



## From Click to Visit: The Role of eWOM in the Choice of Spa Tourism Destinations under Information Acceptance Models

*Del clic a la visita: el papel del boca-oído electrónico en la elección de destinos turísticos termales según los Modelos de Aceptación de la Información*

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### ABSTRACT

This study analyzes how tourists evaluate, accept, and use electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) when choosing spa destinations, focusing on a wellness context where credibility, trust, and experiential relevance strongly shape decision-making. Drawing on an adaptation of the Information Acceptance Model (IACM), the research proposes and empirically tests a theoretical framework that integrates seven key constructs. Data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire completed by 302 visitors to spas and hot springs in the province of Ourense (Galicia, Spain), and the model was assessed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM).

The findings reveal that Source Credibility, Information Credibility, and Needs of Information are the primary antecedents of perceived Information Usefulness. In turn, usefulness significantly predicts information acceptance and mediates the impact of credibility-related variables on visit intention. Several relationships incorporated into the adapted model are supported, highlighting the central role of trust and relevance in wellness tourism decision processes. Conversely, the limited direct influence of Information Quality on usefulness and intention suggests that formal message attributes are less decisive than authenticity and experiential resonance in this context.

This study advances the application of information acceptance theories to experiential tourism by demonstrating the explanatory power of the IACM in wellness settings. It also provides actionable insights for destination managers on designing credible, need-oriented digital content capable of enhancing eWOM effectiveness and strengthening visitors' intention to choose spa destinations.

**Keywords:** Electronic Word-of-Mouth; Information Acceptance Model; Hot Springs; Spa; Wellness Tourism.

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**R E S U M E N**

Este estudio analiza cómo los turistas evalúan, aceptan y utilizan el boca-oído electrónico (eWOM) a la hora de elegir destinos termales, centrándose en un contexto de bienestar en el que la credibilidad, la confianza y la relevancia de la experiencia influyen considerablemente en la toma de decisiones. Basándose en una adaptación del Modelo de Aceptación de la Información (IACM), la investigación comprueba empíricamente un marco teórico que integra siete constructos clave. Los datos se recopilaron mediante un cuestionario autoadministrado a 302 visitantes de balnearios de la provincia de Ourense (Galicia, España), y el modelo se evaluó utilizando el modelo de ecuaciones estructurales (PLS-SEM).

Los resultados revelan que la credibilidad de la fuente, la credibilidad de la información y las necesidades de información son los principales antecedentes de la utilidad de la información. A su vez, la utilidad predice significativamente la aceptación de la información y media el impacto de las variables relacionadas con la credibilidad en la intención de visita. Se confirman varias relaciones del modelo adaptado, destacando el papel de la confianza y la relevancia en los procesos de decisión del turismo de bienestar. Por el contrario, la limitada influencia directa de la calidad de la información sobre la utilidad y la intención sugiere que los atributos formales del mensaje son menos decisivos que la autenticidad en este contexto.

Este estudio mejora la aplicación de las teorías de aceptación de la información al turismo experiencial al demostrar el poder explicativo del IACM en entornos de bienestar. También proporciona información útil para los gestores de destinos sobre el diseño de contenidos digitales creíbles, capaces de mejorar la eficacia del eWOM y reforzar la intención de los visitantes de elegir destinos termales.

*Palabras clave:* Comunicación Boca-oído electrónica; Modelo de Aceptación de la Información; Turismo termal; Balnearios; Bienestar.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Wellness and spa tourism has become a strategic segment within contemporary tourism, driven by growing concerns about physical and mental health, emotional balance, and sustainable lifestyles (Smith & Puczkó, 2014; Pande & Sengupta, 2025). Beyond its economic relevance, this form of tourism is characterized by highly experiential, intangible, and emotionally laden services, which make travelers particularly dependent on external information sources when evaluating destinations (Dillette *et al.*, 2021). As a result, understanding how tourists process, assess, and adopt online information has become a central issue for both researchers and destination managers seeking to influence demand formation and destination choice in wellness-oriented markets (Araujo-Vila *et al.*, 2021).

In digital environments, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and user-generated content (UGC) play a decisive role in shaping tourists' expectations, perceived value, and behavioral intentions, particularly in contexts where service quality cannot be easily evaluated prior to consumption (Filieri & McLeay, 2014; Litvin *et al.*, 2008; George & Ramos, 2024; Zain *et al.*, 2024). While extensive research has examined the effects of eWOM in general tourism and hospitality settings, significantly less attention has been devoted to wellness and spa tourism, despite its distinctive characteristics related to trust, emotional well-being, and experiential consumption (Asyraff *et al.*, 2024). This lack of context-specific evidence limits both theoretical understanding and managerial decision-making in destinations where credibility, perceived authenticity, and therapeutic value are core attributes (Tariya *et al.*, 2023).

Moreover, although persuasion and information acceptance frameworks have been widely applied to online consumer behavior, their use in wellness tourism remains fragmented (Zain *et al.*, 2024). Existing studies often focus either on general information acceptance mechanisms or on technology acceptance and usage intentions, without fully accounting for how credibility cues and information usefulness interact to shape behavioral intentions in experiential tourism contexts (Berné *et al.*, 2020; Berné *et al.*, 2023; Gilabert & Berné, 2024). In particular, the Information Acceptance Model (IACM) offers a theoretically robust yet underutilized framework for explaining how tourists cognitively evaluate and internalize eWOM, but its application to spa tourism remains largely unexplored (Cheung *et al.*, 2008; Sussman & Siegal, 2003).

To address this gap, this study adapts and empirically tests the IACM in the context of spa and hot springs tourism, extending the model in three keyways. First, it incorporates context-specific antecedents related to information credibility and information needs, reflecting the importance of trust and experiential relevance in wellness decision-making (Dillette *et al.*, 2021). Second, it extends the outcome structure of the model beyond information acceptance to include visit intention, enabling the examination of both cognitive and behavioral effects of eWOM (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Third, it validates the adapted model using survey data from spa and hot springs visitors and partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), providing robust empirical evidence on the mechanisms through which online information influences destination choice in wellness tourism.

By doing so, this study contributes theoretically by demonstrating the adaptability and explanatory power of the IACM in experiential and well-being-oriented tourism contexts, conceptually clarifying the role of credibility and usefulness in eWOM processing, and empirically linking information acceptance to visit intention (Cheung *et al.*, 2008; Erkan & Evans, 2016). From a managerial perspective, the findings offer actionable insights for destination managers and spa operators on how to design, curate, and manage online content strategies that enhance trust, perceived value, and consumer engagement in wellness tourism markets.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Spa, Hot Springs and Wellness Tourism

Wellness tourism, encompassing spa and hot springs experiences, has grown due to increasing consumer interest in holistic well-being, integrating physical, mental, and emotional health (Dillette *et al.*, 2021). Hot springs provide unique therapeutic benefits, including pain relief, improved circulation, and stress reduction (Araujo-Vila *et al.*, 2021; Dini & Pencarelli, 2022).

Previous studies highlight not only the health-oriented aspects but also socio-economic benefits, such as rural development and seasonality mitigation (Voigt & Laing, 2014). Nevertheless, much of the literature remains descriptive, focusing on benefits or usage patterns, without deeply examining how wellness tourism interacts with digital information flows or consumer decision-making processes. This gap signals the need to analyze how spa tourism experiences are shaped by online information, particularly eWOM.

### 2.2. User-Generated Content, eWOM, and Traditional Media

User-generated content (UGC) and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) are pivotal in shaping perceptions of tourist destinations, especially in sectors with experiential and subjective outcomes like wellness (Zain *et al.*, 2024). Unlike traditional marketing, eWOM conveys authenticity and peer validation, influencing both cognitive (e.g., service quality) and affective (e.g., emotions evoked) destination images (Gaffar *et al.*, 2022; Garay, 2019).

Research in hotel management has shown that eWOM characteristics significantly influence managerial decision-making and customer behaviour. In particular, Berné *et al.* (2020) demonstrate that eWOM attributes act as contextual variables that shape decision motives and organisational outcomes in hotels, highlighting credibility and content relevance as key evaluative dimensions. Similarly, Berné *et al.* (2023) confirm that credible, structured and strategically managed eWOM plays a central role in how hotel managers implement service improvements and how consumers form behavioural responses. Furthermore, Gilabert & Berné (2024) provide evidence that perceived usefulness and eWOM quality strongly condition managerial attitudes and subsequent adoption behaviours within the hotel ecosystem.

While prior studies confirm the impact of eWOM, they often treat UGC as a generic influence, without analyzing the interplay between source credibility, content quality, and user-specific in-

formation needs. Critically, there is limited examination of how these factors converge to influence decision-making in wellness tourism, leaving a theoretical gap in understanding the mechanisms through which eWOM shapes behavior.

### 2.3. Information Acceptance Model and their application to eWOM in Spa Tourism

The Information Acceptance Model (IACM), derived from the Information Adoption Model (IAM) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), provides a framework to understand how individuals evaluate online information and incorporate it into decision-making (Erkan & Evans, 2016). It emphasizes the combined effect of message-related factors, such as Information Quality, and source-related factors, such as Credibility, on Information Usefulness and subsequent information acceptance (Cheung *et al.*, 2008; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). The model has been widely applied in technology and general online information research, and more recently in tourism, particularly in contexts where trust and perceived usefulness are central to consumer decisions.

However, the use of IACM in tourism research has several limitations. First, prior applications often overlook the specific experiential and emotional characteristics of tourism services, particularly wellness and spa tourism, where experiences are intangible, highly subjective, and linked to personal well-being. Second, the model has rarely accounted for information needs, the active motivation of users to search for specific, relevant information, which is crucial in health-oriented tourism decisions. Third, while IACM predicts information acceptance effectively, it has not consistently integrated behavioral outcomes, such as the intention to visit a destination, which limits its ability to explain the full decision-making process. Finally, most studies employing IACM tend to treat its constructs in isolation, without examining how information quality, credibility, and user needs interact in a holistic framework to influence both cognition and behavior.

The present study addresses these limitations through a deliberate adaptation of the IACM to spa and wellness tourism, capturing the importance of trust, authenticity, and relevance in shaping users' perceptions of eWOM content. Furthermore, the framework explicitly links these constructs to visit intention, providing a behavioral dimension that connects online information acceptance to real-world decision-making. Finally, contextualizing the model to spa and hot springs tourism allows for a more nuanced understanding of the role of experiential, emotional, and health-related cues in influencing both the perceived usefulness of information and its acceptance. This adaptation thus extends the theoretical applicability of IACM, enabling a richer, context-sensitive examination of how eWOM affects tourist behavior and contributes to theory by integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral components in a single framework.

## 3. HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

In a digital environment where tourism decisions are increasingly influenced by other users' shared experiences, understand-

ing the factors that determine the acceptance of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is essential for anticipating tourist behavior. In the specific case of spa tourism, the search for and evaluation of information is even more critical due to the health, wellness, and personal care elements associated with these destinations. This work analyzes how classic variables from the IACM model (Information Credibility, Information Quality, Needs of Information, Information Usefulness, and Information Acceptance), interact within the eWOM framework to influence the intention and decision to visit spa and hot springs destinations. Finally, the final theoretical model is presented (Figure 1).

Source Credibility refers to the perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and impartiality of the information provider, whether peers, wellness influencers, or digital platforms. In wellness tourism, credibility is particularly critical because the evaluation of intangible health benefits depends on trust. Research shows that credible sources enhance users' perceptions of information usefulness, encourage acceptance of content, and ultimately increase the intention to visit the destination (Fileri & McLeay, 2014; Goyal & Taneja, 2023; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

*Hypothesis 1: Source Credibility has a positive relationship with Information Usefulness about spa tourism destinations.*

*Hypothesis 2: Source Credibility has a positive relationship with the acceptance of shared information about spa destinations.*

*Hypothesis 3: Source Credibility has a positive relationship with the intention to visit spa destinations.*

Information Quality includes clarity, completeness, accuracy, organization, and timeliness of the content. In wellness tourism, high-quality information reduces uncertainty, enhances trust, and increases users' confidence in making decisions about health-oriented experiences. Empirical studies highlight that detailed and well-structured content increases perceived usefulness and acceptance, thereby positively influencing visit intention (Cheung *et al.*, 2008; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2023; Wang & Yan, 2022).

*Hypothesis 4: Information Quality about spa and hot springs destinations increases the perceived usefulness of that information.*

*Hypothesis 5: Information Quality about spa and hot springs destinations increases its acceptance by the user.*

*Hypothesis 6: Information Quality about spa and hot springs destinations increases the user's intention to visit them.*

Information Credibility focuses on the truthfulness, consistency, and reliability of the content itself. In wellness tourism, credible content, such as verifiable facts, authentic testimonials, or scientifically backed claims, enhances perceived usefulness, promotes acceptance, and reinforces visit intentions (Erkan & Evans, 2016; González Rodríguez *et al.*, 2022).

*Hypothesis 7: Information Credibility about spa and hot springs destinations increases its perceived usefulness.*

*Hypothesis 8: Information Credibility about spa and hot springs destinations has a positive and direct effect on user acceptance.*

*Hypothesis 9: Information Credibility about spa and hot springs destinations positively influences its visit intention.*

Needs of Information reflect users' motivation to seek specific knowledge, particularly relevant in spa tourism for evaluating therapeutic benefits, safety, or facilities. Higher information needs lead to more careful evaluation of eWOM content, increasing perceived usefulness and acceptance (Dai *et al.*, 2022; Tariyal *et al.*, 2023).

*Hypothesis 10: The greater the need for information is, the higher the perceived usefulness of eWOM about thermal destinations.*

*Hypothesis 11: Needs of Information about spa and hot springs destinations has a positive effect on the acceptance of user-generated content.*

*Hypothesis 12: Needs of Information about spa and hot springs destinations positively affects the intention to visit them.*

Information Usefulness mediates the effect of Source Credibility, Information Quality, Information Credibility, and Needs of Information on acceptance and behavioral intention. When users find content helpful in resolving doubts, reducing risk, or confirming expectations, they are more likely to adopt it and translate that acceptance into a concrete intention to visit the destination (Cheung *et al.*, 2008; Filieri & McLeay, 2014; Goyal & Taneja, 2023).

*Hypothesis 13: A positive attitude toward the usefulness of eWOM content increases its acceptance in spa and hot springs destinations.*

*Hypothesis 14: Acceptance of eWOM content significantly increases the intention to visit spa and hot springs destinations.*

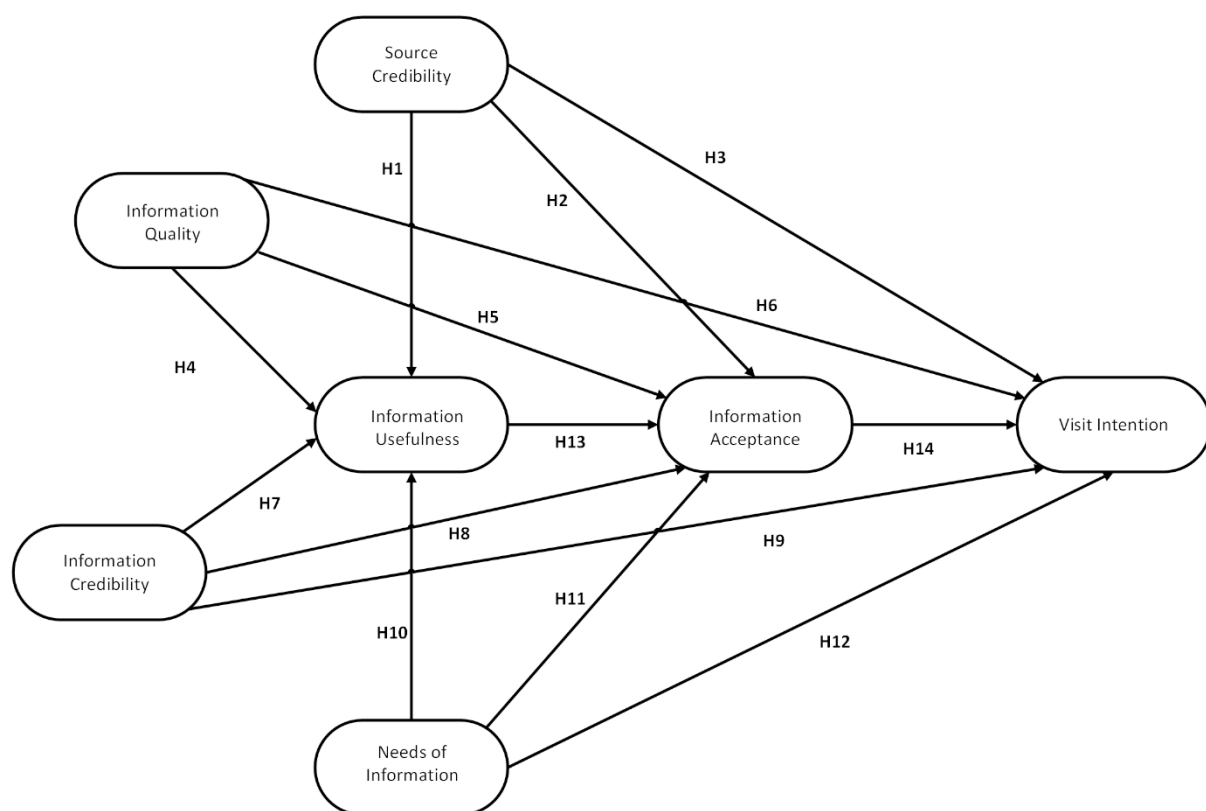


Figure 1  
Theoretical model proposed

Source: Own elaboration.

#### 4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This research pursues various objectives through the application of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The methodological approach adopted in this study follows the most recent and authoritative guidelines for the application of PLS-SEM (Hair *et al.*, 2011; Hair *et al.*, 2017; Hair *et al.*, 2019; Hair *et al.*, 2022; Henseler, 2018; Henseler, 2021; Henseler *et al.*, 2018), constituting the primary methodological reference in variance-based structural equation modelling.

Firstly, it involves an exploratory study aimed at preliminarily analyzing the relationships between the variables included in the proposed theoretical model. This model has been adapted from the approaches developed by Sussman and Siegal (2003) and Erkan and Evans (2016) regarding information acceptance models, though in this case, it is specifically oriented towards the context of online information related to spa and wellness tourism destinations.

In a second phase, the research adopts an explanatory approach, aimed at thoroughly examining the structure of the proposed theoretical model and its capacity to evaluate the ac-

ceptance and perceived usefulness of eWOM about spa centers as a precursor to tourists' visit intention. The analysis was structured around a two-step procedure involving assessment of the measurement model and subsequent evaluation of the structural model, including reliability, convergent and discriminant validity, collinearity checks, and path significance estimation.

Finally, a predictive dimension is considered, with the objective of determining whether the proposed model could generate consistent results when applied to a different sample. This phase allows for the evaluation of its potential generalizability to other contexts (Sarstedt & Danks, 2021; Shmueli & Koppius, 2011).

#### 4.1. Questionnaire Development

Based on the proposed theoretical model, a questionnaire was developed to collect the information required for this research. In the first section, questions were included to gather participants' sociodemographic data, as well as information related to the use of social networks and the consultation of online reviews

about spas and thermal centers. Subsequently, items corresponding to the seven constructs that form the adopted theoretical model were included. Table 1 details the included constructs, the corresponding items, and the bibliographic sources used for their development. This instrument was specifically adapted to the study context, focusing on the acceptance and use of information generated through eWOM in the field of spa tourism, taking the IACM model (Erkan & Evans, 2016) as a reference. A five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) was used to measure the items, a methodology commonly applied in SEM analyses (Hair *et al.*, 2022).

Since all measurement scales were originally developed in English, the questionnaire underwent a translation/back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1980). One researcher independently translated the items into Spanish, and a second expert performed a back-translation into English. Discrepancies were discussed until full semantic equivalence was reached. A pilot test with 25 participants was conducted to assess clarity and comprehension, resulting in minor wording adjustments.

Table 1  
Constructs Used

Code	Construct	Indicators	References
SC	Source Credibility	4	Cheung <i>et al.</i> , (2008); Sussman & Siegal, (2003)
IQ	Information Quality	4	Cuong (2024); Erkan & Evans, (2016)
IC	Information Credibility	4	Cuong (2024); Erkan & Evans, (2016); Ngo <i>et al.</i> , (2024)
IN	Needs of Information	4	Erkan & Evans, (2016); Ngo <i>et al.</i> , (2024)
IU	Information Usefulness	4	Cheung <i>et al.</i> , (2008); Cuong (2024); Erkan & Evans, (2016); Ngo <i>et al.</i> , (2024)
IA	Information Acceptance	4	Cuong (2024); Erkan & Evans, (2016)
VI	Visit Intention	4	Erkan & Evans, (2016); García de Blanes <i>et al.</i> , (2024)

Source: Own elaboration.

#### 4.2. Data Collection

Data was collected through a self-administered online survey on Google Forms, chosen for its efficiency, low cost, and anonymity (Dillman & Smyth, 2007). Conducted face-to-face from February to May 2025, a total of 302 valid responses were obtained. A homogeneous convenience sampling technique was applied, which is appropriate when the objective is to gather data from individuals who share key characteristics relevant to the phenomenon under study and when probability sampling frames are not feasible (Etikan *et al.*, 2016; Jager *et al.*, 2017). In this research, the target population consisted of visitors to spas and hot springs in the province of Ourense (Galicia, Spain), who represent a relatively homogeneous group regarding exposure to wellness tourism experiences and eWOM information. Participants were approached on-site through QR codes displayed at spa facilities, and only adults who had used at least one spa or hot spring within the last 12 months were invited to participate. Although non-probabilistic sampling limits strict generalizability, this design ensures environmental relevance and provides an adequate sample for PLS-SEM analyses, exceeding standard recommendations for minimum sample size (Hair *et al.*, 2022).

The questionnaire was anonymous and self-administered, and respondents provided informed consent before beginning the survey. Participation was voluntary and no incentives were offered. Permission to place QR codes in spa facilities was obtained through prior collaboration agreements with each establishment. To minimize response bias, items belonging to predictors and outcome variables were placed in separate blocks and scale anchors were kept consistent across constructs.

#### 4.3. Sample Size

To determine the minimum required sample size for this study, various estimation methods were applied complementarily. First, according to Hair *et al.* (2022), in the context of Structural Equation Modeling using Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM), a sample of at least 20 cases is sufficient to achieve a statistical power of 0.80, with a significance level of 0.05 and a minimum expected coefficient of determination of  $R^2 = 0.50$ , considering five independent variables in the model. On the other hand, following the methodological recommendations of Chin & Newsted (1999), based on the works of Cohen (1988)

and Green (1991), it is established that, to detect a medium effect size with a statistical power of 0.80 and a significance level of 0.05, the minimum required sample size would be 91 cases, also considering five predictors. Finally, when applying these criteria using the online calculator developed by Soper (2025), the recommended minimum sample size is 170 participants. In this regard, since a total of 302 valid responses were collected, it is concluded that the sample size is adequate for the purposes of this study.

#### 4.4. Bias Control

Several procedural and statistical solutions were implemented to address common method bias (CMB) (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Procedurally, anonymity was guaranteed, participation was voluntary, and predictor and criterion constructs were placed in different sections of the questionnaire to reduce respondents' ability to infer relationships. Additionally, item wording was simplified to minimize ambiguity. Furthermore, participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers and that data would be analyzed only in aggregate form, helping reduce social desirability effects.

To assess common method bias (CMB), Harman's single-factor test was conducted by loading all measurement items into an unrotated principal component analysis. The results show that the first factor accounts for 47.4% of the total variance, which is below the 50% threshold typically used as an indication of substantial method bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). In addition, the full collinearity VIFs in Table 2 indicate that six constructs are below the 3.3 threshold and only one (Information Usefulness) falls within the conservative 3.3-5.0 range (Kock & Lynn, 2012; Kock, 2015). Taken together, these results suggest that CMB is unlikely to threaten the validity of the findings.

Table 2  
Full collinearity VIFs (Common Method Bias)

SC	SQ	IC	IN	IU	IA	VI
2.736	2.570	3.171	2.563	3.775	2.767	1.725

Source: Own elaboration.

## 5. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

### 5.1. Descriptive Analysis

A descriptive analysis of the sample is shown in Table 3. Respondents were evenly distributed by sex and balanced by age, with Generation X slightly predominant (27.2%) and Generation Alpha scarcely represented. Most held a university degree (50.7%) or technical training (41.1%). The majority reported annual incomes between €10,000 and €18,000 (40.5%). Regarding online behavior, 56.6% spent 1-3 hours per day online, 57.3% used social media as their main information source about spas, and 41.7% had posted online comments. Most had visited 2-3 spas in the past year, with bookings split

between online and other methods. The most visited centers in Ourense were Outariz, As Burgas, Arnoia, and Molgas (see Appendices).

### 5.2. Data review and filtering

Following the review of the descriptive data from the sample, a series of preliminary procedures were carried out before initiating the PLS-SEM analysis. First, the presence of missing values and outliers was examined, with 15 outlier observations identified and excluded from subsequent analysis. Additionally, the skewness and kurtosis values of the items included in the study were assessed. Although PLS-SEM is considered a non-parametric method, some authors recommend verifying the data's approximation to a normal distribution, since extreme values could affect the validity of the results (Hair *et al.*, 2022). In this regard, the analysis revealed that all items had skewness values below 3 and kurtosis values under 10, which, according to the criteria established by Matas-Terron (2023), indicates no significant evidence of deviation from normality in the data analyzed.

### 5.3. Measurement Model Analysis

The analysis of the measurement model was carried out using the PLS-SEM technique, with the objective of evaluating the relationships between the observed items and the latent variables, thereby determining the internal consistency and reliability of the proposed model (Hair *et al.*, 2017).

#### 5.3.1. ITEM RELIABILITY, INTERNAL CONSISTENCY AND CONVERGENT VALIDITY

As shown in Table 3, all retained indicators loaded above the 0.707 threshold value (Carmines & Zeller, 1979), which an indicator is considered to have acceptable reliability. About construct internal consistency, Composite reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) values are ranged between 0.900 and 0.940, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values between 0.809 and 0.901, and AVE values are between 0.692 and 0.887 for all constructs, supporting internal consistency and convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair *et al.*, 2019; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Table 3  
Item and Construct Reliability & Convergent Validity (AVE)

Construct	Indicators	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Dijkstra-Henseler (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	AVE
Information Acceptance	IA1	0.914	0.809	0.810	0.913	0.840
	IA2	0.919				
Information Credibility	IC1	0.931	0.868	0.882	0.938	0.883
	IC2	0.949				
Information Usefulness	IU3	0.940	0.873	0.874	0.940	0.887
	IU4	0.944				
Needs of information	IN3	0.945	0.858	0.871	0.933	0.875
	IN4	0.926				
Source Credibility	SC1	0.755	0.879	0.901	0.916	0.733
	SC2	0.879				
	SC3	0.889				
	SC4	0.893				
Information Quality	IQ1	0.796	0.851	0.860	0.900	0.692
	IQ2	0.884				
	IQ3	0.859				
	IQ4	0.784				
Visit Intention	VI1	0.819	0.901	0.904	0.931	0.772
	VI2	0.912				
	VI3	0.912				
	VI4	0.869				

Source: Own elaboration.

### 5.3.2. DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY

With regard to discriminant validity (that is, whether the constructs in the developed model are empirically distinct from each other), the results obtained from the HTMT

(Heterotrait-Monotrait) matrix, developed by Henseler *et al.* (2015), were analyzed. The reference threshold used is 0.90 (Gold *et al.*, 2001). As shown in Table 4, all values are below this threshold, indicating the presence of discriminant validity in the model.

Table 4  
Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	IA	IC	IQ	IU	IN	SC	VI
Information Acceptance							
Information Credibility	0.326						
Information Quality	0.815	0.308					
Information Usefulness	0.555	0.863	0.306				
Needs of Information	0.808	0.475	0.796	0.494			
Source Credibility	0.289	0.835	0.326	0.803	0.296		
Visit Intention	0.515	0.588	0.369	0.686	0.483	0.496	

Source: Own elaboration.

Additionally, as shown in Table 5, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was fulfilled, with the square root of each construct's

AVE exceeding its correlations with other constructs (Fornell-Larcker, 1981).

Table 5  
Fornell-Larcker criterion

	IA	IC	IQ	IU	IN	SC	VI
Information Acceptance	0.916						
Information Credibility	0.276	0.940					
Information Quality	0.678	0.269	0.832				
Information Usefulness	0.467	0.756	0.268	0.942			
Needs of Information	0.678	0.414	0.689	0.430	0.935		
Source Credibility	0.258	0.734	0.288	0.713	0.278	0.856	
Visit Intention	0.440	0.523	0.325	0.610	0.426	0.450	0.879

Source: Own elaboration.

#### 5.4. Structural Model Analysis

Once measurement model analysis has been completed, the next step is to analyze the structural model and verify how the constructs relate to each other.

##### 5.4.1. COLLINEARITY DIAGNOSIS

First, it is essential to ensure that the internal model is free from multicollinearity, as high levels can distort the interpreta-

tion of the individual effects of constructs. To this end, it is necessary to calculate the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), using a reference threshold value of 3 for detecting potential collinearity issues (Hair *et al.*, 2019). The results, presented in Table 6, show that all VIF values are below the established threshold, indicating the absence of significant collinearity among the constructs.

Table 6  
Variance Inflation Factors (VIF)

	IA	IC	IU	IN	SC	IQ	VI
Information Acceptance							2.205
Information Credibility	2.986		2.501				2.506
Information Usefulness	2.863						
Needs of Information	2.359		2.207				2.581
Source Credibility	2.699		2.288				2.298
Information Quality	2.041		2.006				2.338
Visit Intention							

Source: Own elaboration.

##### 5.4.2. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Finally, the analysis of the results presented in Table 7 is carried out, which includes the estimated path coefficients between the different constructs of the model, as well as the statistical significance associated with each relationship. To evaluate the latter, a one-tailed bootstrap resampling technique based on the original samples was applied (Hair *et al.*, 2011), using a total of 10,000 bootstrap samples (Streukens & Leroi-Werelds, 2016). From this procedure, standard errors, t-values, and 90% confidence intervals were obtained. These results allow for the

empirical testing of the hypotheses formulated in the theoretical framework. As observed in Table 7, all path coefficients fall within the established confidence intervals. However, when analyzing their statistical significance, the hypotheses supported by the data are: H1, H3, H5, H7, H9, H10, H11, H12, H13, and H14. In contrast, hypotheses H2, H4, H6, do not reach sufficient levels of significance and therefore are not considered supported. In the case of H8, the hypothesis must also be rejected, as the relationship obtained is in the opposite direction to that initially proposed.

Table 7  
Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Path coefficients (β)	Indirect effect	Total effect	Standard errors	T statistics	5%	95%	p values	Decision
H1: SC -> IU	0.379		0.379	0.075	5.042	0.255	0.503	0.000	Supported
H2: SC -> IA	-0.122	0.189	0.067	0.086	1.423	-0.264	0.019	0.077	Not supported
H3: SC -> VI	0.128	0.020	0.148	0.070	1.836	0.013	0.242	0.033	Supported
H4: IQ -> IU	-0.111		-0.111	0.068	1.641	-0.222	0.000	0.050	Not supported
H5: IQ -> IA	0.443	-0.055	0.388	0.071	6.211	0.326	0.561	0.000	Supported
H6: IQ -> VI	-0.072	0.115	0.042	0.063	1.142	-0.177	0.032	0.127	Not supported
H7: IC -> IU	0.412		0.412	0.081	5.110	0.279	0.544	0.000	Supported
H8: IC -> IA	-0.254	0.206	-0.048	0.087	2.917	-0.398	-0.111	0.002	Not supported
H9: IC -> VI	0.323	-0.014	0.309	0.066	4.880	0.214	0.432	0.000	Supported
H10: IN -> IU	0.230		0.230	0.074	3.111	0.108	0.352	0.001	Supported
H11: IN -> IA	0.297	0.115	0.412	0.083	3.592	0.161	0.433	0.000	Supported
H12: IN -> VI	0.106	0.122	0.228	0.063	1.694	0.003	0.209	0.045	Supported
H13: IU -> IA	0.500		0.500	0.090	5.533	0.351	0.649	0.000	Supported
H14: IA -> VI	0.295		0.295	0.090	3.295	0.148	0.443	0.000	Supported

Measurement correlation-values:  $p < 0.100$ ,  $p < 0.050$ ,  $p < 0.010$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

Source: Own elaboration.

5.4.3. DETERMINATION COEFFICIENT (R<sup>2</sup>)

Once the supported and unsupported hypotheses within the structural model have been determined, the results of the PLS-SEM model obtained are presented in Figure 2, including the outer loadings of each item and the path coefficients for each proposed hypothesis. Additionally, the R<sup>2</sup> coefficients are also

included, which indicate the explanatory power of the model. In this regard, for the variable *Information Usefulness*, an R<sup>2</sup> of 0.651 and an adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of 0.646 were obtained; for *Information Acceptance*, an R<sup>2</sup> of 0.634 and an adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of 0.627 were obtained; and for the variable *Visit Intention*, an R<sup>2</sup> of 0.379 and an adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of 0.368 were obtained.

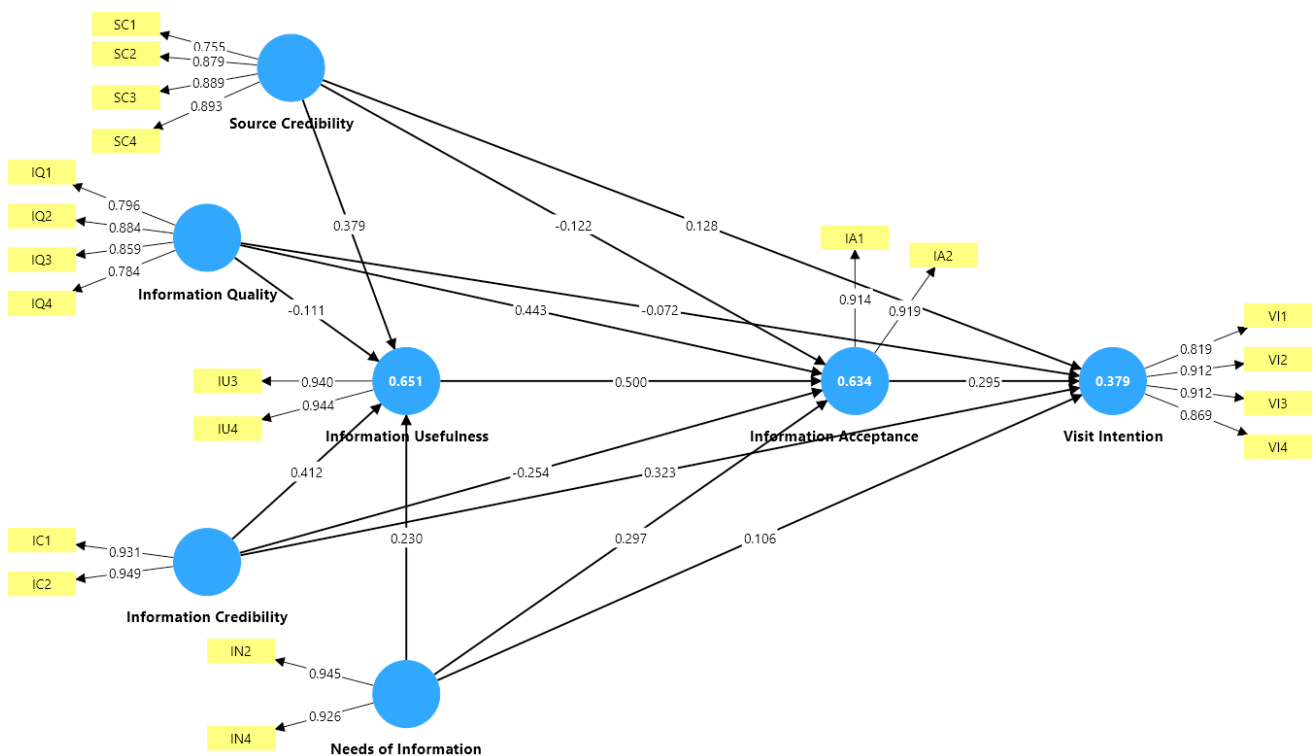


Figure 2  
PLS-SEM model

Source: Own elaboration. Adapted from Smart PLS-4.

### 5.5. Out-of-sample predictive power (PLSpredict)

Finally, the predictive capability of the developed model was evaluated to determine its applicability to future samples different from the one used in the present study. For this purpose, the PLSpredict algorithm was employed, which allows estimating the predictive power of the model (Shmueli *et al.*, 2019).

Table 8 shows the values of the  $Q^2$  statistic corresponding to each of the items of the endogenous constructs. All obtained val-

ues are positive, indicating that the proposed PLS model has a predictive capability superior to that of predictions generated by the benchmark model (Shmueli *et al.*, 2019).

Additionally, the prediction errors of the PLS model were compared with those of the linear regression model (LM) generated by the algorithm. As shown in Table 8, the Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE) values of the PLS model are lower than those of the LM in all cases, except for two indicators of the Visit Intention construct.

Table 8  
Model's predictive power

Prediction's summary	$Q^2$	PLS-SEM_RMSE	LM_RMSE	Difference RMSE
IA1	0.422	0.520	0.538	-0.018
IA2	0.450	0.499	0.503	-0.005
IU3	0.541	0.552	0.579	-0.027
IU4	0.574	0.574	0.586	-0.012
VI1	0.226	0.701	0.688	0.013
VI2	0.308	0.683	0.687	-0.004
VI3	0.210	0.744	0.747	-0.003
VI4	0.247	0.829	0.821	0.008

Source: Own elaboration.

Additionally, the predictive power of the model is further analyzed using the Cross-validated Predictive Ability Test (CVPAT), where it is essential that the model has a lower average loss difference than the averages of the indicators (IA) (Sharma *et al.*, 2022), and the linear model (LM) prediction benchmark (Shmueli *et al.*, 2019).

Table 9  
Cross-validated Predictive Ability Test

CVPAT vs. IA	Average loss difference	t	p
Information Acceptance	-0.201	5.808	0.000
Information Usefulness	-0.401	7.225	0.000
Visit Intention	-0.181	5.565	0.000
Overall	-0.241	7.456	0.000
CVPAT vs. LM	Average loss difference	t	p
Information Acceptance	-0.012	1.383	0.168
Information Usefulness	-0.022	2.666	0.008
Visit Intention	0.005	0.617	0.538
Overall	-0.006	0.836	0.404

Source: Own elaboration.

As shown in Table 9, the model's average loss is significantly lower than the average of the indicators, which supports the predictive validity of both the individual constructs and the model. However, when comparing the model's average losses with those of the reference linear regression model (LM), it is observed that only in the Information Usefulness construct are these losses significantly lower.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This study has empirically validated a theoretical model based on the IACM to explain the acceptance and use of eWOM in the context of spa tourism in northwestern Spain. The results obtained through PLS-SEM confirm that Source Credibility, Information Credibility, and Information Usefulness are key factors significantly influencing content acceptance and the intention to visit spa and hot spring destinations. Significant relationships were also detected in paths added to the original IACM model, expanding the scope of the research.

### 6.1. Discussion

This research advances a user-centered analytical perspective that reveals the cognitive processes through which travelers evaluate and internalize online information. In general terms, the results confirm that Source Credibility, Information Credibility, and Needs of Information are determining factors in Information Usefulness, which in turn influences eWOM acceptance and the intention to visit spas and hot springs destinations, aligning with previous research (Filiari & McLeay, 2014; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Song *et al.*, 2021). In this sense, findings portray a decision process in spa and wellness tourism that is fundamentally grounded in trust and information relevance. Tourists appear to rely on eWOM when it provides credible, experience-proximal cues that help them imagine benefits, reduce uncertainty, and form actionable intentions.

Firstly, results show that Source Credibility positively affects Information Usefulness. This aligns with Cheung *et al.*

(2008) and Goyal & Taneja (2023), highlighting that perceived expertise and honesty increase trust, especially in emotionally engaging contexts like wellness tourism. However, the direct effect of Source Credibility on Information Acceptance was not confirmed. This suggests that credibility alone does not ensure acceptance; the information must first be perceived as useful. In contrast, Source Credibility directly influences Visit Intention. This means that, a prestigious source, such as an institutional website with associated eWOM, could generate visit intention even if the information is not perceived as useful or accepted.

Furthermore, Information Credibility has been detected a strong predictor of Information Usefulness. This aligns with González-Rodríguez *et al.* (2022) and Goya & Taneja (2023), emphasizing that content truthfulness and coherence influence usefulness, acceptance, and visit intention. This highlights the importance for spa managers to provide authentic, verifiable, and emotionally relevant content. However, the direct effect between Information Credibility and Information Acceptance was rejected, indicating that credibility alone does not ensure acceptance, usefulness must be perceived first. Finally, results show that credible information directly affects visit intention, even if it is not perceived as useful or acceptable. To sum up, credibility appears to serve as a risk-reduction function in wellness tourism: when travellers believe that either the messenger or the message can be trusted, they are more likely to treat the content as diagnostic and to progress toward acceptance and intention.

While well-structured, clear and complete information facilitates acceptance, its influence on Information Usefulness and immediate intention is more limited than might be expected. In a domain where people anticipate subjective well-being outcomes, credibility and personal relevance appear to outweigh purely formal attributes of quality. This finding contrasts with studies such as Rodrigues *et al.* (2023) and Wang & Yan (2022), which highlight the importance of structure, clarity, and emotional richness of content in forming favorable attitudes towards tourism destinations. One possible explanation is that, in wellness tourism, users prioritize credibility and practical usefulness of content over formal quality. This reinforces the idea that perceived quality does not always translate into behavioral action, especially if it is not perceived as relevant or trustworthy. This does not diminish the value of quality standards; rather, it indicates that, in wellness, stylistic refinement is likely to be persuasive only when embedded in content that feels authentic and trustworthy. This nuance qualifies generic tourism findings on information quality and underscores the importance of aligning message form with the specific anxieties, aspirations and evaluation heuristics that characterise spa decision-making.

A consistent pattern is that travellers with stronger information need to engage more intensively with eWOM, extract greater perceived usefulness from it, and are more inclined to accept it. In practical terms, wellness visitors who seek clarity about therapeutic benefits, safety, accessibility or specific facilities appear to invest more effort in evaluating reviews and testimonials, and that effort pays off in the form of actionable guidance. This result aligns with Dai *et al.* (2022) and Tariyal *et al.* (2023), who argue that users with greater informational needs tend to engage more actively with eWOM, especially in high involvement contexts like wellness tourism. Furthermore, this finding suggests

that digital content should be designed to respond to specific informational needs, which would increase its persuasive impact.

On the other hand, results of this study exhibit convergence with prior research conducted in hotel settings. For instance, the strong influence of credibility on Information Usefulness and Visit Intention aligns with Berné *et al.* (2020), who identify credibility as a contextual variable that shapes decision processes in hotels. Similarly, Berné *et al.* (2023) show that credible eWOM can trigger concrete organisational actions and behavioural responses in the hotel ecosystem. Regarding Information Quality, the partial support found in this research is aligned with Gilabert & Berné (2024), who argue that the impact of eWOM quality depends on its perceived usefulness and the evaluative motives of decision-makers. This reinforces the idea that in experience-driven tourism contexts, the influence of information quality may be indirect or contingent on deeper psychological mechanisms, including perceived relevance and usefulness. Overall, the parallels with hotel-based research validate the theoretical structure of the adapted IACM and demonstrate that the cognitive mechanisms underlying eWOM acceptance extend across related hospitality sectors.

Across the model, Information Usefulness emerges as the psychological axis through which credibility and motivation-related indicators are transformed into acceptance and, ultimately, into intention. When eWOM is experienced as practically helpful (answering concrete questions, reducing ambiguity, and enabling mental simulation of the spa experience), travellers are more willing to internalise it and to act upon it. These results are consistent with the IACM model postulates (Erkan & Evans, 2016) and recent studies such as García de Blanes *et al.* (2024), highlighting the mediating role of usefulness in the acceptance of tourist information.

The proposed model explains 65.1% of the variance in Information Usefulness, 63.4% in Information Acceptance, and 37.9% in Visit Intention. In this context, it should be considered that acceptable  $R^2$  values depend on the research context and the discipline studied (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Values of 0.20 can be considered high in studies related to consumer behavior (Hair *et al.*, 2022), where visit decisions are usually influenced by multiple personal, contextual, and emotional factors. Therefore, the values obtained in the present model exceed this threshold by a wide margin. Furthermore, the  $R^2$  values obtained for the variables Information Usefulness and Information Acceptance are high, supporting the robustness of the model. Since the objective of the study is to understand interpretation mechanisms, this level of explained variance is adequate and consistent with the exploratory and explanatory approaches adopted. It is recognized that the Visit Intention construct is complex and may depend on more variables than those included in the model, which could increase the final  $R^2$  values. Additional factors such as price, time availability, social platform used, prior experiences, or destination image may not be contemplated in the model and could be useful in future research to improve its explanatory power.

PLSpredict results showed that all  $Q^2$  values were positive, indicating that the PLS model outperforms the reference linear regression (LM) model in predictive capacity. This demonstrates the model's effectiveness in anticipating how users perceive and accept information about thermal centers. RMSE values were

lower for the PLS model across most indicators, especially for Information Usefulness, reinforcing its predictive robustness. These results allow concluding that the constructs Information Acceptance, Information Usefulness, and Visit Intention present an adequate predictive capability with respect to new observations. Finally, the CVPAT analysis confirmed that the PLS model has a significantly lower average prediction loss across constructs. Compared with the LM model, Information Usefulness was the only latent variable showing a significant difference. Therefore, a high predictive power can be conclusively confirmed only for this construct.

### 6.2. Theoretical Implications

This study offers several theoretical contributions that extend current understandings of eWOM and information acceptance processes in experiential tourism contexts.

First, the findings expand the scope of eWOM by demonstrating that credibility play a foundational role not only in transactional or purchase-oriented decisions but also in experience-driven choices, such as selecting a spa or hot springs destination. In these settings, travellers rely on eWOM as a proxy for intangible and affective qualities of the experience, suggesting that credibility functions as a psychological anchor that enables visitors to anticipate sensory, emotional, and well-being outcomes. This shifts eWOM theory beyond its traditional focus on functional product evaluation and highlights its relevance in domains where expectations are shaped by imagination, trust, and the desire for restorative experiences.

Second, the study positions Needs of Information as a central and previously underexplored driver of eWOM processing. Rather than acting merely as a background motivation, Needs of Information operates as a catalyst that intensifies cognitive engagement, making travellers more likely to treat online reviews as diagnostically useful and behaviourally actionable. This insight advances information acceptance models by introducing a more dynamic view of user motivation, one that links the desire to resolve uncertainty with the depth of message elaboration and subsequent behavioural responses. In doing so, the model shows that informational motivation is not only antecedent but also transformative, shaping the way individuals filter, evaluate, and internalize online content in wellness contexts.

Third, the results highlight the pivotal and mediating function of Information Usefulness as the mechanism through which experiential attributes of eWOM become behavioural intentions. This reinforces usefulness as the cognitive core of Information Acceptance while revealing its heightened importance in well-being-oriented tourism. In such contexts, usefulness is not limited to providing instrumental guidance but also helps individuals envision how an experience aligns with personal goals of health, balance, and emotional restoration. Finally, the study deepens the theoretical understanding of how visitors construct meaning from eWOM when evaluating highly subjective experiences.

Collectively, these contributions demonstrate that eWOM theory evolves when applied to experiential rather than transactional decision-making. The model validated here shows that visitors navigating intangible, emotionally charged, and

wellness-related choices process online information through mechanisms that are broader and more motivationally rich than those typically observed in conventional consumer behaviour.

### 6.3. Managerial Implications

Findings provide several actionable insights for spa and wellness destination managers on how to design and manage eWOM strategies that effectively influence visitor decision-making.

First, given that credibility is a key determinant of both Information Usefulness and Visit Intention, managers should prioritise actions that increase trust in digital environments. This includes encouraging verified and detailed reviews, showcasing staff qualifications, and using formats that convey authenticity, such as video testimonials or behind-the-scenes content, instead of highly polished promotional messages. This approach enhances the credibility cues visitors rely on to assess the intangible benefits of spa experiences.

Second, the central role of Information Needs suggests that managers must identify and directly respond to the most common questions of wellness travellers (e.g., therapeutic effectiveness, hygiene, accessibility, staff expertise, expected sensations or benefits). Content such as guided walkthroughs, FAQs, or Q&A formats helps to meet these needs and encourages deeper processing of eWOM, increasing perceived reliability.

Finally, because Information Usefulness acts as a mediator between Credibility and Visit Intention, managers should develop content that assists users in making informed choices: visual itineraries, personalised recommendations, evidence-based explanations of treatments, or simple service-comparison tools. Such materials transform eWOM into a practical planning resource, it would be necessary to strengthen its acceptance and its effect on behavioural intentions.

## 7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

Although this research provides a robust assessment of the IACM in the context of spa and wellness tourism, several limitations arise from the pattern of supported and unsupported hypotheses that deserve specific reflection.

First, four relationships originally proposed in the model were not supported (H2, H4, H6, H8), revealing conceptual nuances in how wellness travellers process online information. For instance, the non-significant effect of Source Credibility on Information Acceptance (H2) suggests that credibility alone is not sufficient for users to internalise eWOM. Travellers appear to require that credible information be processed as useful before it becomes actionable. This is considered a challenge for the assumptions of classical information acceptance models.

Similarly, Information Quality did not significantly predict either Information Usefulness (H4) or Visit Intention (H6). This contradicts findings in general tourism contexts and indicates that, within wellness tourism, formal attributes of quality (clarity, completeness, structure) may be less influential than perceptual attributes such as authenticity or relevance to personal well-being needs. Future research should therefore reconsider whether

“quality” in experiential settings should be conceptualised more affectively, rather than structurally.

The lack of support for H8 reinforces this interpretation: although credible content increases Information Usefulness and Visit Intention, it may not translate directly into acceptance unless travellers perceive that information as personally meaningful. This opens a pathway to explore motivational fit or goal congruence as mediators of information processing in wellness contexts.

Building on these findings, several opportunities should be explored. First, future studies should examine whether travellers interpret credibility and quality through emotional resonance, experiential relevance, or affective authenticity rather than through classical informational criteria. Mixed-methods designs could reveal how wellness tourists define “trustworthy” and “useful” information. Furthermore, qualitative analysis could help explain why travellers may trust a message yet not incorporate it into their decision-making. Second, since several credibility-related hypotheses were not supported, future research should test variables such as emotional congruence, perceived relevance, wellness motivations, or perceived risk reduction as potential mediating mechanisms. Third, because unsupported hypotheses may reflect local behavioural patterns, replication in destinations with different wellness traditions, digital cultures, or risk perceptions would help assess boundary conditions of the adapted IACM. Finally, factors such as prior spa experience, health status, platform type, or social influence may clarify the inconsistent effects observed for Information Quality, integrating them into expanded models.

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## APPENDIX

Table A.1  
Sociodemographic Data of the Sample

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Man	148	49.00%
	Woman	154	51.00%
Year of birth	Before 1964 (Baby Boomers)	73	24.20%
	1965-1981 (Gen. X)	82	27.20%
	1982-1994 (Millenials)	70	23.20%
	1995-2009 (Gen. Z)	67	22.20%
	2010-2025 (Gen. Alpha)	10	3.30%
Level of studies	Post Graduate Studies	153	50.70%
	Technicians	124	41.10%
	Undergraduate Studies	13	4.30%
	High School	12	4.00%
	No Studies	0	0.00%
Annual income	Less than 10,000€	37	12.40%
	10,000-18,000€	121	40.50%
	19,000-35,000€	62	20.70%
	36,000-60,000€	69	23.10%
	More than 60,000€	10	3.30%
Numer of internet hours spent	None	0	0.00%
	1-3 hours	171	56.60%
	4-5 hours	77	25.50%
	6-7 hours	37	12.30%
	More than 8 hours	17	5.60%
Sources to search information about hot springs or spas (various responses)	Social media	173	57.28%
	Opinion's websites	87	28.80%
	Official websites	72	23.84%
	Press	57	18.87%
	TV	76	25.16%
Made online comments about hot springs or spas?	Radio	64	21.19%
	Yes	126	41.7%
Number of hot springs or spas visited in last year	No	176	58.30%
	None	6	2.00%
	1	66	21.90%
	2-3	141	46.70%
	4-5	55	18.20%
Hot springs or spas booked online?	More than 5	34	11.30%
	Yes	154	51.70%
Hot springs or spas visited in Ourense's province (various responses)	No	144	48.30%
	A Chavasqueira	33	10.90%
	Muiño da Vega	70	23.20%
	Outariz	204	67.50%
	As Burgas	160	53.00%
	Prexigueiro	73	24.20%
	Cortegada	49	16.20%
	Arnoia	93	30.80%
	Molgas	85	28.80%
	Laias	70	23.20%
	Carballiño	73	24.20%
Partovia	70	23.20%	
Lobios	59	19.50%	

Source: Own elaboration.