



# Generation Y's online experience and eWOM Adoption: The Moderating Role of perceived Risk

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## ABSTRACT

Tourists can freely share their travel experiences online, where others can read them, view photos and videos of visits, and gather information before choosing a destination for their future trips. In the context of virtual communities, this study proposes a theoretical framework that outlines the relationship between the credibility, quality, and vividness of shared information, community experience, the adoption of eWOM messages, and the intention to visit a destination. Additionally, the moderating effect of perceived risk on the relationship between community experience and message adoption is examined.

The new model was validated through PLS-SEM based on an online survey of 497 members of virtual consumption communities focused on tourism, travel, hospitality, tourist experiences, and recommendations related to Algerian destinations, considered as representatives of Generation Y. The results confirm that online community experience serves as a mediator in the relationship between eWOM characteristics (credibility, quality, and vividness) and the adoption of eWOM messages, which, in turn, mediates the relationship between online community experience and visit intention. Finally, perceived risk significantly moderates the relationship between eWOM characteristics, community experience, and the adoption of eWOM messages shared in various virtual communities.

**Key words:** Virtual Community, community experience, generation Y, eWOM adoption, perceived risk

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The rise of digital technologies and social media platforms has profoundly transformed the way consumers interact with tourist destinations and travel services. Among the most significant innovations, the concept of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has emerged as a major component in tourism-related decision-making processes. Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, which relies on interpersonal exchanges, eWOM is characterized by its broader reach and permanence, making reviews and recommendations accessible to a large audience on online platforms. This gives eWOM messages a decisive influence on

consumer behavior, especially among younger generations.

In this context, Generation Y, also known as millennials, stands out for its close relationship with virtual communities and technology. Continually seeking reliable and personalized recommendations, this group tends to rely heavily on online platforms as their primary source of information when planning travel experiences. This behavior underscores the importance of examining the factors that influence their experience within these digital spaces, particularly in relation to the reception and adoption of eWOM messages.

This study develops a conceptual model incorporating six hypotheses, grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior and the concept of perceived risk as a moderator. First, it is hypothesized that three core dimensions of eWOM message characteristics (perceived credibility, message quality, and content vividness) significantly influence the online experience within virtual communities (H1). Second, community experience is expected to play a crucial role in the adoption of eWOM messages (H2). Furthermore, the mediating role of community experience between eWOM characteristics and message adoption is examined, highlighting its central role in the decision-making process (H4). Beyond this mediation, the study explores the effect of eWOM message adoption on consumers' intention to visit, a key indicator of eWOM's effectiveness in tourism contexts (H3). Message adoption is also analyzed as a mediator between community experience and visit intention (H5). Lastly, the study introduces the concept of perceived risk as a moderator, suggesting that this factor may alter the relationship between message characteristics and message adoption (H6).

These hypotheses address a central research question: To what extent do the characteristics of eWOM messages influence community experience, message adoption, and ultimately visit intention, while accounting for the moderating role of perceived risk?

Users are often unaware of the extent of their influence on their own decisions. This makes it all the more important to examine this influence in relation to tourism and leisure choices. This article focuses on this specific influence, destination choice among Generation Y (also known as Millennials, the cohort following Generation X). Social media has become a key marker of their social identity. According to Werenowska and Rzepka (2020), an individual's existence and belonging to social circles is closely tied to their presence on platforms like Facebook. Social media covers a wide range of topics and serves as a space for sharing experiences and opinions on products and services, as well as everyday life, holidays, and achievements. In many cases, it shapes opinion formation during the purchase decision-making process. Inspiration, for instance, may come from a

travel video viewed on YouTube, encouraging the viewer to visit the featured destination.

Despite numerous studies on social media and purchase decisions across various industries, there remains a need to deepen our understanding of Generation Y consumer behavior within the tourism sector.

To address this research gap, the present study focuses on understanding how Algerian Generation Y perceives risk and experiences virtual environments. Specifically, this study explores how Generation Y's experience within virtual communities based on the attributes that constitute eWOM within virtual communities, and to examine its impact on information adoption and behavioral intention, while, for the first time, investigating the moderating effects of perceived risk.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW:**

This literature review addresses key dimensions of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), namely message quality, credibility, vividness, and content richness. It also examines user experience within virtual communities, eWOM message adoption, visit intention, and perceived risk as a moderating variable in the proposed conceptual framework.

### **2.1. eWOM and Generation Y:**

The definition of Generation Y remains a subject of scholarly debate. García-Madariaga et al. (2017) defined Generation Y as individuals born between 1980 and 2000, although this range may vary slightly across studies. This generational cohort is distinguished by several key characteristics: an innate familiarity with digital technologies; a marked preference for brand engagement and authenticity; heightened sensitivity to pricing strategies and promotional offers; omnichannel consumption behaviors; and a strong reliance on peer-generated content. In particular, recommendations shared on social media platforms and review sites play a pivotal role in shaping their purchasing decisions. In contrast, Strauss and Howe (1991) delineated generational cohorts as follows:

- The Silent Generation (1925–1942)
- Baby Boomers (1943–1960)
- Generation X (1961–1980)
- Generation Y (1981–2000)

Generation Y actively uses and adopts eWOM to gather travel-related information and to exchange personal sentiments and feedback with peers regarding tourism products (Xu & Pratt, 2018).

Therefore, understanding Generation Y consumers' behavioral intentions, particularly their purchasing intentions as influenced by eWOM on social networking platforms, has become crucial for the sustainable growth of the tourism industry.

### **2.2. eWOM Quality:**

Argument quality refers to the extent to which consumers perceive shared information as valuable and persuasive (Zhang and Barnes, 2019).

Prior research has identified three primary drivers of argument quality: *timeliness*, *usefulness*, and *accuracy* (Charo et al., 2015; Tseng and Wang, 2016).

In the context of tourism-related eWOM shared within virtual communities, when information is regularly updated in response to external conditions (e.g., announcements about excursions, festivals, hiking tours, or organized visits), the accuracy of the content is enhanced. This allows recipients to revise their plans based on up-to-date insights. Generation Y consumers, in particular, place high value on timely and accurate information (Viertola, 2018).

### **2.3. eWOM Credibility:**

eWOM credibility refers to the perceived trustworthiness of the sender and the reliability of the information as evaluated by the consumer. Each consumer interprets eWOM messages subjectively, and this interpretive variability contributes to uncertainty surrounding message credibility. Awad and Ragowsky (2008) further argue that information credibility constitutes a pivotal factor in consumers' purchasing decision-making processes. Extant literature supports the existence of a significant relationship between online consumers' purchase intentions and the perceived credibility of eWOM (Martínez et al., 2020; Sardar et al., 2021; Pillay, 2021; Nechoud et al., 2021; Saidani et al., 2023). Consumers' decisions, particularly those related to purchase intentions, are influenced by the credibility of the eWOM they

encounter. As such, credibility is recognised as a critical determinant of eWOM adoption (Saidani et al., 2023).

### **2.4. Perceived Content Vividness and Richness:**

Applied to online content, vividness implies richness in sensory cues that appeal to multiple senses (Huang & Kuo, 2014). In other words, vivid and visually striking content may increase the informational value of travel-related messages and facilitate their adoption. For instance, videos are perceived as more vivid than static images, as they engage both visual and auditory senses.

Cvijikj and Michahelles (2011) examined consumer behavior on social networking sites and found that content format significantly influences engagement. Similarly, Cork and Eddy (2017), in their analysis of Twitter content, demonstrated that vividness could be enhanced by including multimedia elements such as photos or videos ranging from a few seconds to several minutes in length.

Vividness has been shown to affect message perception and user attitudes (Luarn et al., 2015), though the magnitude of this impact may vary depending on the degree of vividness employed (De Vries et al., 2012). Moreover, the perceived vividness of social media content may at times diminish the persuasive strength of the message (Frey & Eagly, 1993). Nevertheless, De Vries et al. (2012) advocate for the use of highly vivid content to increase user interaction on Facebook, a view supported by Luarn et al. (2015), who identified vividness as a key predictor of user engagement with Facebook posts.

### **2.5. Community Experience:**

Virtual community experience is defined as the overall experience a customer derives from interacting with other members within a virtual community (Nambisan and Watt, 2011). This experience is a subjective and internal response triggered by any form of interaction (direct or indirect) between the customer and the various components made available within the community, including product or service features, pricing, advertising, and other elements (Rose et al., 2012). In the context of this study, the components provided by Facebook-based

communities may include elements such as post formats and styles, the quality of content and interactions, user comments, and visual or audiovisual materials.

Hsu and Tsou (2011) suggested that navigating blogs, forums, and websites generates a variety of experiences, emotions, and opinions. In addition, prior research has validated the influence of blog-based community experience on users' behavioral intentions (Huang and Kuo, 2014; Bhattacharya et al., 2018; Nechoud and Ghidouch, 2022). We propose the following hypothesis based on the literature reviewed:

**H1:** *eWOM characteristics ((a) credibility, (b) quality, and (c) vividness) positively influence experience in virtual communities.*

## **2.6. eWOM adoption as a mediator:**

Compared to previous generations, Generation Y is more inclined to seek out reviews and comments on social networking sites and adopt eWOM as part of their decision-making process (Xu & Pratt, 2018). Furthermore, Sardar et al. (2021) demonstrated that eWOM adoption mediates the influence of key eWOM antecedents (information quality and credibility) on consumers' purchase intentions. Based on the preceding literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H2:** *Experience within virtual communities influences the adoption of eWOM messages.*

**H3:** *eWOM adoption positively influences visit intention.*

**H4:** *Community experience mediates the relationship between message characteristics – (a) credibility, (b) quality, and (c) content vividness – and eWOM adoption.*

**H5:** *eWOM adoption mediates the relationship between community experience and visit intention.*

## **2.7. Perceived Risk as a moderator:**

Recent studies have increasingly focused on the role of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in shaping perceived risk, particularly given the exponential growth of user-generated content. The rapid diffusion of online reviews has introduced new challenges for marketers, as negative eWOM can flood digital platforms, potentially confusing or discouraging

prospective buyers (Hussain et al., 2017; Sohaib et al., 2018; İşçi and Kitapçı, 2020; Liao and Chou, 2021; Khwaja and Zaman, 2020).

Consumers typically consult multiple information sources to mitigate uncertainty and arrive at optimal purchase decisions (Zhang et al., 2012). Consequently, access to foundational product information may moderate the relationships between perceived risk and various eWOM dimensions—such as credibility (Zhang and Tran, 2011; İşçi and Kitapçı, 2020), purchase intentions (Lin and Fang, 2006; Tian and Ren, 2009; Sohaib et al., 2018), and perceived eWOM quality (Hussain et al., 2017; Liao and Chou, 2021; Khwaja and Zaman, 2020).

Social media users appear more willing to engage in risk-taking behaviours compared to non-users (Fogel and Nehmad, 2009). Zhu et al. (2012) found that active participation in virtual communities increases individuals' propensity for risky decisions, possibly because users perceive that any errors may be mitigated by support from the community—even if comprised of strangers. Millennials, who are often characterised by their apprehension of failure and need for external validation (Howe & Strauss, 2003), have also been described as more risk-tolerant (Sharma, 2013).

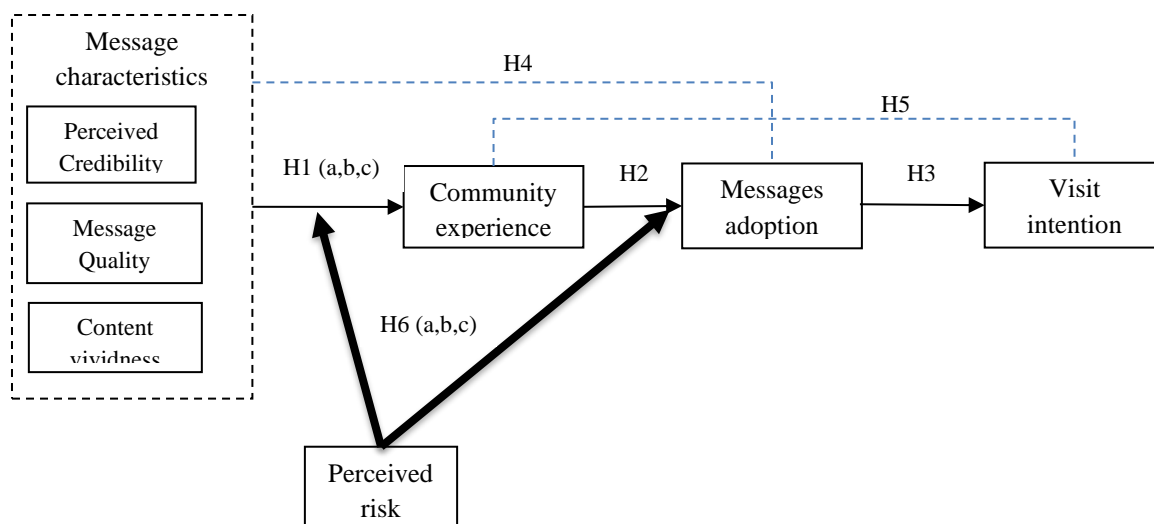
Building upon this discussion and prior literature on information-seeking preferences, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H6:** *Perceived risk moderates the indirect relationship between message characteristics ([a] perceived credibility, [b] message quality, and [c] content vividness) and eWOM adoption.*

## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

### **3.1 Measurement Instrument:**

The proposed research model comprises seven latent variables. All constructs are operationalized through subjective measures using multi-item scales. To ensure the validity and reliability of the constructs, measurement scales were adapted from existing literature (see Appendix 1).



**Figure 1. Proposed Model of Moderated Mediation**

Note: (a) Perceived Credibility; (b) Message Quality; (c) Content Vividness.

### 3.2 Survey Design and Data Collection:

The present study subjected participants to scenarios simulating eWOM interactions in travel-related virtual communities in order to investigate the impact of informational attributes of eWOM messages on destination perception, message adoption, and visit intention. To maintain internal validity, scenarios eliminated any mention of the sender or virtual community name. Destinations were controlled for familiarity by choosing six lesser-known tourist spots.

Data were gathered from April to August 2024 through an online survey that was disseminated via non probability convenience and snowball sampling on Facebook. The sample included 497 valid responses, primarily from adults aged 34- to 45-year-old adults with higher education qualifications—55.67% of whom were working professionals.

The data were analyzed with partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 3. PLS-SEM was suitable because of non-normal data distribution and the objective of the study to examine intricate theoretical extensions. The model included five first-order latent variables and a single second-order latent variable with 36 indicators. A moderating role of community experience was also included to aid the development of theory.

### 3.3 Measurement assessment:

The final model included a reflective-reflective second-order construct (community experience) and five first-order reflective constructs. Using the disjoint two-stage approach, the measurement model was evaluated. In stage one, all lower-order constructs (Sense, Feel, Think, Act, Relate) showed strong reliability (loadings > 0.708, AVE > 0.5, CR > 0.7) (Sarstedt et al., 2019) and discriminant validity (HTMT < 0.85) (Henseler et al., 2015).

In stage two, a second-order construct (community experience) was created using latent scores. The Sense component had a low loading and was removed. The revised model met all thresholds for internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (HTMT < 0.85 and significantly < 1 using 5,000 bootstrap samples). Thus, the measurement model demonstrates strong reliability, as well as convergent, and discriminant validity.

### 3.4 Structural model assessment:

The structural model was assessed using four key criteria:  $R^2$  coefficients, predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ), and the size and path coefficient significance. The  $R^2$  values for community experience (0.546), adoption (0.218), and intention to visit (0.120) indicate acceptable levels of explained variance in the behavioral sciences context (Ali et al., 2017; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017).

Predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ), assessed via the blindfolding procedure, yielded values greater than zero for all endogenous constructs, confirming the model's predictive power (Henseler et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2017).

The path coefficients were tested using 5,000 bootstrap resamples and assessed for significance using 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals.

The effect sizes ( $f^2$ ) were interpreted based on Cohen's (1988) guidelines: 0.02 (weak), 0.15 (moderate), and 0.35 (strong).

indirect effect (ab) and direct effect after including mediator (c) are the same) (Nitzl, et al., 2016).

To test the significance of the indirect effect, we applied the product of coefficients approach using bootstrapping resampling method, and percentile, bias-corrected confidence interval. The results confirmed the significant mediating role of Community experience between respectively credibility ( $\beta=0.093$ ;  $p<0.001$ ), quality ( $\beta=0.238$ ;  $p<0.001$ ), vividness ( $\beta=0.106$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) and adoption, in support of *H1* (Table 1). In addition, the product of coefficients using the bootstrapping

**Table 1.** Results of Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis		Path coefficient	CIs Bias Corrected	Supported
H1	Credibility -> community experience	0.200***	[0.136 ; 0.268]	Yes
	Quality -> community experience	0.511***	[0.442 ; 0.569]	Yes
	Vividness -> community experience	0.227***	[0.153 ; 0.300]	Yes
H2	Community experience -> adoption	0.467***	[0.391 ; 0.533]	Yes
H3	adoption -> Visit intention	0.346***	[0.266 ; 0.421]	Yes
H4	Credibility -> Community experience -> adoption	0.093***	[0.062 ; 0.129]	Yes
	Quality -> Community experience -> adoption	0.238***	[0.191 ; 0.288]	Yes
	Vividness -> Community experience -> adoption	0.106***	[0.069 ; 0.146]	Yes
H5	Community experience -> adoption -> visit intention	0.161***	[0.110 ; 0.217]	Yes
Note: * $p<0,05$ ; ** $p<0,01$ ; *** $p<0,001$				

**Source:** Authors own elaboration

The results in Table 1, show a positive and significant effect of the three characteristics of the eWOM on community experience. It appears that the effect of quality on community experience ( $\beta= 0.511$ ;  $f^2=0.428$ , strong effect size) is stronger than the effect of vividness ( $\beta=0.227$ ;  $f^2=0.083$ , weak effect size) and credibility ( $\beta=0.200$ ;  $f^2=0.079$ , weak effect size) on community experience. Moreover, the results confirmed a significant positive effect of community experience on adoption with a strong effect size ( $\beta=0.467$ ;  $f^2=0.279$ ).

### 3.5 Mediation analysis:

The mediation effect of community experience between credibility and adoption respectively, quality and adoption, vividness and adoption and the mediation effect of adoption between community experience and visit intention are complementary (partial mediation) (the sign of

resampling method demonstrated the significant effect of the mediating role of adoption between community experience and visit intention ( $\beta=0.161$ ;  $p<0.001$ ).

### 3.6 Moderation analysis:

To assess the moderating effect of perceived risk, as suggested by Hair et al. (2021) and Habibi, and Rasoolimanesh (2021), we used the two-stage approach for its higher statistical power. First, following the procedures outlined previously, we find that all measurement models exhibit sufficient levels of reliability and validity. This also holds for the measures of the newly added construct (Perceived risk), which exhibit high degrees of internal consistency reliability and convergent validity. In terms of discriminant validity, all the HTMT values are significantly lower than 0.85 (Hair et al., 2022; Chap. 7).

**Table 2.** Mediation Analysis

Path relation	Indirect effect	Direct Effect	VAF (%)	Mediation Type
Credibility -> Community experience -> adoption	0.093***	0.157**	15.46	complementary (partial mediation)
Quality -> Community experience -> adoption	0.238***	0.345***	51.22	complementary (partial mediation)
Vividness -> Community experience -> adoption	0.106***	0.318***	22.15	complementary (partial mediation)
Community experience -> adoption -> visit intention	0.161***	0.268***	37.02	complementary (partial mediation)

Note: \*p<0,05; \*\*p<0,01; \*\*\*p<0,001

Source: Authors own elaboration

**Table 3.** Results of Moderation Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis		Path coefficient	CIs Bias Corrected	Supported
H6	Perceived risk -> community experience	0.322***	[0.254; 0.397]	Yes
	Interaction effect (Cred x Risque)	-0.036 ns	[-0.084; 0.015]	No
	Interaction effect (Qual x Risque)	0.004 ns	[-0.047; 0.062]	No
	Interaction effect (Viva x Risque)	-0.025 ns	[-0.075; 0.028]	No
	Perceived risk -> adoption	0.119**	[0.026; 0.212]	Yes
	Interaction effect (EXP x Risque)	0.093***	[0.029; 0.153]	Yes

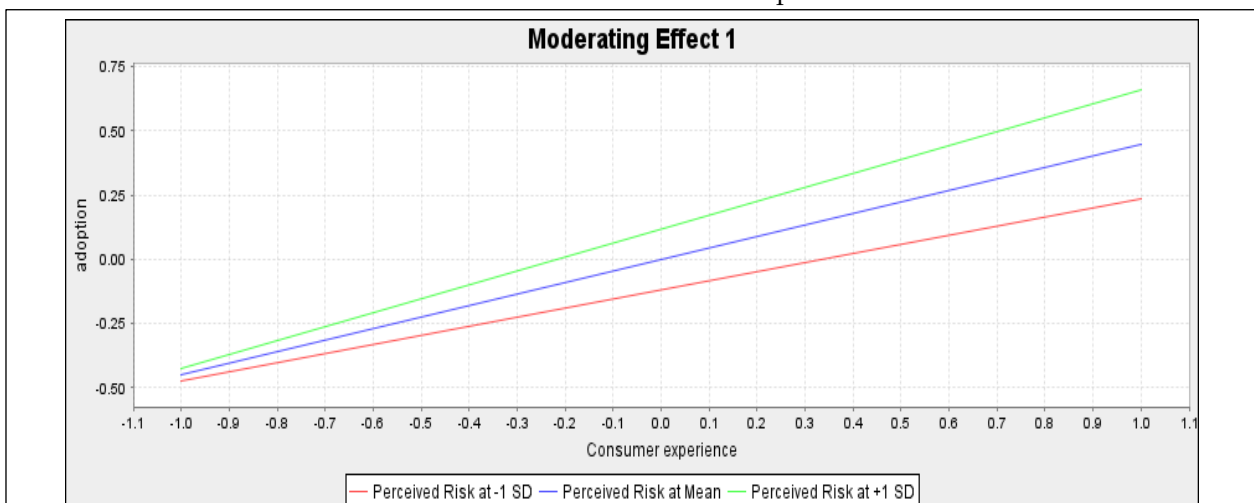
Note: ns : not significant ; \*\*p<0,01; \*\*\*p<0,001

Source: Authors own elaboration

The significance of the interaction terms was tested using the bootstrapping method with percentile and bias-corrected confidence intervals.

The interaction between perceived risk and eWOM characteristics on community experience was insignificant, as the 95% confidence interval included zero.

However, the interaction between perceived risk and community experience on adoption was positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.093$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), with a confidence interval of [0.029, 0.153], which excludes zero. These results confirm that perceived risk moderates the relationship between community experience and adoption:



**Figure 2:** Test of moderating effect of the two-way interaction effect PR\*CE on ADOP

Source: Authors own elaboration

At high perceived risk (+1 SD), the effect of community experience on adoption increases to  $\beta = 0.560$ . At low perceived risk (-1 SD), this effect decreases to  $\beta = 0.374$ .

Thus, perceived risk amplifies the impact of community experience on adoption.

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION :

In line with the Information Adoption Model (IAM) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), our findings confirm that the characteristics of eWOM messages – namely credibility, quality, and content vividness – significantly enhance the experience in virtual communities (H1). According to IAM, message quality and credibility raise perceived usefulness, facilitating adoption of information (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Likewise, ELM suggests that strong central cues (e.g., high-quality arguments) and peripheral cues (e.g., vivid multimedia, rich visuals) promote deeper message processing and favourable user response and increases engagement and sensory stimulation, enhancing experiential dimensions (immersion, enjoyment, informativeness) even when cognitive elaboration is low, vivid content can operate as both a central and peripheral-level cue depending on user motivation (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty et al., 2015). These results are also in line with studies of Chen et al., (2014) and Chung et al., (2015), which asserted that high-quality and credible content increases the affective involvement of users and encourages them to plan trips to destinations shown.

In the context of Algerian Generation Y, who are both digital natives and active social media users, vivid and credible content may particularly enhance immersion and positive affect in online travel communities. Studies of youth eWOM behaviour show that Gen-Y uses multimedia social content to form impressions quickly; therefore, vividness may have an outsized experiential effect in this cohort (Badrul, 2018; Werenowska and Rzepka 2020; Bui et al., 2025).

Furthermore, we found that experience in virtual communities drives consumers' adoption of eWOM messages (H2). When users report positive experiences (e.g., engagement, enjoyment, trust) their willingness to adopt eWOM increases. From

IAM/ELM perspective, positive experience raises involvement and the likelihood of central-route processing or at least increases perceived credibility of the environment, thereby facilitating adoption. This is consistent with broader e-consumer research linking online satisfaction or engagement with behavioural outcomes such as message acceptance or purchase intention) (Erkan and Evans, 2021; Camou et al., 2023).

On the downstream side, we observed that eWOM adoption significantly increases intentions to visit a destination (H3). Adopting eWOM (accepting it as vivid and credible) increases the cognitive basis for forming intentions (Bui et al., 2025) (in our case intention to visit a destination). According to reasoned-action perspectives integrated with IAM (Hagger, 2019), once information is adopted, it increases perceived benefits and reduces uncertainty, leading to stronger behavioural intentions. Many tourism studies report that perceived credibility/usefulness of eWOM significantly predicts visit intention, particularly when destination image or usefulness is high (Werenowska and Rzepka, 2020; Darmoyo and Sustaningrum, 2022; Saidani et al., 2023;).

This research also determined partial mediation effects. Our mediation analysis (H4) shows that the effect of message characteristics on eWOM adoption is indirect, operating through the community experience. In other words, credibility, quality and vividness augment the user's community experience, and it is this enriched experience that elevates adoption. This serial mediation corresponds to IAM's emphasis on perceived usefulness as a mediating construct and to ELM's process whereby message cues shape cognitive or affective responses before behavioural intention emerges. Recent empirical work in eWOM supports this mechanism of indirect effect (Nechoud and Ghidouche, 2022; Saidani et al., 2023; Qadri et al., 2023; Bogdan et al., 2025).

This mediation is theoretically coherent: message characteristics (credibility, quality, vividness) influence the experience of interacting with the content and community (cognitive appraisal, perceived usefulness). That enriched experience, in turn, increases information adoption. Put differently, message

characteristics do not always drive adoption directly, they shape how the consumer experiences the virtual community (usefulness, enjoyment, trust), which is the proximal predictor of eWOM uptake. This serial mediation view is supported by recent empirical work showing that eWOM characteristics operate through intermediate perceptions (usefulness, e-satisfaction) to influence adoption and behavioural intentions (Nechoud et al., 2023; Nechoud and Ghidouche, 2022; Saidani et al., 2023).

In addition, our findings support H5: eWOM adoption mediates the relationship between community experience and visit intention. That is, a positive virtual-community experience alone does not directly translate into visit intention; its effect occurs because the experience encourages adoption of eWOM, which in turn promotes visit intention. This emphasizes that experience matters, but adoption is the crucial link to behavioural intention.

This mediation makes theoretical sense: a positive experience in virtual communities leads people to adopt eWOM messages (H2), and adoption is the immediate cognitive step that generates intention (H3). Thus, the experience is important, but its effect on intention is largely channeled through whether users accept the content as valid/useful.

Crucially, we tested H6 and the findings reveal that perceived risk does not moderate the relationship between eWOM characteristics (credibility, quality, vividness) and community experience, but it does moderate the relationship between community experience and eWOM adoption. Specifically, the stronger the perceived risk, the greater the effect of community experience on the adoption of eWOM messages.

From a theoretical perspective, this pattern aligns with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). When individuals perceive higher risk in a consumption or travel decision, they are more motivated to engage in systematic (central-route) processing of available social information. However, our findings suggest that risk perception influences how individuals rely on their

experiential impressions of the online community, rather than on message cues themselves.

In other words, when the perceived risk of a decision (e.g., traveling to a less familiar destination) is high, users may not base their judgments solely on message characteristics such as credibility or vividness. Instead, they place stronger trust in their overall experience within the virtual community. The community itself becomes a social reassurance mechanism, reducing uncertainty through collective validation rather than individual message evaluation. This supports the idea that, under risk, social trust and community-based cues become more influential than message-level cues (Casaló et al., 2020; Erkan & Evans, 2021). The absence of moderation between eWOM characteristics and community experience indicates that message qualities such as credibility and quality shape experience regardless of perceived risk. This suggests that the experiential value of message content is stable and not contingent upon consumers' perceived uncertainty. In other words, users generally respond positively to credible, high-quality, and vivid messages whether the decision context is risky or not, a finding consistent with previous research showing that message attributes exert robust effects across contexts (Ismagilova et al., 2020).

However, the significant moderation on the path from community experience to adoption reveals that, under high-risk conditions, the experiential connection with the community becomes a critical determinant of eWOM adoption. This aligns with prior studies indicating that perceived risk amplifies the need for social reassurance and trust in virtual interactions (Filieri, 2015; Jalilvand & Heidari, 2017). When consumers face uncertainty, they rely more heavily on the affective and relational dimensions of community experience such as perceived integrity, empathy, and reliability of community members to decide whether to adopt information.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS:

Generation Y represents a significantly larger segment of the population aged between 23 and 43 years, and at this stage, their behavior serves as a compass that entrepreneurs must follow if they wish to grow and capture their

attention. Considering that this generation constitutes the primary users of social media, analyzing their experiences, behaviors, and risk sensitivity as a foundation for planning communication and promotional strategies remains essential.

The main objective of this research was to understand how the characteristics of eWOM messages (namely perceived credibility, message quality, and content vividness) influence community experience, message adoption, and ultimately, the intention to visit. Furthermore, this study explored the mediating roles of community experience and message adoption, as well as the moderating effect of perceived risk. The results offer both theoretical and practical contributions, while opening promising avenues for future research.

#### *Theoretical Contributions:*

From a theoretical perspective, this study enriches the literature on eWOM and consumer behavior in the tourism sector. The results confirm the importance of eWOM message characteristics as key determinants of community experience, emphasizing their role in building trust and reducing perceived uncertainties among consumers.

Additionally, the study highlights community experience as a central mediator in the relationship between message characteristics and eWOM adoption, reinforcing its importance in managing interactions within virtual communities. The findings also show that message adoption acts not only as a mediator between community experience and visit intention but also as a crucial step in the consumer decision-making process.

Finally, the introduction of perceived risk as a moderator enhances the understanding of the complex relationships in this context and enriches the eWOM literature by clarifying where perceived risk exerts its influence in the adoption process: not at the message level but at the social-experiential level. It also extends the IAM framework by highlighting that contextual factors such as risk modulate the strength of the community experience-adoption link, confirming that the adoption of online information is not purely cognitive but also relational and context-sensitive.

#### *Managerial Implications*

From a practical standpoint, the study provides actionable recommendations for destination managers, marketers, and digital platform operators.

First, for Generation Y in Algeria (who value credibility and are heavy multimedia users) managers and community moderators should highlight source cues (verified reviewers, identity signals), quality indicators (detailed, balanced reviews), and moderation to reduce fake content; these increase perceived usefulness and adoption.

Second, the study emphasizes the importance of eWOM message quality in shaping community experience. Managers should encourage users to provide detailed, informative, and relevant reviews that address the needs of future travelers. This could include creating guides or standardized formats for writing reviews. Furthermore, managers should invest in platform features that improve the visitor's experience (multimedia galleries, Q&A, live sessions) but tie experience to usefulness (structured, searchable reviews, fact boxes) to convert experience into adoption.

Finally, the moderating role of perceived risk in consumer behavior calls for strategies aimed at mitigating such risks. For destination marketers and platform managers, results of this study mean that in high-risk contexts (e.g., when promoting lesser-known Algerian destinations), fostering positive community experiences (through authentic interactions, transparent moderation, and visible peer trust) is more effective in encouraging eWOM adoption than simply enhancing message quality or vividness. Conversely, in low-risk contexts, the intrinsic characteristics of messages remain sufficient to generate positive experiences and adoption.

#### *Limitations and Future Research:*

Despite its significant contributions, this study has some limitations that pave the way for future research. First, although Gen-Y is a valuable cohort, internal heterogeneity exists (urban/rural, socio-economic). Comparative samples in Algeria (e.g., urban Algiers vs. smaller cities) could reveal boundary conditions.

Second, the research framework focused specifically on tourism and travel-related virtual communities. Other sectors, such as gastronomy, retail, or financial services, could benefit from applying a similar model.

While the cross-sectional design limits assertions of causality, future longitudinal or experimental work could validate the mediation and moderation mechanisms over time. Additionally, perceived risk could be further divided into distinct dimensions (physical, financial, social) to test differential moderating effects. Moreover, the role of specific platforms (Instagram, TikTok, TripAdvisor) might moderate the efficacy of vividness or credibility cues and merits investigation.

Furthermore, this study did not separately examine the effects of positive versus negative eWOM on Generation Y's community experience. Depending on their exposure to different types of eWOM, Generation Y consumers may have shown varying reactions and perceptions when reading online reviews. A future study could also explore factors that enhance community experience, such as storytelling, virtual reality, and augmented reality.

Finally, the integration of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and personalization algorithms, into virtual community platforms offers a promising avenue for further research. Investigating how these innovations influence eWOM message characteristics, community experience, and decision-making behaviors could lead to a more holistic understanding of the topic.

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Appendix A: Measurement items

Variable	Source	Items Nbr	Scales
eWOM messages quality	Erkan and Evans (2016)	5	Likert
eWOM Perceived Credibility	Ayeh et al. (2013) Ponte et al. (2015)	5	Likert
Content vividness	Babin and Burns (1998) Gavard-Perret and Helme- Guizon (2003) Yim et al. (2017)	6	Likert
Community Experience	Schmitt (1999a, 1999b) Hsu et Tsou (2011) Hung et Kuo (2014)	15	Likert
eWOM message adoption	Wu and Shaffer (1987) Susman et al. (2003) Hung and Kuo (2014)	3	Semantic difference
Intention to visit	Lam and Hsu (2006)	3	Likert
Perceived risque	Hussain et al., (2017)	3	Likert

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