

RESEARCH ARTICLE



From impression to expression: How warmth and competence in relaxing and challenging activities shape pleasure and eWOM

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Abstract

This research investigates how aligning service providers' warmth and competence with the nature of leisure activities (relaxing vs. challenging) influences pleasure and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) sharing. Through a series of five studies, including secondary data analysis (Study 1), scenario-based experiments (Studies 2a, 3, 4, and 5), and observation of actual eWOM behavior (Study 2b), we demonstrate that the alignment between service judgments and activity type (i.e., warmth in relaxing activities and competence in challenging activities) enhances positive eWOM sharing, with this effect being mediated by the pleasure derived from the service experience. Our findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of the cognitive and affective antecedents of eWOM. We extend the stereotype content model to the eWOM research, identifying activity type as a novel boundary condition. We recommend that managers tailor their impression management strategies to the type of activity offered. For relaxing activities, emphasize warmth-related attributes, while for challenging activities, highlight competence-related attributes—both approaches can enhance customer pleasure and encourage positive eWOM sharing.

KEYWORDS

challenging activity, competence, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), pleasure, relaxing activity, warmth

1 | INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has become as a powerful force shaping consumer behavior and decision-making processes (Filieri et al., 2021; Yan et al., 2018). Encompassing product reviews, evaluations, and recommendations shared by consumers across various online platforms (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2003), eWOM is considered more credible than marketing sources

(Filieri, 2015, 2016). Moreover, the influence of eWOM extends far beyond individual consumer choices, as it has been shown to significantly impact key business metrics such as product sales, revenues, and brand equity across various industries, from hospitality to consumer electronics (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Floyd et al., 2014).

Recognizing the profound impact of eWOM, scholars have examined various factors that influence the credibility and helpfulness

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of eWOM (Filieri, 2015; Hong et al., 2017; Yan et al., 2018). Particularly in the service industries, studies have highlighted the power of positive eWOM in enhancing brand image and fostering customer loyalty (Hong et al., 2017). Furthermore, researchers have explored various motivations underlying eWOM behavior (Gonçalves et al., 2018; Yoo & Gretzel, 2008), such as satisfaction (Huang, Zhang, Gursoy, et al., 2020; Jeong & Jang, 2011), intrinsic enjoyment derived from sharing consumption stories online (Pachucki et al., 2022), personality traits (Roy et al., 2023), incentive marketing strategies employed by businesses (Sijoria et al., 2019), and platform characteristics such as interactivity features and anonymity policies (Yan et al., 2018).

Despite valuable contributions, existing literature has limitations in understanding the cognitive and emotional mechanisms driving eWOM in different leisure service contexts. Two major dimensions in human cognitive judgment are warmth and competence, according to stereotype content model (Cuddy et al., 2008). Warmth reflects how we perceive others' intentions, including qualities such as friendliness, helpfulness, and sincerity. Competence is about how capable we think someone is, covering features such as intelligence, efficiency, and the ability to achieve goals. Marketing research confirms the importance of warmth and competence in guiding consumer judgments toward brands and service providers (Güntürkün et al., 2020). However, research applying this model to examine eWOM in various service contexts remains limited (Huang, Zhang, Gursoy, et al., 2020).

Earlier studies reveal mixed results regarding the comparative significance of warmth and competence in influencing customer responses (Kolbl et al., 2019; Marinova et al., 2018), which suggest that the type of leisure service could moderate the effects of these dimensions on consumer behavior. Specifically, the nature of the leisure service activity—whether relaxing or challenging—may influence how consumers prioritize warmth and competence in their evaluations and subsequent eWOM behavior. Relaxing and challenging activities represent two broad categories within leisure services, a classification commonly used in both academic research and industry practice (Mehmetoglu, 2007; Su et al., 2020). Relaxing activities are characterized by their low-intensity nature and focus on promoting serenity, safety, and tranquility (Su et al., 2020). Examples include sunbathing, walking in the forest, spa treatments, and beach relaxation. In contrast, challenging activities involve heightened emotional arousal, greater risk, and require specialized skills and considerable effort (Su et al., 2020). Examples of such activities are climbing, skiing, skydiving, snorkeling, surfing, and white-water rafting.

Regardless of the type of leisure activity, a fundamental motivation for engaging in such pursuits is pleasure (Mehmetoglu, 2007; Su et al., 2020). Pleasure is a positive affective state characterized by feelings of enjoyment, happiness, and satisfaction (Russell & Pratt, 1980). In leisure activities, pleasure can derive from sensory experiences, a sense of accomplishment, or social interactions (Io, 2018). For instance, a spa treatment or beach vacation offers pleasure through relaxation and escape from stress, while skiing or white-water rafting provide pleasure through adrenaline, skill mastery, and navigating challenges. According to the

affect-as-information theory (Clore et al., 2001; Schwarz, 1990), affective states are employed as informational cues for making judgments and decisions. When consumers experience pleasure during a leisure activity, they tend to form stronger emotional connections and share their positive experiences with others (Babić Rosario et al., 2016; Ladhari, 2007). However, research on how warmth and competence in these two major activity contexts specifically influence pleasure and subsequent eWOM sharing is limited.

Building on the stereotype content model, this research seeks to address the research gaps by examining how consumer impression of service attributes (warmth vs. competence) shapes eWOM in relaxing and challenging activities. We propose that the alignment of consumer judgment with activity type elicits pleasure, which in turn drives eWOM sharing behavior. Specifically, warmth may have a stronger impact in relaxing activities, while competence may be more important in challenging ones. To test our hypotheses, we implement five studies utilizing data from Douyin (the Chinese TikTok), 2 × 2 between-subjects design experiments, actual eWOM behavior tracking, scenario experiments, and video stimulation to examine the interaction effect between service judgments and service context on pleasure and eWOM sharing.

This research makes several contributions. First, it extends the stereotype content model to examine eWOM behavior in leisure activity service contexts. Our approach offers a new perspective on eWOM generation by showing how the alignment between service attributes and activity type influences eWOM behavior. Second, it applies the affect-as-information theory to eWOM research, revealing pleasure as a mediator in the psychological mechanism underlying the interaction between consumer judgment and service context on eWOM. Finally, the findings provide actionable guidance for service providers on motivating positive eWOM behaviors by tailoring impression management tactics based on whether the activity is relaxing or challenging in nature.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 | The current state of eWOM research

eWOM, defined as informal online communication about products and services (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), has become a key source of consumer information with the rise of social media, significantly influencing consumer behavior and business outcomes (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Research highlights eWOM's credibility and impartiality compared with traditional advertising, establishing it as a trusted source for product information (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Filieri, 2015, 2016; Verma et al., 2023). eWOM not only guides consumer decisions but also impacts business performance metrics such as sales, revenues, and brand equity (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Floyd et al., 2014). Studies have focused on outcomes like information adoption, purchase intention, and attitude toward products, and brand equity (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Filieri et al., 2023; Sijoria et al., 2019; Verma et al., 2023).

Various aspects of eWOM, such as valence, volume, and source credibility, have been examined to understand their impact on consumer perceptions and decision-making (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018; Filieri, 2015; Nguyen & Chaudhuri, 2019). It has been shown that factors influencing the credibility and helpfulness of eWOM include informational and normative elements, as well as cultural and platform-specific characteristics (Berger & Iyengar, 2013; Filieri, 2015; Hong et al., 2017; Verma et al., 2023; Yan et al., 2018). Studies have compared traditional and online WOM (Eelen et al., 2017), and investigated eWOM across different media types (Liu et al., 2021) and communication channels (Berger & Iyengar, 2013; Yan et al., 2018). Several meta-analyses have quantified the impact of eWOM on sales (Babić Rosario et al., 2016; Floyd et al., 2014). Studies also discuss how companies can effectively manage eWOM to their advantage through promotional campaigns and social media strategies (Litvin et al., 2008; Zhang et al., 2021).

One key stream of research focuses on the various motivations related to eWOM (Gonçalves et al., 2018; Yoo & Gretzel, 2008), such as satisfaction with a product or service (Huang, Zhang, Gursoy, et al., 2020; Jeong & Jang, 2011), the intrinsic enjoyment from sharing consumption stories online (Pachucki et al., 2022), personality traits (Roy et al., 2023), incentive marketing strategies from businesses (Sijoria et al., 2019), interactivity features and policies on anonymity of online platforms (Yan et al., 2018), and altruistic motives (Babić Rosario et al., 2020). Table 1 provides a review of studies examining eWOM drivers, including social motives (Chu & Kim, 2011; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), self-motives (Alexandrov et al., 2013; De Angelis et al., 2012), and product-related factors (Berger & Schwartz, 2011; Moldovan et al., 2011).

However, despite these contributions, the existing literature reveals significant limitations. There is inadequate consideration of how consumer impression (warmth vs. competence) might interact with the specific nature of the service being provided. There remain gaps in understanding the specific cognitive and emotional mechanisms that drive consumers to generate and share eWOM content after service encounters.

2.2 | Alignment of consumer judgment with activity type triggers eWOM

The stereotype content model suggests that warmth and competence are the two fundamental dimensions of human impression formation, playing a critical role in shaping consumer evaluations and behaviors (Fiske et al., 2002; Guo et al., 2020). Customers assess service providers based on verbal and nonverbal cues, such as their manner of speech, movement, and expression (Cuddy et al., 2008), forming opinions about their warmth and competence (Huang & Ha, 2020). These opinions can significantly impact customers' subsequent actions, including eWOM (Huang, Zhang, Gursoy, et al., 2020; Ren et al., 2023).

While most marketing studies suggest that competence takes precedence over warmth due to consumers' task-oriented goals and

the perceived diagnostic value of competence in assessing performance (Aaker et al., 2012; Marinova et al., 2018), some findings indicate that warmth may be more influential in certain situations (Andrei et al., 2017). These contradictory results highlight the need for further research to identify and explain the contingency factors that determine the relative importance of warmth and competence in driving various marketing outcomes, including eWOM (Güntürkün et al., 2020; Kolbl et al., 2019). Based on this understanding, we argue that services tailored to specific contexts may better evoke positive emotions and reactions from customers.

In relaxing activities, where the focus is on rejuvenation and comfort, we expect warmth to have a more positive impact on eWOM than competence. This is because customers in these contexts are more concerned with having an enjoyable, comfortable experience than with assessing technical skills (Su et al., 2020). Conversely, in challenging activities, customers are likely to prioritize competence over warmth (Güntürkün et al., 2020). They need confidence in the service providers' abilities to help them succeed, shifting their attention to competence-related attributes when evaluating the service (Huang, Zhang, Gursoy, et al., 2020; Rokenes et al., 2015). Thus,

H1a. In relaxing activities, warmth (vs. competence) is more likely to trigger eWOM.

H1b. In challenging activities, competence (vs. warmth) is more likely to trigger eWOM.

2.3 | Alignment of consumer judgment with activity type triggers pleasure

Warmth is closely associated with the emotional goals of relaxation and comfort sought after in relaxing activities (Su et al., 2020). Warm interactions not only foster a sense of belonging and social satisfaction, which are integral to pleasure (Mattila & Enz, 2002), but also reduce anxiety and stress, thereby directly increasing the pleasure derived from relaxation-focused services. In contrast, in challenging leisure activities where the focus is on achievement, skill development, and overcoming obstacles, the service provider's competence facilitates customer skill development and mastery, which are inherently pleasurable (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Thus,

H2a. In relaxing activities, warmth (vs. competence) is more likely to trigger pleasure.

H2b. In challenging activities, competence (vs. warmth) is more likely to trigger pleasure.

2.4 | The mediating role of pleasure

Pleasure, a positive affect state, has been identified as a key factor in shaping customer experiences and behaviors (Io, 2018). The

TABLE 1 A review of the major studies on WOM drivers.

Study	Research context	Theoretical background	Key drivers
			<i>Social motives</i>
Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004)	Web-based opinion-platform	Various utilities in decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social benefits • Economic incentives • Altruistic motives.
Yoo and Gretzel (2008)	Online travel reviews	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To help service provider • Concern for other travelers • Enjoyment • Self-enhancement
Jeong and Jang (2011)	Restaurant	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food quality • Satisfaction • Atmosphere
Chu and Kim (2011)	Social network	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tie strength, trust, norms, and information influence • Homogeneity
Dubois et al. (2016)	Unspecified	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpersonal closeness
			<i>Self-motives</i>
De Angelis et al. (2012)	Unspecified	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-enhancement
Alexandrov et al. (2013)	Brand evaluation	Social comparison, social learning, and self-enhancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-enhancement • Self-affirmation • Social bonding • Helping others
Berger (2014)	Unspecified	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-serving
Wu et al. (2016)	Hotel and restaurant	Self-enhancement theory, the agentic versus communal theory of power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive service experience, • Power and experience consistency
Liu et al. (2021)	Hospitality	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-driven • Self-image enhancement • Attention attraction
			<i>Product-related drivers</i>
Berger and Schwartz (2011)	Product evaluation	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Products that are more likely to be noticed by the public or cued by the environment
Moldovan et al. (2011)	New product evaluation	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product originality • Product usefulness
Eelen et al. (2017)	Online review	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand loyalty • Brand is closely connected to the self.
Nguyen and Chaudhuri (2019)	New product introduction	Interpersonal communication theory, consumer learning theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product innovativeness
			<i>Other drivers</i>
Berger and Iyengar (2013)	Unspecified	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating in writing versus oral interactions.
Gonçalves et al. (2018)	Hotel	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combinations of causal conditions
The present research	Services	The stereotype content model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warmth * relaxing activities • Competence * challenging activities • Pleasure as a mediator

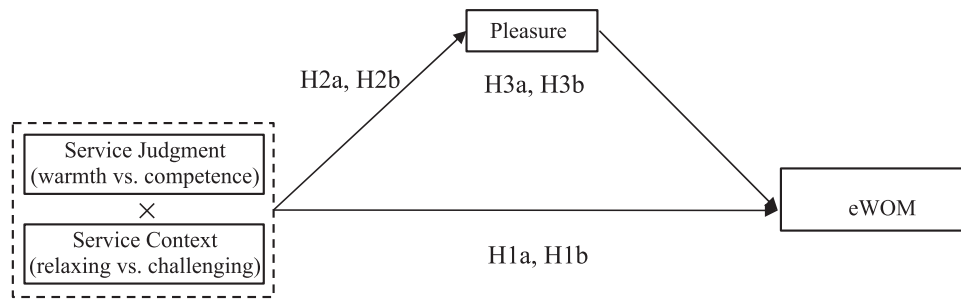


FIGURE 1 Theoretical framework.

affect-as-information theory argues that people rely on their feelings as a valuable source of information when making judgments and decisions (Clore et al., 2001; Schwarz, 1990). Positive affect can influence various mental activities, including motivation and attitudes, which drive individuals to engage in prosocial behaviors such as sharing information and experiences (Briñol et al., 2007; Forgas, 1995; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Studies indicate that when individuals experience positive emotions, they are inclined to share their positive experience (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Therefore, in service encounters, customers' experienced pleasure, stemming from perceived warmth (in relaxing activities) or competence (in challenging activities), acts as a positive affective cue that informs their decision to engage in eWOM sharing.

H3a. In relaxing activities, pleasure mediates the effect of warmth on eWOM.

H3b. In challenging activities, pleasure mediates the effect of competence on eWOM.

Figure 1 illustrates our theoretical framework.

2.5 | Overview of studies

We test the hypotheses through five studies, which include a secondary data study and four scenario-based experimental studies (see Figure 2).

Study 1 utilized Douyin data to explore the interaction effect of service judgment and service context on eWOM behavior. Study 2a, employing a 2×2 factorial between-subjects design, investigated the interaction effect between service judgment and service context on eWOM intention (H1a and H1b). In Study 3, we observed actual eWOM behavior to replicate the findings of Study 2a, using a new scenario involving rock-climbing and hot springs activities. Study 4 examined the mediation effect of pleasure in the interaction effect of service judgment and the type of activity on eWOM (H3a and H3b), also retesting H1a, H1b, H2a, and H2b. Lastly, Study 5 replicated Study 4 with different samples, activities, service designs, and additional control variables.

Before the commencement of the study, we initially selected 20 types of activities based on the top popular destinations in China

(www.ctrip.com) (Byun & Jang, 2015). We recruited 40 participants for a preliminary test from Credamo.com, a reputable online survey platform in China. Based on the test results, we subsequently selected the top four activities in terms of the highest mean scores for both relaxing and challenging activities, which were used as stimuli for the subsequent scenario experiments.

3 | STUDY 1

Study 1 collected and analyzed secondary data from Douyin (China's version of TikTok) to preliminarily investigate the interaction effect between service judgment (warmth vs. competence) and service context (relaxing vs. challenging) on eWOM.

3.1 | Data collection

We first select 8 typical activities requiring service from the top 20 activities listed in the popular leisure activities of Dianping (www.dianping.com) and conduct a pretest for all the eight leisure activities involved (Supporting Information: Web Appendix D). Then, for each type of activity, all Douyin short videos were retrieved using service-related keywords and elements (such as caring, warmth, sincerity, experienced, skilled, and professional services) from January 1, 2022, to July 21, 2023 (Liao et al., 2019). Subsequently, we excluded those videos that had not published content related to service judgment and collected data from 17 well-known service providers in the destination (all with more than 10,000 followers and at least two short videos related to the service). Finally, data cleaning was conducted to exclude irrelevant short videos, involved forwards or raffle prizes, or interactions with celebrities, resulting in 275 usable Douyin videos for analysis. Supporting Information: Table A2 of Web Appendix A provides the relevant data and examples of videos. To ensure data stability, the study collected short video key content, release time, number of followers, and shares.

3.2 | Coding

Referring to how warm and competent service is defined, two researchers who were blind to the study's content coded the short

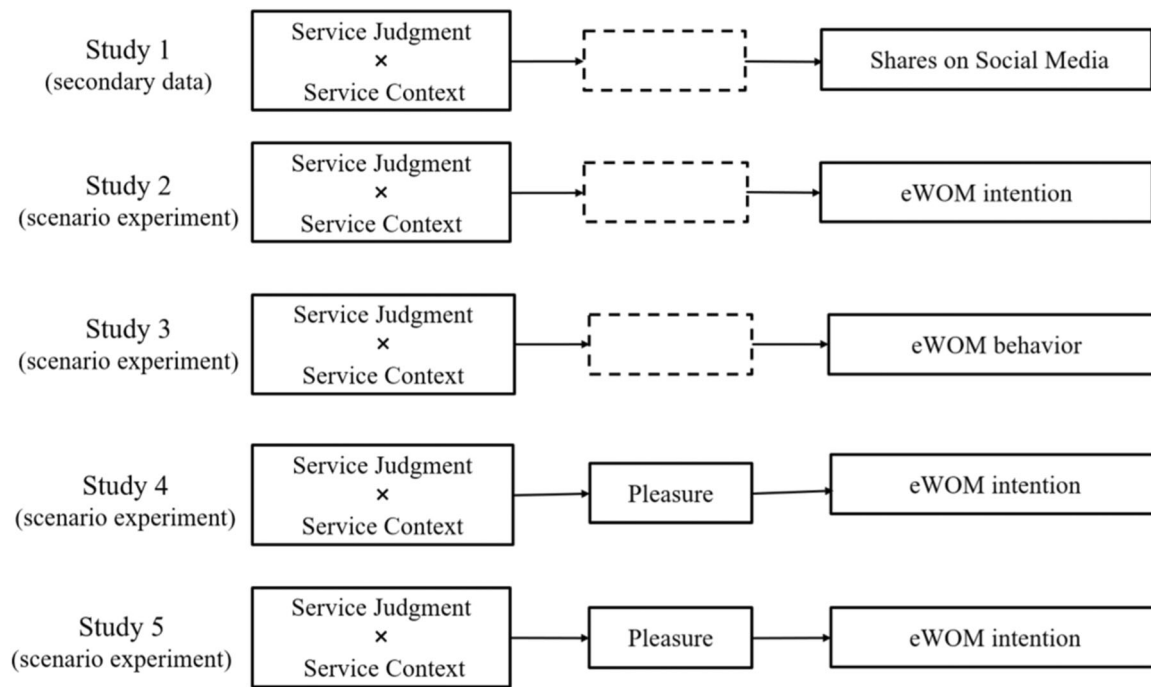


FIGURE 2 Study overview.

TABLE 2 Crosstab and coding examples of service contexts and service judgment for Douyin short videos.

	Warmth	Competence	Total
Relaxing activity	71	62	133
Challenging activity	73	69	142
Total	144	131	275
	Coding	Short video content	Destination
Relaxing activity(1)	Warmth (0)	Passionate service	Universal Studios Beijing
	Competence (1)	A stage created by a professional team	
Challenging activity (0)	Warmth (0)	Carefully set up ski zones	Nanshan Ski Resort
	Competence (1)	Incorporating modern technology to make skiing efficient and convenient	

video content (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.97$, $p < 0.001$). Discrepancies were resolved by a service management expert. Warmth which emphasized friendly, caring, sincere, and so forth, in fulfilling service was coded as 0, whereas competence which emphasized ability, skill, efficiency, and so forth, in fulfilling service was coded as 1. The final number and examples of each type of short video are shown in Table 2.

3.3 | Data analysis and results

We ran a 2×2 ANOVA to examine the interaction effect on eWOM. The mean number of shares (Number of shares/Number of followers)

served as the dependent variable (Liao et al., 2019), and service judgment and service context as the independent variable. Since the release time of short videos affects the number of shares, we consider the release time as a control variable. As predicted, service judgment and service context interaction were significant in predicting eWOM ($F(1, 270) = 17.12$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.06$). Planned contrast (Figure 3) revealed that, in the relaxing activity group, warmth was marginally more likely to trigger shares than competent service ($M_{\text{warmth}} = 4.79\text{E}^{-3} > M_{\text{competence}} = 1.20\text{E}^{-3}$; $F(1, 270) = 2.79$, $p = 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$). While in the challenging activity group, competent service can trigger more eWOM than warm service ($M_{\text{competence}} = 1.26\text{E}^{-2} > M_{\text{warmth}} = 8.70\text{E}^{-4}$; $F(1, 270) = 16.74$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.06$). Thus, H1a and H1b can be supported preliminarily.

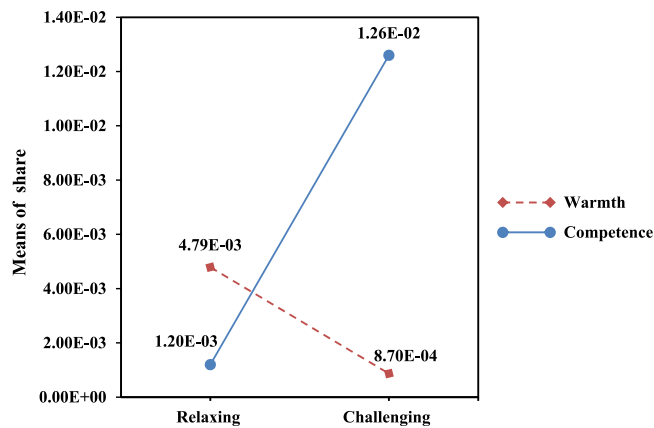


FIGURE 3 Service judgment, service context, and social media shares (Study 1).

3.4 | Discussion

Study 1 provided initial support for the link between service judgment and service context on eWOM. Due to the constraints of secondary data, the dependent variables used in the study only measure the sharing of short videos uploaded by others, rather than accurately measuring one's sharing of their own experiences.

4 | STUDY 2A

Based on Study 1, Study 2a used a scenario-based experiment to examine the potential interaction effect of service judgment and service context on eWOM intention, testing H1a, and H1b.

4.1 | Method

4.1.1 | Design and participants

Study 2a adopted a 2 (warmth vs. competence) \times 2 (relaxing vs. challenging service context) factorial between-subjects design. We recruited 166 students (59% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 28.23$, $SD = 7.03$) through the Marketing Research Lab, a public platform established jointly by Chinese universities for consumer behavior and marketing research. The sample profiles for all studies are presented in Supporting Information: Table A1 of Web Appendix A.

4.1.2 | Procedure and stimuli

We randomly assigned participants to one of four seaside scenarios, categorizing them as either relaxing (such as a beach vacation) or challenging (like surfing), drawing from Su et al.'s (2020) work. We presented participants with text and images related to their designated scenario and asked them to actively envision themselves

participating in the travel experience. Within each activity, we manipulated the service judgment by describing Tom, the tour instructor, either as warm and friendly or as competent and professional (Güntürkün et al., 2020). We ensured consistency in elements such as image size and word count.

After participants read the materials, we gauged their intention to share eWOM using four items (e.g., "I will tell others the story of this trip online"; $\alpha = 0.70$) adapted from Su et al. (2020). We also verified whether participants correctly perceived the type of activity to which they were assigned. Additionally, we evaluated participants' judgments of the tour instructor's warmth and competence using a 7-point semantic differential scale. We assessed the scenario for its realism and clarity. As control variables, we asked participants about their preferences regarding activities and sharing tendencies. Finally, participants provided demographic information. The measurement items are presented in Supporting Information: Web Appendix B, the experimental stimuli in Supporting Information: Web Appendix C, and the results of pretests in Supporting Information: Web Appendix D.

4.2 | Results

4.2.1 | Manipulation check

First, the results of the scenario authenticity test revealed that the majority of participants thought the condition was realistic and easily understandable ($M_{\text{real}} = 5.56$, $SD = 0.94$, $t(165) = 21.45$, $p < 0.001$; $M_{\text{understand}} = 5.62$, $SD = 0.97$, $t(165) = 21.54$, $p < 0.001$, both significantly above the median of 4). Second, as indicated in the independent samples t test, the participants could distinguish between relaxing activity ($M_{\text{relaxing}} = 6.23$, $SD = 0.83$ vs. $M_{\text{challenging}} = 3.07$, $SD = 1.59$, $t(164) = -16.18$, $p < 0.001$) and challenging activity ($M_{\text{relaxing}} = 2.48$, $SD = 1.42$ vs. $M_{\text{challenging}} = 6.28$, $SD = 0.76$, $t(164) = 21.25$, $p < 0.001$). Third, the participants can also distinguish different services ($M_{\text{warmth}} = 3.63$, $SD = 2.01$ vs. $M_{\text{competence}} = 6.06$, $SD = 0.97$, $t(164) = -9.86$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the service contexts and service judgment were successfully manipulated.

4.2.2 | The interaction effect on eWOM intention

To test the interaction effect on eWOM, we ran a 2 \times 2 ANOVA using service judgment and service context as between-subjects factors. Findings suggest that service judgment and service context interaction were significant in predicting eWOM intention ($F(1, 162) = 33.78$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.17$). Planned contrast (Figure 4) revealed that, in the relaxing activity group, warm service ($M_{\text{warmth}} = 5.82$, $SD = 0.57$) can trigger more eWOM intention than competent service ($M_{\text{competence}} = 5.22$, $SD = 0.87$; $F(1, 162) = 14.20$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.08$). While in the challenging activity group, competent service ($M_{\text{competence}} = 6.03$, $SD = 0.57$) can trigger more eWOM intention than warm service ($M_{\text{warmth}} = 5.35$, $SD = 0.79$; $F(1, 162) = 19.93$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.11$). Thus, H1a and H1b were supported.

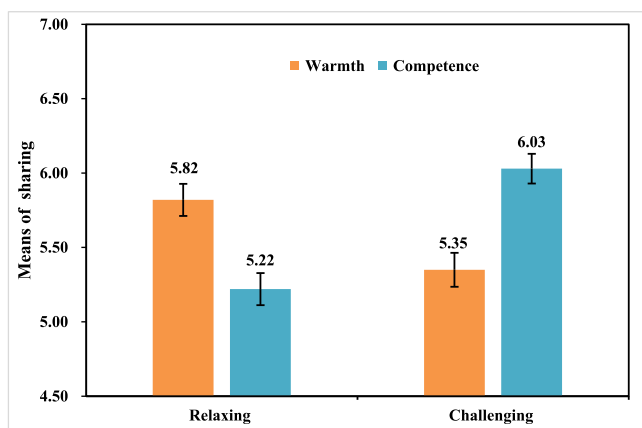


FIGURE 4 Service judgment, service context, and eWOM sharing intention (Study 2a).

4.2.3 | Control variable check

We included preferences toward activities and sharing preference as a covariate and reran 2 (warmth vs. competence) \times 2 (relaxing vs. challenging activity) two-way ANOVA analysis. The mean values of the preferences toward activities (5.45–6.00, $F(3, 162) = 2.74$, $p = 0.05$) and sharing preferences (5.05–5.52, $F(3, 162) = 1.30$, $p = 0.28$) showed significant variation across the four experimental groups. However, the test results showed the interaction effects still hold in predicting eWOM intention ($F(1, 160) = 25.58$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.14$).

4.3 | Discussion

Study 2a employs a scenario experiment in the same environment to confirm the interaction effect between service judgment and service context on eWOM, minimizing potential influences arising from environmental differences. However, in reality, relaxation and challenge activities typically occur in different environments. To validate whether this effect persists in divergent environments, we conducted Study 2b using different samples and contexts. The results suggest that this effect is robust, thus further improving external validity. The experimental design and results of Study 2b are presented in Supporting Information: Appendix E.

5 | STUDY 3

Complementing Studies 1 and 2, Study 3 used the actual eWOM sharing behavior based on new fictional activity destinations (i.e., Peak rock climbing or Spa hot springs) and service scenarios (i.e., service concept and performance of employees) and different control variables (i.e., the number of times participated in this activity and sharing frequency) to retest the interaction effect between service judgment and service context on eWOM (H1a, H1b).

5.1 | Method

5.1.1 | Design and participants

Study 3 adopted a 2 (warmth vs. competence) \times 2 (relaxing vs. challenging activity) factorial between-subjects design. We recruited 150 participants from Credamo.com. After removing participants who did not pass the attention check, we had a total of 147 participants available for analysis (52.4% females, $M_{age} = 30.52$, $SD = 8.22$).

5.1.2 | Procedure and stimuli

We instructed participants to envision themselves purchasing a travel product from Peak Travel Agency, simulating activities like rock climbing or hot springs. The service judgment manipulation followed a method similar to Study 2 (see Supporting Information: Web Appendix C). We informed participants that during their travel, service employees (such as massage technicians or instructors) would perform as shown in the accompanying images. These stimuli were designed with consistent visual elements and word count and had undergone pretesting (see Supporting Information: Web Appendix D).

We measured participants' actual eWOM sharing behavior, based on Leung et al. (2020). Participants were asked if they were willing to share their travel experiences on a social platform by clicking a button. Participants who clicked this button were prompted to write and share a travel story on their preferred social platform(s), while those who did not click the button skipped this step. All participants were made aware later that they would not actually share the travel stories on social media platforms.

To assess the scenario's authenticity, we inquired about participants' perceptions of the likelihood and their ability to imagine themselves in the provided scenario. We further conducted a manipulation check for service contexts and service judgment separately, using a 7-point semantic differential scale for each. Finally, participants provided demographic information and details on control variables, such as the number of times participated in this activity (Byun & Jang, 2015) and sharing frequency (Su et al., 2024).

5.2 | Results

5.2.1 | Manipulation checks

First, according to the results of the scenario authenticity test, the majority of the participants found the situation to be easy to understand and realistic ($M_{real} = 5.99$, $SD = 0.95$, $t(146) = 25.33$, $p < 0.001$; $M_{understand} = 6.24$, $SD = 1.00$, $t(146) = 27.29$, $p < 0.001$, both significantly above the median of 4). Second, the independent samples t test results indicated that the participants could tell apart different kinds of activities ($M_{relaxing} = 1.37$, $SD = 0.54$ vs. $M_{challenging} = 6.17$, $SD = 1.01$, $t(145) = 35.50$, $p < 0.001$) and different service judgment ($M_{warmth} = 2.40$, $SD = 1.85$ vs. $M_{competence} = 5.96$,

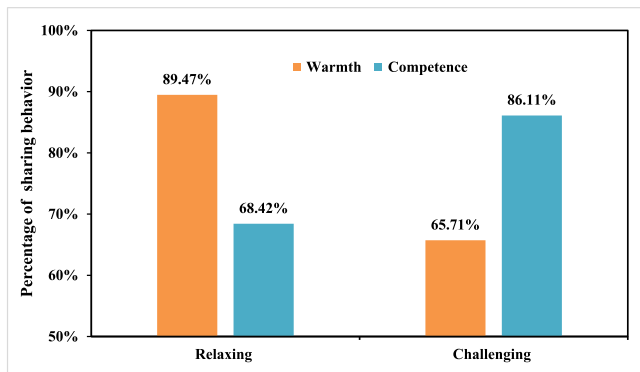


FIGURE 5 Service judgment, service context, and eWOM sharing behavior (Study 3).

$SD = 1.34$, $t(145) = -13.339$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the manipulation was considered successful.

5.2.2 | The interaction effect on eWOM behavior

Two researchers blind to the study's content checked the content of the stories written by the participants and were instructed to code the eWOM sharing behavior (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.92$, $p < 0.001$), and a professor of management resolved any disagreements. A logistic regression on eWOM sharing behavior (1 = eWOM sharing or effective travel stories; e.g., This rock-climbing was very exciting, and the coaching team was also very professional, which allowed me to successfully complete a challenge.; 0 = no eWOM sharing or ineffective travel stories; e.g., 1234567) was carried out with service judgment (specified as categorical and simple contrasts), service contexts (1 = relaxing activity, 0 = challenging activity), and their interactions as predictors. The test results showed a significant interaction effect on eWOM sharing behavior ($B = -2.54$, $Wald = 8.49$, $p = 0.004$).

Furthermore, we decomposed the interaction effect through two separate logistic regression analyses for each service context (see Figure 5). As expected, in the relaxing activity, warm service (89.47%) was more likely to trigger eWOM behavior compared with competent service (68.42%; $B = -1.37$, $Wald = 4.66$, $p = 0.031$). In contrast, in the challenging activity, competent service (86.11%) was more likely to trigger eWOM behavior compared with warm service (65.71%; $B = 1.17$, $Wald = 3.84$, $p = 0.05$). Thus, H1a, H1b was supported.

5.2.3 | Control variable check

We included the number of times participated in this activity and sharing frequency as control variables and reran a binary logistic regression. The mean values of the shared frequency (5.03–5.32, $F(3, 143) = 0.45$, $p = 0.72$) was no obvious difference among the four groups and the frequency of participation in this activity (2.58–3.47,

$F(3, 143) = 3.68$, $p = 0.014$) was significantly different, the results showed the interaction effect on eWOM sharing behavior remained marginally significant ($B = -1.70$, $Wald = 3.47$, $p = 0.06$).

5.3 | Discussion

Study 3 uses actual eWOM sharing behavior based on employees' service concept and performance scenarios to retest H1a, and H1b and confirm the interaction effect between service judgment and service context on eWOM. The results provided more powerful improvements to the eWOM sharing behavior rather than the intention of customers, improving the reliability of study 2.

6 | STUDY 4

In contrast to studies 2a–3, where service judgment was mainly manipulated through employee speech, Study 4 introduced a new experimental scenario focused on the body language of service employees to investigate how this impacts pleasure and, subsequently, eWOM intention (H3a, H3b), while also retesting H1a, H1b, H2a, and H2b. In addition, we controlled for emotional arousal in our experiment.

6.1 | Method

6.1.1 | Design and participants

Study 4 adopted a 2 (warmth vs. competence) \times 2 (relaxing vs. challenging activity) factorial between-subjects design. Our study took place at the prestigious Yuelu Mountain, rated 5A, in Changsha, China. We randomly selected 240 actual customers to participate in the study. Finally, we excluded 38 participants with missing values and the same answer options, leaving 203 valid responses (51.2% female, 79.9% aged 18–40).

6.1.2 | Procedure and stimuli

In addition to verbal behavior, employees' body language can also influence customers' different perceptions of warmth and competence judgment (Marinova et al., 2018). Therefore, Study 4 predominantly utilized gestures and smiles by service assistants to stimulate service judgment (see Supporting Information: Web Appendix C). We used two fictional customer destinations, Rainbow Park and Sky Gate, as stimuli.

Participants were allocated randomly to read about one of these destinations and view a billboard featuring Jerry, their docent/instructor. Warm service was represented by Jerry with open arms, a broad smile, and a "warm and sincere" slogan, while competent service featured Jerry with crossed arms, a slight smile, and a "professional and efficient" slogan. This service judgment

manipulation was consistent, except for the image background of activities.

After reading the materials, we first measured the customer's eWOM sharing intention using the same scale as in Study 2a ($\alpha = 0.70$). Second, participants rated their pleasure using a 7-point scale ($\alpha = 0.90$), manipulation check, and scenario authenticity. Finally, the control variables of emotional arousal ($\alpha = 0.93$) (from Russell & Pratt, 1980), as well as the descriptive questions were posed to the participants.

6.2 | Results

6.2.1 | Manipulation checks

First, based on the scenario authenticity test results, it was found that the majority of participants perceived the situation to be easy to understand and credible ($M_{\text{real}} = 4.86$, $SD = 1.56$, $t(202) = 7.85$, $p < 0.001$; $M_{\text{understand}} = 4.85$, $SD = 1.52$, $t(202) = 7.95$, $p < 0.001$, both were considerably above 4, the median value). Second, the results of the independent samples t test showed that participants accurately distinguished between various types of activities ($M_{\text{relaxing}} = 3.30$, $SD = 1.81$ vs. $M_{\text{challenging}} = 5.16$, $SD = 1.69$, $t(201) = 7.57$, $p < 0.001$) and service judgment ($M_{\text{warmth}} = 3.77$, $SD = 1.99$ vs. $M_{\text{competence}} = 4.82$, $SD = 1.67$, $t(201) = -4.07$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the manipulation of service contexts and service judgment was successful.

6.2.2 | The interaction effect on eWOM intention

We performed ANOVA using customers' eWOM sharing intention as the dependent variable. Findings showed that the interaction effect between service judgment and service context on eWOM ($F(1, 199) = 28.21$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.12$) was significant. Planned contrast (Figure 6) revealed that, in the relaxing activity group, warm service ($M_{\text{warmth}} = 5.82$, $SD = 0.75$) can trigger more eWOM intention than competent service ($M_{\text{competence}} = 5.41$, $SD = 0.82$; $F(1, 199) = 5.16$, $p = 0.024$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$). While in the challenging activity group, competent service ($M_{\text{competence}} = 6.06$, $SD = 0.77$) can trigger more eWOM intention than warm service ($M_{\text{warmth}} = 5.13$, $SD = 1.21$; $F(1, 199) = 27.85$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.12$). Thus, H1a and H1b were supported.

6.2.3 | The interaction effect on pleasure

Next, we further test the interaction effect on pleasure. First, the results showed that the interaction effect was significant in predicting pleasure ($F(1, 199) = 18.77$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$). Planned contrast (Figure 6) revealed that, in the relaxing activity group, warm service ($M_{\text{warmth}} = 5.57$, $SD = 1.42$) can arouse a higher level of pleasure than competent service ($M_{\text{competence}} = 4.54$, $SD = 1.37$; $F(1,$

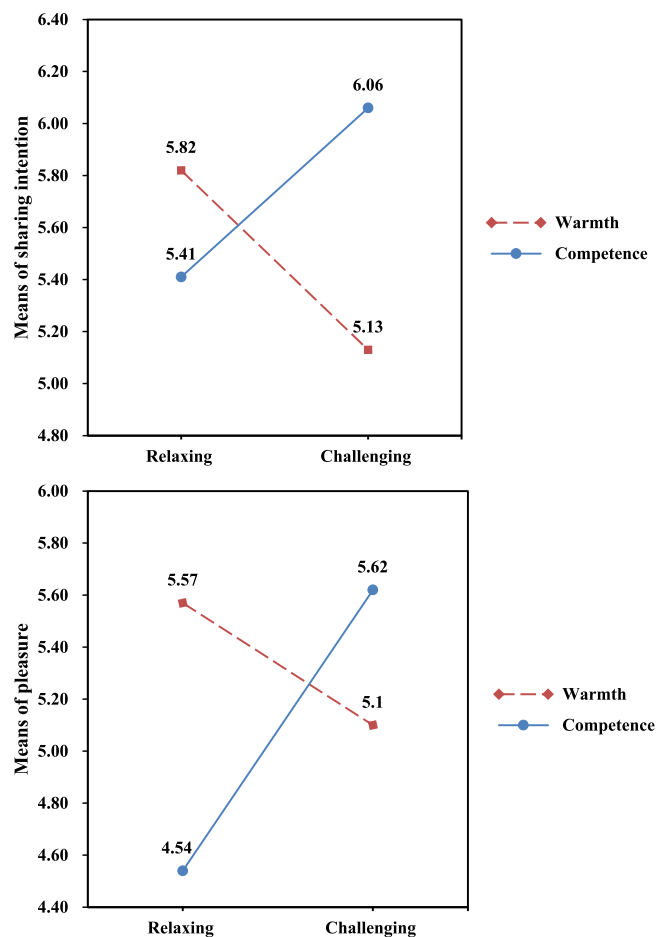


FIGURE 6 Service judgment, service context, pleasure, and eWOM sharing intention (Study 4).

199) = 16.24, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.08$). While in the challenging activity group, competent service ($M_{\text{competence}} = 5.62$, $SD = 1.13$; $F(1, 199) = 4.30$, $p = 0.04$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$) can arouse higher levels of pleasure than warm service ($M_{\text{warmth}} = 5.10$, $SD = 1.14$). Thus, H2a and H2b were supported.

6.2.4 | The moderated mediation effect analysis

The mediation effects were tested by bootstrapping the macro model 7 in SPSS PROCESS by Hayes (2017). After conducting 5000 iterations with the samples, we obtained the parameter estimates' 95% confidence interval (CI, results in Table 3).

The results suggested that the moderating effect of service context on the mediation effect of pleasure was significant (moderated mediation index = -0.24 , $SE = 0.12$, 95% CI = $[-0.50, -0.05]$). Specifically, in the relaxing activity group, the mediation effect of pleasure was significant (indirect effect = -0.16 , $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI = $[-0.34, -0.03]$). Meanwhile, in the challenging activity group, the mediation effect of pleasure was significant was also significant (indirect effect = 0.08 , $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI = $[0.01, 0.20]$).

TABLE 3 Moderated mediation analysis result (Study 4).

	M(PL)				Y(ES)			
	<i>b</i>	SE	LLCI	ULCI	<i>b</i>	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	5.10	0.18	4.75	5.45	4.64	0.28	4.09	5.20
X(SJ)	0.52	0.25	0.03	1.01	0.31	0.13	0.05	0.57
W(SC)	0.47	0.25	−0.03	0.97	−	−	−	−
X×W	−1.54	0.36	−2.24	−0.84	−	−	−	−
M(PL)	−	−	−	−	0.16	0.05	0.06	0.25
	$R^2 = 0.10$, $F(3, 199) = 7.78$, $p < 0.001$				$R^2 = 0.07$, $F(2, 200) = 7.10$, $p < 0.001$			
Indirect effect: SJ → PL → ES					Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Relaxing activity					−0.16	0.08	−0.34	−0.03
Challenging activity					0.08	0.05	0.01	0.20

Abbreviations: ES, EWOM sharing intention; LLCI, lower limit of confident interval; PL, pleasure; SJ, Service judgment; SC, service context; ULCI, upper limit of confident interval.

Therefore, H3a and H3b were supported. Table 3 provides the details of the moderated mediation effect.

6.2.5 | Alternative explanation

Considering pleasure and arousal as two dimensions of emotion (Bigne et al., 2005; Su et al., 2020), arousal may influence their eWOM sharing intention, we rule out the alternative explanation of emotional arousal, and we conducted a similar moderated mediation analysis with service context as the moderator, and emotional arousal as the mediators (PROCESS model 7). Results indicated that emotional arousal could not replace pleasure as a mediator (index of moderated mediation = −0.12, SE = 0.09, 95% CI = [−0.34, 0.01]).

6.3 | Discussion

To keep our operations as clean as possible, Study 4 chose to focus on photos to manipulate service context and service judgment. However, whether this conclusion can be replicated in real situations needs further research.

7 | STUDY 5

Building upon Study 4, Study 5 incorporated four sets of videos that combined audio and visual elements, which effectively conveyed emotions and feelings, enabling a more precise assessment of service. The study focuses on new fictional activity destinations (i.e., the Haven Lake and the Leap Bungee) and similar service scenarios (i.e., service assistant in the journey) and different control variables

(i.e., the familiarity and times of participation in this activity and level of stress).

7.1 | Method

7.1.1 | Design and participants

Study 5 adopted a 2 (warmth vs. competence) × 2 (relaxing vs. challenging activity) factorial between-subjects design. We enlisted 238 participants from Credamo.com and excluded 13 participants who completed the task too quickly, failed the attention check, or provided the same answer to all questions, leaving 225 valid responses (52.4% females and $M_{\text{age}} = 28.95$, $SD = 7.11$).

7.1.2 | Procedure and stimuli

Based on the pretest results, we selected two fictional destinations, Haven Lake for relaxing activity and Leap Bungee for challenging activity. We created introduction materials (see Supporting Information: Web Appendix C) to differentiate between these types. Participants were randomly assigned to watch one of four videos featuring a tour assistant at these destinations. They were assured of receiving the same level of service in the activity. To ensure the videos' authenticity, we enlisted a professional tour service employee and filmed on-site at actual customer destinations. The videos remained consistent in all aspects, except for the service judgment manipulations.

We altered service judgment using specific keywords (e.g., warmth characterized by helpfulness, genuine friendliness; competence characterized by experience, professionalism, and efficiency) and subtle cues (e.g., gestures, facial expressions) during the tour.

Two undergraduate film production students managed the production process, and we sought feedback from a professor, incorporating suggested revisions. The videos had a duration of 20 s and contained approximately 90 words, with less than 30% variation in the words used across manipulations (see Supporting Information: Web Appendix C). Customer's eWOM sharing intention ($\alpha = 0.70$), pleasure ($\alpha = 0.82$), manipulation check, and scenario authenticity were similar to those used in Study 4. Participants answered questions regarding the number of times of participation, familiarity with this activity, and the level of stress, along with several demographic questions.

7.2 | Results

7.2.1 | Manipulation checks

First, based on the scenario authenticity test results, it was found that the majority of participants perceived the situation to be easy to understand and credible ($M_{\text{real}} = 5.88$, $SD = 0.93$, $t(224) = 30.32$, $p < 0.001$; $M_{\text{understand}} = 6.05$, $SD = 0.93$, $t(224) = 32.98$, $p < 0.001$, both significantly above the median of 4). Second, the independent samples t test demonstrated the participants' ability to differentiate between various types of activities ($M_{\text{relaxing}} = 2.17$, $SD = 1.54$ vs. $M_{\text{challenging}} = 6.04$, $SD = 1.08$, $t(223) = 21.96$, $p < 0.001$) and different service judgment ($M_{\text{warmth}} = 3.40$, $SD = 2.01$ vs. $M_{\text{competence}} = 5.52$, $SD = 1.54$, $t(223) = -8.88$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the manipulation was considered successful.

7.2.2 | The interaction effect on eWOM intention

We conducted the same procedure as in Study 4 to test customers' eWOM sharing intention. Results suggested that the interaction effect between service judgment and service context on eWOM ($F(1, 221) = 18.28$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.08$) was significant. Planned contrast (Figure 7) revealed that, in the relaxing activity condition, warm service ($M_{\text{warmth}} = 5.97$, $SD = 0.66$) can trigger more eWOM intention than competent service ($M_{\text{competence}} = 5.66$, $SD = 0.76$; $F(1, 221) = 6.60$, $p = 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$). While in the challenging activity condition, competent service ($M_{\text{competence}} = 6.16$, $SD = 0.51$) can trigger more eWOM intention than warm service ($M_{\text{warmth}} = 5.74$, $SD = 0.62$; $F(1, 221) = 12.03$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$). Thus, H1a and H1b were supported.

7.2.3 | The interaction effect on pleasure

Next, we further test the interaction effect on pleasure. First, the results demonstrated that the interaction effect was significant in predicting pleasure ($F(1, 221) = 24.92$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.10$). Planned contrast (Figure 7) revealed that, in the relaxing activity group, warm service ($M_{\text{warmth}} = 5.87$, $SD = 0.73$) can induce a higher level of pleasure than competent service ($M_{\text{competence}} = 5.12$, $SD = 1.16$;

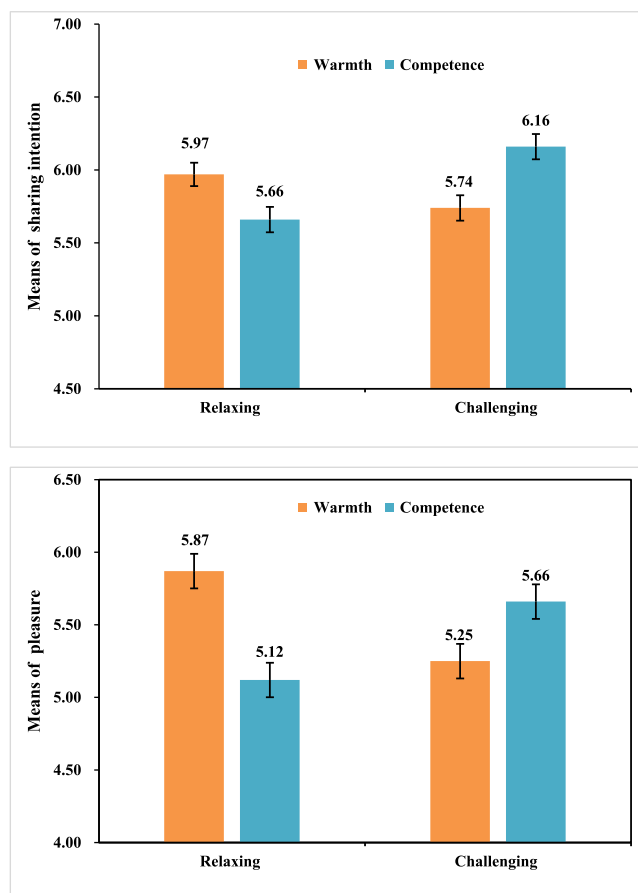


FIGURE 7 Service judgment, service context, pleasure, and sharing intention (Study 6).

$F(1, 221) = 21.14$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$). While in the challenging activity group, competent service ($M_{\text{competence}} = 5.66$, $SD = 0.76$) can arouse higher levels of pleasure than warm service ($M_{\text{warmth}} = 5.25$, $SD = 0.81$; $F(1, 221) = 6.18$, $p = 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$). Thus, H2a and H2b were supported.

7.2.4 | The moderated mediation effect analysis

The mediation effects were tested in the same way as in Study 4, and the results are presented in Table 4. The moderated mediation effects of pleasure were found to be significant (moderated mediation index = -0.42 , standard error = 0.12 , 95% CI = $[-0.68, -0.21]$). Specifically, in the case of relaxing activities, the mediation effect was significant (indirect effect = -0.27 , standard error = 0.09 , 95% CI: $[-0.46, -0.13]$). Similarly, for challenging activities, the mediation effect was also significant (indirect effect = 0.15 , standard error = 0.06 , 95% CI: $[0.04, 0.29]$). Therefore, H3a and H3b were supported.

To exclude other possible explanations of emotional arousal, we conducted a similar moderated mediation analysis with service context as the moderator, and emotional arousal as the mediator (PROCESS model 7). The findings revealed that emotional arousal could not replace pleasure as mediators (moderated mediation

TABLE 4 Moderated mediation analysis result (Study 5).

	M(PL)				Y(ES)			
	<i>b</i>	SE	LLCI	ULCI	<i>b</i>	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	5.25	0.12	5.01	5.48	3.88	0.24	3.40	4.36
X(SJ)	0.42	0.17	0.09	0.75	0.12	0.08	−0.04	0.27
W(SC)	0.63	0.17	0.30	0.95	−	−	−	−
X×W	−1.18	0.24	−1.64	−0.71	−	−	−	−
M(PL)	−	−	−	−	0.36	0.04	0.27	0.44
$R^2 = 0.11, F(3, 221) = 9.17,$ $p < 0.001$					$R^2 = 0.24, F(2, 222) = 35.18,$ $p < 0.001$			
Indirect effect: SJ → PL → ES					Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Relaxing activity					−0.27	0.09	−0.46	−0.13
Challenging activity					0.15	0.06	0.04	0.29

Abbreviations: ES, EWOM sharing intention; LLCI, lower limit of confident interval; PL, pleasure; SJ, Service judgment; SC, service context; ULCI, upper limit of confident interval.

index = −0.08, standard error = 0.07, 95% CI = [−0.26, 0.03]). We then conducted an ANCOVA test, considering service context and service judgment as two factors and the four control variables mentioned earlier as covariates. The results confirmed that the interaction effect remained significant ($F(1, 217) = 14.74$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.06$). Subsequently, we performed a similar moderated mediation analysis with service context as the moderator and pleasure as the mediator (using PROCESS model 7), while including the four control variables as covariates. This analysis showed that the moderated mediation effect remained significant (moderated mediation index = −0.26, standard error = 0.10, 95% CI = [−0.47, −0.10]).

7.3 | DISCUSSION

Study 5 once again utilized video format to validate the interaction effect of activity and service judgment on customers' intention to share their experience and the mediating role of pleasure. This analysis excluded the influence of emotional arousal, participation frequency, familiarity with the activity, and stress levels. The outcomes enhanced the overall generalizability and validity of the findings from Study 4.

8 | GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research investigates the interaction effect between service judgment (warmth vs. competence) and service context (relaxing vs. challenging activities) on customers' eWOM sharing behavior. Through five studies, including secondary data analysis and experimental designs, the research consistently found that warm service triggered more eWOM in relaxing activities, while competent service

led to more eWOM in challenging activities. The research also reveals that pleasure mediated this interaction effect. Specifically, warm service in relaxing activities and competent service in challenging activities induced higher levels of pleasure, which in turn increased eWOM intention. These findings were robust across different samples, scenarios, and control variables, contributing to our understanding consumer eWOM behavior.

8.1 | Theoretical contributions

Our research offers two significant theoretical contributions to the field of eWOM research. First, we extend the stereotype content model to explore the psychological mechanisms driving eWOM behavior in leisure service contexts, addressing the model's limited application in this area. We expand the model's use beyond traditional social psychology to assess the relative importance of warmth and competence judgments in influencing eWOM behavior. While previous research has identified various motivational factors such as satisfaction (Huang, Zhang, Gursoy, et al., 2020), personality traits (Roy et al., 2023), and platform characteristics (Yan et al., 2018), it has not investigated how warmth and competence affect eWOM behavior in leisure service contexts. Our empirical evidence reveals that the alignment between service attributes (warmth and competence) and activity type (relaxing or challenging) plays a key role in shaping eWOM behavior. This study thus provides a more nuanced understanding of eWOM motivations, emphasizing the interaction between consumer perceptions and service characteristics.

Second, our study introduces a novel perspective on the role of emotions in eWOM generation and sharing. While previous studies on eWOM have largely focused on the impact of emotions on the transmission and valence of messages (Babić Rosario et al., 2016; Ladhari, 2007; Liu et al., 2021), they have not considered pleasure as

a mediating factor in eWOM sharing. We address this gap by applying the affect-as-information theory (Clore et al., 2001; Schwarz, 1990) to eWOM research. Our study proposes and empirically tests how the pleasure derived from the alignment between service attributes and activity type serves as a critical informational cue driving eWOM sharing behavior. This application of affect-as-information theory to the eWOM context extends its influence beyond its established domains, such as satisfaction, loyalty, and other behavioral outcomes in service encounters (Mattila & Enz, 2002). Our research pioneers its application by treating pleasure as a mediating factor in the eWOM research.

8.2 | Managerial implications

This research provides actionable guidance for leisure service providers to motivate positive eWOM behaviors. Our findings suggest that impression management tactics should be tailored based on whether the activity is relaxing or challenging in nature. By aligning service attributes with the type of activity, managers can enhance customer pleasure and encourage organic postencounter sharing on review sites, social media, and online communities.

For relaxing activities such as spa treatments or casual dining, service providers should focus on enhancing perceptions of warmth. This can be achieved through friendly interactions, caring language, gentle background music, and cozy atmospheres. Organizations should offer employees training in personalized engagement strategies, emphasizing friendly greetings, appropriate use of humor, and relatable gestures toward consumers. These approaches can inspire positive interactions and organic eWOM promotion.

Conversely, for more challenging activities like adventure excursions or business conferences, the emphasis should be on conveying competence. This can be accomplished through professional certifications, efficient issue resolution, high-tech equipment, and credential displays. Employee training in such organizations should focus on pursuing professional certifications or qualifications, while also providing standardized clothing and equipment. Well-trained staff should be able to concisely communicate domain expertise and thoughtfully handle problems or queries to motivate online eWOM.

Managers should accurately assess whether their service's attributes evoke relaxation or challenge to devise an appropriate service strategy. Implementing regular evaluation and reward systems can motivate employees to deliver better service. Ultimately, when service experiences foster the specific perceptions—warmth for relaxing situations and competence for challenging ones—that elicit pleasure, customers feel intrinsically motivated to spread positive eWOM.

8.3 | Limitations and future research

This study provides new insights into the drivers of eWOM but is not without limitations, which highlight promising avenues for future research. First, the current study primarily focuses on examining the

matching effects between service judgments and service context in influencing eWOM intentions and behaviors. Future research could explore additional boundary conditions and contextual factors, such as product type (utilitarian vs. hedonic), service provider (AI vs. human), and service focus (people vs. objects), that may influence how warmth and competence judgments impact eWOM intentions. Moreover, while the stereotype content model served as the theoretical foundation for this study, investigating these relationships using alternative frameworks, for example, attribution or affect theories, could provide complementary insights.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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