding. Kamaluddin et al. (2023) also found that tourism information quality in social media enhances destination brand awareness among youth, suggesting that information quality triggers further engagement and sharing behaviors that reinforce brand salience over time. In a related context, Arifah et al. (2024) demonstrated that high-quality e-WOM arguments and source credibility increase information usefulness and visit intention, implying that information quality operates partly through its impact on the communicative process (e-WOM) rather than only through direct cognitive effects. Taken together, these studies support the mediating pattern found in this research: high social media quality encourages users to generate positive e-WOM, and this user-generated communication amplifies destination brand awareness.

H7: e-WOM mediates the effect of Social Media Credibility on Destination Brand Awareness
H7 shows the most substantial effect in the model (indirect effect β = 0.356; t = 4.166; p = 0.000), confirming that e-WOM significantly mediates the relationship between Social Media Credibility and Destination Brand Awareness. This means that credible social media content builds trust, which in turn motivates users to share their experiences and opinions; these e-WOM activities then substantially enhance brand awareness. (Damayanti & Indrawati, 2023) Similarly, it was reported

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that social media credibility strongly influences e-WOM and destination brand awareness, indicating that credibility-driven communication is a potent mechanism in tourism promotion. Ngo et al. (2024) showed that information credibility is a core determinant of e-WOM outcomes on social networking sites, affecting information adoption and purchase intention; this underscores how credibility enhances the persuasive and transmissible power of online messages. Hasanein et al. (2025) further demonstrated that content credibility partially mediates the link between visual social media posts (foodstagramming) and visit intention, suggesting that credibility can serve as a bridge between content attributes and behavioral responses, conceptually similar to the mediating role of e-WOM in the present study. Moreover, prior work on the impact of e-WOM source credibility on destination visit intention among Chinese tourists indicates that credible e-WOM sources significantly enhance visit intention and online involvement, reinforcing the idea that credibility-driven e-WOM has powerful effects on destination-related outcomes. These convergent findings strongly support the conclusion that credibility-induced e-WOM is a highly effective pathway for strengthening destination brand awareness, which is entirely in line with the magnitude and significance of the H7 effect observed in this study.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that social media quality and social media credibility play an essential role in shaping destination brand awareness, both directly and indirectly through electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). High-quality, relevant, complete, and easy-to-understand content on Perlang's social media platforms significantly strengthens tourists' recognition of the destination. At the same time, credible and trustworthy information enhances user trust, thereby stimulating stronger e-WOM engagement. The mediating role of e-WOM confirms that user-generated communication functions as a strategic bridge between social media practices and brand outcomes. These findings validate the conceptual model and highlight the interconnected nature of content attributes and user behaviors in digital tourism branding. Beyond the empirical confirmation, the results offer several key insights for strengthening community-based digital marketing strategies in tourism villages. First, community-managed social media channels must prioritize content quality, ensuring messages are visually appealing, factually accurate, contextually relevant, and regularly updated. In destinations like Perlang, showcasing authentic narratives, local culture, daily activities, transformation stories of ex-mining sites, and unique ecological features can enhance informational value and stimulate positive e-WOM. Second, strengthening social media credibility is equally critical. Community administrators should adopt transparent communication practices, provide verifiable information, and maintain consistent branding across platforms. Involving trusted voices such as local leaders, cultural ambassadors, or returning visitors can increase perceived authenticity and expand the reach of credible online narratives. Third, the mediating role of e-WOM highlights the strategic importance of mobilizing visitors and residents as digital advocates. Tourism communities should actively encourage user participation through campaigns, hashtag movements, interactive quizzes, photo contests, or rewards for user-generated content. Establishing a shared sense of ownership among community members and visitors can magnify the organic spread of information and reinforce destination brand awareness.

Lastly, this study underscores that community-based tourism destinations must shift from passive promotion to participatory digital engagement, leveraging the collective voice of the community to build long-term brand resonance. In regions with limited infrastructure and modest marketing budgets, such as Bangka Belitung, strategically managed social media platforms offer a cost-effective pathway to enhance visibility, attract new segments, and strengthen local identity.

Nevertheless, the study acknowledges certain limitations. The predominantly young sample may not fully represent diverse digital behaviors across age groups. The single-destination focus limits generalizability, suggesting the need for multi-site comparative studies or longitudinal research to track evolving patterns of digital engagement. Future research may also explore additional constructs, such as emotional resonance, influencer authenticity, algorithmic visibility, and community empowerment, to refine the model and enhance its applicability across digital tourism contexts. Overall, the findings of this research contribute to both theory and practice by demonstrating how content quality, credibility, and e-WOM operate as mutually reinforcing mechanisms within digital destination branding. For community-based tourism destinations, these insights offer a practical roadmap for designing more effective, credible, and participatory digital marketing strategies that enhance brand awareness and sustain tourism development in the digital era.

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