

ABSTRACT

The increasing use of celebrity endorsers in tourism promotion through social media has produced inconsistent findings regarding their influence on intention to visit. This inconsistency indicates a research gap suggesting that the effect of celebrity endorsers may not be direct and requires further explanation through mediating mechanisms. Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of celebrity endorsers and destination image on intention to visit by incorporating follower stickiness and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) as mediating variables in the context of South Korea tourism promotion through K-pop celebrities.

This study adopts a quantitative approach using a survey method and analyzes the data through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The results demonstrate that both celebrity endorsers and destination image have a positive and significant effect on follower stickiness. Furthermore, destination image and follower stickiness significantly influence e-WOM, while follower stickiness and e-WOM have a positive and significant effect on intention to visit, with follower stickiness emerging as the strongest predictor. These findings indicate that the influence of celebrity endorsers on intention to visit is indirect and mediated by follower stickiness and e-WOM, thereby contributing to the literature on tourism marketing and offering practical implications for developing emotionally engaging and digitally effective destination promotion strategies.

Keywords: celebrity endorser, destination image, follower stickiness, electronic word of mouth, intention to visit.