The Relationship Between Social Media And The Intent To Choice Sustainable Travel: A Case Study Of Generation Z Tourists

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Abstract: In the context of the growing urGenerationcy of sustainable tourism trends due to environmental issues and climate change, the role of social media in influencing the choiceion of sustainable tourism destinations is gaining significant attention. The study aims to evaluate the relationship between social media and the intention of Generation Z tourists to choose sustainable tourism. Using 194 survey samples and quantitative analyses with SPSS26 software, including reliability testing, exploratory factor analysis, correlation analysis, and multivariate linear regression at a 5 percent significance level. The results show that four factors related to social media communication, including information quality, social media advertising, information usefulness, and electronic word of mouth positively influence the intention of Generation Z tourists to choice sustainable travel. Based on these findings, the study offers implications for tourism enterprises and organizations to develop effective communication strategies, increase awareness, and promote sustainable tourism behaviors among Generation Z.
Keywords: Generation Z, Intention, Social media communication, Sustainable tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION
In the context of increasing globalization and climate change, the world tourism industry faces a series of serious challenges related to the environment, culture, and overcrowding of destinations. The massive, uncontrolled growth of mass tourism not only damages natural resources and ecosystems but also erodes indiGenerationous cultural values, disrupting local community structures. In light of these consequences, sustainable tourism is no longer a temporary trend but has become an essential development approach, actively promoted by international organizations, governments, and tourism enterprises to ensure a balance between economic growth, environmental protection, and the preservation of long-term socio-cultural values. In Vietnam, sustainable tourism is gaining increasing attention from the government, as evidenced by many policies aimed at promoting green tourism products, community tourism, and socially responsible tourism models. However, for these initiatives to truly expand and be implemented, it is crucial to change the perceptions and behavioral choices of tourists, especially among the younger Generation. Alongside the rapid advancement of digital technology, social media has become a powerful tool that significantly influences consumer decision-making, not only for everyday goods but also within the service sector, particularly in tourism. Tourism is a specialized industry that depends heavily on information and frequently uses electronic platforms and the Internet to distribute products and engage with customers (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). In this context, social media has become a key tool for tourists to search, compare, and assess destination information. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, or personal travel blogs have become primary sources of information, where tourists explore others' experiences, adopt new trends, and interact to form their own opinions. In particular, for Generation Z, who often "live with social networks," the habit of updating information, evaluating places, and sharing experiences can greatly influence perceptions and decisions regarding sustainable tourism. Although social networks heavily influence Generation Z's perception and consumption behavior, the extent and mechanisms of social media's impact on their intention to choose sustainable tourism still face many limitations. Additionally, most current research only surveys the overall effect of social media on tourism behavior in general, but has not specifically explored sustainable tourism as a more responsible of behavior. Based on these gaps, this study aims to assess the influence of social media on Generation Z tourists' intention to choice sustainable tourism, as a result, providing a foundation to help enterprises develop effective communication strategies aligned with their mindset.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT
2.1. Generation Z
Generation Z is the next demographic group after Millennials, also known as Generation Y. Although there are some differences in how they are identified, most scholars agree that Generation Z includes

people born from the mid-1990s to the early 2010s. According to the Oxford Dictionary, Generation Z is "a group of people born between the late 1990s and early 2010s, who are very familiar with the Internet and rely heavily on smartphones to manage every aspect of their lives. Cho et al. (2018) believe that Generation Z is a group of people born between 1996 and 2010. growing up amid rapid digital technology development and increasing globalization. Meanwhile, Williams et al. (2010) define Generation Z as people born after 1994 who have the notable characteristics of having access to and using the Internet from a young age, being heavily influenced by social media, and being able to recognize and leverage the power of technology flexibly. The study by Nguyen and Do (2024) states that Generation Z refers to a group of young people aged between 18 and 28 years old, born between 1997 and 2012. According to Dolot (2018), Generation Z is an open-minded group willing to explore new experiences, not only in technology but also in life, including travel. This group demonstrates dynamism, curiosity, and adaptability to new trends. However, according to Hysa et al. (2021), most of Generation Z lack substantial finances due to not having stable jobs, so they often prefer thrifty or family- and friend-oriented entertainment activities. Schlossberg (2016) believes that Generation Z has the potential to bring about significant changes in future consumer behavior thanks to their ability to master technology and their sensitivity to trends. Haddouche and Salomone (2018) argue that Generation Z will present both opportunities and challenges for the travel and hospitality industry shortly as their needs become more personalized, responsible, and sustainable. Therefore, Generation Z consists of young people who grow up in a high-tech environment, are sensitive to information, have a social conscience, and are easily influenced by social media channels. To align with the demographic development and real situation in Vietnam, the study adopts the approach of Nguyen and Do (2024), which considers Generation Z as individuals born between 1997 and 2012.

2.2. Social media and sustainable tourism

In the age of advanced digital technology, social media has become a popular tool with a wide-reaching influence on consumer behavior, especially in sectors like tourism. Social media is not just a communication platform but also a channel for sharing information, promoting brands, and shaping consumers' purchasing decisions or service choices. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media is a group of Internet-based applications built on the foundation of Web 2.0 technology that allows users to create and share content they produce. Chung and Koo (2015) define social media as a collection of web applications that enable users worldwide to share ideas, experiences, thoughts, information, and connect through digital platforms. Social media encompasses many different forms, such as social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram), personal blogs, forums, photo/video sharing platforms (TikTok, YouTube), product and service review systems (TripAdvisor, Google Review), and online communities (Aichner and Jacob, 2015). With features like openness, dialogue, community, and high connectivity (Tran, 2021), social media enables users not only to receive one-way information but also to engage in dialogue, provide feedback, and create content, thus boosting interaction and trust in consumer behavior. The study by Hajli (2013) shows that social media is increasingly becoming the primary source of information in the purchasing decision-making process. Consumers' exposure to content created by other users, such as reviews, sharing experiences, comments, and more, has a significant influence on their perceptions, attitudes, and purchase intentions. Therefore, more enterprises, especially in the service industry, are actively using platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, blogs, and YouTube to build their brands, promote their image, and connect with their target customers. Social media is not only a new communication tool but also a social interaction platform capable of shaping and guiding consumer behavior, playing an increasingly important role in influencing decisions to buy products and services.

Thanks to its openness, interactivity, rapid spread, and high level of social influence, social media is becoming a strategic tool in shaping tourists' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors towards sustainable development in tourism. According to Munar and Jacobsen (2014), the tourism industry is a special sector that depends on personal information and experiences, with social media serving as a powerful channel for sharing and transmitting travel experiences, influencing tourists' decision-making process. Tourism enterprises can effectively utilize the features and tools of social media platforms to develop marketing strategies that align with modern consumer trends and generate new demand for sustainable tourism products. Social media not only promotes brands and introduces tourism services and products but also helps reach target customer groups more precisely. Young people, such as Generation Z, are often interested in sustainable values, local experiences, and social responsibility during their travel journeys. According to Ngo (2022), using social media platforms helps enterprises spread their brand image and travel websites to a larger audience, reach potential customers of different ages and regions, and promote

two-way interaction to build customer trust and sympathy for tourism products offered by enterprises. Social media is not only a tool to share images and information but also a strategic platform for tourism enterprises to raise awareness, foster positive attitudes, and encourage consumers to choose sustainable tourism, especially amid the growing trend of responsible consumption that gains increasing societal interest.

2.3. Hypothesis development

In the context of an increasingly digital media landscape, advertising is no longer limited to traditional channels like print newspapers, magazines, or direct marketing. Instead, it has expanded significantly to social networking platforms such as Facebook, Zalo, Instagram, YouTube, and others. This shift is considered a strategic change in marketing efforts, enabling enterprises to reach target customers quickly, in highly interactive ways, and more cost-effectively. Especially in the tourism industry, advertising on social networks not only promotes products and services but also can communicate messages related to sustainable development, shaping tourists' perceptions and behaviors (Heinrichs et al., 2011). The study by Khang et al. (2012) shows that social media significantly influences the pre-consumer decision-making process, and if widely shared, advertising content will strongly impact consumer behavior. For Generation Z, the presence and pervasiveness of social media advertising have become even more significant. According to Ninan et al. (2020), advertising on social networks positively influences this group's purchase intentions and behaviors. In the context of tourism aimed at sustainable development, enterprises use social networks to promote sustainable values such as environmental protection, preserving indigenous culture, and supporting local communities. These efforts can play a crucial role in guiding Generation Z's sustainable tourism choices. Therefore, the proposed research hypothesis is as follows:

H1: Social media advertising positively influences intention to choice sustainable tourism among Generation Z tourists.

In the context of modern travel, information about destinations, services, and experiences plays a crucial role in helping customers make informed decisions. When information is presented in a comprehensive, clear, and personalized way, customers are more likely to trust the products or services they are considering (Ninan et al., 2020). Especially in the tourism industry, access to useful information not only helps tourists plan better but also enhances the quality and convenience of their trips. The value of this information shows how well tourism content shared on social media platforms can assist tourists in finding, planning, and choosing activities that meet their individual needs, especially within the context of sustainable tourism. Previous studies have demonstrated a positive link between the usefulness of information and specific behaviors such as online travel booking (Kucukusta et al., 2015) or the intention to use the Internet to search for travel information (Castañeda et al., 2007). Generation Z consistently uses social media as a key support tool for looking up, sharing, and evaluating travel information. For this group, social networks serve not only as communication platforms but also as trustworthy sources of information, which heavily influence their perception and choice of travel options. Therefore, the proposed research hypothesis is as follows:

H2: Information usefulness positively influences intention to choice sustainable tourism among Generation Z tourists.

According to Bae et al. (2017), the reliability and quality of information shared on social media platforms significantly influence future travel choices and orientation. Tourism information now comes in many formats such as images, audio, text, and video, and each format adds its own perceived value for the viewer (Tarute et al., 2017). Especially in the online environment, the quality of information content plays a crucial role in shaping and promoting the intention to buy goods or use services. The study by Yip and Mo (2020) confirms that clear, authentic, and comprehensive high-quality information increases trust levels and encourages consumer behavior. Supporting this view, Bebber et al. (2017) also believe that information quality has a positive and direct impact on consumers' purchase intentions. Therefore, the proposed research hypothesis is as follows:

H3: Information quality positively influences intention to choice sustainable tourism among Generation Z tourists.

Besides being the official communication tool for enterprises, social networks also act as platforms for creating and spreading information through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which means users actively share their feelings, evaluations, and real experiences about tourist destinations (Yang, 2017). Electronic word-of-mouth is considered one of the most persuasive sources of information in the online environment (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016), which has the potential to significantly impact consumer

perception and behavior, especially in the field of tourism where emotional, personal experiences and beliefs play a crucial role (Gómez-Suárez et al., 2017). For sustainable tourism, eWOM on social networks helps spread content related to environmental responsibility and cultural preservation, supporting local communities with the core values of sustainable tourism. Positive sharing from previous tourists about activities such as using environmentally friendly services, respecting local identity, or tourism associated with community development can contribute to generating interest, encouraging learning behaviors, and guiding the intention to choose sustainable tourism among Generation Z, a group of digital consumers who are sensitive to social information and tend to act based on reviews from the online community. According to Grewal et al. (1998), the customer's decision to choice products and services is closely linked to the content shared by other consumers on social media, especially with intangible products like travel. Therefore, the proposed research hypothesis is as follows:

H4: Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) positively influences intention to choice sustainable tourism among Generation Z tourists.

Summarizing the hypotheses above, the proposed research model is as follows:
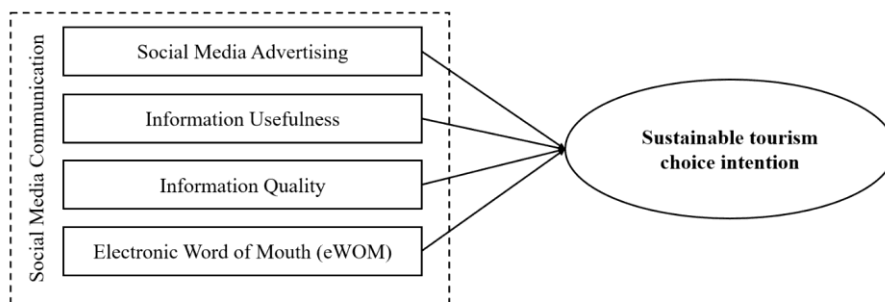

Figure 1. Research model

Source: Recommended by the authors

Based on the research model and hypotheses outlined earlier, the overall research equation is expressed as follows:

$STC = \beta_0 + \beta_1{}^*SMA + \beta_2{}^*IU + \beta_3{}^*IQ + \beta_4{}^*eWOM + \varepsilon$

In which:

STC (Dependent Variable): Sustainable tourism choice intention

Independent variables (X_i): Social Media Advertising (SMA), Information Usefulness (IU), Information Quality (IQ), Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM).

ε: Random Error.

3. Research methods

3.1. Measurement scale

The preliminary scale is developed based on studies from both domestic and international sources, including Hays et al. (2013), Kim et al. (2017), Trivedi and Rozia (2019), Gebsombut and Ho (2019), Odusanya et al. (2020), Huerta Álvarez et al. (2020), Cheng et al. (2020), and Zhang Tritong et al. (2022). It includes 18 observational variables related to 4 independent variables and one dependent variable. To ensure the scale is suitable for the target group and research context before being formally included in the survey, the author held a group discussion with several Generation Z tourists and tourism managers and consulted with three experts to refine the variable content, the relationships among variables, and the observed variables in the preliminary scale. This discussion was recorded, then analyzed to guide the development, screening, and finalization of a comprehensive scale, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Measurement scales

Scales	Sign	Items
Social media advertising	SMA1	Tourists rely on social media ads to determine their travel choices.
	SMA2	Sustainable tourism ads on social media are always current.
	SMA3	Sustainable tourism ads on social media deliver quality information.
	SMA4	Managing sustainable tourism on social media is engaging and interesting.
Information usefulness	IU1	Travel content from social media sites helps tourists plan their trips.

Scales	Sign	Items
	IU2	Information about sustainable travel from social media sites enhances trip quality.
	IU3	Information about sustainable tourism from social networking sites serves as a helpful source for tourists to enjoy a more convenient and easier trip.
Information quality	IQ1	Social networking sites offer complete information for tourists.
	IQ2	Sustainable tourism information on social media is reliable.
	IQ3	Sustainable tourism information on social networks aligns with reality.
	IQ4	Accurate information on sustainable tourism for social media
Electronic word of mouth	eWOM1	Tourists often look at other tourists' online reviews when selecting an appealing destination.
	eWOM2	When tourists arrive at a sustainable destination, their online reviews increase confidence in that destination.
	eWOM3	Tourists often read other tourists' online reviews to discover which destinations are impressive and welcoming.
	eWOM4	To choose the right travel destination, tourists are always interested in review information on social networks.
Sustainable tourism choice intention	STC1	Tourists will select destinations that are highly rated and popular on social networks.
	STC2	Tourists will focus on visiting the destination mentioned on social media rather than other tourist spots.
	STC3	Tourists will travel to popular destinations shared on social networks.

Source: Complied by the authors

3.2. Sample size and data collection

The sample size of the study was determined based on the optimal ratio in EFA according to Hair et al. (2010), which is 10:1 to ensure the validity of the analysis and to prevent invalid votes from affecting the process. The authors issued 200 questionnaires. Using a convenient non-probability sampling method, data were collected through an online survey via a Google Form link sent to Generation Z tourists on social networking sites, focusing on sustainable tourism. The survey period took place from February to April 2025. At the end of the process, after cleaning and removing the bad votes, the author collected 194 valid survey responses eligible for analysis using SPSS26 software, with tests conducted at a 5 percent level of statistical significance.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The statistical results describing the characteristics of 194 survey samples showed that 112 respondents were female (accounting for 57.7 percent) and 82 were male (accounting for 42.3 percent). In terms of educational level, there were 141 respondents with a university degree or who were university students, accounting for 72.7 percent, 33 respondents with a college or intermediate degree, accounting for 17.0 percent, and 20 respondents with a postgraduate degree or studying for graduate school, accounting for 10.3 percent. Regarding travel frequency, 68 respondents, or 35.1 percent, reported taking 2-3 trips based on social media advertising. The first trip was taken by 55 respondents, which is 28.4 percent, 46 respondents took 4-5 trips, accounting for 23.7 percent, and 25 respondents took 6 or more trips, accounting for 12.8 percent. In terms of travel booking methods, 122 respondents often book travel services through online platforms such as websites, apps, or social networks, making up 62.9 percent, while the remaining 72 respondents still prefer to book directly through traditional travel agencies or acquaintances, accounting for 37.1 percent.

Table 2: Reliability test

Scales	Cronbach's Alpha	Corrected Item – Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Social media advertising	0.805	0.472 – 0.565	0.797 – 0.765
Information usefulness	0.792	0.503 – 0.588	0.778 – 0.741
Information quality	0.776	0.497 – 0.530	0.764 – 0.729

Electronic word of mouth	0.814	0.481 – 0.573	0.808 – 0.753
Sustainable tourism choice intention	0.821	0.516 – 0.590	0.810 – 0.774

Source: The results of data processing (2025)

The results of the reliability test show that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the scales is above 0.7, meeting reliability standards and surpassing the minimum recommendation of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). Additionally, the Corrected Item-Total Correlation exceeds 0.3, and the Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted is lower than the overall Cronbach's Alpha, indicating that no variables are problematic and do not need to be removed. The scale satisfies all conditions to proceed with including it in the EFA.

Table 3: The result of EFA

Items	Factor Loadings			
	1	2	3	4
IQ4	0.799			
IQ2	0.760			
IQ1	0.757			
IQ3	0.746			
SMA2		0.838		
SMA1		0.819		
SMA3		0.801		
SMA4		0.794		
IU1			0.802	
IU3			0.787	
IU2			0.761	
eWOM1				0.799
eWOM4				0.760
eWOM2				0.757
eWOM3				0.746
Eigenvalue	6.521	3.115	2.374	1.286
% of Variance	40.254	58.637	67.429	76.588
KMO = 0.791, Sig. = 0.000				
STC3	0.808			
STC1	0.786			
STC2	0.753			
Eigenvalue	1.909			
% of Variance	77.214			
KMO = 0.801, Sig. = 0.000				

Source: The results of data processing (2025)

The results of EFA for the independent variables show that the Eigenvalue is greater than 1. The KMO coefficient of 0.791 meets the criteria (greater than 0.5 and less than 1), indicating that the data are suitable for exploratory factor analysis. Additionally, Bartlett's test has a Sig. of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, showing that the observed variables are linearly correlated with each other and confirming the appropriateness of using EFA. Four groups were extracted with a total variance of 76.588 percent, and the factor loadings are all greater than 0.5. Therefore, the scale demonstrates sufficient reliability and discriminant validity, satisfying the requirements for subsequent analyses (Hair et al., 2010).

The results of EFA for the dependent variable show that the KMO coefficient is greater than 0.5 and less than 1, and the significance of Bartlett's test is less than 0.05, with eigenvalues greater than 1, as recommended by Hair et al. (2010). Three observed variables were combined into a single group, accounting for a total variance of 77.214 percent (more than 50 percent).

Table 4: Correlation analysis

	STC	SMA	IU	IQ	eWOM
STC	1	0.638**	0.732**	0.759**	0.614**
SMA	0.638**	1	0.213**	0.189*	0.247**
IU	0.732**	0.213**	1	0.172**	0.185*
IQ	0.759**	0.189*	0.172**	1	0.236**

	STC	SMA	IU	IQ	eWOM
eWOM	0.614**	0.247**	0.185*	0.236**	1
*significant at p < 0.05, **significant at p < 0.01					

Source: The results of data processing (2025)

The correlation analysis results showed that independent variables had a positive and statistically significant correlation with sustainable tourism choice intention at $p < 0.01$, with a correlation coefficient (r) greater than 0.4. There is a low to moderate correlation between the independent variables ($r < 0.3$), indicating no multicollinearity, which makes them suitable for inclusion in linear regression analysis (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 5. Multivariate linear regression analysis results

Scales	Unstandardized coefficients	Standardized coefficients	Sig.	VIF
Constant	0.213			
SM	0.284	0.296	0.000	1.732
IU	0.256	0.277	0.003	1.805
IQ	0.321	0.307	0.000	1.711
EW	0.215	0.248	0.001	1.823
R^2	0.794			
Adjusted R^2	0.765			
Sig. (F)	0.000			
Durbin-Watson	1.812			

Source: The results of data processing (2025)

The multivariate linear regression analysis using the Enter method shows that the summary of the multiple linear regression with $R^2 = 0.794$ indicates that the model explains 79.4 percent of the variance. Meanwhile, the adjusted R^2 provides a more accurate reflection of the model's fit, reaching 0.765. It means that 76.5 percent of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the four factors in the model, with the remaining variation attributed to other factors and random error. The Durbin-Watson value of 1.812 suggests there is no violation of the first-order autocorrelation assumption. Additionally, the ANOVA analysis and F-test results show a Sig of 0.000, indicating that the linear regression model is consistent with the data and can be used.

Testing the research hypotheses indicates that the elements have a significance level (Sig.) below 0.05, and the VIF (variance inflation factor) for independent variables is less than 2, suggesting no multicollinearity issue. In addition to the quantitative analysis results, diagnostic tests such as the scatterplot, histogram, and P–P plot all demonstrate that the multivariate linear regression model meets the fundamental assumptions well. The scatterplot shows residuals are randomly distributed around the mean of zero, without a distinct pattern or trend, indicating a reasonable linear relationship between the variables and consistent error variance. The histogram indicates that the residuals have a nearly normal distribution, with an average value of approximately 0 and a standard deviation close to 1, which reflects that the assumption of the normal distribution of errors is met. At the same time, the P-P plot shows data points that are close to the diagonal line, demonstrating that the residuals follow a normal distribution reasonably well. Therefore, the regression model adheres to the basic assumptions, and the hypotheses are accepted. The regression equation, based on the standardized beta coefficient, is written as follows.

STC = 0.307*IQ + 0.296*SMA + 0.277*IU + 0.248*eWOM + ε

Thus, four factors related to social network communication, including information quality, social media advertising, information usefulness, and the electronic word of mouth, have a direct impact on the sustainable tourism choice intention of Generation Z tourists. The analysis results reflect the positive influence of social media on the sustainable travel choices of Generation Z tourists, who are a group of young consumers often interested in social networks. These findings provide a basis for helping tourism enterprises develop appropriate communication strategies to attract tourists and assist local authorities in promoting sustainable tourism destinations and activities.

5. Implications

First, destination management agencies and tourism enterprises need to enhance the quality of information shared on social networking platforms. This information must be accurate, complete, current, and reflect reality, including details about environmentally friendly services, community activities, and sustainable experiences at the destination. High-quality information will help increase

trustworthiness, build confidence, and encourage Generation Z tourists to choose sustainable destinations. Develop separate policies for controlling the quality of content and images posted on social media, and establish guidelines to help enterprises train staff on online advertising and media standards. Advertising content must be official and approved by the appropriate government tourism authority or derived from official publications like books and promotional materials issued by the same agency to ensure authenticity.

Second, enterprises should create advertising content that is creative and appealing by integrating images, videos, and inspiring messages about sustainable tourism. Ads ought to tell real stories, highlight positive tourist experiences, and emphasize the social and environmental benefits of responsible tourism. The focus should be on providing quality, accurate information, with eye-catching images and vivid, attractive video clips, especially on platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. Collaborating with celebrities, influencers, and organizations with many followers and visits can help promote local tourism on social media. Additionally, policies should be improved to support and establish mutual agreements among stakeholders to increase cooperation in sharing advertising messages on social networks.

Third, it is necessary to enhance the usefulness of information on social networks during the process of searching for and planning travel. Tourism enterprises and digital platforms should provide information that is well-organized, accessible, and capable of supporting tourists in preparing for their journey, from selecting destinations, transportation, and accommodations to activities related to sustainability factors. Useful content not only helps users feel more comfortable and saves time, but also increases the perceived value and quality of their experience.

Fourth, promote and effectively manage electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Enterprises should encourage customers to share sustainable travel experiences on social media through promotional campaigns, hashtags, and sharing reviews of previous tourists or celebrities and influencers. Additionally, it is important to proactively monitor feedback and reviews on social networks and handle negative comments professionally.

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