

USER-GENERATED CONTENT, EWOM INTENSITY, AND TRAVEL INTENTION: A NETNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF ALGERIAN FACEBOOK TRAVEL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract:

This study explores how electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) intensity mediates the relationship between user-generated content (UGC) and travel intention in Algerian Facebook travel groups. Grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory and selected UTAUT2 constructs, it examines how content features, social dynamics, and platform affordances influence digital engagement. A netnographic analysis of 89 posts reveals that multimedia and personal storytelling enhance eWOM intensity, which significantly impacts travel decisions. The study proposes a conceptual framework integrating motivational and technological factors, offering insights into digital behavior in emerging tourism markets. A quantitative phase is recommended to validate and extend the model.

Keywords: eWOM intensity, user-generated content, travel intention, Facebook groups, digital engagement

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JEL Classification Codes : L83, M31, Z32, D83, O33

1- Introduction:

In early 2025, Facebook remained the most widely used social media platform in Algeria, with an estimated 25.6 million users, representing 54.2% of the total population. Among adults aged 18 and above, Facebook usage reached 83.5%, while 73.4% of the age eligible population (13+) were active users. Additionally, Facebook's advertising reach accounted for 70.5% of Algeria's internet user base, indicating its dominant role in shaping online interactions and content dissemination. Gender distribution among Facebook users showed 42.0% female and 58.0% male engagement (DataReportal, 2025). Facebook has emerged as influential virtual communities where users exchange experiences, recommendations, and visual content (Madi & Bensouilah, 2024), while the platform has groups that can function as informal promotional channels, particularly in regions where institutional tourism marketing is limited or underdeveloped. Their participatory nature allows users to co-create destination narratives and validate travel decisions through peer-to-peer interactions. The user-driven dynamic we find within these communities aligns closely with the concept of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), which refers to informal, consumer-generated communication shared via digital platforms (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). In contexts like Algeria, where formal tourism campaigns are fragmented, Facebook travel groups might serve as grassroots spaces for eWOM dissemination, shaping perceptions and influencing travel intentions.

The concept of eWOM has received extensive attention in tourism and consumer behavior research. Studies have examined its credibility, valence, and impact on travel intention, often using models such as the Information Adoption Model (IAM) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Cheung et al., 2008; Filieri & McLeay, 2013). For example, Saidani et al. (2023) investigated the serial mediation of perceived usefulness and information adoption in virtual communities, demonstrating how some eWOM characteristics (such as credibility and quality) affect travel intention, with gender acting as a moderating factor. Their findings underscore the importance of perceived usefulness in eWOM adoption but do not address the intensity of eWOM or the motivational factors behind its generation.

Other studies, such as Fine, Gironde and Petrescu (2017), have explored prosumer motivations for eWOM behavior in hospitality contexts, identifying both intrinsic (like enjoyment and altruism) and extrinsic (such as recognition and influence) drivers. However, these studies are often limited to specific platforms (TripAdvisor, Facebook & google reviews) and do not extend to broader destination image formation or travel intention. Furthermore, Vu Dinh et al. (2025) conducted a bibliometric analysis of 109 studies on eWOM in tourism, identifying emerging themes such as green eWOM, platform-specific dynamics, and cultural influences, while calling for more research on eWOM dissemination mechanisms and their behavioral impacts.

Despite these contributions, several gaps and limitations remain. First, eWOM intensity is often associated with the frequency, emotional richness, and level of user engagement in shared content and those have been highlighted as a critical dimension in understanding the eWOM process (Babić Rosario et al. 2019) and yet it has not been systematically studied as a mediating variable between UGC and travel related outcomes in Algerian context. Second, the motivational factors driving users to generate eWOM in community-based platforms like Facebook travel groups are underexplored, particularly in emerging markets such as Algeria. Third, existing research often lacks integration between behavioral theories and content dynamics, limiting the explanatory power of current models.

To address these gaps, our study draws on two complementary theoretical frameworks: the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and some elements from the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2). UGT provides a lens to understand the motivations behind user engagement in eWOM, including information-seeking, entertainment, social interaction, and self-expression (Katz et al., 1973; Ruggiero, 2000). UTAUT2, on the other hand, includes key constructs such as performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions, which influence behavioral intention and use behavior (Venkatesh, Thong, and Xu, 2012). By combining these models, this research investigates how eWOM intensity mediates the relationship between UGC and travel intention.

The following sections present a review of relevant literature and theoretical foundations, followed by the development of a conceptual

framework. The methodology section outlines the netnographic approach adopted, leading to the presentation of findings and their discussion. The article concludes with implications, limitations, and directions for future research.)

2- Literature review

2-1. User-Generated Content (UGC) in Tourism:

User-generated content (UGC) refers to digital content voluntarily created and shared by users, including reviews, photos, videos, and travel narratives (Sigala, 2025). In tourism, UGC represents a central element of destination marketing, offering peer driven insights that often surpass traditional promotional materials in credibility and influence (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Social media platforms, particularly Facebook, have amplified the visibility and circulation of UGC, enabling travelers to share experiences and influence others in real time. In Algeria, Facebook serves as vibrant communities where users exchange itineraries, advice, and impressions, generating a rich pool of UGC that might shape brand and destinations perceptions while boosting consumer engagement (Chorana & Cherroun, 2021; Madi & Bensouilah, 2024).

While the impact of UGC on consumer decision making is well documented, the process through which UGC leads to the generation of electronic eWOM remains underexplored. Existing studies have identified dimensions such as credibility (Cheung et al., 2008), valence and volume (Park & Lee, 2009), visual appeal (Lo et al., 2011), and interactivity (Munar, 2011) as influential in shaping user engagement. However, few studies have systematically examined how these content characteristics motivate users not only to consume but also to actively share, comment, or recommend (which are behaviors that constitute eWOM). This lack of focus on the transitional mechanisms from UGC to eWOM represents a significant gap in literature.

To address this, our research emphasizes eWOM intensity, a construct that captures the depth and frequency of user engagement with shared content. Unlike binary measures of eWOM (presence or absence), intensity reflects the strength of user involvement, including how emotionally expressive, frequent, and socially interactive the communication is. This focus allows us to move beyond static content analysis and explore the behavioral dynamics that amplify the influence

of UGC in digital travel communities. The next section will introduce the concept of eWOM in greater detail, clarifying its dimensions and relevance to tourism research.

2-2. The Role of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

Electronic word of mouth is defined as any evaluative statement (positive or negative) shared by consumers via digital platforms such as social media, blogs, and review sites (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In the tourism sector, eWOM has become a central force in shaping destination image, trust, and travel intention, particularly in peer-driven environments (Sousa & Fortes, 2023). In Algeria, where traditional tourism marketing has limited reach, eWOM plays a critical role in influencing travel decisions by amplifying user-generated narratives and peer recommendations (Madi & Bensouilah, 2024).

Studies have identified several key dimensions of eWOM effectiveness, including credibility, valence, volume, usefulness, and interactivity (Cheung et al., 2008; Park & Lee, 2009; Munar, 2011). These dimensions affect how travelers interpret and act upon shared content, especially in high-involvement decisions like travel planning. However, eWOM does not merely reflect passive content consumption; it functions as an active mediator that transforms raw UGC into socially validated discourse, shaping how potential travelers perceive and evaluate destinations (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

A growing body of research has begun to explore eWOM intensity, which refers to the degree of user engagement with content (how frequently, emotionally, and interactively users share, comment, and amplify travel-related information). For example, Zhou et al. (2019) found that tourists' emotional states and platform features significantly influence their eWOM behavior on social media. Similarly, Izogo & Mpinganjira (2020) demonstrated that eWOM triggered customer-to-customer interactions on social media platforms can lead to deeper engagement and even repurchase intentions. These studies highlight that eWOM intensity is not just about volume but about depth of interaction, emotional resonance, and social validation.

Despite these insights, most existing studies focus on general eWOM attributes (such as credibility or quantity) without isolating or measuring intensity as a distinct construct. Moreover, few studies have

examined how eWOM intensity operates in localized, peer-driven contexts like Algerian Facebook travel groups, where institutional messaging is weak and peer influence is dominant, which represents a significant gap in the literature.

Our research addresses this gap by focusing on eWOM intensity as a mediating variable between UGC and tourism outcomes. By doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how digital peer communication drives destination perception and behavioral intention in emerging tourism markets. The next part will highlight the distinction between UGC and eWOM. Although eWOM is frequently categorized as a subset of UGC, it is essential to distinguish between the two constructs to avoid conceptual overlap and to enhance analytical precision.

2-3. Distinction and Interplay Between UGC and eWOM

Although UGC and eWOM are often discussed together due to their shared origin in consumer created content, recent literature supports treating them as distinct constructs: UGC encompasses a broad range of content types, often informational or expressive, while eWOM specifically involves evaluative and persuasive communication aimed at influencing others (Thao & Shurong, 2020; Smith et al., 2012). Zahrah et al. (2024) modeled UGC and eWOM as independent variables, showing that each contributes differently to consumer engagement and purchase intention. Muda and Hamzah (2021) demonstrated that UGC source credibility influences attitudes toward content, which in turn affects eWOM behavior, suggesting a causal relationship rather than equivalence.

This differentiation is not merely semantic; it has critical analytical implications. By treating UGC and eWOM as separate constructs, researchers can explore how specific attributes of UGC (for instance: emotional tone, visual richness and authenticity) serve as antecedents to eWOM behavior, including its intensity. For instance, Cheung et al. (2020) found that emotionally charged UGC (entertainment and interaction) significantly increases the likelihood of users engaging in eWOM through comments and shares. Similarly, Saura et al. (2022) emphasized that UGC characteristics shape online user behavior and influence how content is amplified within digital communities.

In tourism contexts, this distinction is particularly relevant. Travelers often encounter UGC in the form of photos, videos, or narratives, which may not be explicitly evaluative but still trigger eWOM responses when users comment, recommend, or share their own experiences. Understanding this UGC to eWOM pathway allows for more precise modeling of how destination image and travel intention are formed.

2-4. Theoretical Foundations: UGT & UTAUT2

The conceptual model of this study is grounded in two complementary theoretical frameworks: Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2), chosen for their relevance in explaining digital engagement and technology adoption in tourism and social media contexts. These models have been widely used, either independently or in combination, to investigate consumer behavior in online environments. For example, Chiu et al. (2024) integrated UGT and UTAUT2 to examine user engagement with fitness content on YouTube, demonstrating that both motivational and technological factors jointly shape digital participation. Similarly, Alalwan et al. (2017) applied UTAUT2 alongside Trust (which is one of social relation gratification factors in UGT model) to explore mobile app usage, showing how gratification motives and perceived usefulness interact to influence behavioral intention.

In our study, UGT (Katz et al., 1973) provides a framework for understanding the psychological and social motivations behind travelers' engagement with social media and their contribution to user-generated content (UGC). In tourism research, UGT has been used to prove that individuals seek information, entertainment, and identity expression through digital platforms (Menon, 2022). UTAUT2, on the other hand, offers a robust model for analyzing the acceptance and use of technology (Venkatesh et al., 2012), incorporating constructions such as performance expectancy and facilitating conditions. In technology adoption research, perceived usefulness from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is conceptually aligned with performance expectancy in UTAUT2, both referring to the belief that using a system enhances task performance (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2012), and in the context of Algerian tourism, Nechoud et al. (2021) demonstrated that

perceived usefulness, along with destination image, significantly mediates the relationship between eWOM credibility and visit intention, highlighting its pivotal role in shaping travelers' behavioral responses to digital content.

Facilitating conditions play a foundational role in enabling tourists to engage with electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) platforms, particularly in emerging tourism markets. These conditions (such as access to mobile internet, digital literacy, and institutional support) create the necessary environment for travelers to seek, trust, and act upon eWOM content. Research by Suresh and Muneeswaran (2020) using the UTAUT2 framework in the context of e-tourism found that facilitating conditions significantly influenced tourists' intention to use mobile apps for travel planning. Similarly, Mosbeh (2025) confirmed that facilitating conditions positively impact behavioral intention to adopt virtual reality in tourism, highlighting their relevance in digital engagement. Without adequate infrastructure and support, even credible and persuasive eWOM may fail to translate into actual travel decisions, underscoring the importance of including facilitating conditions in models predicting eWOM effectiveness.

While several constructs from the UTAUT2 model share conceptual similarities with dimensions of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), performance expectancy and facilitating conditions were retained in this study due to their distinct and foundational roles in predicting technology adoption in tourism. Performance expectancy (defined as the degree to which individuals believe that using a technology will help them achieve gains in task performance (Venkatesh et al., 2012)) is conceptually close to informational gratification (stay informed satisfaction), but yet more technology-specific and predictive of adoption behavior, and it offers a more structured and predictive lens for assessing perceived usefulness in technology acceptance models. Facilitating conditions, similarly, reflect the technical and organizational infrastructure that enables technology use (Tamilmani et al., 2021), aligning with accessibility gratifications in UGT, but providing a more operational measure of readiness and support. Other UTAUT2 constructs (such as hedonic motivation, social influence, effort expectancy, price value, and habit) were excluded due to their conceptual overlap with UGT dimensions already integrated into the model. For example,

hedonic motivation corresponds to entertainment gratification, and social influence mirrors social interaction gratification, both of which are addressed through UGT-based variables. This selective approach ensures theoretical clarity, avoids redundancy, and focuses the analysis on the most impactful predictors of digital tourism behavior in the Algerian context.

3- Summary and Conceptual Model Implications

By combining UGT and some constructs from UTAUT2, this research builds a conceptual framework that captures both the motivational antecedents of UGC creation and the behavioral determinants of eWOM intensity. This dual-theoretical approach allows us to explore how travelers interact with digital content and how these interactions influence their travel intentions. The relevance and validity of this integrated model will be examined in the empirical section of this research, where it will be tested in the context of Algerian Facebook travel groups.

Table N°1 : Overview of the studies related to drivers of UGC & eWOM

Authors	Major findings	Factors affecting EWOM
Guy Assaker Rania El-Haddad HALLAK R (2019)	Homophily, performance expectancy, and price-saving orientation are the strongest predictors of individual usage intentions' of UGC. Moreover, the dimension of habit, operationalized as a subjective measure of impulsive and automatic use of UGC, was found to be the strongest predictor of travelers' actual UGC usage.	Homophily Performance expectancy Price saving Facilitating conditions
Thilina Karunanayake MADUBASHINI	The results of the study discuss the main eight element affect the purchase intention of automobiles, but the two	All use and gratification elements except homophily and trust.

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(2019)	elements not strongly affect the purchase intention which were namely, homophily and trust. Consumer resonance mediating the user generated characteristics to purchase intention of automobiles.	
Shu-Chuan Chu Yoojung Kim (2011)	Tie strength, trust, normative and informational influence are positively associated with users' overall eWOM behaviour, whereas a negative relationship was found with regard to homophily.	Tie strength Normative influence Informational influence
Pablo Fariás (2017)	The results show that tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, self-presentation, and voluntary self-disclosure are all positively directly associated with eWOM inSNSs. The results also show that homophily exerts a positive indirect influence on eWOM through the mediators of tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, and self-presentation.	Tie strength Informational influence Self presentation Voluntary self disclosure Homophily Trust

Source: Author's elaboration based on literature review

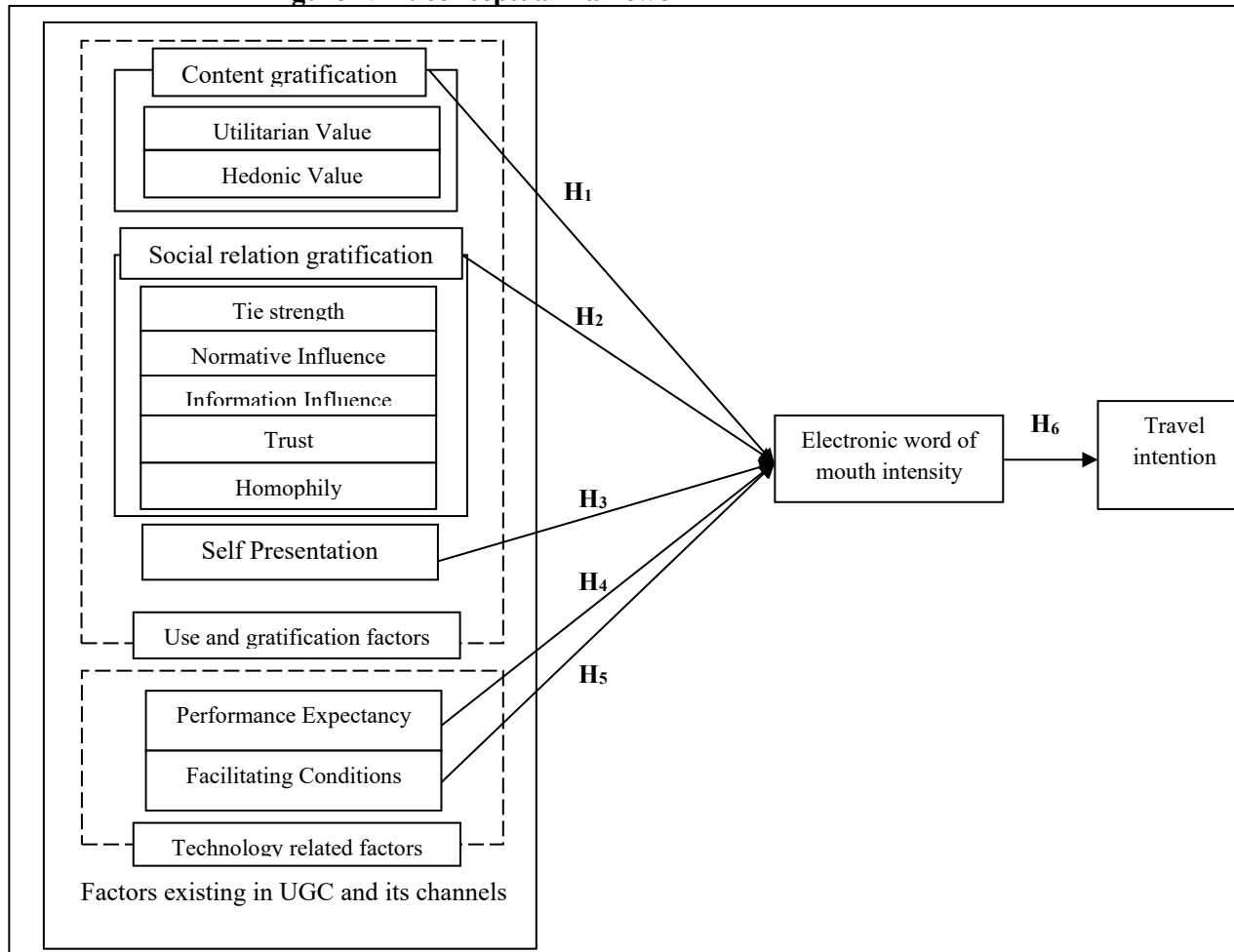
To construct our conceptual model, we adopted a synthesis approach grounded in empirical findings from prior research on UGC and eWOM. The model integrates key predictors and mediators identified across diverse contexts to ensure both theoretical robustness and contextual relevance. Assaker, Hallak, and El-Haddad (2019) emphasized the role of homophily, performance expectancy, price-saving orientation, and habit in predicting UGC usage, with habit being particularly influential

in driving impulsive and automatic content creation. Karunanayake and Madubashini (2019), in their study on automobile purchase intention, found that consumer resonance, mediated by UGC characteristics, had a stronger impact than homophily or trust, suggesting that content relevance and emotional connection are more critical than mere similarity.

For eWOM behavior, Chu and Kim (2011) identified tie strength, trust, normative influence, and informational influence as positive drivers, while noting a negative relationship with homophily. Farías (2017) further validated the importance of tie strength in shaping eWOM engagement. Shang et al. (2017) demonstrated that utilitarian value, normative and informational influence, and self-presentation significantly affect customer resonance, whereas hedonic value showed limited impact. Jahn and Kunz (2012) also highlighted the role of functional and hedonic content in driving fan-page participation, reinforcing the importance of content value in digital engagement.

By integrating these findings, our model captures both motivational antecedents (e.g., habit, performance expectancy) and social-cognitive mediators (e.g., tie strength, normative influence) that influence UGC creation and eWOM intensity. This multidimensional framework allows us to explore how these factors interact to shape travel intention in peer-driven environments. In order to give an answer to our research question and drawing on the information given in this literature review, we propose model below, and the relevance and applicability of this model will be empirically tested in the empirical section of this research, focusing on Algerian Facebook travel groups.

Figure N°1 : conceptual framework



Source: Author's elaboration based on literature review

4- Research methodology:

4-1. Philosophical and Methodological Foundations

Our study adopts the online ethnography method, which is netnographic approach (Kozinets, 1998; Kozinets & Gretzel, 2022), a qualitative method tailored to the analysis of online communities and digital interactions. Netnography is particularly suited for tourism research due to its capacity to capture experiential, emotional, and social dimensions of travel discourse in digital environments (Kozinets, 2020; Gewinner, 2023). It allows for immersive observation of user-generated

content (UGC) and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) within naturally occurring conversations.

Netnography has become a widely adopted qualitative method in tourism research, particularly for exploring user-generated content (UGC), electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and digital travel communities. Originally conceptualized by Kozinets (1998), the method has evolved to address the complexities of online behavior in Web 2.0 and beyond (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2022; Tavakoli & Mura, 2018). Recent studies have demonstrated its versatility across various tourism contexts. For instance, Gewinner (2023) applied netnography to cross-cultural travel experiences, emphasizing its ability to capture emotional and symbolic dimensions often missed by quantitative methods. Gholamhosseinzadeh et al. (2021) used netnography to analyze how travel bloggers influence destination image and tourist engagement through digital storytelling. In rural tourism, An and Alarcón (2021) combined netnographic insights with cluster analysis to segment tourist profiles based on online reviews, while Küster and Vila (2024) identified emotional and spiritual factors contributing to destination loyalty in pilgrimage tourism. Willment (2021) examined travel blogging as digital labor, using netnography to understand how bloggers curate content and interact with audiences. These studies collectively affirm netnography's value in tourism research, not only for its methodological richness but also for its capacity to uncover nuanced, context-specific insights into traveler motivations, perceptions, and interactions.

The philosophical foundation of this research is informed by a social constructivist perspective, which posits that meaning is co-created through interaction, particularly within digital environments where individuals express, negotiate, and reshape their travel-related perceptions. This ontological stance aligns with the view that online communities serve as spaces of collective meaning-making, especially in tourism contexts where destination image and travel intention are shaped by peer discourse and shared narratives (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Schwandt, 2000). Epistemologically, the study adopts an interpretive approach, emphasizing the importance of understanding the subjective experiences and symbolic expressions embedded in user-generated content and comment interactions. This orientation is particularly relevant in netnographic research, where the goal is to

uncover the nuanced, context-dependent meanings that users attach to travel experiences and digital engagement (Mkono, 2012; Kozinets, 2020).

4-2. Community Selection and Sampling Strategy

The selection of the online communities for this study was guided by the principle of contextual relevance and digital ethnographic suitability. In line with Kozinets' (2020) emphasis on identifying naturally occurring, active spaces of interaction, we chose four Algerian travel groups on Facebook that exhibit high levels of engagement and thematic consistency with tourism discourse. These groups were selected based on specific criteria: frequency of weekly publications, community size, volume of interactions (likes, comments, shares), and group accessibility (public or private). Such criteria align with recommendations from Mkono (2012), who stresses the importance of selecting communities that reflect authentic user behavior and diverse expressions of experience. The Algerian Facebook travel groups chosen for this study are widely recognized among local users and serve as dynamic platforms for sharing travel narratives, seeking advice, and engaging in peer-to-peer recommendation. By focusing on these groups, the study captures a localized and culturally embedded form of digital tourism discourse, contributing to the growing body of research that explores destination perception and travel intention through social media ethnography (Kastenholz et al., 2021; Gholamhosseinzadeh et al., 2021).

Table N°2 : Selected groups & number of posts per group

Groups	Number of studied posts
سياحة1001	40
Nboujiw community	20
Tourism Algeria السياحة في الجزائر	34
Discover Algeria	10
Total	104

Source: Author's compilation based on netnographic data collected from Facebook groups (January – June 2021).

4-3. Data collection and filtering

The data collection process followed the principles of digital ethnography, with a focus on observing naturally occurring user behavior in online communities. In line with Kozinets' (2020) updated netnographic framework, we adopted a non-participatory approach, commonly referred to as "lurking," which allowed for unobtrusive observation of interactions within selected Algerian Facebook travel groups. These groups were chosen for their high activity levels and thematic relevance to domestic tourism. Over a six-month period, from January to June 2021, we systematically tracked posts and comments, capturing a wide range of seasonal and event-driven content. A total of 114 posts were initially collected, but 15 were excluded due to their promotional nature (primarily advertisements from travel agencies) which tended to elicit transactional responses rather than organic engagement. The final dataset comprised 89 posts, which were diverse in format (e.g., text, images, videos, or combinations thereof) and thematic orientation. Posts were categorized according to their alignment with eWOM dimensions (opinion seeking, personal experience sharing, and sharing others' experiences) as proposed by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004). This filtering process ensured that the data reflected authentic peer-to-peer communication, a key criterion for meaningful netnographic analysis (Mkono, 2012; Gholamhosseinzadeh et al., 2021). Additionally, the presence or absence of hashtags was recorded, given their role in enhancing content discoverability and thematic clustering within algorithmic structure in social media networks (Rasel et al., 2025).

Table N°3 : Posts filtered in the study per type of content

Type of the content	Number of posts
Images	1
Images + Text	59
Images+video+text	2
Text	13
Video+ Text	14
Total	89

Source: Author's compilation based on netnographic data collected from Facebook groups (January – June 2021).

Table N°4 : Posts filtered in the study per topic of the post

Topic of the content	Number of posts
Seeking for an opinion	20
Sharing a personal experience	56
Sharing others experience	13
Total	89

Source: Author's compilation based on netnographic data collected from Facebook groups (January – June 2021).

Table N°5 : Posts filtered in the study classified with or without hashtags

Posts	Number of posts
Without hashtags	43
With hashtags	46
Total	89

Source: Author's compilation based on netnographic data collected from Facebook groups (January – June 2021).

4-4. Analytical framework

Our analytical framework combines thematic netnographic coding with selected constructs from UTAUT2 and the Uses and Gratifications Theory to interpret user behavior in Algerian Facebook travel groups. While U&G helps explain why users engage with travel content for emotional or informational satisfaction, the inclusion of performance expectancy and facilitating conditions from UTAUT2 allows us to assess how perceived usefulness and ease of interaction with platform features (such as hashtags or multimedia formats) affect engagement levels. Posts were analyzed based on their format, thematic intent (e.g., opinion seeking, experience sharing), and interaction metrics (likes, comments), enabling a nuanced understanding of how user-generated content contributes to eWOM and travel intention within these digital communities (Venkatesh et al., 2012).

5- Results and findings

Our study analysis of 89 posts from Algerian Facebook travel groups revealed several patterns in user engagement and eWOM behavior. Posts

combining images and text generated the highest number of interactions ($n = 936$) and a substantial volume of comments ($n = 174$), followed by posts that included images, videos, and text ($n = 691$ interactions; $n = 580$ comments). In contrast, text-only posts received the lowest engagement ($n = 109$ interactions; $n = 76$ comments), suggesting that multimedia content significantly enhances user responsiveness. These findings align with previous research emphasizing the role of hedonic and utilitarian gratifications in shaping online engagement (Cheung et al., 2020; Chiu et al., 2024) where visual richness and narrative depth contribute to perceived value.

Table N°6 : Number of reactions and comments per type of content

Type of content	Number of reactions (likes)	Number of comments
Images	325	42
Images + Text	936	174
Images+video+text	691	580
Text	109	76
Video+ Text	613	121

Source: Author's compilation based on netnographic data collected from Facebook groups (January – June 2021).

The presence of hashtags also appeared to influence interaction levels. Posts with hashtags received a total of 1069 interactions and 222 comments, compared to 412 interactions and 91 comments for posts without hashtags. This supports the idea that facilitating conditions, as conceptualized in UTAUT2 (Venkatesh et al., 2012), play a role in enhancing content discoverability and thematic relevance within social media platforms (Rasel et al., 2025).

Table N°7 : Number of reactions and comments classified with or without hashtags

Posts	Number of reaction	Number of comments
Without hashtag	412	91
With hashtag	1069	222

Source: Author's compilation based on netnographic data collected from Facebook groups (January – June 2021).

When analyzing post themes, posts sharing others' experiences generated the highest average interactions ($n = 950$), while personal experience posts elicited the most comments ($n = 169$). Posts categorized as opinion seeking had lower interaction rates ($n = 243$) but still prompted meaningful engagement through comments ($n = 142$). These results suggest that users are more likely to react to third-party narratives but engage more deeply with personal storytelling, reflecting the dual role of social identity and self-presentation in digital tourism discourse (Goffman, 1959; Menon, 2022).

Table N°8 : Average of reactions and comments classified based on the topic of the posts

Topic of the post	Average of reactions (likes) per post	Average of comments per post
Seeking for an opinion	243	142
Sharing a personal experience	887	169
Sharing others experience	950	141

Source: Author's compilation based on netnographic data collected from Facebook groups (January – June 2021).

Further analysis of comment types revealed that opinion giving was the most dominant form of eWOM across all themes. Notably, posts sharing personal experiences attracted all three dimensions of eWOM (opinion giving, opinion seeking, and opinion sharing), indicating a richer dialogic structure. This multidimensional engagement highlights the importance of narrative authenticity and emotional resonance in fostering meaningful peer-to-peer interaction (Chu & Kim, 2011; Gholamhosseinzadeh et al., 2021).

Table N°9 : Types of comments based on the topic of the post

Topic of the post	Opinion seeking comment	Opinion sharing comment	Opinion giving comment
Seeking for an opinion	8	15	20
Sharing a personal experience	33	41	48
Sharing others experience	9	10	13

Source: Author's compilation based on netnographic data collected from Facebook groups (January – June 2021).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that content format, thematic framing, and platform features collectively influence the intensity and

nature of eWOM in Algerian travel-related Facebook communities. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital environments conditions impact the intensity of eWOM and how this latter mediates travel intention and peer influence in emerging tourism markets.

6- Discussion

The results confirm that multimedia content (particularly posts combining images and text) generates significantly more engagement than text-only formats. This supports the relevance of content gratification, a central concept in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973), where both utilitarian value (e.g., practical travel information) and hedonic value (e.g., emotional appeal, aesthetic quality) play a role in stimulating user interaction and eWOM behavior (Shang et al., 2017).

Beyond content, the study highlights the importance of social relation characteristics within UGC platforms. Posts sharing personal or others' experiences attracted diverse comment types (opinion giving, seeking, and sharing) suggesting that tie strength, normative influence, trust, information exchange, and homophily within the community shape how users respond to content. These findings align with prior research on social influence in digital environments (Chu & Kim, 2011; Gholamhosseinzadeh et al., 2021) and reinforce the idea that eWOM is not only content-driven but also socially mediated.

The role of self-presentation also emerged as a relevant factor. Users who shared personal travel experiences often received more varied and emotionally resonant responses, indicating that identity expression and social validation are key motivators for content creation and interaction (Schau & Gilly, 2003; Goffman, 1959). This behavior reflects the performative nature of social media, where users curate their digital personas through travel narratives, often with the implicit goal of gaining recognition or approval from peers.

From a technological perspective, the presence of hashtags and the ease of navigating content within the groups reflect the impact of facilitating conditions, while the high engagement with informative posts suggests that users perceive a clear performance expectancy which

means, they expect useful outcomes from engaging with UGC. These two constructs, drawn from UTAUT2 (Venkatesh et al., 2012), are particularly relevant in understanding how platform design and user expectations influence eWOM behavior in tourism contexts.

Based on these findings, the following hypotheses are proposed for validation in complementary quantitative study:

H1: The content gratification of the user-generated content influences positively the intensity of electronic word of mouth.

H2: The social relation characteristics of a user-generated content platform influence positively the intensity of electronic word of mouth.

H3: Self-presentation in UGC platforms influences positively eWOM intensity.

H4: Performance expectancy influences positively eWOM intensity.

H5: Facilitating conditions influence positively eWOM intensity.

H6: The electronic word of mouth intensity influences positively the travel intention.

H7: The user-generated content has a significant relation with travel intention mediated by eWOM intensity.

These hypotheses aim to structure the relationships observed in the qualitative phase and will be tested through a survey-based quantitative study to validate the proposed conceptual model and assess its generalizability.

7- Conclusion

Our study explored the dynamic of UGC and eWOM within Algerian Facebook travel groups using a netnographic approach. By analyzing 89 posts over a 6 months period, the research revealed how content format, thematic framing, and platform features influence user engagement and the intensity of eWOM. The findings confirmed that multimedia content (particularly posts combining images and text) elicits higher interaction rates, while personal experience sharing fosters richer comment diversity. These results support the relevance of content gratification dimensions, including utilitarian and hedonic value, as well as social relation characteristics such as tie strength, trust, and normative influence, in shaping eWOM behavior. Additionally, the study highlighted the role of self-presentation and two key constructs from

UTAUT2 (performance expectancy and facilitating conditions) in enhancing user engagement and perceived usefulness of UGC platforms.

However, the qualitative nature of the study limits the generalizability of findings across broader populations or platforms. Second, the analysis was restricted to four Facebook groups, which may not represent the full spectrum of travel-related discourse in Algeria. Third, the interpretation of comments and interactions is inherently subjective and could benefit from sentiment analysis to capture emotional tone and intent more accurately. Moreover, cultural factors may influence how users engage with social media, potentially affecting the transferability of findings to other contexts (Manrai & Manrai, 2011). Finally, concerns about the mental health effects of excessive social media use raise questions about future user behavior and the sustainability of engagement patterns (Gretzel & Stankov, 2021).

To address these limitations and validate the conceptual model proposed in this study, a complementary quantitative phase is recommended. This future research should test the hypotheses derived from the qualitative findings using survey data, allowing for statistical validation of the relationships between UGC, eWOM intensity, and travel intention. Additionally, expanding the scope to include other platforms such as Instagram or TikTok, and incorporating sentiment analysis tools, could offer a more comprehensive understanding of digital tourism behavior in Algeria and beyond.

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