

# The Influence of Social Media Word-of-Mouth on Tourists' Intention to Visit Yunnan for Coffee Tourism: The Mediating Role of Attitude

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## Abstract

This research aimed to study 1) the effects of word-of-mouth on tourists' behavioral intentions to choose Yunnan as a coffee tourism destination and 2) the mediating role of attitude. The sample was 480 Chinese tourists aged 23-45 from ten major domestic cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Chongqing, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Hangzhou, Xi' a Wuhan, and Nanjing) who showed interest in Yunnan coffee tourism. They were selected by a random sampling method through fan communities on social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Douyin. The instrument for collecting data was a structured questionnaire consisting of three validated constructs: word-of-mouth, attitude toward Yunnan coffee tourism, and intention to participate in coffee tourism. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale. The research results were found as follows: 1) on the issue of word-of-mouth, word-of-mouth had a statistically significant positive effect on both tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions; 2) on the issue of attitude, attitude toward coffee tourism significantly influenced intention and partially mediated the relationship between word-of-mouth and intention. Findings highlight the importance of social influence and emotional engagement in promoting emerging tourism niches.

**Keywords:** Word-of-mouth; Social media; Tourist attitude; Behavioral intention; Yunnan coffee tourism.

## Introduction

In recent years, coffee tourism has emerged as a distinctive form of experiential travel, allowing tourists to engage in immersive activities that connect agriculture, culture, and leisure (Chen et al., 2021). Unlike conventional tourism, coffee tourism emphasizes the entire coffee-making process, from plantation visits and harvesting to brewing and tasting, fostering deeper interactions between visitors and local communities (Maspul, 2023). This niche market has contributed to the diversification of rural economies and promoted sustainable agricultural practices and the preservation of cultural identities (Woyesa & Kumar, 2021). By offering culturally rich and sensory experiences, coffee tourism appeals particularly to modern travelers seeking authentic and meaningful journeys.

Alongside the rise of niche tourism forms, the digital transformation of society has profoundly reshaped tourists' decision-making processes. Platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, Douyin, and Xiaohongshu have become central to information acquisition, experience sharing, and destination image formation (Wang et al., 2022). Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), fueled by user-generated content on these platforms, now plays a pivotal role in influencing tourists' preferences and behavioral intentions (Antonio et al., 2020). Despite the growing body of research on social media and tourism behavior, the role of eWOM remains underexplored in specialized contexts such as coffee tourism. As tourism demand shifts toward personalization and thematic experiences (Azmi et al., 2023). Understanding how eWOM drives interest in niche sectors like coffee tourism becomes increasingly critical (Casalegno et al., 2020).

Given its favorable climate, biodiversity, and rich cultural heritage, Yunnan Province is well-positioned to become a leading coffee tourism destination within this broader context. Accounting for nearly 98% of China's coffee production (Pan, 2023). Yunnan offers not only agricultural abundance but also vibrant ethnic traditions and picturesque landscapes (Zhang et al., 2023). Government initiatives such as promoting the "Yun Coffee" brand and integrating agriculture with tourism have laid a strong foundation for development. Nevertheless, Yunnan's coffee tourism faces significant challenges, including low digital visibility, a weak specialized brand identity, and limited promotion focused on coffee-related experiences (Ma et al., 2022). Most social media content highlights general scenic and cultural attractions rather than positioning Yunnan as a unique coffee tourism destination, signaling a critical strategic and research gap.

Although prior studies have explored the relationship between social media and tourism behavior using frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Joo et al., 2020; Ulker-Demirel & Ciftci, 2020), limited attention has been given to the emerging sector of coffee tourism. To address this gap, this study explores how social media-driven word-of-mouth influences tourists' attitudes and intentions toward visiting Yunnan for coffee tourism. Integrating the Cultivation Theory, which elucidates how sustained media exposure shapes perceptions (Maleknia et al., 2025), with the Theory of Planned Behavior, which links perceptions to attitudes and behavioral intentions, this research constructs a comprehensive framework for analysis. By applying these complementary theoretical lenses, the study seeks to advance understanding of how social media affects tourism behavior in niche contexts and offers practical insights into promoting Yunnan's coffee tourism more effectively.

## Research objectives

1. To explore the effects of word-of-mouth on tourists' behavioral intentions to choose Yunnan as a coffee tourism destination
2. To examine the mediating role of attitude.

## Literature review

### Theoretical basis

Cultivation theory explains how prolonged exposure to media gradually shapes individuals' perceptions of social reality (Shah et al., 2020). In recent years, the theory has been adapted to study digital environments, particularly social media platforms, where sustained exposure to user-generated content significantly influences tourists' destination images (Liu et al., 2024). In tourism research, Cultivation Theory is associated with three key variables: repeated exposure, word-of-mouth (WOM), and behavioral intentions (Han & Chen, 2022). Empirical studies have demonstrated that repeated exposure to destination visuals, narratives, and user-generated content on platforms like Douyin and Xiaohongshu can alter tourists' perceptions and cultivate favorable destination images, even before actual visits (Chi et al., 2024). In this study, Cultivation Theory suggests that continuous exposure to WOM related to Yunnan coffee tourism on social media platforms may gradually cultivate tourists' positive perceptions and attitudes toward Yunnan as a desirable coffee tourism destination. This theoretical foundation supports examining how persistent digital WOM influences the formation of tourists' attitudes and subsequent travel intentions.

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) has become one of the most influential models for predicting individual decision-making and behavior (Ajzen, 2020). TPB posits that behavioral intention- the most immediate predictor of actual behavior- is determined by three core constructs: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (La Barbera & Ajzen, 2020). TPB has been extensively applied in tourism to understand travel-related decisions, including destination choice, environmentally responsible behaviors, and revisiting intentions (Azhar et al., 2023). Recent studies emphasize that tourists' favorable attitudes towards tourism products and services positively impact their travel intentions, especially when reinforced by positive social influences and a strong sense of behavioral control facilitated by online information (Wong et al., 2022). In the context of Yunnan coffee tourism, tourists' intentions to visit are shaped by their attitudes toward Yunnan's coffee tourism offerings, perceptions of social endorsement from peers or influencers via platforms like Xiaohongshu, and their perceived ease of engaging in coffee tourism activities (Yeap et al., 2021). Therefore, this study adopts TPB to propose that attitude serves as a key mediating variable through which WOM influences tourists' behavioral intentions, providing a theoretical basis for analyzing the decision-making process of potential visitors to Yunnan coffee tourism destinations.

### Conceptual review

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is the informal and interpersonal exchange of information about products, services, or experiences between consumers (GUO et al., 2020). WOM involves verbal, non-commercial communication perceived as trustworthy by the receiver. In the digital age, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) encompasses user-generated content disseminated through social media platforms, online reviews, and blogs, often considered more credible and influential than traditional marketing (Nilashi et al., 2022). In the context of Yunnan coffee tourism, WOM pertains specifically to disseminating personal experiences and evaluations related to coffee attractions, plantation visits, coffee-themed festivals, and cultural

events within Yunnan Province (Becker et al., 2024). For this study, WOM is operationalized based on key dimensions such as credibility (the perceived trustworthiness of the shared content), frequency (the extent of repeated exposure), and the richness of user-generated narratives. Understanding WOM's role is essential, as positive and frequent narratives on platforms like Douyin and Xiaohongshu can enhance destination image, arouse curiosity, and stimulate travel intentions.

Attitude is conceptualized as an individual's evaluative disposition toward a particular object, behavior, or concept, reflecting the degree of favorable or unfavorable appraisal (Bakanauskas et al., 2020). It encompasses three components: cognitive (beliefs about attributes), affective (emotional responses), and behavioral (readiness to act) elements. In tourism research, attitude is a pivotal construct influencing destination choice, activity engagement, and overall travel behavior (Passafaro, 2020). Tourist attitudes are shaped by various factors, including personal experiences, cultural background, and information acquired through media and social interactions (Pop et al., 2023). For this study, attitude toward Yunnan coffee tourism refers to tourists' overall evaluative judgment formed by their beliefs about the attractiveness and quality of Yunnan's coffee tourism offerings, their emotional attachment to the destination, and their predisposition to engage in coffee tourism activities (Wang & Chu, 2021). Attitude functions as an internal psychological state that mediates the effect of external stimuli, such as WOM, on travel-related decision-making.

Intention is the motivational commitment that reflects an individual's conscious willingness and plan to engage in a specific behavior (Xiong et al., 2023). It is distinguished from attitude in that while attitude captures an evaluative assessment, intention explicitly measures an individual's readiness to perform the behavior. In the tourism domain, intention is often operationalized as the self-reported likelihood of visiting a destination, participating in tourism activities, or making specific travel-related choices. In this study, intention toward Yunnan coffee tourism refers to the extent to which potential tourists express a deliberate plan and determination to visit Yunnan for coffee-related experiences, including plantation tours, coffee festivals, and cultural immersions associated with coffee culture (Wang & Chu, 2021).

#### Hypothesis development

Word-of-mouth (WOM), particularly in its electronic form (eWOM), has become a pivotal factor in shaping consumer attitudes within the tourism sector. eWOM encompasses online consumer-to-consumer communications, such as reviews, social media posts, and blogs, which are often perceived as more credible than traditional marketing communications (Le et al., 2023). In tourism, eWOM significantly influences potential travelers' perceptions and decisions, as user-generated content can enhance destination image, stimulate interest, and ultimately influence travel intentions (Pahlevan Sharif & Mura, 2019). Therefore, this study hypothesizes:

*H1. Word-of-mouth about Yunnan coffee tourism positively influences attitudes towards Yunnan coffee tourism.*

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) posits that an individual's attitude toward a behavior significantly influences their intention to perform that behavior (Cheng, 2019). In tourism, numerous studies have validated the positive relationship between tourists' attitudes toward a destination and their intention to visit. Research has demonstrated that favorable attitudes toward sustainable tourism practices lead to stronger intentions to engage in such behaviors (Ashraf et al., 2020). Similarly, positive perceptions of a destination's attributes have been linked to increased travel intentions (Tavitiyaman et al., 2021). Therefore, this study proposes:

*H2. Attitude towards Yunnan coffee tourism positively influences intention to Yunnan coffee tourism.*

In tourism, numerous studies have validated the mediating role of attitude in the relationship between external influences, such as word-of-mouth (WOM), and behavioral intentions. Research has demonstrated that attitude partially mediates the relationship between trust in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) sources and the intention to follow such recommendations (Anubha & Shome, 2021). Similarly, studies have found that brand attitude can mediate the relationship between WOM and revisit intentions in the hospitality sector (Foroudi et al., 2021). Therefore, this study proposes:

*H3. Attitude toward Yunnan coffee tourism mediates the relationship between word-of-mouth of Yunnan coffee tourism and intention to Yunnan coffee tourism.*

**Table 1** Hypothesis development statement

H1	Word-of-mouth about Yunnan coffee tourism positively influences attitudes towards Yunnan coffee tourism.
H2	Attitude toward Yunnan coffee tourism positively influences intention to participate in Yunnan coffee tourism.
H3	Attitude towards Yunnan coffee tourism mediates the relationship between word-of-mouth of Yunnan coffee tourism and intention to participate in Yunnan coffee tourism.

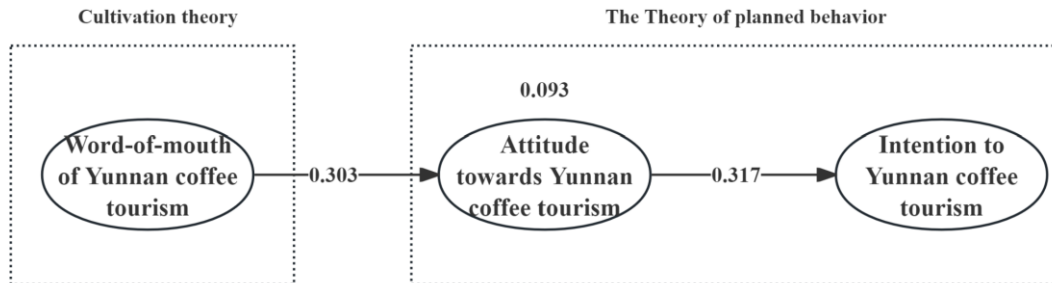
### Theoretical framework

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model developed for this study. Grounded in Cultivation Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the model aims to examine how social media-driven word-of-mouth (WOM) influences tourists' attitudes and intentions toward visiting Yunnan for coffee tourism. Cultivation Theory provides the basis for understanding how continuous exposure to WOM content related to Yunnan coffee tourism gradually shapes tourists' perceptions and evaluations. Meanwhile, TPB informs the mechanism through which these evaluations (attitudes) translate into behavioral intentions.

The model comprises three core constructs: word-of-mouth, attitude, and intention. Based on the reviewed literature, this study hypothesizes that (1) WOM positively affects tourists' attitudes toward Yunnan coffee tourism (H1), (2) attitude positively influences tourists' intention to visit Yunnan for coffee tourism (H2), and (3) attitude mediates the effect of WOM on tourists' intention (H3). The conceptual framework shown in Figure 1 visually represents these hypothesized relationships.

Specifically, the path from WOM to attitude reflects the cultivation effect of repeated exposure to destination-related narratives. The path from attitude to intention captures the core prediction of TPB, linking evaluative disposition to behavioral commitment. Finally, the mediating role of attitude highlights how external WOM influences tourist intention indirectly by shaping internal evaluations. This integrated framework provides a theoretically grounded structure for empirical testing.

**Fig.1** Theoretical model of this study



## Methodology

This study investigates the influence of social media word-of-mouth on the intention to visit Yunnan as a coffee tourism destination, explicitly focusing on the mediating role of tourists' attitudes. The target population comprises individuals aged 23 to 45 from ten major Chinese cities: Shanghai, Chengdu, Chongqing, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hangzhou, Xian, Wuhan, and Nanjing. These cities were selected based on their identification as core domestic source markets for Yunnan tourism. Participants were selected using purposive sampling from follower groups and coffee-related interest communities on social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Douyin. These platforms were chosen because they are highly popular among young to middle-aged Chinese consumers. They serve as primary channels for destination-related word-of-mouth sharing, especially for niche tourism experiences like coffee tourism. Inclusion criteria required participants to follow or interact with coffee-related content on Xiaohongshu or Douyin within the past year and reside in one of the target cities. Exclusion criteria included participants who submitted incomplete questionnaires or failed attention-check questions.

The online survey was distributed through platform-specific tools such as Xiaohongshu private messaging, Douyin fan group links, and Wenjuanxing (a professional Chinese online survey platform). Recruitment occurred between December 2024 and February 2025. A total of 523 responses were collected, of which 480 were valid and used for further analysis after excluding responses that were incomplete, inconsistent, or failed quality screening checks. This sample size satisfies the recommended ratio of 10-15 respondents per questionnaire item for structural equation modeling (Memon et al., 2020).

The structured questionnaire was designed to measure the key variables using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Word-of-mouth (WOM) refers to informal, consumer-generated communication online and offline about Yunnan coffee tourism. It captures exposure to and perceived credibility of information shared through social media, blogs, and peer discussions (Becker et al., 2024). Attitude toward Yunnan coffee tourism is conceptualized as an individual's overall attitude toward Yunnan as a destination. It encompasses cognitive evaluations of the experience (e.g., perceived uniqueness, authenticity) and affective responses (e.g., interest, excitement) (Wang & Chu, 2021). Intention to participate in coffee tourism is defined as the likelihood that individuals will plan or consider traveling to Yunnan for a coffee-related tourism experience. This includes both behavioral intention and motivational readiness. Measurement items are adapted from Wang and Chu (2021) and reflect tourists' decision readiness based on prior attitudes and media exposure.



This study employed a multi-stage analytical approach: descriptive statistics summarized demographic characteristics and variable distributions; reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha assessed the internal consistency of each construct; confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) tested the measurement model for convergent and discriminant validity; and structural equation modeling (SEM) examined the hypothesized direct and mediating relationships among WOM, attitude, and intention. Ethical considerations were strictly observed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before participating, and all responses were treated confidentially and anonymously. Participation was voluntary, and participants were allowed to withdraw at any time.

## Research results

### 1. Descriptive analysis

Table 2 presents the demographic profile of the study participants, offering an overview of their gender distribution, regional origin, education level, and annual family income. The gender distribution reveals a relatively balanced sample, with 54.2% female respondents ( $n = 263$ ) and 45.8% male respondents ( $n = 222$ ), suggesting slight female predominance in engagement with Yunnan coffee tourism.

Regarding regional representation, respondents were sampled from ten major cities with domestic tourist sources in China. Wuhan (11.3%), Guangzhou (10.9%), and Chengdu (10.3%) accounted for the most significant proportions, followed closely by Beijing and Xi'an (both 10.1%). Other cities, including Shanghai, Chongqing, Shenzhen, and Hangzhou, each contributed 9.7%, while Nanjing had the lowest representation at 8.5%. This distribution reflects a diverse and geographically representative sample of China's primary coffee tourism markets.

Regarding educational attainment, the sample is highly educated. Respondents holding a master's degree (25.8%) and a bachelor's degree (25.4%) constituted the majority, followed by those with a doctorate (24.7%) and high school diploma (24.1%), indicating that participants are generally well-informed and capable of critically engaging with tourism-related content. Annual family income was relatively evenly distributed. The largest income group was 200,000-250,000 RMB (19.2%), followed by 150,000-200,000 RMB (16.9%), 250,000-300,000 RMB (17.9%), and more than 300,000 RMB (17.3%). The lower income brackets—less than 100,000 RMB (14.6%) and 100,000-150,000 RMB (14.0%)—were also represented, suggesting broad economic diversity within the sample. Collectively, these characteristics contribute to the representativeness and generalizability of the findings regarding Yunnan coffee tourism behavior.

**Table 2** Essential Information

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	222	45.8
	Female	263	54.2
Region	Beijing	49	10.1
	Shanghai	47	9.7
	Chengdu	50	10.3
	Chongqing	47	9.7
	Shenzhen	47	9.7
	Guangzhou	53	10.9
	Hangzhou	47	9.7
	Nanjing	41	8.5
	Wuhan	55	11.3
	Xi'an	49	10.1
Education Level	High school diploma	117	24.1
	Bachelor's degree	123	25.4
	Master's degree	125	25.8
	Doctorate	120	24.7
Annual Family Income (in RMB)	Less than 100,000	71	14.6
	100,000 - 150,000	68	14.0
	150,000 - 200,000	82	16.9
	200,000 - 250,000	93	19.2
	250,000 - 300,000	87	17.9
	More than 300,000	84	17.3

## 2. Reliability and Validity of Constructs

### 2.1 Reliability Analysis

Table 3 presents the internal consistency reliability of the measurement scales used to assess the three core constructs in this study: word-of-mouth, attitude toward coffee tourism, and intention to engage in coffee tourism. Cronbach's alpha values for word-of-mouth (0.878), attitude (0.842), and intention (0.838) all exceeded 0.80, reflecting strong internal consistency and reliability (Izah et al., 2023). Values above 0.90 may indicate redundancy, while values below 0.70 suggest insufficient internal consistency (Cheung et al., 2024). The word-of-mouth scale, which includes five items, achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.878, reflecting excellent internal consistency. The attitude toward the coffee tourism scale, comprising four items, yielded an alpha of 0.842, and the intention to engage in the coffee tourism scale, also based on four items, showed a reliability coefficient of 0.838. These results indicate that each construct is measured reliably and that the items within each scale consistently reflect their respective theoretical dimensions.

**Table 3** Reliability Statistics

Variables	Number of questions	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Word-of-mouth of Yunnan coffee tourism	5	0.878
Attitude towards Yunnan coffee tourism	4	0.842
Intention to participate in coffee tourism	4	0.838



## 2.2 Validity Test

Table 4 presents the results of the KMO and Bartlett Test. The KMO value of 0.928 indicates "marvelous" sampling adequacy, and Bartlett's test was significant ( $p < .001$ ), supporting the suitability of the data for factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett's test of sphericity, on the other hand, tests the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix. A significant result ( $p < 0.05$ ) indicates that the variables are sufficiently correlated to proceed with factor analysis (Williams et al., 2010). As shown in Table 3, the KMO value is 0.928, which falls into the "marvelous" category, indicating that the sample data are highly suitable for factor analysis. In addition, Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant ( $\chi^2 = 5507.748$ ,  $df = 276$ ,  $p < .001$ ), confirming that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix. These findings jointly support the appropriateness of conducting factor analysis on the dataset, ensuring the reliability and validity of the forthcoming confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

**Table 4** KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.928
	Approx. Chi-Square	5507.748
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	276
	Sig.	.000

## 2.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Table 5 presents the convergent validity assessment. Convergent validity was evaluated using standardized factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) (Cheung et al., 2024). All standardized factor loadings exceeded 0.70, composite reliabilities (CR) exceeded 0.80, and average variance extracted (AVE) values surpassed the 0.50 threshold, demonstrating strong convergent validity (Hancock & Mueller, 2001). Specifically, factor loadings for word-of-mouth indicators range from 0.733 to 0.789; attitude, 0.742 to 0.768; and intention, 0.731 to 0.773.

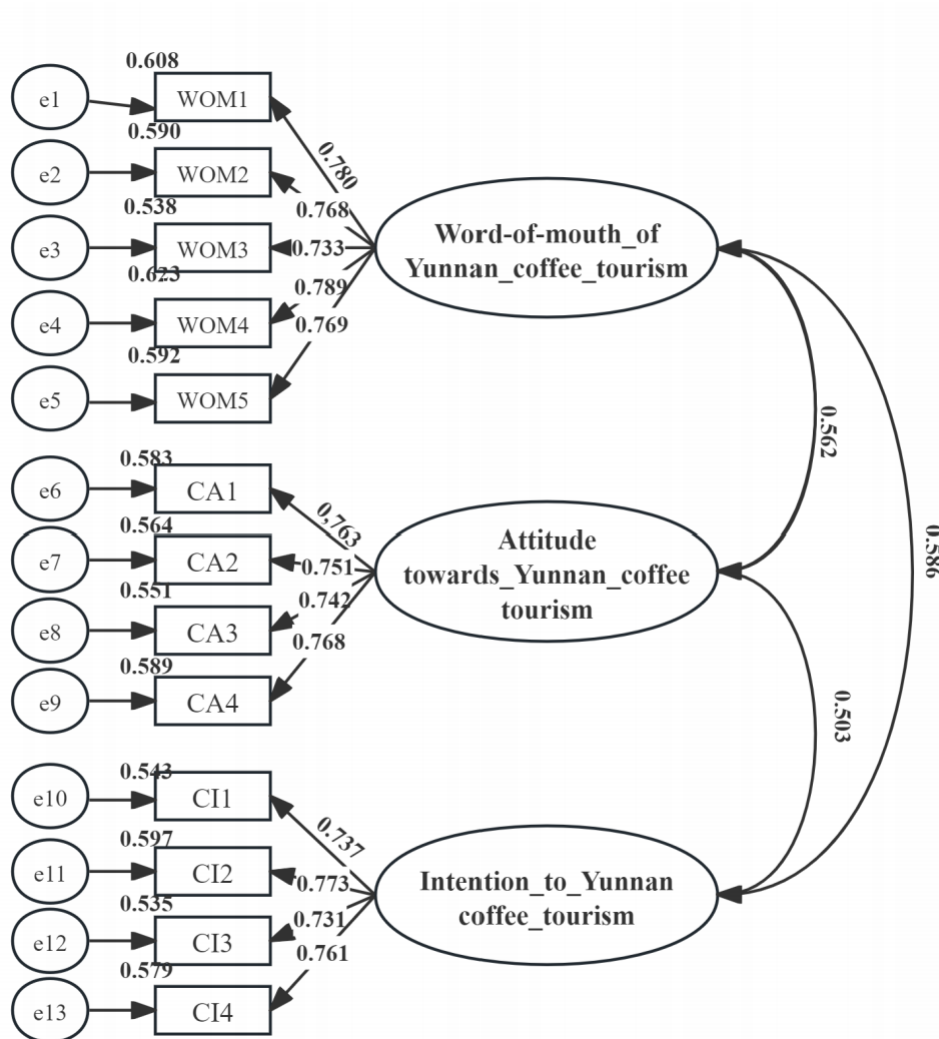
The CR values for all three constructs are above 0.80 (word-of-mouth = 0.878, attitude = 0.842, intention = 0.838), exceeding the acceptable level of 0.70 and indicating high internal consistency. Likewise, AVE values are above the minimum threshold of 0.50 (word-of-mouth = 0.59, attitude = 0.572, intention = 0.564), confirming that each construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators. These results collectively demonstrate strong convergent validity, affirming that the measurement model effectively captures the theoretical constructs intended in the study.

**Table 5** Convergence Validity

Latent variables	Observation indicators	Factor loading	CR	AVE
Word-of-mouth	WOM1	0.780	0.878	0.590
	WOM2	0.768		
	WOM3	0.733		
	WOM4	0.789		
	WOM5	0.769		
Attitude toward coffee tourism	CA1	0.763	0.842	0.572
	CA2	0.751		
	CA3	0.742		
	CA4	0.768		
Intention to coffee tourism	CI1	0.737	0.838	0.564
	CI2	0.773		
	CI3	0.731		
	CI4	0.761		

Figure 2 illustrates the CFA model, confirming strong correlations among constructs. Multiple observed indicators represent each latent construct, and all standardized factor loadings exceed the minimum recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong item reliability and convergent validity. For the Word-of-mouth construct, five items (WOM1-WOM5) demonstrate loadings ranging from 0.733 to 0.789, indicating that each indicator significantly contributes to the latent construct. Similarly, the Attitude construct is measured by four indicators (CA1-A4), with factor loadings between 0.742 and 0.768, confirming strong measurement validity. The Intention construct includes four indicators (CI1-CI4), with loadings ranging from 0.731 to 0.773, affirming the reliability of the intention scale. In addition, the diagram displays the correlations among the latent constructs. Word-of-mouth is positively correlated with attitude ( $r = 0.562$ ) and intention ( $r = 0.586$ ), while attitude is positively associated with intention ( $r = 0.503$ ). All correlations are statistically significant and moderate in strength, suggesting meaningful theoretical relationships among the constructs. These results collectively support the adequacy of the measurement model in representing the latent constructs of interest and provide a sound foundation for structural model testing.

Fig.2 Measurement model



## 2.4 Discriminant Validity

Table 6 shows that the square roots of the AVE values for each construct exceeded their inter-construct correlations, confirming satisfactory discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The diagonal values represent the square roots of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct, while the off-diagonal values indicate the inter-construct correlations. The square roots of the AVEs for word-of-mouth (0.768), attitude (0.756), and intention (0.751) all exceed the corresponding inter-construct correlations. Specifically, the correlation between word-of-mouth and attitude is 0.562, between word-of-mouth and intention is 0.586, and between attitude and intention is 0.503. These results satisfy the Fornell-Larcker criterion, indicating that each construct shares more variance with its indicators than with other constructs.

Hence, the findings confirm that the three constructs demonstrate adequate discriminant validity, supporting their distinctiveness within the measurement model and justifying their inclusion in the subsequent structural model analysis.

Table 6 Discriminant validity test

Latent Variables	1	2	3
Word-of-mouth of Yunnan coffee tourism	0.768		
Attitude towards Yunnan coffee tourism	0.562 ***	0.756	
Intention to Yunnan coffee tourism	0.586 ***	0.503 ***	0.751

### 3 Hypothesis Testing and Structural Model Results

#### 3.1 Model Fit

Table 7 presents the model fit indices. The structural model demonstrated excellent fit:  $\chi^2/df = 1.421$ , RMSEA = 0.029, and all incremental fit indices (GFI = 0.946, AGFI = 0.932, NFI = 0.939, TLI = 0.978, CFI = 0.981) exceeded 0.90.

Table 7 Model fit metrics

Fit index	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI	TLI	CFI
Reference standards	<3	<0.08	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9
Result	1.421	0.029	0.946	0.932	0.939	0.978	0.981

#### 3.2 Findings for Objective 1: The Direct Effect of Word-of-Mouth on Intention

Table 8 reports the standardized path coefficients and statistical significance of the hypothesized relationships within the structural model. The SEM results confirmed a strong positive relationship between word-of-mouth (WOM) and attitude toward Yunnan coffee tourism ( $\beta = 0.303$ ,  $p < .001$ ), supporting Hypothesis H1. Furthermore, attitude toward coffee tourism significantly influenced intention to visit ( $\beta = 0.317$ ,  $p < .001$ ), supporting Hypothesis H2. These findings align with Cultivation Theory by demonstrating that continuous exposure to positive WOM on social media platforms cultivates favorable attitudes, which, according to TPB, drive intention formation. Word-of-mouth had a strong positive effect on tourists' attitudes toward Yunnan coffee tourism ( $\beta = 0.303$ ,  $p < .001$ ), which in turn positively influenced tourists' behavioral intentions ( $\beta = 0.317$ ,  $p < .001$ ), confirming that social media WOM is an essential factor in tourism decision-making.

Table 8 Structural equation model path test

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	$\beta$	S.E.	CR.	P	Results
H1	WOM→CA	0.313	0.303	0.057	5.496	***	Supported
H2	CA→CI	0.296	0.317	0.056	5.323	***	Supported

Note: Word-of-mouth of Yunnan coffee tourism (WOM); Attitude towards Yunnan coffee tourism (CA); Intention to Yunnan coffee tourism (CI).

#### 3.3 Findings for Objective 2: The Mediating Role of Attitude

Table 9 reports the mediation analysis results. The indirect effect of WOM on intention through attitude was statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.093$ , 95% CI [0.026, 0.184]), supporting Hypothesis H3. This confirms that attitude partially mediates the relationship between word-of-mouth and tourists' intention to visit Yunnan coffee destinations. Attitude serves as a partial mediator between WOM and intention, highlighting the dual influence path in the model—both a direct WOM effect and an indirect WOM effect via attitude.

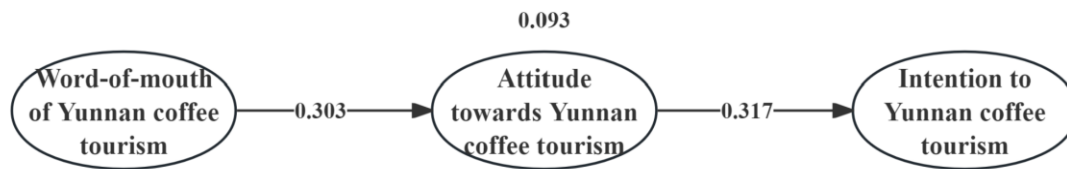
**Table 9** Mediation effect bootstrap test

Hypothesis	Mediation path	Effect size	SE	Bias-Corrected 95%CI	Results
H3	WOM→CA→CI	0.093	0.041	0.026	0.184

*Note: Word-of-mouth of Yunnan coffee tourism (WOM); Attitude towards Yunnan coffee tourism (CA); Intention to Yunnan coffee tourism (CI).*

Figure 3 illustrates the complete structural model, visually representing the direct and indirect paths between WOM, attitude, and intention.

**Fig.3** Structural model



### 3.4 Summary of Total Effects

Table 10 reports the standardized direct effects of key structural paths in the model and their standard errors and bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals obtained via bootstrap estimation. The path from Word-of-mouth (WOM) to Attitude towards Yunnan coffee tourism (CA) demonstrates a significant positive effect (effect size = 0.35, SE = 0.081), with a bias-corrected confidence interval ranging from 0.200 to 0.505, which excludes zero. This indicates that word-of-mouth exposure significantly enhances tourists' attitudes toward Yunnan coffee tourism. Similarly, the path from Attitude (CA) to Intention to Yunnan coffee tourism (CI) is also significant (effect size = 0.296, SE = 0.076), with a 95% confidence interval of 0.122 to 0.433, further confirming the positive influence of favorable attitudes on tourists' behavioral intentions. These findings collectively support the hypothesized direct relationships in the structural model and underscore the importance of attitude as a key psychological mechanism linking social influence to behavioral outcomes.

**Table 10** Total Effects

Effect path	Effect size	SE	Bias-Corrected 95%CI	
WOM→CA	0.35	0.081	0.2	0.505
CA→CI	0.296	0.076	0.122	0.433

*Note: Word-of-mouth of Yunnan coffee tourism (WOM); Attitude towards Yunnan coffee tourism (CA); Intention to Yunnan coffee tourism (CI).*

These findings empirically support the Cultivation Theory by demonstrating that repeated WOM exposure via social media platforms shapes tourists' perceptions and attitudes. Similarly, the results align with the Theory of Planned Behavior, affirming that attitude toward a destination critically influences tourists' behavioral intentions. The study's results illustrate

how external media exposure and internal evaluative processes influence tourism decision-making.

## Discussion

*RO 1. To explore the effects of word-of-mouth on tourists' behavioral intentions to choose Yunnan as a coffee tourism destination*

This study found that word-of-mouth (WOM) has a significant positive influence on tourists' attitudes toward Yunnan coffee tourism, and through attitudes, it also impacts their behavioral intentions. The direct positive effect of WOM on tourists' intention aligns with the fundamental proposition of Cultivation Theory, where sustained exposure to destination narratives can shape tourists' perceptions and behavioral outcomes. These findings are consistent with several previous studies. Chou et al. (2024) confirmed that eWOM is critical in shaping tourists' destination image and subsequent travel intentions, especially among experience-driven tourists. Nguyen and Tong (2022) demonstrated that frequent exposure to destination-related user-generated content on social media significantly enhances tourists' intention to visit those destinations, supporting the cultivation perspective. Yamagishi et al. (2024) reported that consumer-generated WOM on digital platforms like Instagram and TikTok strengthens tourists' favorable perceptions and increases their likelihood of actual travel behavior. Thus, this study's results reinforce the role of digital WOM as an influential mechanism shaping tourists' decision-making, particularly in niche markets like coffee tourism. However, some inconsistencies exist. Goyal and Taneja (2023) found that while WOM strongly impacts destination image, its direct effect on travel intention may vary depending on tourists' prior familiarity with the destination—a factor not explicitly examined in the present study. This indicates a potential contextual dependency that future studies may explore.

*RO 2. To examine the mediating role of attitude.*

The study further revealed that attitude significantly mediates the relationship between word-of-mouth and tourists' intention to visit Yunnan for coffee tourism. This finding emphasizes that WOM not only influences intention directly but also shapes internal cognitive evaluations (attitudes) that, in turn, predict behavioral intentions, thereby validating the Theory of Planned Behavior. This mediating role of attitude is consistent with previous empirical research. Anubha and Shome (2021) demonstrated that consumer attitude significantly mediates the effect of trust in eWOM on the intention to engage in eco-tourism activities. Bhatt et al. (2024) found that tourist attitudes partially mediate the impact of online information quality on behavioral intentions in adventure tourism. The present findings align closely with these results, highlighting the pivotal role of attitude as a cognitive-affective bridge between external social influence (WOM) and internal behavioral motivation (intention). Nonetheless, some differences should be noted. Shahzad et al. (2023) suggested that in some cases, particularly among repeat travelers, the mediating role of attitude may diminish as intention becomes increasingly influenced by previous experience rather than newly formed attitudes. In the case of Yunnan coffee tourism, where novelty and experiential freshness are emphasized, the strong mediating effect of attitude remains prominent.

### 1. Implication of theories

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of tourist behavior by integrating the Cultivation Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to examine how word-of-mouth (WOM) influences tourists' attitudes and intentions toward Yunnan coffee tourism.

Cultivation Theory posits that prolonged exposure to media content shapes individuals' perceptions and attitudes. In tourism, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is a form of media



content influencing potential tourists' perceptions of a destination (Ababneh, 2022). This study's findings align with this theory, demonstrating that positive WOM significantly enhances tourists' attitudes toward Yunnan coffee tourism. This supports the notion that consistent exposure to favorable information cultivates positive perceptions and attitudes toward a destination.

The Theory of Planned Behavior asserts that an individual's attitude toward a behavior significantly influences their intention to perform that behavior (Conner, 2020). The study corroborates this, revealing that a positive attitude toward Yunnan coffee tourism significantly predicts the intention to visit. This finding reinforces the TPB framework, highlighting the pivotal role of attitude in shaping behavioral intentions within the tourism context.

Moreover, the study uncovers a mediating effect of attitude in the relationship between WOM and intention. This suggests that WOM influences intention directly and indirectly through attitude, offering a nuanced understanding of the interplay between social influence and individual decision-making processes. This mediating role of attitude bridges the external influence of WOM and the internal cognitive processes leading to behavioral intentions, enriching the TPB by incorporating elements of media influence as outlined in Cultivation Theory.

These findings are consistent with recent studies that have explored the impact of eWOM on tourist attitudes and intentions. Sharma and Arora (2024) found that eWOM significantly influences tourist attitudes and behavioral intentions in the context of adventure tourism. Similarly, Ashfaq et al. (2022) demonstrated that WOM substantially impacts destination image and tourist attitude more than mass media, ultimately affecting travel intention. These studies support the current research's assertion that WOM is a powerful tool in shaping tourist perceptions and behaviors.

By integrating Cultivation Theory and TPB, this study provides a comprehensive theoretical framework that elucidates how external media influences (WOM) and internal cognitive evaluations (attitude) jointly shape tourists' intentions to engage in specific tourism activities, such as Yunnan coffee tourism.

## **2. Implication to practice**

This study offers several practical implications for stakeholders seeking to enhance Yunnan coffee tourism's attractiveness and market penetration. Word-of-mouth (WOM) 's significant influence on attitude and intention underscores the centrality of social influence in consumer decision-making. Specifically, tourists place high value on the opinions and experiences of others, actively seek such information, and use it to assess the quality of tourism experiences. Therefore, tourism stakeholders should strategically cultivate and amplify positive WOM, particularly in digital spaces.

First, coffee tourism operators and destination marketers should actively encourage satisfied tourists to share their experiences via social media platforms such as Douyin, Xiaohongshu, and WeChat Moments, where peer-to-peer content spreads organically. This can be achieved by offering incentives such as discounts, free merchandise, or recognition (e.g., reposting user content). User-generated content (UGC) highlighting unique, authentic coffee experiences will resonate strongly with prospective tourists and shape favorable perceptions.

Second, as attitudes toward Yunnan coffee tourism were found to be a key mediator and direct predictor of intention, enhancing the perceived experiential value is vital. Tourism businesses should design immersive and emotionally engaging offerings-such as coffee farm visits, DIY roasting sessions, or interactive workshops with local baristas-that generate positive evaluations. These experiences should be framed to communicate enjoyment, cultural richness, and lifestyle appeal, encouraging favorable emotional responses.

Third, since tourists exhibit strong behavioral intentions when their attitudes are positive, it is crucial to facilitate seamless trip planning and decision-making processes. This includes improving access to accurate information, offering user-friendly booking channels, and maintaining consistent quality across all touchpoints of the tourism experience. Providing clear visuals, social proof, and narrative storytelling in online marketing materials will reinforce positive attitudes and increase the likelihood of converting from interest to action.

Finally, local tourism authorities can play a critical role by supporting the branding of “Yun Coffee” through integrated destination marketing campaigns. As highlighted in the sample, collaborating with key opinion leaders (KOLs), influencers, and travel bloggers can further extend the WOM effect among targeted age groups (23-45 years). Promoting Yunnan coffee tourism as a culturally rich and emotionally rewarding experience will align well with the motivations and expectations of this demographic.

In sum, stakeholders should recognize the strategic value of WOM and attitude cultivation in influencing intention and implement targeted measures that promote engaging experiences, credible narratives, and consumer participation in the storytelling process.

## Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of word-of-mouth (WOM) on tourists' intention to participate in Yunnan coffee tourism, focusing on the mediating role of attitude. Grounded in Cultivation Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the findings confirm that WOM significantly enhances tourists' attitudes, positively influencing their behavioral intentions. The results also demonstrate that attitude partially mediates the relationship between WOM and intention, reinforcing the theoretical linkage between long-term media exposure and cognitive-affective evaluations in tourism decision-making. Methodologically, the study validated the measurement constructs through confirmatory factor analysis and established the robustness of the structural model using SEM, providing strong empirical support for the proposed framework.

While offering important theoretical and practical insights, this study acknowledges several limitations, including reliance on cross-sectional self-reported data and a sample restricted to domestic Chinese tourists aged 23 to 45. Future research could employ longitudinal designs, expand the demographic scope to include older or international tourists, and examine additional media-related variables such as source credibility or frequency of exposure. Overall, this research advances the understanding of how social media-driven WOM and internal psychological mechanisms influence tourism behavior, offering valuable implications for sustainable tourism marketing and destination development strategies.

## New Knowledge

This study contributes new and original knowledge to tourism behavior, destination marketing, and media influence by proposing and validating an integrative framework that links word-of-mouth (WOM), attitude, and intention in the context of Yunnan coffee tourism.

This study extends the application of Cultivation Theory into the field of tourism, particularly within the emerging niche of coffee tourism. While Cultivation Theory has traditionally been used to explain long-term media influence on general perceptions and societal attitudes, this study reconceptualizes it in tourism-related user-generated content, positioning WOM as a digital media stimulus that influences tourists' destination evaluations. This represents a significant theoretical extension, validating the cultivation effect in the micro-context of destination-specific behavioral formation.

This research strengthens the explanatory power of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by empirically confirming the mediating role of attitude in translating WOM into behavioral intention. In doing so, the study reveals how external media cues interact with internal cognitive-affective processes to shape behavioral intentions, thereby enhancing the TPB framework through integration with media influence theories.

Conceptually, the study proposes a new research model that links WOM, attitude, and intention within a unified structure and tests it in the context of Yunnan's coffee tourism industry, a relatively underexplored segment in tourism literature. This model confirms the direct effects among variables and demonstrates the partial mediating role of attitude, offering a nuanced understanding of the mechanism through which media-based social influence is internalized and transformed into behavioral intention. Furthermore, this study operationalizes WOM as a multidimensional construct encompassing information seeking, perceived credibility, and influence on decision-making. This refined operational definition enriches existing literature by providing a validated scale suitable for destination-specific WOM research.

From a methodological standpoint, the study demonstrates the effectiveness of using social media-based random sampling to reach targeted tourists, specifically followers of coffee-related content on Xiaohongshu and Douyin. This approach ensures relevance and engagement among respondents and offers a replicable strategy for sampling within digital tourism communities. In addition, the research employed a rigorous structural equation modeling (SEM) framework, validating the proposed model through a comprehensive assessment of reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and model fit indices. Incorporating bootstrap methods to test indirect effects further enhances methodological robustness and provides a replicable framework for future researchers investigating similar mediated relationships.

## Suggestion

In sum, this study generates novel theoretical and empirical insights by extending Cultivation Theory into tourism and integrating it with TPB; proposing and validating a new conceptual model linking WOM, attitude, and intention; introducing an operationalized WOM construct specific to destination marketing; demonstrating digital sampling and SEM practices that can inform future methodological designs. These contributions collectively advance the academic understanding of how social influence, cognitive-affective processing, and behavioral intention converge in tourism decision-making, particularly in the evolving context of experiential and specialty tourism.

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