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A study on the Influence of Airline IWOM Information Characteristics on Consumers' Purchase Intention in the Era of Big Data: a Study Based on the Perspective of Consumers' Perceived Value

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Abstract

With the rapid development of big data computing and computer technology, consumers are more and more inclined to choose online shopping, especially in today's increasingly fierce competition among airlines, Internet Word of Mouth (IWOM) also reputation becomes more important. IWOM has communication characteristics such as fast spreading speed, wide influence, and strong persistence, which has a great impact on consumers' choice decisions. Therefore, an in-depth understanding of IWOM has certain guiding significance for big data analysis of service quality and customer perception of the influencing factors. Based on the theory of perceived value and purchase intention, this paper constructs a SOR model using computer technology from the dual perspectives of consumer perceived value and airline environment. The obtained data were analyzed using Smart PLS3.0 software, and the conclusions drawn were: word-of-mouth information has a positive impact on perceived value, and perceived value indirectly affects customers' willingness to buy, and perceived value has different mediating effects.

Keywords: Big data, airlines, internet word of mouth, information characteristics, perceived value, purchase intention

1. Introduction

The paper discusses the important role of the Internet in modern life, emphasizing its impact on social production and daily life. The text mentions statistics for the use of big data, online purchasing trends, the role of digital marketing, and the impact of Internet Word of Mouth (IWOM) on consumer behavior, especially in the context of the Chinese civil aviation industry. The rapid development of computer technology has made the Internet an essential part of contemporary life, influencing social production and daily activities. The 2018 report shows that there were more than 4 billion Internet users in 2017, an increase of 57.7% since 2000, with Asia accounting for 49.2% of the world's Internet users. In 2017, 1.66 billion people shopped online, generating sales of $230 million, which is expected to increase to $448 million by 2021 [1].In China, as of June 2022, 1.047 billion used mobile Internet, up by 17.85 million, with a 99.6% penetration rate [2]. The growth of the Internet has expanded digital marketing and IWOM's role, particularly amplified during the pandemic. The dynamic market requires consumers to seek trustworthy information, with IWOM playing a key role in purchase decisions. The evolving influence of IWOM, with its rapid spread and cost-effectiveness, significantly affects consumer behavior. In a competitive market, building a solid reputation and distinctive IWOM is vital for businesses. However, research on IWOM in China's aviation to boost customer purchase intentions is lacking, with a need for more specialized studies and a broader application to enhance the sector's performance.

Building upon the aforementioned research context, this paper employs the SOR model to examine the impact of airline IWOM information attributes on online consumer decision-making processes and to explore the underlying mechanisms, addressing the following research questions:

Question 1: Do airline IWOM information characteristics have significant effects on online consumers' decision-making process, and if so, what are these effects?

Question 2: What are the mechanisms by which airline IWOM information characteristics influence consumer purchase intentions? In other words, what is the mediating factor between airline IWOM information characteristics and online consumers' decision-making process?

Question 3: And how does perceived value influence consumers' purchase intentions?

2. Theoretical Background and Research Model

2.1 Theoretical background

As information technology advances, consumers increasingly rely on IWOM to make purchasing decisions, with extensive research linking IWOM to consumer purchase intent. Studies across various sectors have shown IWOM's significant impact. Charlett (1995) initiated research on IWOM's influence on purchase intent [3]. Smith (2002) found IWOM affects trust in brands within the tourism sector, influencing purchase intentions [4]. In 2012, Steven noted IWOM's role in markets with high concentration levels, affecting the relationship between service satisfaction and performance. Lee and Rabjohn (2008) emphasized IWOM's emotional feedback role in online shopping [5], affecting consumers' perceptions and intentions [6]. Kotler and Keller (2015) demonstrated that word-of-mouth characteristics like quantity, quality, and credibility influence purchase intentions [7]. Ren (2018) highlighted IWOM's utility in affecting user effectiveness, considering factors like reviewer reputation and IWOM type [8]. Li Shengli and Li Fan (2019) described IWOM as an interactive communication method impacting consumer attitudes and purchasing motivation [9]. Wang and colleagues (2021) found that IWOM's informational features significantly affect decision-making, especially for engaging products [10]. Envelope I and Envelope P (2022) showed that increased online review frequency and recommendations boost purchase willingness [11]. Filieri (2023) explored how word-of-mouth source characteristics like expertise and credibility affect the quality of information and consumer behavior, emphasizing the direct impact of IWOM source credibility on purchase intentions [12].

In China, significant research has delved into IWOM's role in shaping consumer purchase intentions, particularly emphasizing its mechanism of influence: Sun and Liu (2023) examined domestic travel agencies, finding that positive IWOM content significantly boosts consumer acceptance and the likelihood of selecting those agencies [13].Wang and Wang (2024) explored how negative IWOM in virtual communities is influenced by member relationships and reliance on these communities [14].Yang and Luo (2024) studied the effect of IWOM on movie ticket purchases, highlighting the impact of IWOM ratings on box office success. Gao [15] (2017) confirmed that perceived value mediates the relationship between IWOM and consumer behavior. Li [16] (2020) found that IWOM affects food purchase intentions indirectly, with crowdsourced behavior and perceived value playing mediating roles [17].Xu and Liu (2022) researched the additional comment function in IWOM, noting its enhancement of perceived comment value and efficiency in information gathering [18]. Xu (2023) investigated IWOM's impact on furniture purchase intentions, revealing significant effects of IWOM quantity and quality, with perceived quality serving as a full mediator. These studies collectively highlight the multifaceted impact of IWOM on consumer behavior, offering insights for developing effective sales and marketing strategies [19].

2.2 Research model

2.2.1 Definition of IWOM

Accelerated Sci-Tech Evolution & IWOM Emergence The rapid advancement in science and technology sets the stage for IWOM, distinct from traditional word-of-mouth. Whyte [20] (1954) first explored IWOM, highlighting its communicative impact. Arndt (1967) emphasized word-of-mouth's third-party role in consumer decisions, signifying its interpersonal essence [21]. Chatterjee (2001) noted online word-of-mouth's creation through multi-channel consumer interactions [22]. Newman (2003) identified IWOM as Internet-based textual interactions for

information exchange on products [23]. Kim (2005) observed IWOM's influence on novice buyers, shaping their product awareness through shared opinions [24]. Guo (2023) examined IWOM in her study, noting its blend of commercial and non-commercial elements, affecting information flow [25]. Litvin (2008) described IWOM as Internet-enabled user communications about product or service experiences [26]. Wang et al. (2023) found consumer reviews on Internet platforms amplify IWOM's reach [27]. Peng et al. (2023) discussed enhancing product attention through social media topics, termed online reputation. Synthesizing [28] insights from Kim, Litvin and Wang, this study defines airline IWOM as consumers using the Internet to share and spread their views, feelings, and experiences about airline services or products.

2.2.2 IWOM characteristics

Smith (1983) took the qualities of IWOM as an example and found that it can be comprehensively assessed by credibility, objectivity, usefulness, persuasiveness, relevance and adequacy [29]. Park (2007) highlighted that modern IWOM distinguishes itself by the influence of its volume on communicative effectiveness [30]. According to Ehrlich (2010), in response to how tourism companies utilize the characteristics of IWOM for marketing in the tourism industry, some websites have a higher level of authenticity, simulation and credibility. IWOM spreads faster compared to traditional media. Therefore, it is recommended that tourism companies pay high attention to the application of online platforms in their marketing process [31]. Huang and Lao (2013) demonstrated that incorporating an accuracy metric significantly enhances the precision and intelligibility of review content, thereby augmenting its influence and contributing to the effective propagation of IWOM [32]. Hu Ying (2015) proposed that in order to strengthen branding in the civil aviation industry, it is crucial that we need to pay special attention to the performance of word-of-mouth (WOM) in terms of communication speed and effectiveness [33]. In the food and beverage industry, He (2019) showed that the impact of IWOM on consumers' purchasing decisions lies in the ease of access to information and the degree of formality, a feature that has attracted the attention of an increasing number of consumers [34].

2.2.3 Overview of perceived value

Evolution of Perceived Value Concept Zhong (2013) introduced that perceived value arises from customers' assessment of their input versus the output from a product or service [35]. Liu (2018) and Hu (2022) [36] echoed this by defining perceived value as the subjective evaluation of product or service benefits versus expectations or actual attributes [37]. Sheth (1991) expanded this in the tobacco sector, identifying five value dimensions: functional, social, emotional, cognitive, and situational [38]. Huang (2007) tailored a model for tourism, adding quality and cost aspects to the perceived value dimensions [39]. Wang (2012) further dissected mobile service value into six facets [40], including self-actualization and security. Shan et al. (2018) adapted the perceived value concept for the luxury industry, focusing on economic, functional, personal, and social aspects [41]. Cui and Chen (2020), as well as [42] Yan (2021), emphasized functional, emotional, and social values in assessing re-consumption and green advertising's impact on purchase intentions [43]. Ni (2022) streamlined perceived value into functional and emotional categories within the context of Taobao's live streaming, underscoring these as critical for consumer behavior. Synthesizing these perspectives, this study adopts Cui and Ni's framework [44], focusing on functional and emotional value to understand perceived value in the current context.

2.2.4 Overview of willingness to buy

Kalder (1991) posits that consumers' purchasing preferences for specific goods are somewhat mirrored in their purchase intentions [45]. Zeithaml (1998) was the first to conceptualize purchase intention as a psychological choice, illustrating how size differentiation influences consumer purchase intentions. A robust purchase desire can expedite and solidify spending decisions, whereas a tepid desire might lead to hesitation in decision-making [46]. Mcmillan (2003) discovered that interactive communication on Internet platforms, particularly online word-of-mouth reviews, can evoke positive emotions and alter consumers' behavioral intentions [47]. Li et al. (2012) observed that the quality of negative online reviews markedly influences customers' purchase intentions and satisfaction levels [48]. Kim et al. (2015) contended that leveraging word-of-mouth effects to fulfill customers' unique perceptual needs is crucial for augmenting their purchase intentions, thereby boosting enterprise profits [49]. In studying online reviews and consumers' purchase intention, Guo and Li (2019) discovered that sensory

experience information in online reviews can inspire consumers to form a mental image of the product, thus fueling their desire to purchase [50]. Liang et al. (2021) found that IWOM serves as a mediator that can significantly elevate consumers' purchase intentions, particularly with experiential products, when consumers are positively encouraged [51].

2.2.5 SOR model

In the 1970s, Russell and Mehrabian (1974) initiated research on the impact of external stimuli on an individual's internal activities, introducing the SOR (Stimulus-Organism-Response) model to examine how external factors influence mental processes [52]. They posited that external environmental factors could stimulate a person's cognitive framework, actively influencing behavior and responses. The comprehensive SOR model comprises three components: Stimulus, Organism, and Response. As shown in Figure 1 .Initially, external environmental factors act as stimuli, inducing a cascade of internal changes and emotional responses within the individual, ultimately leading to a behavioral response. This model has become a foundational theoretical framework in numerous studies on consumption and behavioral intention, offering vital support for scholars in related fields.

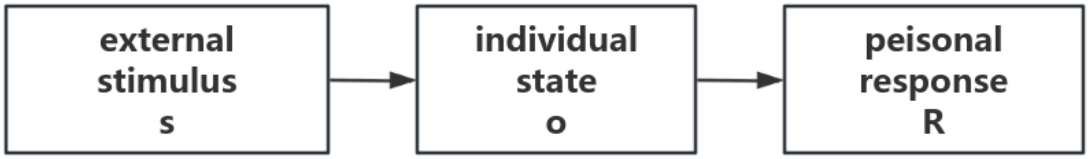

Figure 1 SOR model theory

3. Model Construction and Research Hypotheses

3.1 Model construction

After a thorough review of the literature on IWOM and consumer purchase intention, and integrating the SOR model theory, this study's model has been successfully formulated; for details, see Fig. 2. This study investigates the impact of IWOM on purchase intention, examining the information characteristics of IWOM in terms of quantity, quality, and credibility.

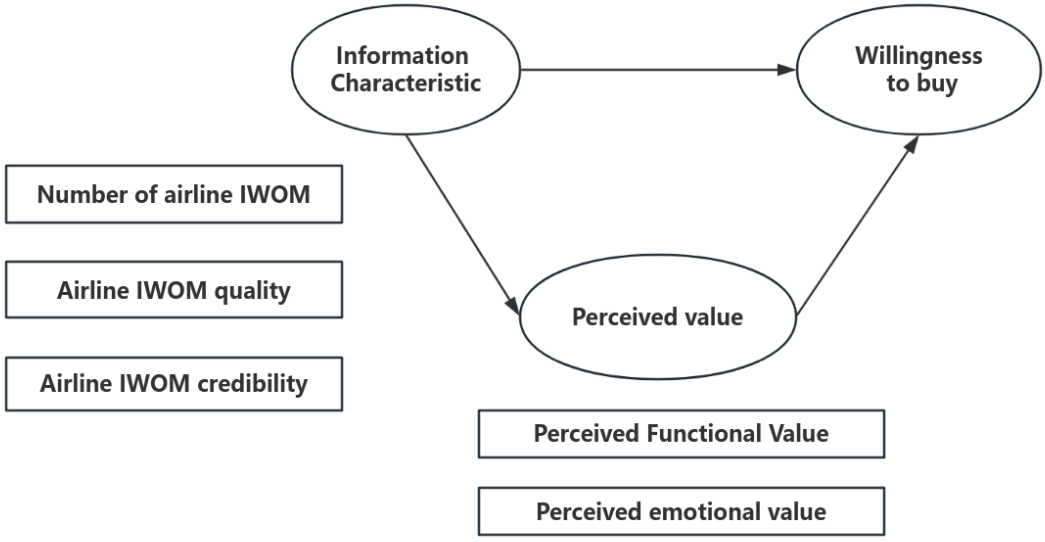

Figure 2 Airline IWOM Information characterization - purchase intention model diagram

3.2 Research hypotheses

3.2.1 Research hypotheses on information characteristics and consumer purchase intention of Internet Word of Mouth (IWOM)

IWOM quantity is defined by the volume of comments consumers post across various platforms, reflecting their brand awareness and potentially swaying their purchasing decisions. Song et al. (2022) discovered that increased online interaction and commentary on sporting events correlate with higher viewership, attracting more consumer interest and significantly influencing purchase intentions [53].

IWOM quality is assessed based on the credibility and objectivity of the information provided, as well as its potential impact on other consumers.

The quality of word-of-mouth (IWOM) information on online platforms varies, with some being trustworthy while others lack reliability. The credibility of IWOM information is critical in shaping consumers' valuation of that information. Previous studies related to the credibility of IWOM information have mostly focused on negative IWOM information. Numerous scholars have shown that highly credible positive IWOM can enhance consumers' trust and perceived value, and thus stimulate their desire to buy; the opposite is true.

In summary, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Characteristics of IWOM information positively influence purchase intention.

H1a: The quantity of IWOM has a positive impact on purchase intention.

H1b: The quality of IWOM positively impacts purchase intention.

H1c: The credibility of IWOM positively affects purchase intention.

3.2.2 Research assumptions on information characteristics and perceived value of IWOM

IWOM enables consumers to share their experiences on Internet platforms post-usage of a product or service, facilitating pre-purchase understanding through peer evaluations, clarifying uncertainties, and providing timely access to promotional information, thereby augmenting perceived value. The subjective evaluation of a product by consumers, encompassing the assessment of cost-benefit ratios, constitutes three primary aspects of perceived value: functional, emotional, and social value. With the advent of the Internet era, consumers are often disturbed by a variety of external information, such as access to a large amount of online word-of-mouth (IWOM) through social media platforms, which can affect their shopping experience. The attributes of IWOM information influence consumers' initial judgments and recognition of products, thereby impacting their perceived value [54]. In summary, the following hypotheses are proposed in this paper:

H2: The informational characteristics of IWOM positively influence the perceived value.

H2a: The number of IWOM positively influences the perceived functional value.

H2b: The quantity of IWOM positively influences the perceived emotional value.

H2c: IWOM quality has a positive impact on perceived functional value.

H2d: IWOM quality has a positive impact on perceived emotional value.

H2e: IWOM credibility has a positive impact on perceived functional value.

H2f: IWOM credibility positively influences perceived emotional value.

3.2.3 Research hypotheses on perceived value and purchase intention

The correlation between perceived value and consumer purchase intention has been extensively studied, yielding substantial findings. In 1991, Dodds established a perceived value model that incorporates variables including consumers' perceived profit, perceived value, and commodity price, underscoring the notable impact of perceived value on purchase intention [55]. Wu (2005) [56], Hu, Liu, Yan (2021) [57] explored the relationship between perceived value and purchase intention from various angles. In 2022, Pang, Tan, and Lau conducted a study

integrating theories of planned behavior, perceived risk, and the processing likelihood model to explore how online food delivery services influence consumer purchase intentions through perceived value [58]. In summary, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

H3: Perceived value positively influences purchase intention.

H3a: Perceived functional value positively influences purchase intention.

H3b: Perceived emotional value positively influences purchase intention.

3.2.4 The mediating role of perceived value

Scholars have investigated the mediating role of perceived value in the context of purchase intention across various settings. For instance, Li (2016) discovered that in the e-commerce live streaming environment, the perceived value derived from live streaming features positively influences consumer purchase intentions [59]. In the context of live shopping, Xu (2018) demonstrated that as consumers' perceived value increases, the live broadcast platform boosts engagement and purchase desire. Furthermore, preferential interactions in the live broadcast influence purchase intentions through perceived value's mediating role [60]. In 2021, JI Fang and her team discovered that attributes of live e-commerce broadcasts and contextual factors enhance perceived and emotional value, subsequently impacting consumers' purchase intentions [61]. Zhang (2022) found that ecotourism motivation significantly boosts travelers' satisfaction, with perceived value serving as an intermediary between these variables [62]. Qin (2023) demonstrated that social media marketing directly and positively influences consumers' rural tourism intentions, with perceived value partially mediating this relationship and enhancing tourism intentions [63]. Based on this, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

H4: Perceived value mediates the relationship between informational features of IWOM and purchase intention.

H4a: Perceived functional value mediates the relationship between information characteristics and purchase intention in IWOM.

H4b: Perceived emotional value mediates the relationship between informational features and purchase intention in IWOM.

4. Methodology

4.1 Questionnaire design and data collection

Based on an extensive review of relevant literature, a comprehensive questionnaire was meticulously designed to align with the specific research objectives of this study. The questionnaire was finalized after reviewing an extensive body of literature and information. This questionnaire is divided into three main parts, The first section is the header, detailing the research objectives and expressing gratitude to the respondents. The second section collects respondents' basic information, including age, gender, occupation, and their habits regarding searching for airline information online. The third section is the core of the questionnaire, containing variables' measurement items, where respondents are instructed to answer based on their actual experiences. Responses were measured using a Likert five-point scale, where 1 signifies 'strongly disagree,' 2 'disagree,' 3 'unsure,' 4 'agree,' and 5 'strongly agree.'

4.2 Selection of measurement variables

4.2.1 Measurement of airline IWOM information characteristics

(1) Number of IWOM

The sum of the number of messages received by consumers on social platforms is the number of IWOM. In the process of using the Internet, customers' perceptions are influenced by IWOM, which occurs through others' evaluations of them. Consumers tend to subconsciously perceive a product's reputation as a symbol of having a high level of visibility, perhaps due to their psychological tendencies. Therefore, in order to fulfill the needs of this study and to provide a comprehensive overview of the existing literature, we designed and developed a scale to measure the amount of IWOM about airlines, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1 Airline IWOM quantity measurement scale.

Question No.	Measurement Item	Source
1	There are a lot of word-of-mouth information about this airline with many users commenting on it.	Liu (2019)
2	A lot of similar IWOM information about the airline can be found through search engines.	
3	The IWOM information of the airline can be copied or reproduced by multiple web pages.	Xu (2020)
4	The amount of word-of-mouth information is enough to help you choose an airline.	

(2) Quality of IWOM

The quality of IWOM lies in its ability to comprehensively assess multiple aspects of the information, such as objectivity and usefulness, so as to provide users with a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding. In this paper, by combing the existing literature as well as combining the needs of this study, we designed and developed a measurement scale for the quality of airline IWOM, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Airline IWOM quality measurement scale.

Question No.	Measurement Item	Source
1	The IWOM information of airlines is complete, comprehensive and rich in content.	Liu (2022)
2	The airline's IWOM information is easy to understand.	
3	IWOM information of airlines is updated quickly and timely.	Liu (2021)
4	IWOM information is closely related to the airline product or service itself.	Xiong (2020)

(3) IWOM credibility

Consumers' tendency to trust information, i.e., the credibility of IWOM, reflects their trustworthiness of the information. The virtual nature of the Internet makes it impossible for consumers to judge whether the information reviewed online is completely reliable. Often, the more credible IWOM information can stimulate consumers' willingness to use the product. Therefore, this paper designs and develops a measurement scale for the credibility of airline IWOM by combing the existing literature as well as combining the needs of this study, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Airline IWOM credibility measurement scale.

Question No.	Measurement Item	Source
1	I think the sources of information about airline IWOM are truthful and reliable.	Liu (2019)
2	I believe that the sources of information from airline IWOM are trustworthy.	
3	I think airline IWOM has a profound effect on their company's overall evaluation of the same product or service. The overall evaluation of the same product or service has a profound effect.	Xu (2020)
4	I will give up choosing an airline when I encounter a lot of negative IWOM information.	

4.2.2 Measurement of perceived value

Generally speaking, when consumers shop online, they can express their feelings and experiences during the whole shopping process through social media by posting relevant information, and this experience and feelings are actually the perceived value that consumers pursue during the shopping process. Therefore, the measurement scale of perceived value is shown in Table 4.

4.2.3 Measurement of willingness to buy

At the initial stage, consumer's willingness to buy is not in the field of marketing, but belongs to the scope of psychological research, reflecting the inherent psychological needs of individuals. It is one of the most important considerations when consumers make choices of goods or services, and it is also the basic data on which corporate marketers need to base their effective promotional programs. With the continuous expansion and development of the economic field, people gradually begin to interact with multiple disciplines, thus integrating the willingness to buy into the study of Internet Word of Mouth (IWOM). In this process, word-of-mouth, as an important marketing approach, has a huge role to play in consumer behavior. It has been widely explored in the literature

that the transmission and influence of word-of-mouth information reduces financial risk to a certain extent, as well as reduces the probability of post-purchase consumer remorse, thus realizing a win-win situation for both parties. Therefore, by combing the existing literature as well as incorporating the needs of this study, this paper designs and develops a measurement scale for purchase intention, as shown in Table 5.

Table 4 Perceived value measurement scale.

Measurement Variables	Question No.	Measurement Item	Source
Perceived Functional Value	1	I can improve the efficiency of my access to information through the Internet Word of Mouth (IWOM) of airlines	Sun (2009)
	2	The IWOM of the airlines can help me to better understand the information about the airlines I need	Zhong (2013)
	3	I am more likely to recognize products or services related to the airline through the airline's Internet Word of Mouth (IWOM)	
Perceived emotional value	1	I was able to enjoy products or services related to this airline through word-of-mouth	Liu (2015)
	2	IWOM is able to bring me a happy mood	Wang (2022)
	3	I was able to get a better understanding of the airline through IWOM.	

Table 5 Willingness to buy measurement scale

Question No	Measurement Item	Source
1	This IWOM is very helpful to my purchase decision	Jin (2007)
2	The word-of-mouth information spread online has a great influence on my willingness to buy.	
3	I think it is worthwhile to buy products from this airline	Banasal & Voyer (2000)

4.3 Data collection

This study utilized the internet channel for the distribution and collection of the questionnaires. The method of questionnaire star was utilized in the survey process to complete the questionnaire sending. Firstly, Questionnaire Star was utilized to design the questionnaire, and secondly, the generated QR code was sent to the students and friends around us through social software such as WeChat and Weibo in order to fill in the questionnaire. In this questionnaire survey, we collected a total of 500 questionnaires, and after strict screening, 462 questionnaires with validity were finally screened out, and its validity rate was as high as 92%.

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive statistical analysis

In this survey, we collected 462 valid questionnaires and analyzed them with descriptive statistics of demographic characteristics, whose basic information mainly includes gender, age, occupation, education, monthly income, frequency of air travel, frequently searched for information, and platforms for browsing information, and the specific results are shown in Table 6.

The data shows a notable demographic distribution among airline passengers: 64.5% are male, and 35.5% are female, indicating a higher number of male travelers. Age-wise, the majority (62.8%) are between 20-40 years old, reflecting a group that is likely active on social media and engaged in online word-of-mouth discussions. Occupation-wise, students make up 26.4% and institutionalized personnel 42.9%, with self-employed individuals at 18.4%, making these the primary respondent groups. In terms of education, a significant 66% have at least a bachelor's degree. Income data reveals that the largest segment (29.9%) earns between 5,000 and 7,500 RMB per month. Regarding information interests, 35.5% prioritize fare details, with service quality and promotions also being key areas of interest, whereas flight scheduling attracts less attention.

5.2 Reliability analysis

The 462 valid questionnaires collected were subjected to reliability test using Smart PLS 3.0 and their specific

results are shown in Table 7 below.

Table 6 Frequency statistics of basic information of the sample

Basic Information	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	298	64.50%
	Female	164	35.50%
Age	<20	30	6.50%
	20-30	120	26%
	30-40	170	36.80%
	40-50	98	21.20%
	＞50	44	9.50%
Occupation	Students	122	26.40%
	Institutions	198	42.90%
	Self-employed	85	18.40%
	Others	57	12.30%
Educational background	High school and below	54	11.70%
	Specialized	103	22.30%
	Undergraduate	199	43.10%
	Master's Degree	106	22.90%
Monthly Income	＜5000	127	27.50%
	5000-7500	138	29.90%
	7500-10000	109	23.60%
	＞10000	88	19%
Frequency of Flight	Less than 5 times	286	61.90%
	5-10	108	23.40%
	More than 10 times	68	14.70%
Frequently searched information	Service Quality	100	21.60%
	Fare Information	164	35.50%
	Flight Arrangement	86	18.60%
	Special Offers	112	24.30%
Browse related information platforms	WeChat	180	39%
	Weibo	50	10.80%
	Official Website	213	46.10%
	Other	19	4.10%

Table 7 Reliability analysis

Latent Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	CR
IWOM quantity	0.828	0.887
IWOM Quality	0.817	0.880
IWOM credibility	0.822	0.883
Perceived Functional Value	0.765	0.858
Perceived Emotional Value	0.725	0.831
Willingness to buy	0.709	0.814

According to the table, the CR values for all combinations of latent variables are higher than 0.7, which indicates that the reliability of the questionnaire is good. Next, the coefficient values of Cronbach's Alpha were observed, the coefficient value of IWOM quantity was 0.828, the coefficient value of IWOM quality was 0.817, and the coefficient value of IWOM trustworthiness was 0.822, and the coefficient values of Cronbach's Alpha of all three latent variables exceeded 0.8, which indicates that these three variables in this questionnaire have a high level of reliability. The coefficient value of perceived functional value is 0.765, the coefficient value of perceived emotional value is 0.725, and the coefficient value of willingness to buy is 0.709, and the Cronbach's coefficient values of these three potential variables exceed 0.6, which indicates that these three variables have shown a satisfactory level of reliability in this questionnaire.

In summary, the final test values of the six latent variables involved in the model constructed in this paper satisfy the acceptable requirements in terms of both the combined reliability CR and the clombach coefficients, and thus

the questionnaire has a high level of reliability.

5.3 Validity analysis

Validity analysis, also known as usefulness analysis, generally speaking, the higher the validity, the higher the chances that the measurement results will be consistent with the researcher's expectations. Validity can be categorized into three elements, namely content validity, convergent validity and discriminant validity, which together constitute a complete validity system. Given that the measurement instrument chosen for this study has been studied by scholars in a more mature version, its content validity can be guaranteed, and it is mainly used to test structural validity and convergent validity.

5.3.1 Convergent validity

If the standardized factor loading coefficient is greater than 0.7 and the AVE value is greater than 0.5, the validity of the data can be regarded as better. From Table 8, it can be seen that the AVE values of all variables are more than 0.5, while the minimum value is 0.624; moreover, the standardized factor loading coefficients of all observed variables are more than 0.7, and the minimum value is 0.711. To sum up, the scale has good convergent validity.

Table 8 Convergence validity analysis

Latent Variables	Observation Variables	loading factor	AVE
Number of IWOM	NIWM1	0.739	0.662
	NIWM2	0.861	
	NIWM3	0.865	
	NIWM 4	0.783	
IWOM quality	QIWM1	0.755	0.650
	QIWM2	0.876	
	QIWM3	0.870	
	QIWM4	0.711	
IWOM credibility	CIWM1	0.753	0.655
	CIWM2	0.873	
	CIWM3	0.860	
	CIWM4	0.742	
Perceived Functional Value	PFV1	0.851	0.670
	PFV2	0.870	
	PFV3	0.727	
Perceived emotional value	PEV1	0.861	
	PEV3	0.725	
Willingness to buy	PI1	0.960	0.692
	PI2	0.780	

5.3.2 Discriminant validity

In this study, the Heterotropic-Transgender-Monotropic Ratio (HTMT) test was used to assess the discriminant validity and the values between the variables are presented in Table 9 and all the values are below the requirement of 0.85. In this study, we used the Fornell-Larcker method to test discriminant validity. The results show that the square root of each variable is greater than the correlation coefficient with other variables, which meets the requirements of our test (see Table 10 for details). Therefore, the discriminant validity of this study meets the requirements.

5.4 Structural equation modeling analysis

5.4.1 Covariance test

When multiple covariances exist in a model, it can cause deviations in the model path coefficients and also reduce the accuracy of the model measurements, therefore, a multiple covariance test is usually performed prior to structural modeling analysis. In the study, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) method was used to perform the covariance test of the data, if the VIF value is greater than 3.3, then the model may have covariance problem; if all the VIFs are equal to or less than 3.3, then there is no linearity problem in the model. In this study, the VIF values of both internal and external model were calculated and the results are shown in Table 11, all the VIF values

are less than 3.3, so there is no covariance problem in the model.

Table 9 Results of the heterogeneity-unity ratio test

	Word-of-mouth credibility	IWOM quantity	IWOM Quality	Perceived Functional Value	Perceived Emotional Value	Willingness to buy
Word of mouth credibility						
IWOM Quantity	0.035					
IWOM Quality	0.077	0.128				
Perceived Functional Value	0.407	0.338	0.416			
Perceived Emotional Value	0.335	0.433	0.483	0.463		
Willingness to buy	0.376	0.511	0.479	0.553	0.698	

Table 10 Results of fornell - larcker test

	Word-of-mouth credibility	IWOM quantity	IWOM Quality	Perceived Functional Value	Perceived Emotional Value	Willingness to buy
Word of mouth credibility	0.809					
IWOM Quantity	0.020	0.814				
IWOM Quality	0.008	0.105	0.806			
Perceived Functional Value	0.338	0.308	0.361	0.818		
Perceived Emotional Value	0.305	0.388	0.427	0.417	0.790	
Willingness to buy	0.314	0.403	0.404	0.477	0.569	0.832

(Note: Numbers grouped on the main diagonal are AVE square root values)

Table 11 Table of covariance tests

	Word-of-mouth credibility	IWOM quantity	IWOM Quality	Perceived Functional Value	Perceived Emotional Value	Willingness to buy
Word of mouth credibility			1.001	1.001	1.643	
IWOM Quantity			1.017	1.017	1.627	
IWOM Quality			1.016	1.016	1.786	
Perceived Functional Value				1.852		
Perceived Emotional Value				2.307		
Willingness to buy						

5.4.2 Model fit tests

The two metrics R2 and Q2 are generally used when evaluating models in Smart PLS.
In order to assess the explanatory ability of structural equation models, it is usually necessary to verify their R2, which can reasonably explain the accuracy of the model's predictive ability in the range of 0-1, and the closer the value of R2 is to 1, the better the explanatory ability of the model. The R2 derived from this study using PLS algorithm algorithm and the adjusted R2 values are shown in Table 12, the values of R2 are around 0.5, which indicates that the model has some explanatory power.

In order to assess the predictive power of a structural equation model, a test of Q2 is usually required. If the value of Q2 is greater than zero, it indicates that the model has explanatory power for the predictive relevance of an endogenous latent variable, and an increase in the value of Q2 will further enhance the predictive power of the model. Validation using the blindfolding algorithm in the Smart PLS 3.0 software shows that the Q2 value is greater than zero, which indicates that the model has excellent predictive power, as shown in Table 13.

Table 12 Results of R2 test

	R2	Adjusted R2
Perceived functional value	0.560	0.456
Perceived emotional value	0.567	0.564
Willingness to buy	0.487	0.482

Table 13 Q^2 test results

	SSO	SSE	Q^2=(1-SSE/SSO)
Perceived functional value	1386.000	1132.424	0.183
Perceived emotional value	1386.000	1108.136	0.200
Willingness to buy	924.000	671.803	0.273

In summary, the combination of the two metrics, R2 and Q2, shows that the overall fit of the model in this study is good enough for subsequent research.

5.4.3 Model fitness test

In PLS-SEM, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) can be regarded as an important indicator of model fit test, when the SRMR value drops to zero, it indicates that it is flawless; the best fit threshold for PLS-SEM should be the case where the SRMR value is less than 0.08. Using the PLS algorithm in the Smart PLS3.0 software yields an SRMR value of 0.062 for the model in this study, which meets the threshold indicating that the fit of the model is appropriate.

5.5 Direct effect test

Using the self-help method (Bootstrapping) in Smart PLS3.0, this study explored the effect of airline IWOM information characteristics on consumers' purchase intention, and by verifying the data of paths, path coefficients, and the P-value of the probability of significance, the conclusions shown in Table 14 were drawn.

Table 14 Parameter table for standardized path coefficients

Hypothetical path	Initial sample (O)	sample mean(M)	standard deviation (STDEV)	T-statistic (O/STDEV|)	P-value	
IWOM volume perceived functional value	0.280	0.281	0.034	8.163	0.000	***
IWOM volume perceived emotional value	0.353	0.355	0.033	10.651	0.000	***
IWOM quantity willingness to buy	0.371	0.370	0.035	10.612	0.000	***
IWOM quality perceived functional value	0.329	0.329	0.035	9.410	0.000	***
IWOM quality perceived emotional value	0.388	0.389	0.032	11.238	0.000	***
IWOM quality willingness to buy	0.206	0.209	0.038	5.372	0.000	***
IWOM credibility perceived functional value	0.341	0.339	0.035	9.634	0.000	***
IWOM credibility perceived emotional value	0.309	0.311	0.035	8.825	0.000	***
IWOM credibility willingness to buy	0.319	0.317	0.034	9.334	0.000	***
Perceived functional value willingness to buy	0.157	0.157	0.040	3.930	0.000	***
Perceived emotional value willingness to buy	0.271	0.271	0.041	6.545	0.000	***

(Note: *** denotes $p < 0.001$, ** denotes $p < 0.010$, * denotes $p < 0.050$, NS denotes not significant)

From the above table, it can be seen that the P-values of IWOM information features on purchase intention and perceived value are all less than 0.05, which meets the requirement of the significance level, so the hypotheses H1, H1a, H1b, H1c, H2, H2a, H2b, H2c, H2d, H2e, and H2f are valid. Also the significance p-value of perceived

functional value and perceived emotional value on purchase intention is less than 0.05, so hypotheses H3, H3a, H3b also hold.

5.6 Mediating effect test

In order to investigate the relationship between the informational characteristics of airline IWOM and consumers' purchase intention, this study continued to use the self-help method (Bootstrapping) in the Smart PLS 3.0 software to derive the results of the test for the significance of the specific indirect effect, as shown in Table 15.

Table 15 Mediated effects test

Hypothetical path	Initial sample (O)	sample mean (M)	standard deviation (STDEV)	T-statistic (O/STDEV|)	P-value	Intermediation effects
Number of word-of-mouth perceived functional value willingness to buy	0.044	0.013	3.421	0.001	0.19	Unmediated
IWOM quantity perceived emotional value willingness to buy	0.096	0.016	5.800	0.000	0.42	Partially mediated
IWOM quality perceived functional value purchase intention	0.052	2.052	3.052	0.000	0.25	Partially mediated
IWOM quality perceived emotional value purchase intention	0.105	2.105	3.105	0.000	0.51	Partially mediated
IWOM credibility perceived functional value purchase intention	0.068	2.054	3.054	0.000	0.21	Partially mediated
Word-of-mouth credibility perceived emotional value purchase intention	0.084	0.017	5.000	0.000	0.26	Partially mediated

If the value of VAF is less than 0.2, there is no mediation; if the value of VAF is between 0.2 and 0.8, it is partial mediation. From the data, it can be seen that perceived functional value does not play a mediating role between the number of IWOM and purchase intention; in addition to this, perceived value partially mediates between IWOM information characteristics and purchase intention.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Key findings

This study developed a mathematical model from the perspective of consumer perceived value and employed Smart PLS3.0 software to validate the model and hypotheses, yielding the following conclusions:

6.1.1 The influence of IWOM information features on perceived value

IWOM information features exhibit varying levels of impact on perceived functional and emotional value. When examining IWOM's impact on perceived functional value, credibility emerged as the most influential, with a path coefficient of 0.341, followed by quality at 0.329 and quantity at 0.280. The investigation into IWOM's impact on perceived affective value revealed that quality is the most influential at 0.388, followed by quantity at 0.353, and credibility at 0.309.

6.1.2 Influence of IWOM information characteristics on consumers' purchase intention

Regarding the variables affecting purchase intention, IWOM quantity exerts the greatest influence at 0.371, followed by credibility at 0.319 and quality at 0.206.

6.1.3 The influence of perceived value on consumers' willingness to buy

Perceived value positively affects purchase intention, with variations in the impact of perceived functional and emotional value. Notably, perceived emotional value has the most substantial effect at 0.271, followed by

functional value at 0.157.

6.1.4 The mediating role of perceived value

Through the collected data, the model testing revealed that perceived functional value does not mediate the relationship between IWOM quantity and purchase intention. However, IWOM quality and credibility significantly influence purchase intention, suggesting their intermediary roles, albeit partially. Similarly, perceived emotional value partially mediates the relationship between IWOM information characteristics and purchase intention.

6.2 Management implications

In this era of swift technological advancement, gaining travelers' recognition necessitates efficiently and accurately conveying positive information, fostering constructive communication, and delivering superior service quality. Therefore, this paper puts forward some suggestions and countermeasures in relation to IWOM.

6.2.1 Emphasize the quantity of IWOM and enhance the willingness of individual dissemination

Post-flight, passengers often evaluate their experience to express their views and assist others via online reviews. However, most passengers currently lack the habit of online reviewing, which results in some outstanding airline service companies failing to gain consumer recognition and thus failing to take full advantage of the rapid nature of word-of-mouth communication on the Internet. To boost airline brand awareness, management should foster a culture of proactive engagement among staff and encourage passengers to share their unique flight experiences. For consumers, whether they have a favorable word-of-mouth image is also a high-profile issue, and these factors can have a profound impact on their purchase intentions. To motivate travelers to participate in online reviews, airlines can also offer incentives to travelers who participate in reviews to encourage them to do so.

6.2.2 Emphasize the quality of iwom information and strengthen information supervision capability

Airlines can leverage data monitoring on platforms like WeChat and Weibo to enhance word-of-mouth quality. They should promptly address and correct false or harmful comments to protect their reputation and public trust. Handling negative reviews swiftly and maintaining the option to dispute unverified complaints is vital. Valuing honest and objective feedback is crucial for building a robust online presence. Due to the rapid spread and significant impact of negative information, particularly on prospective travelers, airlines must improve their monitoring and response strategies to swiftly address and mitigate negative word-of-mouth effects.

6.2.3 Cooperate with multidisciplinary platforms to promote and cultivate high-quality opinion leaders

Airlines should utilize data monitoring on platforms like WeChat and Weibo to enhance the supervision and quality of IWOM. It's crucial to quickly address and correct or remove malicious or inaccurate comments to maintain credibility. Airlines must also promptly manage negative reviews, reserving the right to reject unfounded feedback. Prioritizing objective and authentic reviews is key to building a strong online reputation, which is foundational for effective branding. Given the swift spread and significant impact of negative information, especially on future travelers, enhancing the monitoring and quick response to negative IWOM is vital to mitigate its potential adverse effects.

6.3 Limitations and future development direction

(1) Enhancing the screening of variables is crucial to ensure their accuracy and reliability. Future research on airline IWOM information should adopt a multi-faceted approach, exploring various aspects such as negative information and visual characteristics in order to further improve the relevant theories. Subsequent research should include negative IWOM and dual-sided information as variables to deepen the exploration of IWOM's impact.

(2) The data of the sample can be further improved. While the questionnaire distribution was online, future research could benefit from on-site data collection, such as administering paper questionnaires to airport travelers, to enhance the study's value. And in the formal pilot study, although the sample is more balanced between men and women, the proportion of female subjects is still slightly high, which is not quite in line with the statistics of gender characteristics of civil aviation passengers. Increasing the sample size and employing a more systematic

sampling method could enhance the study's external validity.

(3) Future research should include more mediating variables like perceived risk in their models and examine how the strength of social ties affects word-of-mouth effectiveness in different contexts, especially comparing online interactions with face-to-face ones. It's also important to explore how individuals with varying cognitive needs respond to different types of word-of-mouth recommendations. These areas require deeper investigation to enhance our understanding of digital and traditional word-of-mouth dynamics.

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