UNDERSTANDING TOURISTS' INTENTION IN THE FACE OF EARTHQUAKE RISKS: AN ANALYSIS OF WORD-OF-MOUTH IMPACT IN THE TURKISH TOURISM CONTEXT

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Abstract

Purpose – The objective of this research is to uncover the correlation between word-of-mouth communication, electronic word-of-mouth communication, perceived risk, and the intention to visit Turkey following an earthquake that occurred in February 2023.
Methodology/Design/Approach – Data was collected from adult participants aged 18 and above in the United States of America. After data collection, any missing patterns in the data records were addressed, resulting in a refined dataset consisting of 501 participants. The analysis was performed using SmartPLS-4 and SPSS.
Findings – According to the results, positive word-of-mouth about earthquakes does not decrease tourists' perceived risk of visiting Turkey. However, positive word-of-mouth and electronic word-of-mouth about earthquakes do increase tourists' intention to visit Turkey. Positive electronic word-of-mouth about earthquakes reduces tourists' perceived risk of visiting Turkey. Lastly, the perceived risk associated with earthquakes decreases tourists' intention to visit Turkey.
Originality of the research – In a ground-breaking research endeavour that examines the seismic events of February 2023, this study pioneers an investigation into the complex motivations of tourists who choose to visit Turkey. It unravels the intricate interplay between word-of-mouth communication, electronic word-of-mouth, perceived risk, and the inclination to visit Turkey following the earthquake.
Keywords earthquake; word-of-mouth; perceived risk; intention to visit

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INTRODUCTION

Earthquakes can have a significant and far-reaching impact on the tourism sector from multiple angles (Faisal et al., 2020). First and foremost, the infrastructure damage caused by earthquakes can greatly impede the functioning of tourist facilities in affected destinations (Yang et al., 2008). The impairment of crucial infrastructure elements such as hotels, roads, airports, and tourist attractions can pose obstacles to tourists' comfortable and safe travel (Ritchie, 2008). Moreover, security concerns that arise in earthquake-affected regions can instil anxiety and hesitation among tourists (Bhattarai, 2021).

When traveling to areas with a high risk of natural disasters, tourists may experience concerns that can have a detrimental effect on their tourism experiences (Rossello et al., 2020). This could lead to disruptions in their holiday plans, resulting in reservations being cancelled or travel being postponed (Mair et al., 2016). Consequently, tourists may lose faith in the destination and opt to avoid regions prone to natural disasters (Korstanje & Tarlow, 2013). This lack of trust can have far-reaching consequences for the tourism sector, including financial losses, reservation cancellations, and financial challenges for businesses (Ulak, 2020). Such outcomes can exacerbate economic imbalances in tourist destinations (Zhang & Cheng, 2019). Therefore, it is imperative for tourist establishments in these regions to implement effective measures to mitigate natural disaster risks and clearly communicate their crisis response strategies to inspire confidence in tourists (Chan et al., 2020). By doing so, they can cultivate trust and minimize potential negative impacts on the tourism sector (Ghimire, 2015).

Furthermore, the process of recovering from an earthquake can result in temporary and also long-term decline in the appeal of tourist destinations and their ability to attract visitors (Zhang et al., 2021). Repairing infrastructure and implementing increased security measures to address the earthquake damage typically takes a significant amount of time (Mieler & Mitrani-Reiser, 2018). During this period, the allure of the destination for tourists can significantly diminish (Rossello et al., 2020). The restoration of damaged infrastructure, the return of architectural splendour to its former glory, and the full implementation of security measures can all contribute to a decrease in tourists' interest in the region (Mendoza et al., 2021). Consequently, tourists may choose to alter their travel plans and visit destinations that are considered safer and more stable, leading to a reduction in the destination's capacity to attract tourists, which is vital for sustainable tourism (Hall & Prayag, 2020). Additionally, the uncertainties during the recovery process after an earthquake can undermine tourists' confidence in the region (Qian et al., 2021). Taking into account potential risks and deficiencies in services, tourists may opt for alternative destinations (Aznar-Crespo et al., 2020). This situation can have a detrimental impact on the long-term sustainability of the tourism sector, as tourist

destinations may gradually lose their competitive advantages (Huang et al., 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to act swiftly and effectively during the recovery process after an earthquake to maintain the attractiveness of tourist destinations and their ability to attract visitors (Hall & Prayag, 2020).

Traveling to tourist destinations with a high risk of disasters presents unique challenges and considerations for travellers (Williams & Balaž, 2015). Visiting remote or hazardous locations requires travellers to take specific precautions and make necessary preparations that differ from those typically made for popular tourist destinations. The potential occurrence of disasters in these areas raises significant concerns about the safety and well-being of travellers, which can ultimately impact travel arrangements (Saepudin & Putra, 2023). Therefore, travellers must carefully assess the associated risks and make well-informed decisions about their travel plans, while also taking appropriate measures to ensure their own safety. Understanding how travellers choose and navigate these destinations can provide valuable insights for both travellers and destination management organizations. Pahrudin et al. (2023) found that information sources such as word-of-mouth (WOM) and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) significantly influence visit intention following post-earthquake disasters. However, risk perception does not significantly impact visit intention in post-earthquake disasters. Hamouda & Yacoub (2018) suggest that the cognitive destination image is influenced by perceived risk, while the affective image of a destination is influenced by eWOM. Azhar et al. (2022) indicate that eWOM and destination image both significantly and positively influence tourists' intention to revisit a destination after the COVID-19 pandemic.

On February 6, 2023, at 4:17 am, a 7.7 magnitude earthquake centred in Kahramanmaraş, Turkey occurred, followed by a second earthquake with a magnitude of 7.6 at 1:24 pm (Ozkula et al., 2023). These seismic events resulted in a tragic loss of 53,537 lives and caused 107,213 injuries. It has now become imperative to comprehend and evaluate the factors that may lead to substantial changes in the tourism industry following such a catastrophic event. The earthquake is anticipated to have a decisive impact on tourists' travel intentions and destination preferences (Zhang et al., 2023). Therefore, the objective of this research is to delve into the correlation between word-of-mouth communication, electronic word-of-mouth communication, perceived risk, and the intention to visit Turkey after the earthquake that occurred in February 2023. Evaluating the earthquake's impact on the tourism sector is a crucial step in establishing a solid foundation for future tourist movements and destination preferences. The literature has long recognized the importance of risk perception in influencing tourist behaviour intention (Seabra et al., 2013). However, this research represents a significant advancement in understanding the relationship between risk perception, WOM, eWOM, and travel intention. The tourism sector, which is vulnerable to various crises such as safety concerns, political instability, health issues, and crime (Sharifpour & Walters, 2014; Yang et al., 2015), highlights the need to investigate these relationships. This study's approach is noteworthy as it examines both traditional WOM and eWOM as sources of information. By considering both communication channels, it provides a comprehensive understanding of their impact on visit intention, bridging the offline and online realms of consumer influence. This holistic approach sheds light on how individuals perceive and respond to recommendations in different contexts, enhancing our understanding of consumer behaviour in the digital age where information dissemination is rapid and diverse. Additionally, the study's exploration of risk perception offers valuable insights for destination marketing organizations (DMOs), especially in mitigating its impact during crises such as earthquakes in destinations like Turkey. By recognizing and addressing risk perception, DMOs can better tailor their strategies to maintain visitor confidence and engagement even in challenging circumstances.

1. BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

1.1. Word-of-Mouth (WOM) and Intention to Visit

Traditional word-of-mouth communication, which Arndt (1967) defines as "non-commercial interpersonal verbal communication related to any product, brand, or service," is often relied upon by consumers when making purchasing decisions. This is because WOM is perceived as more trustworthy than traditional media (Albarq & Al Doghan, 2020; Boonsiritomachai & Sud-On, 2020). The influence of individuals' conversations cannot be underestimated, as it significantly impacts the behaviour of others (Allard et al., 2020). Positive WOM is a result of satisfying product or service experiences, and while negative WOM has a greater impact on consumer behaviour, positive WOM behaviour occurs more frequently (Vazquez-Casielles et al., 2013). Consumers often share their positive experiences and product knowledge with those around them, and this shared information has a significant impact (Pop et al., 2022). Information received from friends, colleagues, or family is seen as more reliable than traditional advertisements on television or in magazines (Qader et al., 2022).

Some studies (Segota et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2020) suggest that WOM can be a highly effective source in destination selection under certain conditions. Ajzen (1991) explains behaviour through the theory of planned behaviour, and in the tourism industry, Soliman (2021) have incorporated the WOM variable into the theory of planned behaviour model. The impact of WOM in the decision-making stage, especially for risky decisions, is particularly important (Nilashi et al., 2022). In the tourism industry, where non-material, intangible assets such as tourism services are not evaluated before use, the influence of WOM is particularly strong. Decision-makers obtain information through WOM from their close environment, which helps mitigate potential risks that could compromise the holiday experience (Al-Adwan et al., 2020). Recommendations from friends or other travellers play a significant role in ensuring safe and enjoyable travel experiences for tourists (Filieri et al., 2015). The sharing of safety-related recommendations and experiences in the tourism industry greatly impacts tourists' decision-making processes (Zou & Yu, 2022).

The relationship between WOM and perceived risk plays a crucial role in shaping visitors' knowledge about a destination and their perception of risk (Altarawneh et al., 2018). Positive WOM can effectively reduce visitors' perception of risk, while negative WOM or insufficient information can amplify the perceived level of risk. This perceived level of risk directly impacts visitors' intention to visit the destination (Abubakar & Mavondo, 2014). A high perceived risk can lead to a decrease in visitors' travel intentions, whereas a low perceived risk can enhance their motivation to visit (Khan et al., 2019). Notably, certain risk factors like natural disasters have a significant influence on visitors' confidence in a destination, thereby negatively affecting their intention to visit (Wang, 2017). For example, positive WOM can lower visitors' perceived risk associated with a destination, thus boosting their intention to visit. The presence of natural disaster risks can profoundly impact the interplay between WOM, perceived risk, and visit intention. Positive WOM concerning a destination's handling of natural disasters may paradoxically increase visitors' perception of risk, and yet positively influence their intention to visit the destination. When examining the relationship between word-of-mouth communication, perceived risk, and the intention to visit Turkey, natural disaster risks such as earthquakes are of crucial importance. The information and experiences shared among potential visitors, particularly in regard to earthquake risks, shape perceptions and affect intentions to visit Turkey. In this context, the proposed hypotheses are as follows:

H_1: Positive word-of-mouth regarding earthquakes reduces tourists' perceived risk of visiting Turkey.

H_2: Positive word-of-mouth regarding earthquakes enhances tourists' intention to visit Turkey.

1.2. Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) and Intention to Visit

eWOM refers to the continuous and dynamic exchange of information among potential, current, or past customers regarding a product, service, brand, or business (Verma & Yadav, 2021). This exchange of information occurs online through various forms such as written texts, images, and videos (Fox & Longart, 2016; Jan & Bhat, 2021). eWOM is often referred to as "buzz marketing" or "rumour marketing" and differs from traditional WOM marketing in two key ways (Duman & Das, 2021). Firstly, it takes place online, utilizing written texts, images, and films as mediums for information exchange (Mishra & Satish, 2016). Secondly, the impact of eWOM on the perception of businesses, brands, or tourist destinations is significant, influencing purchasing decisions and intentions to visit (Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015).

Positive eWOM can enhance the reputation of businesses and tourist destinations, attracting more visitors (Gonzalez-Rodriguez et al., 2016). Conversely, negative eWOM can damage reputation and result in a loss of potential customers (Chen et al., 2022). Therefore, it is imperative for companies, destinations, and brands to establish strategies for effectively managing and positively influencing eWOM (Aprilia & Kusumawati, 2021). This can be achieved by prioritizing customer satisfaction, promoting positive experiences, and promptly and efficiently responding to customer feedback (Liu et al., 2019). Similarly, positive eWOM can shape the perception of risk among tourists considering a destination (Hamouda & Yacoub, 2018). Information shared through eWOM, especially when based on positive and favourable experiences, can foster trust among potential tourists, alleviating uncertainties and concerns when making travel decisions (Chong et al., 2018).

eWOM can greatly impact visitors' access to destination information and their perception of risk (Gonzalez-Rodriguez et al., 2022). Online reviews, social media posts, and other eWOM through digital platforms have the power to shape visitors' perception of risk associated with a destination (Sotiriadis & Van Zyl, 2013). Positive eWOM can effectively reduce visitors' perceived risk, while negative eWOM can magnify it. The information visitors obtain from online platforms can significantly influence their confidence in the destination and ultimately impact their intention to visit (Molinillo et al., 2018). Notably, prominent risk factors like the risk of natural disasters can heighten visitors' perception of risk, thus discouraging their intention to visit (Chew & Jahari, 2014). Conversely, positive eWOM can diminish visitors' perceived risk, leading to an increased intention to visit (Kim & Chang, 2020). Negative eWOM or the presence of negative information about natural disasters on online platforms can amplify visitors' perception of risk; consequently deterring their intention to visit (Pahlevan Sharif & Mura, 2019). In the context of the 2023 earthquakes in Turkey, positive eWOM related to these events can impact tourists' intentions to visit the country. Positive eWOM can contribute to a positive perception of safety in Turkey by highlighting its safety and reliability. In light of these considerations, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H_3: Positive electronic word-of-mouth regarding earthquakes reduces tourists' perceived risk of visiting Turkey.

H_4: Positive electronic word-of-mouth regarding earthquakes enhances tourists' intention to visit Turkey.

1.3. Perceived Risk and Intention to Visit

Perceived risk is a crucial factor that influences travellers' decision-making process, and this topic has been emphasized in a series of significant research studies (Carvalho, 2022; Sadiq et al., 2022). Perceived risk refers to the likelihood of an event occurring, especially when the danger is beyond an individual's control and influence (Siegrist & Arvai, 2020). It has a profound impact on tourists' travel decisions and is a prominent theme in the tourism literature (Wang & Karl, 2021). As Kim et al. (2008) stated, the negative consequences associated with perceived risk create obstacles that impede consumers' decision-making processes. These barriers imply that potential dangers and uncertainties complicate the decision-making process, introducing

concerns regarding the travel experience. Furthermore, according to Han's study (2005), perceived risk influences the choice of tourist destinations. While tourists may prefer safe and low-risk destinations, concerns about unsafe places can impact their preferences and alter travel plans.

George (2003) has demonstrated that the presence of unsafe destinations can have a negative impact on tourists' intentions to revisit and recommend. The perception of risk can influence tourists' decision not to return to a destination or recommend it to others, due to negative experiences and concerns about safety. This factor is crucial for the long-term success and sustainability of tourist destinations. Hsieh et al. (2016) emphasize the significant correlation between increased perceived risk and decreased travel intentions among tourists. This highlights the need for the tourism industry to develop strategies aimed at reducing perceived risks and ensuring secure travel experiences. Understanding and managing perceived risk can enable tourists to enjoy safe, satisfying, and repeatable travel experiences.

Perceived risk is often analysed by categorizing it into different dimensions. Dolnicar (2005) classified the risks perceived by travellers into property, planning, health, environmental, and political risks. These categories encompass various factors that influence travellers' experiences and can help us better understand the factors that shape their travel decisions. Environmental risk includes events such as natural disasters, landslides, and similar occurrences, which can have an impact on tourists' travel experiences. According to Dolnicar (2005), individual risks such as earthquakes, floods, severe storms, and droughts not only affect tourists' perceptions but also pose specific challenges during their travels (Smith, 2013). For example, a study conducted in Taiwan in 1999 revealed that tourism did not recover for a year after an earthquake (Huang & Min, 2002). Similarly, Mazzocchi &Montini (2001) found evidence of a significant decline in tourist traffic following a major earthquake in Italy. These instances highlight the significant impact that environmental risks can have on travel decisions. Ghimire's (2016) research in Nepal emphasizes that no place is safe from crises like earthquakes, wars, floods, and other natural and societal disasters. Furthermore, he argues that visitor concerns in some locations arise from a lack of swift evacuation options, underscoring the importance of crisis management and secure evacuation plans for tourist destinations (Ghimire, H. L. (2015).

The risk of natural disasters holds significant importance for the tourism industry (Rossello et al., 2020). The presence or history of such calamities in a destination can generate serious apprehensions and perceived risks among tourists (Cakar, 2021). This scenario has the potential to erode the confidence of visitors in the destination, thereby adversely affecting their intention to visit (Harrington, 2021). For instance, if a region experiences frequent earthquakes (Hall & Prayag, 2020) or if hurricanes (Möller, 2024) are prevalent in a tropical area, potential tourists may reconsider their travel plans due to the potential hazards posed by these natural disasters. Furthermore, the enduring aftermath of significant previous natural disasters can erode visitors' confidence and sway their intention to visit (Nair & Pratt, 2024). In light of these considerations, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

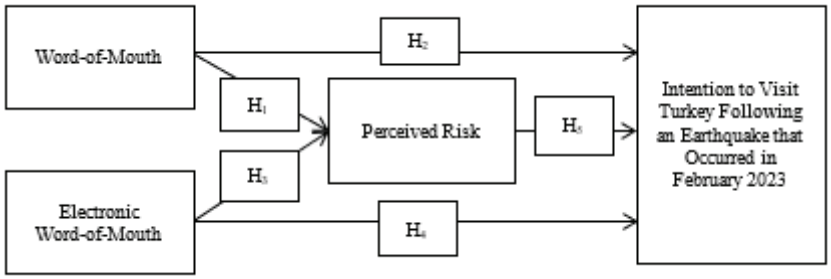
H_5: The perceived risk associated with earthquakes reduces tourists' intention to visit Turkey.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Model

The conceptual model of the study is presented in Figure 1. The objective of this research is to uncover the correlation between word-of-mouth communication, electronic word-of-mouth communication, perceived risk, and the intention to visit Turkey following an earthquake that occurred in February 2023. The relationships between the variables are illustrated in the conceptual model.

Figure 1: **Conceptual Research Model**



2.2. Instruments and Data Collection

The data in this study was collected using the instruments specified in Table 1. A five-step Likert-type scale was employed for the questions, ranging from 1 (indicating "Strongly Disagree") to 5 (indicating "Strongly Agree"). The constructs and items can be found in the Appendix.

Table 1: **Instrument Development**

Instrument	Number of Statements	Adapted From
Word-of-Mouth	4	Xu et al. (2020)
Electronic Word-of-Mouth	7	Abubakar (2016); Abubakar et al (2017)
Perceived Risk	3	Roehl & Fesenmaier (1992)
Intention to Visit	3	Phillips & Jang (2007)

The sampling method employed in this study is convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique whereby participants are selected based on their ease of accessibility and availability (Obilor, 2023). Rather than utilizing random selection, researchers choose individuals who are readily accessible or easy to reach (Pandey & Pandey, 2021). Data was collected from adult participants aged 18 and above in the United States of America, utilizing Amazon MTurk as the data collection platform. The survey questionnaire was conducted online, using Qualtrics software. To ensure data adequacy, a sample size of 384 participants was intentionally chosen, following the recommendations of Hair et al. (2009). Throughout the data collection process, great care was taken to maintain accuracy and consistency. The data collection period was limited to one week in January 2024, after which the predetermined sample size was reached. After data collection, any missing patterns in the data records were addressed, resulting in a refined dataset consisting of 501 participants. In study, we did not employ any specific filter questions, such as asking participants if they had ever visited Turkey. Out of the total number of participants, 46.1% are female (231 participants), while 53.9% are male (270 participants). In terms of age distribution, 24.8% of participants fall within the "30 years and below" age group, 34.5% fall within the "31-34" age group, and 40.7% fall within the "39 years and above" age group. The majority of participants (87%) are married. Regarding education, 1.4% of participants attended primary school, 5% completed high school, 72.6% held an associate's/bachelor's degree, and 21% held a postgraduate degree.

The participants' demographic characteristics were analysed using SPSS through frequency analysis. To determine the values of mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis for the scale items, SPSS was utilized. SmartPLS was used to calculate factor loadings, VIF values, Cronbach's Alpha values, and Composite Reliability values of the scales. Additionally, SmartPLS was employed to conduct Fornell-Larcker analysis in order to examine correlations among constructs. Discriminant validity was assessed using SmartPLS and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). Finally, to test the research hypotheses, structural equation analysis was carried out using SmartPLS.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Validity and Reliability of Scales

To evaluate the appropriateness of the scales for factor analysis, the skewness and kurtosis values of all statements were examined. The descriptive findings of the scales are presented in Table 2. Skewness values were utilized to assess the normal distribution of the data in this study, and it is recommended by Tabachnick & Fidell (2007) that each variable's skewness should be less than 3. The obtained values indicate that the data are indeed normally distributed.

Table 2: **Descriptive Results of Scale Items**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Word-of-Mouth (WOM)				
WOM1	3.93	0.864	-0.813	0.950
WOM2	3.99	0.924	-0.797	0.378
WOM3	3.90	0.946	-0.619	-0.037
WOM4	3.93	0.926	-0.900	0.917
eWord-of-Mouth (eWOM)				
EWOM1	3.81	0.994	-0.793	0.401
EWOM2	3.93	1.014	-0.940	0.521
EWOM3	3.87	1.069	-0.922	0.394

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
EWOM4	3.94	0.963	-.0.896	0.632
EWOM5	3.89	1.001	-0.854	0.397
EWOM6	3.95	0.957	-0.897	0.740
EWOM7	3.92	0.972	-0.972	0.915
Perceived Risk (PR)				
PR1	2.18	1.036	0.846	0.383
PR2	2.27	1.073	0.688	-0.030
PR3	2.26	1.094	0.837	0.157
Intention to Visit (IV)				
IV1	3.84	0.972	-0.716	0.197
IV2	3.90	0.904	-0.835	0.825
IV3	3.90	0.998	-0.923	0.629

To assess the validity and reliability of the scales, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted. In addition, Cronbach's Alpha (α) values, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR) were calculated to evaluate the internal consistency and reliability of the identified dimensions. The results, displayed in Table 3, were evaluated based on four criteria: (1) statistical significance of all scale items with loadings greater than 0.50 on their respective scales, (2) AVE exceeding 0.50, (3) α value exceeding 0.60, and (4) CR (rho_a and rho_c) greater than 0.70, as specified by Fornell & Larcker (1981) and Hair et al. (2009).

Table 3: **Exploratory Factor Analysis of Scales**

	Factor Loading	VIF	α	CR (rho_a)	CR (rho_c)	AVE
Factor1: Word-of-Mouth (WOM)			**0.69**	**0.715**	**0.810**	**0.519**
WOM1	0.722	1.376				
WOM2	0.575	1.146				
WOM3	0.768	1.382				
WOM4	0.795	1.388				
Factor2: eWord-of-Mouth (eWOM)			**0.89**	**0.881**	**0.905**	**0.578**
EWOM1	0.785	1.955				
EWOM2	0.757	1.805				
EWOM3	0.775	2.077				
EWOM4	0.697	1.641				
EWOM5	0.784	1.961				
EWOM6	0.736	1.783				
EWOM7	0.781	2.167				
Factor3: Perceived Risk (PR)			**0.80**	**0.802**	**0.883**	**0.715**
PR1	0.838	1.581				
PR2	0.847	1.817				
PR3	0.851	1.821				
Factor4: Intention to Visit (IV)			**0.79**	**0.793**	**0.878**	**0.707**
IV1	0.862	1.820				
IV2	0.827	1.588				
IV3	0.832	1.669				

The findings show that the dimensions exhibit reliability and internal consistency according to established criteria (Field, 2009). All items in the scales were included in the analysis because their loadings exceeded the 0.50 threshold. The constructs demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency reliability, with both α and CR values exceeding 0.70. Furthermore, all latent variables had AVE values higher than 0.50 (Hair et al., 2009).

Several methodologies have been devised to evaluate discriminant validity, and the Fornell-Larcker approach has emerged as the favoured technique in applied research (Afthanorhan et al., 2021). According to Fornell & Larcker's criteria (1981), the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for the constructs under investigation should surpass the correlations between them. Table 4 illustrates that the observed values satisfy this criterion.

Table 4: **Correlations among Constructs (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)**

	AVE	eWOM	PR	IV	WOM
eWord-of-Mouth (eWOM)	0.578	0.760			
Perceived Risk (PR)	0.715	0.479	0.845		
Intention to Visit (IV)	0.707	0.769	0.482	0.841	
Word-of-Mouth (WOM)	0.519	0.773	0.372	0.728	0.720

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) method (Hair et al., 2017). This method calculates the average of heterotrait-heteromethod correlations in relation to the average of monotrait-heteromethod correlations. The HTMT assessment results are displayed in Table 5, indicating a satisfactory level of discriminant validity. The highest recorded HTMT value was 0.870, which falls below the established threshold of 0.90 (Gold et al., 2001).

Table 5: **Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations**

	eWOM	PR	IV	WOM
eWord-of-Mouth (eWOM)				
Perceived Risk (PR)	0.567			
Intention to Visit (IV)	0.819	0.605		
Word-of-Mouth (WOM)	0.882	0.494	0.870	

3.2. Results of Structural Equation Model

The values of the direct effects evaluation were examined to assess the specific interactions between variables in the research model. The findings of this analysis are presented in Table 6. The results provide support for four out of the five hypotheses, as indicated by their t-values surpassing the recommended threshold of 1.96 at a significance level of 5% (Hair et al., 2017).

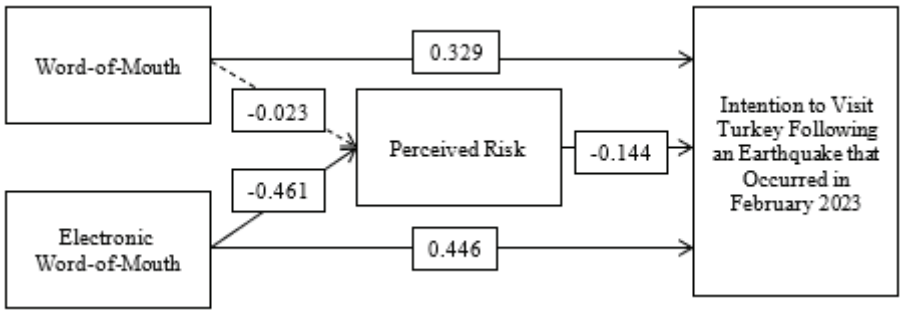
Table 6: **Findings of Direct Effects Evaluation**

		Path Coefficients	t-value	P value	Hypothesis
H1	WOM -> PR	-0.023	0.258	0.797	Rejected
H2	WOM -> IV	0.329	4.615	0.000	Supported
H3	eWOM -> PR	-0.461	5.422	0.000	Supported
H4	eWOM -> IV	0.446	5.818	0.000	Supported
H5	PR -> IV	-0.144	3.052	0.002	Supported

Note: WOM: Word-of-Mouth, eWOM: Electronic Word-of-Mouth, PR: Perceived Risk, IV: Intention to Visit

According to the results, positive word-of-mouth about earthquakes does not decrease tourists' perceived risk of visiting Turkey, thus hypothesis 1 is not supported. However, positive word-of-mouth and electronic word-of-mouth about earthquakes do increase tourists' intention to visit Turkey. Additionally, positive electronic word-of-mouth about earthquakes reduces tourists' perceived risk of visiting Turkey. Lastly, the perceived risk associated with earthquakes decreases tourists' intention to visit Turkey. The path coefficients for these relationships are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: **Structural Equation Model (Path Coefficients)**



Note: --------> : No significant relationship

4. DISCUSSION

Understanding how tourists perceive and respond to potential risks is crucial in the constantly evolving tourism industry (Williams & Balaz, 2015). This study focuses on the relationship between word-of-mouth (WOM), perceived risk, and tourists' intentions to visit Turkey, specifically in relation to earthquakes. The findings challenge common assumptions about the impact of positive WOM on risk perception and provide insights into the complex factors that shape tourists' decision-making process (Beiger & Laesser, 2004). Contrary to our initial hypothesis, the study reveals that positive word-of-mouth about earthquakes does not decrease tourists' perceived risk of visiting Turkey. This unexpected discovery calls for a reassessment of the traditional belief that positive stories alone can alleviate concerns related to seismic activity. To fully comprehend the intricate nature of risk perception, further research is necessary to uncover the underlying factors that influence tourists' judgments when evaluating destination safety. In their study on the impact of earthquakes on tourists' intention to visit Indonesia, Pahrudin et al. (2023) discovered that positive word-of-mouth reduces the perceived risk for tourists visiting the Indonesia. There are several potential reasons for this finding. Firstly, the results of studies in the literature may have been obtained under varying conditions. For instance, research conducted in different geographical regions or cultural contexts may yield different outcomes. While this particular study focused solely on the intention of US citizens to visit Turkey following an earthquake, Pahrudin et al. (2023) did not impose any country restrictions when collecting data and utilized surveys on social media platforms like Facebook. Secondly, differences in results can also be influenced by changing times and conditions. While studies in the literature may have been conducted at specific times and under certain conditions, this study was conducted immediately after two major earthquakes in Turkey. Rindrasih (2018) concluded that past disasters did not strongly impact tourists' decision to visit Indonesia. Given that Indonesia experiences frequent earthquakes as compared to Turkey where severe earthquakes are rare, it can be assumed that tourists perceive earthquakes differently in these two destinations.

In this study, it has been determined that positive eWOM reduces tourists' perception of risk. This finding is also supported by the research conducted by Hussain et al. (2017). In their study, Hussain et al. (2017) found that customers perceive eWOM as a reliable source and that it diminishes their risk perception during times of crisis. Avraham (2015), in a study investigating the impact of the Arab Spring on tourists, concluded that eWOM could enhance tourists' perception of risk, which in turn affects their intention to visit destinations. Similarly, Assaker & O'Connor (2021) stated in their study that eWOM can bolster the image of a destination during situations of terrorism and political crisis, thereby reducing tourists' perceived risk. These findings demonstrate that positive eWOM has the ability to influence tourists' perception of risk and even increase their intention to visit destinations during times of crisis.

A significant finding demonstrates that positive WOM, as well as eWOM, plays a significant role in increasing tourists' intentions to visit Turkey. This highlights a dynamic interaction between traditional and digital channels, where personal recommendations and online discussions combine to create a more compelling narrative for potential visitors (Oliveira & Panyik, 2015). The literature supports the idea that both WOM and eWOM have an impact on tourists' intention to visit a destination, as well as the influence of destination image on this intention (Doosti et al., 2016; Jalilvand et al., 2012). In a similar vein, Assaker & O'Connor (2021) concluded, based on their study investigating the impact of political and terrorism risks in Lebanon on destination image and tourists' intention to visit Lebanon, that positive eWOM has a positive influence on the intention to visit Lebanon. Additionally, some studies in the literature (Assaker & O'Connor, 2021; Avraham, 2015) have indicated that positive eWOM is an important tool for restoring the image of destinations, particularly in the aftermath of disasters like natural disasters, as it directly affects tourists' intention to visit destinations. Destination marketers can effectively promote tourism in areas vulnerable to natural disasters by harnessing this combined influence (Mason et al., 2019). The study emphasizes the unique impact of positive eWOM, showcasing its ability to mitigate tourists' perceived risk of earthquakes in Turkey. This underscores the growing significance of online platforms in shaping travellers' perceptions and suggests that positive eWOM can offer reassurance in the face of concerns about seismic events.

Interestingly, despite the decrease in perceived risk due to positive eWOM, the study uncovers a counterintuitive relationship - the perceived risk associated with earthquakes actually diminishes tourists' intentions to visit Turkey. This intriguing finding warrants further investigation into the complex factors that shape tourists' decision-making processes. Understanding the delicate balance between risk perception and the allure of a destination is vital for the development of effective tourism strategies. The study has revealed that the perceived risk associated with earthquakes has a negative impact on tourists' intention to visit Turkey. Similarly, Chew & Jahari (2014) determined in their study that perceived risk reduces tourists' intention to revisit Japan following a period of post-disaster. Perceived natural risk has a negative impact on tourists' perception of the destination image (Wang, 2017). Thus, tourists may consider selecting alternative destinations that are perceived as safer, such as Greece and Spain, in order to mitigate the risks associated with earthquakes, rather than choosing destinations like Turkey. Consequently, this could lead to a decline in the intention to visit Turkey due to the perceived earthquake risk.

CONCLUSION

This research study contributes significantly to the scientific literature by investigating the influence of WOM and eWOM on the intention to visit Turkey, particularly in relation to perceived risk related to earthquakes. The study brings a new perspective to the research on the impact of WOM and eWOM on tourists' travel intentions, emphasizing the importance of perceived risk in these effects. This study investigates the impact of WOM and eWOM on tourists' perceptions and intentions to visit Turkey, particularly in the context of earthquakes. The findings suggest that positive WOM does not decrease tourists' perceived risk but does increase their intention to visit Turkey. Moreover, positive eWOM specifically enhances tourists' intention to visit Turkey while reducing their perceived risk associated with earthquakes. This research underscores the significant role of perceived risk in shaping tourists' intentions to visit Turkey, especially after natural disasters like earthquakes. Additionally, it highlights that perceived risk strongly influences the perception of destination image, which in turn has a negative impact on tourists' travel intentions. Destination managers are advised to address risk perception to improve destination image and travel intentions. Strategies such as creating transformative advertisements to evoke positive emotions towards the tourism destination could be effective in reducing risk perception and encouraging willingness to travel, as demonstrated in previous research (Brodien Hapairai et al., 2018).

Traditionally, positive WOM has been regarded as a powerful tool for mitigating perceived risks associated with tourist destinations (Tham et al., 2013). However, this study challenges this assumption and suggests that positive WOM alone may not be sufficient in decreasing tourists' perceived risk in the face of natural disasters. As a result, existing theoretical frameworks need to be reassessed, prompting researchers to delve into the nuanced factors that influence risk perception in different contexts. The positive impact of eWOM in reducing tourists' perceived risk introduces a new dimension to our theoretical understanding of risk communication. Digital platforms, previously seen as channels for information dissemination, now emerge as active agents that shape risk perceptions. Therefore, theoretical models should incorporate the specific mechanisms through which online discourse contributes to risk mitigation, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the role of digital communication in the context of tourism. Incorporating the insights from this study into existing theories of tourism resilience is pivotal. To comprehend how destinations, especially those susceptible to natural disasters, can overcome negative perceptions, it is crucial to have a nuanced understanding of the factors that influence tourists' intentions. Theoretical frameworks on tourism resilience should consider the role of both traditional and electronic WOM as critical elements in shaping destination image and facilitating recovery.

Given that positive WOM alone does not significantly reduce the perceived risks associated with earthquakes; destination managers should focus on developing comprehensive communication strategies. These strategies should not only include personal recommendations but also utilize electronic platforms to disseminate positive narratives about safety measures, preparedness, and effective risk management practices. Recognizing the combined impact of positive WOM and eWOM on tourists' intentions, destination marketers should embrace integrated communication campaigns. Destination managers should invest in and actively manage their online presence, engaging with tourists through social media, travel forums, and review platforms. By fostering positive electronic discourse, destinations can proactively shape their image, alleviate concerns, and build trust among potential visitors. Incorporating the findings from this study into tourism resilience plans is crucial for regions susceptible to natural disasters. Destination managers should develop adaptable strategies that leverage positive WOM to enhance resilience. Establishing partnerships with travel influencers, local businesses, and government agencies can create a unified narrative that promotes sustainable tourism practices, ensuring the long-term viability of the destination.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the sample size is constrained to the United States, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. To ensure a broader scope, it is recommended to carry out studies in diverse geographical locations. Additionally, relying solely on self-reported data in this research introduces the potential for biases and inaccuracies. Future studies could further explore the influence on customer profiles within different geographic regions or cultural contexts. For future research, it is essential to investigate the temporal aspects of perceived risk, cultural variations in WOM influence, and the influence of emerging technologies on tourist decision-making. Furthermore, evaluating the long-term effectiveness of risk mitigation strategies and comprehending the role of social media influencers can significantly enhance our understanding of tourist behaviour in destinations prone to seismic activities. In study, we did not include a specific filter question asking participants about their previous visits to Turkey. This can be seen as a limitation of the study. In future research, it would be beneficial to include specific filter questions to obtain more information about the participants or to expand the sample groups to include different demographic categories. Furthermore, conducting comparative analyses between individuals who have visited a specific tourist destination and those who have not could be accomplished by collecting data from both groups.

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APPENDIX. CONSTRUCTS AND MEASUREMENT ITEMS

Constructs and items:

(1) Word-of-Mouth

- When I want to travel to Turkey's tourist destinations, I will feel safe because I follow the recommendations offered by friends or fellow travellers.
- When I want to visit the Turkey tourist destinations in the post-earthquake disaster of 2023, I will seek guidance and recommendations from friends or fellow tourists.
- Turkey is safe for travellers in the post-earthquake disaster of 2023.
- I decided to advise my friends or relatives to visit Turkey tourist destinations post-earthquake disaster of 2023, because safe from the disaster.

(2) Electronic Word-of-Mouth

- I might visit a destination in Turkey in the post-earthquake disaster of 2023 because my friends uploaded Turkey tourist destination on Instagram.
- I might visit a destination in Turkey in the post-earthquake disaster of 2023 because my friends uploaded Turkey tourist destinations on Facebook.
- I plan to visit a destination in Turkey in the post-earthquake disaster of 2023 after watching Turkey tourist destinations on YouTube.
- I often read online travel reviews of tourist destinations to make a good impression on myself and others.
- I often read online travel reviews to convince myself of the right choice for Turkey tourist destinations post-earthquake disaster of 2023.
- I often collect information from tourist's online reviews before traveling to Turkey tourist destinations post-earthquake disaster of 2023.
- When I travel to Turkey tourist destinations, online travel reviews make me confident to travel to Turkey tourist destinations in post-earthquake disasters of 2023.

(3) Risk Perception

- Your friends and social environment will worry about your safety when traveling in Turkey post-earthquake disaster of 2023.
- Turkey tourist destinations are the high risk for tourists.
- Your friends and social environment see or assume that Turkey tourist destinations are a dangerous place to visit.

(4) Visit Intention

- I want to visit Turkey tourist destinations rather than others.
- I predict that I plan to visit Turkey tourist destinations in the future post-earthquake disaster of 2023.
- I will visit Turkey tourist destinations in the future post-earthquake disaster of 2023.