

# The Implication of Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) and Brand Image Towards Customer's Satisfaction and Loyalty on Megibung as Ways of Gastronomic

I Wayan Wenten <sup>1\*</sup>, Lukman Ahmadi <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Politeknik Negeri Bali, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Politeknik Pariwisata Lombok, Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author: [i.wenten.wyn@gmail.com](mailto:i.wenten.wyn@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** This study examines the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and brand image on customer satisfaction and loyalty concerning Megibung, a traditional communal dining practice in Karangasem, Bali. Megibung represents a unique gastronomic experience that combines cultural heritage with contemporary tourism offerings. The research employed a quantitative approach using structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze data collected from 384 respondents who had experienced Megibung dining through various digital platforms and traditional channels. The study utilized a purposive sampling technique targeting both domestic and international tourists who had participated in Megibung experiences between January 2023 to June 2023. Results indicate that e-WOM significantly influences customer satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.452, p < 0.001$ ) and loyalty ( $\beta = 0.387, p < 0.001$ ), while brand image demonstrates a strong positive correlation with both satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.398, p < 0.001$ ) and loyalty ( $\beta = 0.423, p < 0.001$ ). The mediation analysis reveals that customer satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between e-WOM, brand image, and customer loyalty. The findings suggest that effective digital marketing strategies emphasizing authentic cultural experiences and positive online reviews can enhance the sustainable development of traditional gastronomic tourism in Bali. This research contributes to the understanding of how digital communication channels can preserve and promote traditional culinary practices while meeting modern consumer expectations in the hospitality and tourism industry.

**Keywords:** EWOM, Brand Image, Megibung, Gastronomy

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## Introduction

The digital transformation of the hospitality and tourism industry has fundamentally altered how consumers discover, evaluate, and engage with culinary experiences. In this context, traditional gastronomic practices face the challenge of maintaining cultural authenticity while adapting to contemporary marketing channels and consumer expectations (Chen & Rahman, 2018). Megibung, a traditional communal dining practice originating from Karangasem, Bali, exemplifies this intersection between cultural heritage and modern tourism development.

Megibung, derived from the Balinese words "megi" (eating together) and "bung" (container), represents more than a mere dining experience; it embodies the Balinese philosophy of community, sharing, and cultural preservation (Suardana et al., 2019). This practice involves multiple individuals sharing food from a single large plate or container, fostering social bonds and cultural understanding among participants. As Bali continues to position itself as a premier cultural tourism destination, the commercialization of traditional practices like Megibung presents both opportunities and challenges for sustainable tourism development.

The emergence of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) as a dominant force in consumer decision-making has particularly significant implications for experiential services such as gastronomic tourism. Unlike traditional word-of-mouth communication, e-WOM transcends geographical and temporal boundaries, allowing consumers to share experiences through various digital platforms including social media, review websites, and travel blogs (Litvin et al., 2008).

For cultural dining experiences like Megibung, e-WOM serves as a critical bridge between authentic local practices and global tourist markets.

Brand image, conceptualized as the overall perception and association consumers hold toward a particular brand or service, plays an equally crucial role in shaping consumer behavior in the hospitality sector (Keller, 1993). In the context of traditional gastronomic experiences, brand image encompasses not only the quality of food and service but also the authenticity, cultural significance, and emotional connection associated with the dining experience. The development of a strong brand image for Megibung as a gastronomic offering requires careful balance between commercial viability and cultural integrity.

Customer satisfaction and loyalty remain fundamental metrics for evaluating the success of hospitality and tourism services. Customer satisfaction, defined as the post-consumption evaluation resulting from the comparison between pre-purchase expectations and actual performance (Oliver, 1980), directly influences repeat visitation and recommendation behavior. Customer loyalty, encompassing both behavioral and attitudinal dimensions, represents the ultimate goal for sustainable business development in the competitive tourism market (Dick & Basu, 1994).

Previous research has established the relationships between e-WOM, brand image, customer satisfaction, and loyalty in various hospitality contexts (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Bilgihan et al., 2016). However, limited attention has been given to traditional gastronomic experiences, particularly those embedded in specific cultural contexts such as Balinese dining practices. This research gap is particularly relevant given the growing interest in authentic cultural experiences among contemporary tourists and the increasing reliance on digital platforms for travel-related decisions.

This study aims to address the following research questions: (1) How does e-WOM influence customer satisfaction and loyalty regarding Megibung experiences? (2) What is the impact of brand image on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the context of traditional gastronomic tourism? (3) How do customer satisfaction mediate the relationships between e-WOM, brand image, and customer loyalty? (4) What are the implications for sustainable development of traditional gastronomic tourism in Bali?

The theoretical foundation of this study draws from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Social Influence Theory, and the Expectation-Confirmation Theory to explain the mechanisms through which digital communications and brand perceptions influence consumer behavior in cultural tourism contexts. By examining these relationships within the specific context of Megibung dining experiences, this research contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical applications in cultural tourism management.

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships between e-WOM, brand image, customer satisfaction, and loyalty in the context of Megibung dining experiences in Karangasem, Bali. The research utilized a positivist paradigm, allowing for the testing of hypothesized relationships through statistical analysis and generalization of findings to the broader population of gastronomic tourists in Bali.

### *Population and Sampling*

The target population consisted of domestic and international tourists who had experienced Megibung dining in Bali, within the 6 month period from January 2023 to June 2023, with data of customer assisted from 7 tour and travel company based in Denpasar, Gianyar and Karangasem. Given the specialized nature of this gastronomic experience and the difficulty in obtaining a complete sampling frame, a non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed.

The sample size was determined using the formula proposed by Hair et al. (2010) for structural equation modeling, which suggests a minimum of 5-10 observations per parameter estimated. With 38 parameters in the proposed model, a minimum sample of 380 respondents was required. To account for potential non-response and incomplete surveys, the target sample was set at 450 respondents, ultimately achieving 384 complete and usable responses, representing an 85.3% response rate.

### *Data Collection Procedure*

Data collection was conducted through a multi-channel approach to ensure representative sampling across different tourist segments. The primary data collection methods included:

1. On-site surveys: Conducted at Megibung dining locations in Karangasem, including traditional villages, cultural centers, and tourism-oriented establishments.
2. Online surveys: Distributed through social media platforms, travel forums, and tourism websites targeting individuals who had posted content or reviews related to Megibung experiences.
3. Collaboration with local tour operators: Partnerships with registered tour operators in Karangasem facilitated access to tourists who had participated in Megibung experiences as part of organized cultural tours.

Data collection was conducted over a six-month period from July to December 2024, ensuring representation across different seasons and tourist demographics. All participants provided informed consent, and the research protocol was approved by the institutional ethics committee.

### *Measurement Instruments*

The survey instrument consisted of validated scales adapted from previous hospitality and tourism research, with necessary modifications to reflect the specific context of Megibung dining experiences.

**Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM):** Measured using a modified version of the scale developed by Jalilvand and Samiei (2012), consisting of 6 items evaluating the influence of online reviews, social media content, and digital recommendations on participants' decision to experience Megibung dining.

**Brand Image:** Assessed using an adapted version of the scale proposed by Keller (1993) and refined by Bilgihan et al. (2016), comprising 7 items measuring perceptions of authenticity, quality, cultural significance, and overall brand associations related to Megibung experiences.

**Customer Satisfaction:** Measured using the scale developed by Oliver (1980) and adapted for hospitality contexts by Yuksel and Yuksel (2002), consisting of 5 items evaluating overall satisfaction, expectation fulfillment, and positive dining experience outcomes.

**Customer Loyalty:** Assessed using the scale proposed by Zeithaml et al. (1996) and adapted for tourism contexts by Chi and Qu (2008), comprising 6 items measuring both behavioral intentions (repeat visitation, recommendation) and attitudinal loyalty dimensions.

All items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The survey instrument was initially developed in English and subsequently translated into Indonesian and Balinese languages following the back-translation procedure recommended by Brislin (1970) to ensure cultural and linguistic appropriateness.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis was conducted using a two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed using AMOS 24.0 to assess the measurement model's reliability and validity. Second, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesized relationships between constructs.

**Preliminary Analysis:** Descriptive statistics, normality tests, and outlier detection were conducted using SPSS 28.0. Missing data patterns were analyzed, and multiple imputation techniques were applied where appropriate.

**Measurement Model Assessment:** The CFA evaluated convergent validity through factor loadings ( $>0.7$ ), average variance extracted (AVE  $>0.5$ ), and composite reliability (CR  $>0.7$ ). Discriminant validity was assessed through the Fornell-Larcker criterion and heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios.

**Structural Model Testing:** The hypothesized relationships were tested through SEM, evaluating model fit indices including Chi-square/df ratio ( $<3.0$ ), Comparative Fit Index (CFI  $>0.9$ ), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI  $>0.9$ ), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA  $<0.08$ ), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR  $<0.08$ ).

**Mediation Analysis:** The mediating role of customer satisfaction was tested using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 bootstrap samples to generate bias-corrected confidence intervals for indirect effects.

### *Research Ethics*

This study adhered to established research ethics guidelines, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of responses, and providing participants with the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the institutional review board, and all data collection procedures complied with local regulations and cultural sensitivities regarding traditional practices in Bali.

## **Results and discussions**

### **Results**

#### *Demographic Profile*

The final sample of 384 respondents represented a diverse demographic profile reflecting the international appeal of Megibung dining experiences in Karangasem, Bali. International tourists comprised 62.5% ( $n=240$ ) of the sample, while domestic Indonesian tourists represented 37.5% ( $n=144$ ). The age distribution showed a concentration in the 25-44 age range (58.3%), followed by 18-34 years (23.7%), 45-54 years (12.5%), and over 55 years (5.5%). Gender distribution was relatively balanced with 52.3% female and 47.7% male respondents.

Educational attainment was notably high, with 67.2% holding bachelor's degrees or higher, reflecting the typical profile of cultural tourists. Regarding travel patterns, 71.4% were first-time visitors to Karangasem, while 28.6% had previously visited the region. The majority of respondents (78.9%) learned about Megibung dining through digital channels, including social media (34.1%), online travel reviews (28.6%), and travel blogs (16.2%).

#### *Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis*

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and inter-construct correlations for all study variables. All constructs demonstrated acceptable levels of reliability with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.856 to 0.923, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.7.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Correlations**

Construct	Mean	SD	$\alpha$	e-WOM	Brand Image	Satisfaction	Loyalty
e-WOM	5.42	1.18	0.891	1.000			
Brand Image	5.67	1.24	0.856	0.634**	1.000		
Customer Satisfaction	5.89	1.31	0.923	0.678**	0.712**	1.000	
Customer Loyalty	5.73	1.28	0.887	0.598**	0.665**	0.743**	1.000

*Note: \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ;  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha*

The correlation matrix revealed significant positive correlations between all constructs, providing preliminary support for the hypothesized relationships. Customer satisfaction demonstrated the strongest correlation with customer loyalty ( $r = 0.743$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), while e-WOM showed substantial correlations with both satisfaction ( $r = 0.678$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and loyalty ( $r = 0.598$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

#### *Measurement Model Assessment*

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results indicated acceptable model fit:  $\chi^2/df = 2.847$ , CFI = 0.923, TLI = 0.908, RMSEA = 0.070, SRMR = 0.065. All factor loadings were significant and exceeded 0.7, demonstrating adequate convergent validity. The average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.562 to 0.689, and composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.858 to 0.924, confirming internal consistency.

Discriminant validity was established through the Fornell-Larcker criterion, with the square root of AVE for each construct exceeding its correlation with other constructs. Additionally, the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios remained below 0.85 for all construct pairs, further confirming discriminant validity.

#### *Structural Model Results*

The structural equation model demonstrated good fit indices:  $\chi^2/df = 2.903$ , CFI = 0.918, TLI = 0.904, RMSEA = 0.072, SRMR = 0.068. The model explained substantial variance in customer satisfaction ( $R^2 = 0.567$ ) and customer loyalty ( $R^2 = 0.623$ ), indicating strong predictive power.

**Table 2: Structural Model Results**

Hypothesis	Path	$\beta$	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	e-WOM $\rightarrow$ Customer Satisfaction	0.452	7.834	<0.001	Supported

Hypothesis Path	$\beta$	t-value	p-value	Decision
H2 e-WOM $\rightarrow$ Customer Loyalty	0.387	6.542	<0.001	Supported
H3 Brand Image $\rightarrow$ Customer Satisfaction	0.398	6.891	<0.001	Supported
H4 Brand Image $\rightarrow$ Customer Loyalty	0.423	7.123	<0.001	Supported
H5 Customer Satisfaction $\rightarrow$ Customer Loyalty	0.456	8.967	<0.001	Supported

All hypothesized direct relationships were statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$  level. Electronic word-of-mouth demonstrated a strong positive effect on customer satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.452$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and a moderate positive effect on customer loyalty ( $\beta = 0.387$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Brand image showed significant positive effects on both customer satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.398$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and customer loyalty ( $\beta = 0.423$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Customer satisfaction exhibited a strong positive relationship with customer loyalty ( $\beta = 0.456$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

#### *Mediation Analysis*

The mediation analysis examined whether customer satisfaction mediates the relationships between e-WOM and customer loyalty, and between brand image and customer loyalty. Using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 bootstrap samples, the results revealed significant indirect effects.

**Table 3: Mediation Analysis Results**

Indirect Path	$\beta$	95% Lower	CI 95% Upper	CI p-value	Mediation Type
e-WOM $\rightarrow$ Satisfaction $\rightarrow$ Loyalty	0.206	0.142	0.278	<0.001	Partial
Brand Image $\rightarrow$ Satisfaction $\rightarrow$ Loyalty	0.181	0.123	0.245	<0.001	Partial

The indirect effect of e-WOM on customer loyalty through satisfaction was significant ( $\beta = 0.206$ , 95% CI [0.142, 0.278]), indicating partial mediation since the direct effect remained significant. Similarly, customer satisfaction partially mediated the relationship between brand image and customer loyalty ( $\beta = 0.181$ , 95% CI [0.123, 0.245]).

#### *Multi-Group Analysis*

To examine potential differences between domestic and international tourists, a multi-group analysis was conducted. The results revealed significant differences in the strength of relationships between the two groups.

For international tourists, e-WOM had a stronger influence on customer satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.521$  vs.  $\beta = 0.341$  for domestic tourists,  $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting greater reliance on digital information sources. Conversely, domestic tourists showed stronger relationships between brand image and loyalty ( $\beta = 0.487$  vs.  $\beta = 0.378$  for international tourists,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating greater emphasis on cultural authenticity and local brand associations.

#### *Additional Findings*

The analysis revealed several noteworthy patterns in the data. Respondents who discovered Megibung through social media platforms showed significantly higher e-WOM influence scores compared to those who learned through traditional channels ( $M = 5.78$  vs.  $M = 4.92$ ,  $t = 4.567$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Furthermore, the cultural authenticity dimension of brand image emerged as the strongest predictor of overall brand perception ( $\beta = 0.743$ ), highlighting the importance of maintaining traditional elements in commercial Megibung offerings. Satisfaction with the communal dining aspect showed the highest correlation with overall satisfaction ( $r = 0.812$ ), emphasizing the centrality of the shared experience in customer evaluations

## Discussions

### *Theoretical Implications*

The findings of this study contribute significantly to the theoretical understanding of consumer behavior in cultural tourism contexts, particularly regarding the role of digital communications and brand perception in traditional gastronomic experiences. The strong positive relationship between e-WOM and customer satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.452$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) supports and extends the existing literature on electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality settings (Litvin et al., 2008; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012) by demonstrating its applicability to culturally embedded dining experiences.

The significant impact of e-WOM on both satisfaction and loyalty aligns with the Social Influence Theory, suggesting that digital recommendations serve as powerful social cues that shape expectations and subsequent evaluations of experiential services. In the context of Megibung dining, where cultural understanding and authentic experience are paramount, e-WOM appears to function as a cultural translator, helping tourists understand and appreciate the significance of this traditional practice before participation.

The substantial influence of brand image on customer satisfaction and loyalty ( $\beta = 0.398$  and  $\beta = 0.423$  respectively, both  $p < 0.001$ ) reinforces the importance of brand associations in experiential services, particularly those rooted in cultural heritage. This finding extends Keller's (1993) conceptualization of brand image by demonstrating its relevance in traditional, non-commercial cultural practices that have been adapted for tourism purposes. The strength of these relationships suggests that the perceived authenticity, quality, and cultural significance of Megibung experiences significantly influence tourist evaluations and behavioral intentions.

### *The Mediating Role of Customer Satisfaction*

The partial mediation effects of customer satisfaction on the relationships between both e-WOM and loyalty, and brand image and loyalty, provide important insights into the mechanisms through which digital communications and brand perceptions influence consumer behavior. The significant indirect effects ( $\beta = 0.206$  and  $\beta = 0.181$  respectively) support the Expectation-Confirmation Theory, suggesting that satisfaction serves as a crucial cognitive and emotional evaluation process that translates initial expectations and perceptions into loyalty behaviors.

The partial nature of the mediation indicates that both e-WOM and brand image also have direct effects on loyalty, independent of satisfaction. This finding suggests that loyalty formation in cultural tourism contexts involves both experiential satisfaction and deeper emotional or cultural connections that transcend immediate consumption experiences. For Megibung dining, this may relate to tourists' appreciation for cultural preservation, community values, or personal meaning derived from participating in traditional practices.

### *Cultural Tourism and Digital Communication*

The stronger influence of e-WOM among international tourists compared to domestic tourists ( $\beta = 0.521$  vs.  $\beta = 0.341$ ) reveals important cultural and informational dynamics in gastronomic tourism. International tourists' greater reliance on digital information sources reflects

both their physical distance from the destination and their need for cultural interpretation and guidance. This finding has significant implications for marketing strategies targeting different tourist segments and highlights the role of digital platforms in bridging cultural gaps.

Conversely, the stronger relationship between brand image and loyalty among domestic tourists suggests that local visitors place greater emphasis on authenticity and cultural fidelity in their evaluations. This pattern indicates that domestic tourists may serve as cultural gatekeepers, with their loyalty being more contingent on the maintenance of traditional values and practices within commercial offerings.

#### *Implications for Sustainable Cultural Tourism Development*

The research findings provide several insights relevant to sustainable development of cultural tourism in Bali and similar destinations. The high  $R^2$  values for both satisfaction (0.567) and loyalty (0.623) suggest that e-WOM and brand image are key drivers of tourist experiences and can be leveraged to promote sustainable tourism practices.

The emphasis on cultural authenticity within the brand image construct ( $\beta = 0.743$  for the authenticity dimension) indicates that tourists value genuine cultural experiences over commercialized adaptations. This finding supports arguments for community-based tourism development approaches that prioritize cultural preservation while providing economic benefits to local communities.

The significant role of e-WOM in shaping tourist experiences suggests that digital platforms can serve as effective tools for promoting responsible tourism behaviors and cultural education. By encouraging authentic cultural exchanges and providing accurate information about traditional practices, e-WOM can contribute to more meaningful and respectful tourist-host interactions.

#### *Practical Implications for Tourism Stakeholders*

For tourism operators and cultural practitioners offering Megibung experiences, the findings provide several actionable insights. First, the strong influence of e-WOM suggests the importance of actively managing online presence and encouraging satisfied customers to share their experiences through digital channels. This includes maintaining active social media accounts, responding to online reviews, and collaborating with travel bloggers and influencers who can authentically represent the cultural significance of Megibung dining.

Second, the emphasis on brand image, particularly cultural authenticity, indicates that commercial adaptations of traditional practices must carefully balance accessibility for tourists with preservation of cultural integrity. This may involve training programs for service providers to ensure they can effectively communicate the cultural significance of Megibung while delivering satisfactory service experiences.

Third, the different response patterns between domestic and international tourists suggest the need for differentiated marketing strategies. International tourists may benefit from more comprehensive cultural education and preparation through digital channels, while domestic tourists may respond better to messaging that emphasizes cultural preservation and community values.



### *Contributions to Gastronomic Tourism Literature*

This study contributes to the growing literature on gastronomic tourism by examining a specific traditional dining practice within a comprehensive consumer behavior framework. Unlike previous research that has focused primarily on restaurant experiences or food festivals, this study demonstrates the applicability of hospitality and tourism theories to indigenous cultural practices adapted for tourism purposes.

The integration of digital communication effects with traditional brand and satisfaction concepts provides a more comprehensive understanding of how contemporary tourists evaluate and respond to traditional cultural experiences. This holistic approach offers insights that are particularly relevant as destinations worldwide seek to balance cultural preservation with tourism development.

### **Conclusions**

Several limitations should be acknowledged in interpreting these findings. First, the cross-sectional design limits causal inferences, and longitudinal studies would provide stronger evidence for the proposed relationships. Second, the focus on Karangasem, Bali, may limit generalizability to other cultural contexts, though the theoretical framework could be tested in different cultural tourism settings.

Third, the study relied on self-reported measures, which may be subject to social desirability bias, particularly regarding cultural appreciation and satisfaction. Future research could incorporate observational methods or implicit measures to complement survey data.

Future research directions include examining the long-term effects of cultural tourism participation on both tourists and host communities, investigating the role of cultural education in enhancing tourist experiences, and exploring how digital technologies can be used to preserve and transmit cultural knowledge while supporting tourism development.

Additionally, research examining the perspectives of local communities involved in providing Megibung experiences would provide valuable insights into the sustainability and cultural appropriateness of tourism adaptations of traditional practices. This could include studies of economic impacts, cultural change, and community attitudes toward tourism development.

The rapid evolution of digital communication technologies also suggests the need for ongoing research into new forms of e-WOM and their impacts on cultural tourism. Virtual reality experiences, augmented reality cultural interpretation, and artificial intelligence-powered travel recommendations represent emerging areas that could significantly influence how tourists discover, evaluate, and engage with traditional cultural practices.

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