

Synthetic WOM? The Emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence-Induced Recommendations

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Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used ChatGPT to improve the readability, grammar, and language of the manuscript. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Conflict of Interest – Declaration of Interest Statement

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Funding

There was no funding for this research project.

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Abstract

This paper examines how Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) influences word-of-mouth (WOM) in travel and hospitality, focusing on synthetic WOM (syWOM). It explores how GAI-driven WOM reshapes traveler interactions and decision-making in an experience-centric industry. Using a literature review and conceptual analysis approach¹, this study examines the integration of GAI tools, such as ChatGPT, to enhance travel experiences. The analysis presented in this study highlights GAI's potential in inducing syWOM and its effects on traveler perceptions and behaviors. Additionally, it addresses the emerging role of GAI in WOM, emphasizing the need for further research on its impact on travel planning and engagement. This study presents a fresh view of the interaction of syWOM with GAI in travel, aiming to inform future research and practical applications of personalized traveler engagement.

Keywords: WOM, generative AI, synthetic WOM, tourism, hospitality, information seeking, syWOM

Introduction

The exponential progress of Large Language Models (LLMs) and GAI has revolutionized how consumers and travelers communicate, share, and access information online². As the presence of GAI weaves into the fabric of daily interactions across multiple sectors, its influence on WOM has become a critical area of exploration. This is particularly pertinent within the travel and hospitality sectors, which are distinguished by their reliance on experiential information³, high density of information exchange⁴, and inherent uncertainty of product features that cannot be evaluated before purchase or consumption⁵.

Travelers, who increasingly depend on WOM to inform their decisions, are at the heart of this transformation⁶. In daily interactions, WOM may take various formats - online reviews, ratings, social testimonials, etc.⁷⁻¹⁰. In practical terms, Expedia integrated ChatGPT into its chat so that travelers can start an open-ended conversation in the app and obtain useful and practical recommendations, tips, and information¹¹. Although GAI-like tools can generate tailored information, how travelers perceive and act upon GAI-generated recommendations remains to be investigated. Theoretically, by instantly addressing queries (prompts), GAI tools can provide quick, reliable, and interactive responses, and enhance the overall travel experience¹²⁻¹⁴. In the post-travel phase, travelers share their experiences through an array of online review platforms, directly contributing to the broader WOM ecosystem. Theoretically, GAI can play a fundamental role in producing more content-heavy WOM, further assisting travelers in articulating their experience more effectively. However, given the infancy of the domain, future studies should help in understanding how GAI-enhanced WOM impacts consumer perceptions, satisfaction, and subsequent behavioral intentions. The intersection of GAI capabilities and WOM raises both opportunities and challenges. The integration of tools, such as ChatGPT or Gemini, into travel services exemplifies the potential of GAI to enhance the information-gathering process with tailored recommendations^{2,4,14}. As travelers seek instantaneous information during their journeys, the GAI's promise of rapid and reliable responses could redefine the travel experience. Similarly, in the post-travel phase, the role of GAI in enriching the narrative quality of shared experiences through more elaborate and content-rich user-generated contributions is another frontier for exploration.

The potential of GAI to initiate paradigm shifts in decision-making, consumer behavior, and marketing communications is widely acknowledged^{4,6,14-16}, yet the specific contours of its impact remain indistinct. There remains a pronounced gap in our understanding of WOM generated or enhanced by GAI - the novel concept of synthetic WOM (syWOM). While

existing studies have explored the general influence of WOM on consumer behavior, there is limited research specifically addressing how syWOM, with its unique characteristics such as interactivity, personalization, and immediacy, impacts consumer perceptions, trust, and decision-making in the travel and hospitality sectors. This gap is critical because understanding the role of syWOM could reveal new dimensions of consumer engagement and behavior that differ significantly from traditional or eWOM.

This research introduces the concept of synthetic WOM (syWOM), offering a novel framework for understanding the transformative impact of GAI on consumer interactions in the travel and hospitality sectors. By paving the way for future investigations, this study will provide critical insights that guide scholars and practitioners into researching and using syWOM to enhance consumer engagement, trust, and decision-making in an increasingly digitalized marketplace.

Methodological Approach

To map the interplay between GAI and WOM, we used MacInnis's¹ procedure, which is illustrated in Figure 1. First, we extracted approximately 90 relevant scientific outputs published over the last 10 years. We intentionally extended the time window to check for eventual pre-trends and capture a broader and wider angle^{as in 9,17}. Subsequently, the extracted articles were thoroughly filtered to match the research focus of the present study (topics included GAI, WOM, eWOM, online reviews, hospitality, and tourism). As a result, only a small portion of the original articles was relevant to our particular case. According to MacInnis, the next step is the integration of fragmented knowledge, which we define as GAI-induced WOM – synthetic or aggregated WOM (syWOM). The ultimate aim of this step is to provide an overarching framework and perspective of observed and defined phenomena. The last phase (delineation) aims to elaborate on the interplay of syWOM with various WOM

dimensions (information seeking, forwarding, providing) and travel phases (pre-, during-, and post-travel), and to relate to involved stakeholders.

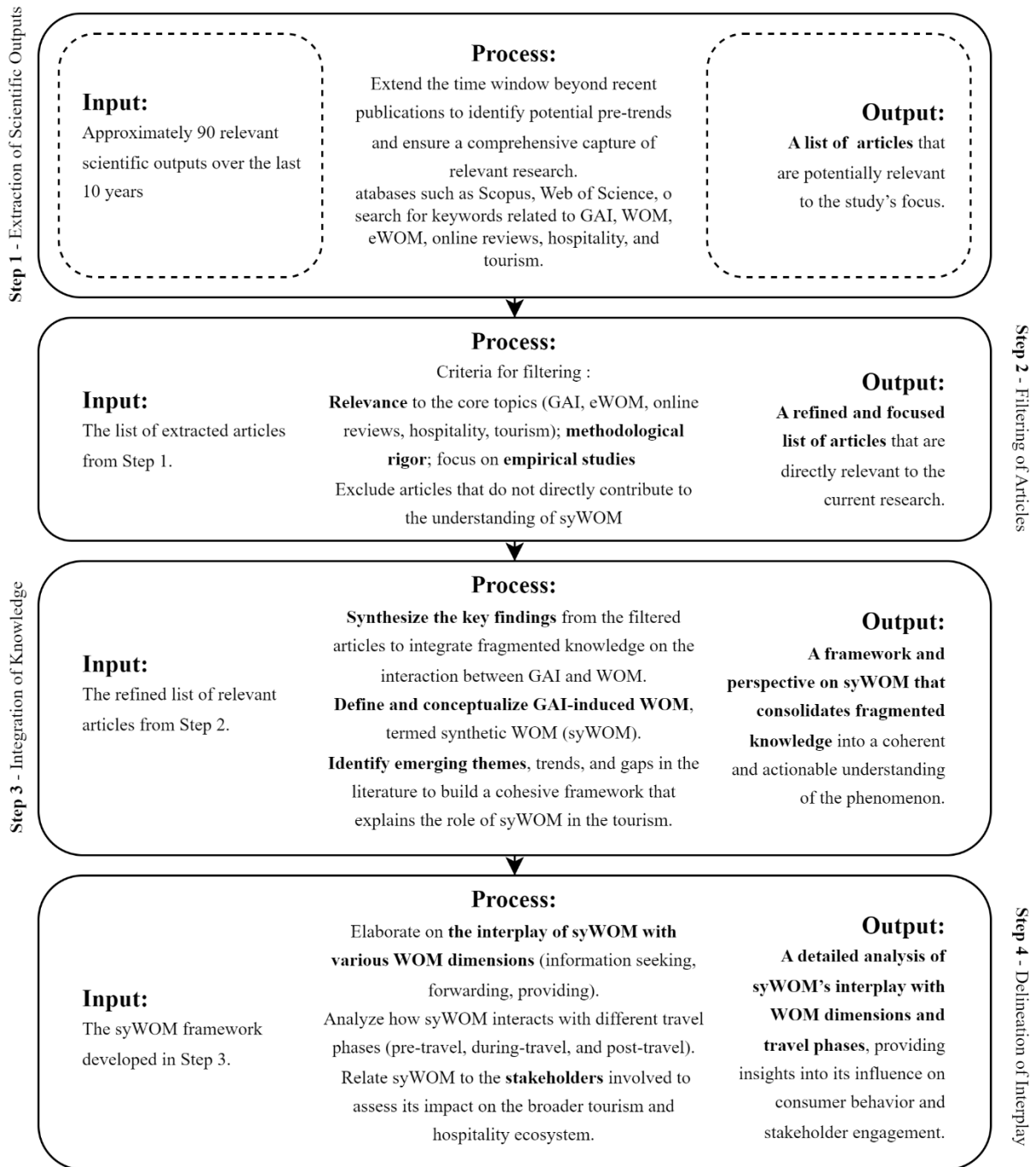


Figure 1 Flowchart of the Methodological Approach (Source: Authors)

Interplay of eWOM, Travel Industry, and GAI

The Rise and Relevance of GAI for the Travel and Hospitality Domains

The rise of GAI presents a new era in natural language processing and human-computer interaction, with profound implications for the travel and hospitality domains¹⁴. As an advanced language model², GAI excels in generating contextually relevant real-time conversational responses, opening avenues for enhanced customer experiences and operational efficiency. In the travel sector, for instance, GAI-driven chatbots can offer near-instantaneous responses to customer inquiries, providing personalized travel advice and dynamic itinerary planning¹⁸, thus improving the travel-planning experience. Potential integration with existing technologies, such as virtual reality (VR) for immersive travel previews, amplifies GAI's impact, offering innovative solutions for a more connected and personalized guest experience. To date, real-world applications have already emerged, such as Expedia, Kayak, and Kiwi where GAI has already been successfully deployed to enhance customer interaction and service delivery^{10,19}. However, the application of GAI in these sectors is not without problems², which include privacy concerns, the necessity for culturally sensitive responses, the imperative to maintain a human element in service provision, etc. Moreover, ethical concerns extend to ensuring responsible AI use that respects data privacy and mitigates bias while promoting sustainable tourism practices.

Looking ahead, the potential economic impact of GAI on travel and hospitality is significant, ranging from cost savings through automation to new revenue streams through personalized service offerings^{4,6,14,15,20,21}. These sectors may also face broader structural changes such as job shifts, with new roles emerging in AI management and ethical oversight. Overall, GAI presents an emerging frontier for the travel and hospitality sectors, offering opportunities for innovation and improving customer engagement. However, GAI utilization

deployment must be taken with caution, with careful consideration of ethical, privacy, and cultural factors to ensure responsible and sustainable integration into these dynamic industries

²². The following table presents the recent domain-relevant contributions.

Table 1 Overview of recent studies related to GAI and WOM (Source: Authors)

Source	Focus	Key variables	Key findings	Limitations	Relevance of this study
23	Investigate the impact of ChatGPT on consumers' perceptions.	Anthropomorphism, Trust	WOM enhances the perceived richness and trustworthiness of information.	Cross-sectional data collection.	Highlights the role of syWOM in enhancing trust.
24	Analyze the impact of inaccurate information provided by ChatGPT on consumer trust and WOM.	Impact of incorrect information, Trust, Consumer behavior	Inaccuracies in WOM decrease consumer trust.	Individual differences in terms of misinformation recognition.	Emphasizes the importance of accuracy in syWOM.
25	ChatGPT's ethical framing and consumer trust.	Message framing Trust, Ethical considerations	Ethical framing of WOM can enhance/erode trust.	Hypothetical scenarios may not reflect real-world behavior.	Relevant for exploring the ethical dimensions of syWOM.
26	Evaluate the effectiveness of LLMs in hotel marketing.	Effectiveness of LLMs, Customer interaction, Content accuracy	AI-generated content is accurate but lacks emotional depth.	The study's scope is limited to English-language content.	Provides insights into the limitations of syWOM.
27	Identify linguistic differences between AI-generated and human-generated hotel reviews.	Rate of affect terms, Positive and negative language	WOM is more emotionally charged but less linguistically varied.	Limited examination of language dimensions.	Highlights the linguistic and emotional characteristics of syWOM.
28	Explore the impact of AI-generated content on consumer perceptions.	Consumer perceptions, Trust, Content quality	AI-generated content can enhance engagement.	The study focused on a limited range of content types.	Relevant for understanding how syWOM influences consumer perceptions and engagement.
29	Ethical implications of using GAI in marketing communication.	Ethical considerations, Consumer trust, Marketing Effectiveness	Ethical use of WOM can strengthen consumer trust.	The study did not explore long-term consumer reactions.	Relevant for exploring the ethical considerations of syWOM.

30	How syWOM influences purchasing decisions.	Purchasing decisions, Information Quality	WOM can significantly influence purchasing decisions when perceived as credible.	The study was limited to online environments.	Relevant for understanding the impact of syWOM on purchasing decisions.
30	Reliability of AI-generated reviews.	Review reliability, AI vs. human-generated content	AI-generated reviews are generally reliable but may lack complex insights.	The study was limited to reviews in the English language.	Provides insights into the reliability of syWOM.
31	Examine the role of WOM in building brand loyalty.	Brand loyalty, Consumer engagement, Trust	WOM can enhance brand loyalty when integrated effectively.	The study did not account for different demographic factors.	Relevant for assessing how syWOM can be used to enhance brand loyalty.

The Interplay of eWOM and Travel and Hospitality Sectors

Babić Rosario and colleagues³² have expanded the definition of eWOM to encompass all consumer-generated communications that leverage digital platforms and target peer consumers. Unlike WOM, eWOM operates through electronic platforms, offering more efficient transmission of information³³. Critical to understanding the mechanics of eWOM is the second-order constructs of information giving, seeking, and forwarding, as explored in various studies^{34–36}. These constructs formalize the flow of information that is crucial in the context of travel and hospitality³⁷. Information giving involves creating and sharing experiences with opinion leaders (reviewers, bloggers, journalists, etc.) that play a key role in amplifying this dissemination^{3,8,38}. Information seeking, characterized by a series of search queries, is driven by trust in peer reviews and is perceived as devoid of commercial bias³⁹. Information forwarding encompasses the distribution of both user- and marketer-generated content, mediating the interaction between information seekers and opinion leaders⁴⁰.

The travel and hospitality sectors, which are inherently experiential and reliant on customer perceptions and experiences, are profoundly affected by eWOM. For example, 85%

of travelers consider eWOM trustworthy as personal recommendations, directly influencing their travel decisions^{41,42}. Another study by Lee and colleagues⁴³ highlighted that hotels with higher ratings reported a corresponding increase in occupancy rates of up to 25%. Given the experiential nature of these industries and the substantial body of research linking eWOM with tourism^{32,44}, it is evident that eWOM is not just a peripheral communication tool but a central component in the decision-making process of modern travelers. For example, online review platforms, such as TripAdvisor and Yelp, have become sources for individuals seeking (and providing) information and guidance when making travel arrangements⁴⁵. While positive eWOM can enhance a destination's reputation, attract potential visitors, and drive customer bookings, negative eWOM can have detrimental effects (e.g., dissuading travelers, damaging reputation, etc.)⁴⁶. Therefore, service providers should invest resources in the proactive management of eWOM to maintain positive sentiments around their destinations, brands, experiences, etc. For instance, encouraging satisfied travelers to share positive experiences and promptly address negative feedback.

Over time, these include information processing, brand awareness, travelers' preferences, and booking intentions^{42,47}. Additionally, some focus on eWOM's helpfulness⁴⁸, the trustfulness of eWOM^{49,50}, the role of visual cues on travelers' intentions, and so on⁵¹. Therefore, it appears that eWOM's influence on the travel and hospitality sectors is multi-layered and that it is an evolving interplay rather than a one-off isolated occurrence. Despite extensive research on eWOM^{4,9,52}, no attempt has been made to elaborate on the implications of GAI on WOM.

Conceptualizing GAI-enhanced WOM

The proliferation of digital platforms has given rise to a significant evolution in the way travelers communicate their experiences with products and services. However, WOM's reach

is inherently limited to physical interactions and personal networks¹⁰. The advent of the Internet has expanded this reach through eWOM, which magnifies the reach and impact of consumer opinions⁵³. Unlike traditional WOM, eWOM is not confined to face-to-face interactions because it leverages online platforms to spread opinions and experiences rapidly across networks. The digital nature of eWOM allows for a broader reach, as reviews and opinions shared online are accessible to a global audience⁹.

Building on this, GAI-generated recommendations have emerged as the newest format in the domain of information exchange and retrieval. Essentially, GAI-sourced recommendations may be considered a type of WOM primarily because of the following features:

- i. GAI-generated recommendations are tailored to **individual preferences** based on data analysis, mimicking the personalized advice one might receive from a friend or family member in traditional or eWOM. This personalized nature aligns with the essence of WOM, which is predicated on the perceived relevance and trustworthiness of shared information.
- ii. Similar to traditional WOM and eWOM, GAI-generated recommendations have the power to **influence consumer behavior** and subsequent decisions. They can shape opinions and perceptions about a product or service by providing information that consumers consider when making choices, thereby fulfilling one of the essential roles of WOM.
- iii. When designed and deployed effectively, GAI-generated recommendations can gain **credibility** over time as users experience accuracy and helpfulness. The GAI's ability to provide useful recommendations can mirror the trust that consumers place in human-generated WOM or (although less) in eWOM.
- iv. GAI-generated recommendations can **easily be shared** across platforms, leading to rapid dissemination. When users share GAI suggestions with their networks, this creates a ripple

effect that parallels the spread of information through traditional WOM or eWOM channels.

- v. **Aggregation:** GAI can aggregate and synthesize reviews and ratings to generate recommendations, effectively providing a form of social proof, which is a hallmark of WOM and eWOM. This aggregation can reflect the collective experiences of a community, thus providing a digital equivalent of community-based WOM where the 'community' is the dataset from which the GAI learns and generates its recommendations.

This advanced form of WOM termed synthetic WOM (syWOM), harnesses the power of GAI to find, curate, create, and disseminate WOM messages. It builds on the foundation of WOM and eWOM by not only spreading consumers'/travelers' messages across digital networks but also by enhancing their relevance and personalization aspects. A prominent feature of GAI for synthesizing large volumes of structured and unstructured data⁶ provides a suitable background for more targeted, informative, and context-specific WOM. It is based on the information sourced from the most influential messages, tailored to individual preferences, and hypothetically predicts future travelers' needs based on past behaviors and preferences.

Theoretically, syWOM transcends both WOM and eWOM. While eWOM extends the reach of traditional WOM to global audiences, syWOM distributes content across multiple platforms and networks, ensuring that influential messages reach relevant consumers/travelers in time. GAI can rapidly process data and generate responses in real-time⁵⁴, facilitating dynamic interaction that mimics WOM, crucial for contemporary travelers and businesses. With the advancement of natural language generation⁵⁵, syWOM can produce content indistinguishable from human-generated WOM, enhancing perceived authenticity while maintaining GAI's efficiency. Furthermore, the consistency and persistence of syWOM provide distinct advantages. Unlike WOM, which is sporadic, and eWOM, which depends on engagement with review platforms^{9,10}, syWOM ensures a consistent digital presence,

maintaining traveler engagement over time. Ultimately, syWOM has the potential to redefine the landscape of peer-to-peer communication, where GAI acts as a proxy. It leverages the depth and trust of WOM, and the reach of eWOM, and enhances these with the GAI's precision, agility, and intelligence. SyWOM is not a replacement for the human element in WOM but an enhancement that advances its WOM capabilities.

Given the above, GAI-induced WOM (syWOM) *refers to the creation, dissemination, and engagement with content that is influenced, curated, or directly generated by GAI. This encompasses algorithmically driven generation and refinement of content that captures consumer experiences, evaluative opinions, and endorsements about products, services, or experiential offerings. GAI utilizes advanced techniques to model and replicate the dynamics of traditional WOM, acting as an intermediary that reflects and shapes consumer discourse within the digital ecosystem.*

Essentially, syWOM represents a paradigm shift beyond pure information sharing and retrieval, marking a significant evolution from passive content consumption to interactive GAI-enhanced content retrieval, generation, curation, and dissemination.

Table 2 Redefining aspects of syWOM on an individual level (Source: Authors)

Aspect^a:	WOM	eWOM	syWOM
Origin	Directly from personal experiences shared verbally.	Created by consumers, based on personal experiences and shared online.	Initiated by AI algorithms or enhanced by AI, based on data analysis and user input.*
Medium	Face-to-face interactions.	Digital platforms (social media, review sites).	Digital platforms, potentially across broader and more diverse channels due to AI integration.
Interactivity	Limited to immediate social context.**	One-way or multi-way communication online.	Dynamic, potentially real-time AI-enabled interaction.*
Personalization	Highly personalized.	Static, can be targeted but not individualized.**	Advanced personalization using AI to tailor content to individual preferences.*
Scalability	Limited to social reach and memory of the individuals.**	Enhanced reach through online networks, but still limited by user engagement.	Highly scalable, AI can generate vast amounts of content quickly and distribute widely.*

Content Creation	User-generated based on individual experiences.	User-generated, based on individual experiences shared online.	User-generated content is enhanced by AI or entirely AI-generated.*
Authenticity	Perceived as highly authentic.	Considered authentic, but less personal due to the online nature.**	This may raise authenticity concerns.**
Sentiment Analysis	Informal based on personal interaction.	Typically requires manual analysis or separate software tools.**	Integrated sentiment analysis.
Data-Driven	Not data-driven.	Data can be collected and analyzed, but not inherently data-driven.	Highly data-driven (for content generation and customization).*
Reach	Confined to a local area or social circle.**	Broad reach through the internet.	Unlimited reach (transcending geographical and social boundaries).
Speed	Dependent on personal encounters.**	Dependent on user engagement.**	Near-instantaneous, with AI processing and sharing content rapidly.*
Consistency	Variable (dependent on individual's memory and communication skills).	Variable (dependent on user's engagement and platform algorithms).	High consistency (maintained by automated systems).*
Feedback Loop	Immediate (limited to those physically present).	Feedback is manually given and can influence future posts.	AI can automatically incorporate feedback to fine-tune future content.
Influence on Decision-Making	Strong**	Influences decisions via online peer recommendations and social proof.**	Influences decisions by merging peer insights with predictive analytics for persuasive content.*
Mode	Verbal	Text with visualization	Elaborated and structured text (with visualization) with interactive conversational feedback.
Entity (unit of information)	Personal information	Aggregated and averaged personal information	Aggregated, personalized, and structured information

Note: * significant differences; ** major challenges based on the literature; ^a Based on 9,10,42,44,49,50,56

Generation and Retrieval of syWOM

SyWOM represents a convergence of organic travelers' dialogue and sophisticated technology that refines how information is generated, disseminated, and accessed. This synergy has implications for domains where consumer perceptions and shared experiences are fundamental to decision-making (e.g., tourism, hospitality, high-involvement decisions).

The Role of GAI in Content Creation

GAI stands at the forefront of this transformation and is a pivotal tool in the creation of WOM content. Unlike eWOM, which relies solely on consumer-generated narratives³², syWOM leverages state-of-the-art algorithms to generate reviews, responses, and recommendations, which can augment and amplify human-generated content. GAI models are trained on vast datasets that encompass diverse customer interactions, preferences, and feedback¹⁸. This capability is not limited to crafting simple messages, as it extends to generating complex narratives that can profoundly articulate experiences, closely mirroring the human storytelling instinct⁵⁷. Therefore, GAI should be able to ensure a steady stream of fresh and engaging content that captures the essence of consumer experiences and insights, which are particularly crucial for the pre-travel consideration phases.

Algorithmic Curation of eWOM Content

Beyond creation, GAI excels in curating content⁵⁸. With travelers facing a wealth of information, the ability to go through and present the most relevant and impactful information is crucial⁵⁹. GAI employs advanced algorithms to curate UGC along with GAI-generated messages, providing a balanced and comprehensive view. Essentially, algorithmic curation involves the selection of content that is most relevant, and the ranking of this content based on its recency, relevance, and reliability¹⁶. This personalized approach ensures that potential travelers can access the most meaningful WOM at the right time, significantly influencing their travel planning and booking activities. Furthermore, GAI can identify gaps in existing content, prompting the creation of additional WOM to provide a complete picture of current offerings and experiences.

Equally important is the retrieval of WOM. GAI-driven search functionalities enable travelers to retrieve past WOM content generated by both humans and AI. Travelers (users)

can conversationally interact with the system, mimicking organic WOM exchanges and enabling a seamless information retrieval process. In the context of tourism and hospitality, syWOM is not merely a tool for information dissemination but also an active participant in the storytelling of travelers' experiences (Figure 1). As GAI continues to evolve, its potential to enhance the authenticity and trustworthiness¹⁹ of WOM through intelligent and empathetic engagement with travelers' narratives will become an indispensable asset in shaping the future of travel and hospitality marketing.

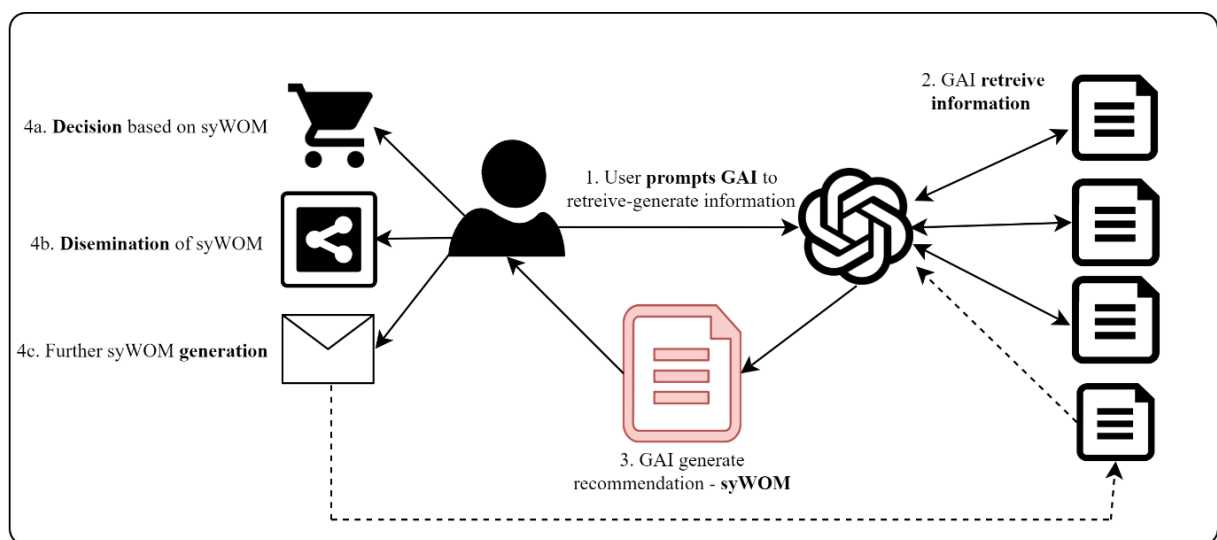


Figure 2 Synthetic WOM ecosystem (Source: Authors)

Notes: User-level aspect; 4c - syWOM may be considered a source for further syWOM generation; Prompt is defined as a message or request for input from the user.

How is syWOM Reshaping Information Retrieval and Generation in the Travel and Hospitality Sectors?

Essentially, syWOM plays asymmetric roles across various travel phases. While it may be central when travelers seek information during travel preparation, it may be less critical at a later stage. Consequently, it may be more relevant for the sharing and dissemination of experiences in later stages (during and post-trip phases). Notably, GAI can assume a specific role (e.g., digital nomad, solo traveler, tourist guide, local, etc.)¹⁸ and craft recommendations

to fit the exact context. Table 3 presents the background rationale for GAI deployment across the travel phases.

Table 3 The relevance of syWOM’s aspects for various travel phases (Source: Authors)

Aspect/phase	Pre-travel		During-travel		Post-travel	
	Relevant	Rationale	Relevant?	Rationale	Relevant?	Rationale
Inf. seeking	Yes	Used to gather inspiration, ideas, alternatives, and personal experiences to plan itineraries efficiently.	Yes	Tourists seek real-time recommendations to make “on-the-spot” decisions.	No	Few need to seek information as their information needs have already been met.
Inf. providing	No	Travelers are consumers of information rather than providers, as they are gathering insights for planning rather than sharing experiences.	Yes	Travelers share their experiences and updates with peers, relying on syWOM to enhance their relevance and reach.	Yes	Travelers provide detailed feedback and personal narratives that inform future travelers' decisions.
Inf. forwarding	Yes	Travelers are likely to share GAI-generated travel content that resonates with their interests, contributing to the planning process.	No	Travelers are engaged in navigating their surroundings in real-time, which limits their capacity and intent to provide reviews.	Yes	Travelers continue to share GAI-curated reviews.

Note: Relevance of individual syWOM dimensions may change across phases as GAI advances and/or travelers’s behavior change

Disrupting Effect of syWOM in the Travel Planning Phase

The pre-travel phase is a critical stage in which travelers actively seek information to make informed decisions⁴². Traditional WOM/eWOM sources authored by peer travelers have been instrumental in providing insights and guidance. However, GAI introduces a new dimension to the pre-travel experience as it holds the potential to engage in interactive conversations and produce personalized recommendations²⁵. Hypothetically, it enhances the quality and customization of WOM in the pre-travel phase. By leveraging GAI (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini, Bing), travel planning platforms can offer travelers a conversational interface,

allowing them to seek information and advice more interactively⁵⁴. GAI has the potential to provide comprehensive and up-to-date information, catering to individual needs, and facilitating informed decision-making. Still, the lack of transparency in the information source and the absence of human expertise may raise doubts among travelers, impacting their trust in the recommendations provided. Additionally, as GAI learns from large datasets, it can replicate the bias inherent in the original datasets, thereby providing distorted information.

Information Seeking

In the pre-travel phase, information seeking is crucial as they gather relevant details to make informed decisions. The integration of GAI into this phase offers unique implications for WOM. For instance, travelers can interact with a GAI to seek personalized recommendations based on their preferences and budgets. For illustration, GAI can generate responses tailored to specific queries (e.g. *What are the must-visit landmarks in Tokyo for photography enthusiasts?*). By utilizing GAI, travelers can access a conversational interface that assists in exploring destinations, accommodations, and activities, enhancing their pre-travel experience and supporting their decision-making process.



You

Recommend me the hotel on the Adriatic coast that satisfies the majority of the following criteria:

1. Is less than 7 hours drive from Vienna
2. Costs less than 90 EUR per night for a family of four
3. Infant stay is free of charge
4. Close proximity to a beach
5. Offers late checkout
6. Has a rating of more than 4.5 on TripAdvisor/Booking
7. Is pet friendly
8. One of the travelers is visually impaired

< 2 / 2 >



ChatGPT

After a quick search, here's what I found.

Based on your criteria, I found several options for hotels on the Adriatic coast that may meet your needs:

1. **Hotel Saint Hildegard Omiš** in Omiš, Croatia, offers large rooms and a variety of amenities, including a seasonal outdoor swimming pool and free WiFi. It's situated close to Beach Čelina and has received great reviews for its cleanliness and friendly staff.
2. **Hotel Miramare Crikvenica** in Crikvenica, Croatia, is a 5-star accommodation with an indoor pool, sea views, and free WiFi. It's noted for its polite staff, exquisite food, and convenient location.
3. **Hyatt Regency Kotor Bay Resort** in Kotor, Montenegro, features a spa, wellness center, and private beach area, with rooms offering views of Kotor Bay. It's a bit challenging to reach by rental car but offers a prime location once you're there.
4. **Hotel Kloest Durrës** in Durrës, Albania, is known for its perfect location, modern style, and friendly, helpful staff. It offers free WiFi throughout the property and is highly recommended for its good energy and quality service.
5. **Hotel Sport & Residenza** in Cesenatico, Italy, is located near the sea and town center,

Figure 3 Information seeking in the pre-travel phase via GAI (Source: chat.openai.com)

Information Forwarding

Information forwarding plays a significant and overlooked role in the pre-travel phase as travelers share valuable insights and recommendations with others. The integration of GAI has significant implications for forwarding information during this phase. Hypothetically, travelers can engage in conversations with Gemini to seek personalized recommendations and share them with fellow travelers. By simply forwarding the GAI recommendation, travelers

can assist others who are planning upcoming travel activities. Additionally, GAI can provide current insights into travel deals and discounts¹⁹, which travelers can then forward to their social networks, ensuring that valuable information reaches a wider audience. The integration of GAI in the pre-travel phase enhances the forwarding of relevant and timely information, facilitating the exchange of domain-relevant and domain-specific knowledge among travelers and broader communities.

Proposition #1: The GAI significantly disrupts the travel planning phase in terms of how information is retrieved and forwarded.

How Does syWOM Support “on-the-spot” Decision-making During Travel?

While traveling, individuals often seek real-time information, recommendations, and assistance to enhance their travel experience¹⁸. In particular, when unexpected events take place (e.g., bad weather, crisis events, overcrowding, etc.)⁶⁰. EWOM has emerged as a significant source of information that influences travelers’ on-the-spot behavior and decision-making. Essentially, UGC plays a central role in shaping and enhancing travel experiences, aiding itinerary adjustments, and facilitating informed decision-making⁶¹. Furthermore, the extensive use of GAI in the context of eWOM during travel presents new opportunities for travelers to obtain instant information. GAI’s ability to generate immediate and interactive responses can provide real-time assistance, address queries, and offer personalized recommendations.

Information Seeking

Information seeking during the travel phase plays a crucial role in helping travelers navigate unfamiliar territories and make the most of their on-the-spot experiences. For example, they can ask questions such as "*What are the current operating hours of the Louvre Museum?*" or "*Where can I find the best local street food in Bangkok?*". GAI can provide immediate and interactive responses⁶², enabling travelers to make informed decisions on-the-

go. By leveraging syWOM, travelers can enhance their travel experience by accessing up-to-date information, local insights, and personalized recommendations. Notably, GAI can serve as an autonomous tour guide (available 24/7)¹⁸.

Information Providing

During travel, information provision plays a significant role in enhancing the travel experience⁶³. GAI enhances the massive potential of real-time information. Travelers can engage with GAI to share updates regarding their current location, local events, and activities. Furthermore, GAI can provide insights into hidden gems and off-the-beaten-path attractions, allowing travelers to forward these unique recommendations to fellow travelers or socially close individuals. A potent risk lies in the fact that less-visited and congested sites may become overwhelmed as a result, leading to a higher information pressure to find something unique on the spot. Essentially, by leveraging GAI for information provision during travel, travelers can contribute to the collective domain-relevant knowledge of their networks.

Proposition #2: *Synthetic WOM supports on-the-spot decision-making and allows travelers more control over their experiences.*

Post-travel GAI-mediated Experience Sharing?

The post-travel phase is a crucial period during which travelers reflect on and share their experiences, express their opinions, and provide recommendations⁶⁴. However, not everybody shares travel experiences due to a lack of skills, time, and knowledge¹⁸. In this context, GAI as a proxy can accelerate the information-sharing process. Traditionally, post-travel eWOM has provided valuable information and serves as a reference point for future travelers⁶⁵. Now, the integration of GAI offers new possibilities for generating engaging narratives and facilitating the expression of travel experiences. For example, Gemini can assist travelers in articulating their experiences effectively, generating compelling and informative

content, the so-called AI-generated UGC (AIGC)⁵⁵. GAI's ability to generate contextually appropriate recommendations can help travelers express their opinions and recommendations more coherently and persuasively.

Information Providing

In the post-travel phase, the information provided is central, as travelers pronounce their experiences and recommendations^{9,10}. Travelers can engage in conversations with GAI to generate detailed and insightful narratives about their travel experiences. For example, a traveler can describe the breathtaking sunrise view from a mountaintop, recommend hidden gems in a particular city, or provide tips for budget-friendly dining options. GAI's ability to generate personalized and engaging content¹⁶ enhances the storytelling aspect of WOM. In addition, it can assist travelers in responding to specific queries from other prospective travelers, such as inquiries about the safety of a destination or suggestions for family-friendly activities. By relying on GAI, travelers can contribute valuable information to the WOM landscape and assist others in their travel planning and decision-making processes.

Information Forwarding

There are significant implications for information forwarding, as travelers can generate detailed narratives about their travel experiences¹⁸ and forward them to others. For example, a traveler can forward valuable information about trail routes, scenic viewpoints, and recommended gear. Additionally, GAI can assist travelers in forwarding practical information such as local customs, language tips, and safety recommendations, ensuring that fellow travelers are well-informed before embarking on their journeys. By leveraging GAI for information forwarding in the post-travel phase, travelers contribute to the enrichment of WOM with valuable insights, personal anecdotes, and practical advice, thereby shaping the decisions and experiences of future travelers.



You

Create an online review that I can share and forward with my social circles. Write in plain English and communicate the main points. Mind the following:

1. It is about Eiffel Tower
2. I was there with my family and was very negatively surprised by the fact that it was overcrowded
3. The personnel was rude and did not speak any English
4. There was no dedicated entry for those who bought tickets online upfront
5. We had issues to carry the stroller over multiple stairs
6. Still, the view was amazing and my daughter was playing with pigeons that were nesting over there



ChatGPT

Title: Mixed Experience at the Eiffel Tower - Breathtaking Views but Some Drawbacks

Review:

I recently visited the Eiffel Tower with my family and wanted to share our experience, which was a mix of awe and frustration. Firstly, the iconic structure is as majestic as you'd imagine, offering a view of Paris that is simply breathtaking. My daughter had a delightful time playing with the pigeons nesting around, which added a quaint charm to our visit.

However, there were significant downsides to our experience. The most pressing issue was the overwhelming crowd. We were not prepared for the sheer number of people, which made navigating the space with a family quite challenging. More so, the lack of a dedicated entry line for visitors who had purchased tickets online was a big letdown. This oversight led to unnecessary waiting and confusion.

Additionally, we faced difficulties with our stroller due to the multiple stairs, which was not ideal for families with young children or for visitors with mobility issues. This aspect of our visit could have been much smoother with better planning and facilities from the Tower's administration.



Figure 4 GAI's capabilities in composing recommendations based on a prompt (Source: chat.openai.com)

Proposition #3: *GAI will lead to new forms and levels of experience sharing via enriched narrative, visualization, and more informative syWOM.*

The Interplay of syWOM and Major Stakeholders

In the syWOM ecosystem, tripartite synergy exists among travelers, service providers, and online platforms. Each stakeholder plays a distinct role in a cycle that is both iterative and interdependent. Travelers, as content generators and consumers, form the core of the WOM narrative, which is then processed and enhanced by AI to inform and guide their choices.

Service providers should use syWOM for strategic reputation management in response to the dynamic flow of online opinions. Meanwhile, online platforms assume the role of facilitators, applying advanced AI to mediate the relationship between travelers and service providers^{25,58}.

Travelers as Content Generators and Consumers

Travelers sit at the heart of the (sy)WOM as they are the primary source of content and the most significant consumer segment for that content⁹. Travelers' narratives serve as data that the GAI transforms into relatable and engaging content¹⁸. Conversely, travelers are end-users who seek out and consume syWOM and rely on it to inform their travel decisions. Their engagement patterns, search behaviors, and feedback loops provide critical data that AI systems use to refine their algorithms⁶⁶, ensuring that the generated content remains pertinent and impactful. Notably, syWOM emphasizes the dual impact of traveler engagement; it not only influences individual decision-making but also contributes to a broader understanding of consumer preferences and trends. As generators of WOM, travelers are not mere bystanders, but active participants whose contributions continuously shape the syWOM landscape.

Proposition #4: Travelers' dual role as contributors to and consumers of syWOM drives a self-enhancing loop that continuously refines the relevance and impact of GAI-generated travel content.

Service Providers, Quality and Reputation Management

Hypothetically, for service providers in the tourism and hospitality industry, syWOM presents both an opportunity and challenge in terms of quality and reputation management. On the one hand, syWOM can amplify positive experiences rapidly across a vast network, exponentially enhancing a provider's reputation. However, this also means that negative recommendations have the potential to spread with equal speed and reach^{58,67}. The integration of GAI in marketing communication efforts represents a significant shift from reactive to

predictive reputation management^{2,68}. GAI serves as an advanced analytical tool to anticipate customer needs and concerns⁶⁹, allowing them to address issues before escalating into negative syWOM. This anticipatory approach to quality and reputation management is becoming increasingly critical as the volume and velocity of online information continue to grow.

***Proposition #5:** Service providers' adoption of syWOM transforms reputation management from a reactive to a predictive strategy, enhancing their ability to address customer concerns and influence perception.*

The Central Role of Online Platforms

Online platforms serve as critical mediators of eWOM, providing the infrastructure necessary for its creation, curation, and consumption³¹. They play a pivotal role in shaping the syWOM environment, determining which content is highlighted or suppressed, and thus influencing consumer perceptions and behaviors. Their algorithms can have far-reaching consequences^{18,70,71}, affecting everything from individual business fortunes to broader industrial trends. Platform policies and GAI tools must be transparent, fair, and designed to avoid biases that could mislead consumers or unfairly harm service providers.

***Proposition #6:** Online platforms, through the use of GAI, will significantly shape the syWOM landscape by actively influencing content visibility and consumer perceptions, necessitating a responsible and ethical framework for GAI applications.*

Major Challenges Related to the Synthetic Nature of WOM

Several challenges are associated with syWOM. This is not an exhaustive list but rather a summary of the most central topics and issues related to GAI^{24,57,62,69,70,72,73}. Addressing these challenges requires a multilayered approach involving ongoing research, development of best practices, user education, and industry collaboration. By addressing these challenges, scholars

and marketers can harness the full potential of GAI in enhancing syWOM and empowering travelers to make informed and meaningful travel decisions.

- i. One major challenge is ensuring the **quality and reliability** of the information generated or curated by the GAI. GAI generates responses based on patterns and examples in its training data^(10,70), which may not always guarantee accuracy or up-to-date information⁵⁹. Validating and verifying the information provided by GAI is crucial to ensuring that travelers can make informed decisions based on reliable and trustworthy data.
- ii. Another challenge is **the potential for bias and subjectivity** in the information generated by GAI. GAI models, such as ChatGPT, are trained on vast amounts of data, which can inadvertently contain biases present in the training data¹⁵. This can result in biased recommendations or perspectives for travelers. Minimizing biases and ensuring that the information provided is fair, objective, and diverse is essential.
- iii. The effective use of GAI in travel decision-making relies on **travelers' understanding of how to interact with the system and ask relevant questions**^{18,72}. Users may face challenges in formulating queries appropriately, leading to inaccurate or irrelevant responses. Additionally, the limitations of GAI in understanding complex queries may hinder its ability to provide satisfactory answers⁵⁸. It is crucial to educate travelers about their capabilities and limitations and provide guidance on how to interact effectively with the system to obtain desired information.
- iv. Utilizing GAI raises concerns regarding **privacy and data security**. Eventually, GAI interactions may involve the sharing of personal information or preferences²⁰, which must be handled with utmost care to protect user privacy. Ensuring compliance with data protection regulations and implementing robust security measures to safeguard user data are vital to address these challenges.

- v. The implications of GAI in travel decision-making also **raise ethical considerations**⁷¹. For example, there may be instances in which GAI generates/curates content that is misleading or promotes unethical practices. It is essential to establish guidelines and ethical frameworks to govern the use of GAI in syWOM, ensuring that the generated/curated information aligns with ethical standards and promotes responsible decision-making⁶⁹.

***Proposition #7:** Addressing the multifaceted challenges of syWOM is essential for the effective integration of GAI into effective and ethical travel decision-making processes.*

Challenges in Addressing Fake Reviews

The interplay between GAI and fake online reviews raises significant concerns^(14,18,25), with consequent negative implications for GAI-generated syWOM. Sourced fake online reviews generated to deceive or manipulate consumers^{74,75} can undermine the integrity and reliability of the information retrieved from GAI. This information poses a threat to decision-making, trust in online platforms, and overall market fairness. The problem of fake online reviews is pervasive. According to a recent study⁷⁶, 82% of consumers read online reviews for local businesses, and of those, 33% suspect encountering fake reviews. Fake reviews can artificially inflate product ratings, misrepresent product features and quality, or promote competing products while denigrating others^{9,77}. When incorporated by GAI, fake reviews can potentially mislead and manipulate consumers, leading to biased decision-making and eventually negative experiences. The adverse implications of incorporating fake reviews into syWOM include the following.

- i. SyWOM can **misrepresent products**, services, or destinations, providing **inaccurate information** that may mislead consumers/travelers. This can lead to misguided decisions, dissatisfaction, and harm to negatively targeted businesses.

- ii. **Undermines trust in online platforms and review systems.** When consumers cannot rely on the authenticity and credibility of syWOM, their confidence in making informed decisions diminishes, potentially resulting in decreased engagement.
- iii. Fake reviews can create an **unfair advantage for businesses** that employ deceptive tactics. Genuine businesses may face challenges in competing on a level playing field if their offerings are overshadowed by fraudulent positive reviews or if negative reviews are targeted toward them.

On the other side, mitigation strategies to address the negative implications of incorporating fake information into syWOM eventually include:

- i. Implementing **robust mechanisms to validate the authenticity and accuracy of reviews** can help filter out fake reviews. This can involve using advanced algorithms and technologies to identify suspicious patterns, inconsistencies, or linguistic cues that indicate potential fake reviews.
- ii. **Empowering users to report and provide feedback regarding suspicious reviews** can aid in identifying and flagging potential instances of fake reviews/information. Creating a user-driven system that encourages the reporting of suspicious activities can help to maintain the integrity of online review platforms.
- iii. **Educating** users about the existence of fake reviews (e.g., their impact and identification) can enhance consumer awareness and resilience.
- iv. **Collaborating with online review platforms** to establish and enforce guidelines for fake reviews can contribute to maintaining the integrity of online review ecosystems. Strengthening cooperation among GAI developers, platform administrators, and regulatory bodies can foster collective efforts to combat fake reviews effectively.

***Proposition #8:** The incorporation of fake reviews in syWOM challenges the integrity and reliability of decision-making, necessitating robust mitigation strategies to preserve consumer trust and market fairness.*

Concluding Remarks

By following WOM and eWOM postulates, syWOM can potentially become a cornerstone of marketing communication. Challenges, such as authenticity, ethical considerations, and the balance between GAI content and human input, are critical issues facing syWOM. However, marketers and stakeholders have a unique opportunity to leverage early adoption advantages, positioning themselves at the forefront of this innovative trend. This paper presents a compelling argument for the value that syWOM can offer affected stakeholders in the domains of tourism and hospitality.

What are the Major Managerial Implications of syWOM?

SyWOM presents substantial opportunities and challenges for service providers in the hospitality and tourism industry. The capacity of GAI to generate highly personalized and contextually relevant content is a significant advantage for enhancing travel engagement. To optimize the effectiveness of syWOM, service providers should employ GAI to deliver customized content that aligns with users' unique needs and preferences. By using contextual data and user profiles, companies can ensure that the syWOM generated is not only relevant but also engaging, which can result in improving traveler satisfaction and decision-making. The proliferation of deceptive online reviews threatens the credibility of syWOM, requiring robust mechanisms for review validation. Service providers should develop and employ advanced GAI algorithms designed to detect and filter out fake reviews by identifying suspicious patterns and inconsistencies. Additionally, fostering a user-driven system that

encourages reporting and feedback on suspicious reviews can further enhance the integrity of syWOM. By implementing these measures, organizations can safeguard the reliability of their online reviews and maintain consumer trust.

In the context of ethics, service providers must develop and enforce ethical frameworks to prevent the dissemination of biased or misleading information. Regular audits of GAI-generated content are necessary to ensure compliance with ethical standards and address potential issues related to misinformation. Finally, stakeholders must educate users about how to effectively interact with GAI and evaluate the authenticity of generated content can improve the quality of syWOM interactions. Service providers should invest in educational resources and training programs that help users navigate GAI systems and make informed decisions.

Where to Now? SyWOM and Future Research Directions

Given that the GAI domain is in its infancy, there are numerous research frontiers pending investigations (Table 3). Among the many and based on the recognized challenges, several promising avenues for future research stand out:

- i. Future research should explore **the impact of syWOM on user perceptions and trust**. Investigating how users perceive and evaluate the information provided by GAI, as well as their trust in its recommendations, can shed light on the effectiveness of GAI in influencing (traveling) decision-making. This research stream should assist in identifying factors that enhance or hinder user trust in GAI-generated WOM.
- ii. Researchers should explore **the customization and contextualization of syWOM**. Examining how to tailor information according to individual user preferences and travel contexts can enhance the relevance and usefulness of GAI-generated recommendations. This research stream can explore techniques such as leveraging user profiles, historical

data, and real-time inputs to generate personalized and context-aware WOM, ultimately improving travelers' decision-making process.

- iii. Given the potential for biases in GAI-generated content, future research could focus on **mitigating bias and ensuring fairness in syWOM**. This includes developing techniques to identify and address biases in the training data as well as incorporating fairness considerations during the generation of recommendations. Research can also explore methods to allow users to control and customize the level of bias in the recommendations they receive, thereby promoting transparency and inclusivity in eWOM processes.
- iv. It is crucial to evaluate the **user experience and the effectiveness of syWOM in real-world scenarios**. Future research could employ user-centric evaluation methods to assess the impact of GAI on user (traveler) decision-making processes, satisfaction, and post-purchase experiences. This research stream can involve user studies, surveys, and user feedback analysis to gain insights into the strengths, limitations, and areas of improvement of GAI in the context of syWOM.
- v. As GAI becomes more integrated into syWOM processes, research should focus on ethical considerations and guidelines for responsible use. Investigating ethical implications and privacy concerns and ensuring transparency in the utilization of ChatGPT can contribute to the development of ethical frameworks and guidelines for both researchers and industry practitioners.

Table 4 Future research directions (Source: Authors)

Topic	Research question
User Perceptions and Trust	How do users perceive GAI as a source?
	Do users perceive GAI as trustworthy?
	What are the major risks associated with the continuous usage of GAI for information retrieval?
	Do users find GAI-generated recommendations received helpful?
	What type of information communicated via GAI is more helpful?
	What are the long-term effects of syWOM on online review platforms?
Contextualization	How does personalization impact behavior?
	What are the implications of providing enhanced contextual prompts on information retrieved from GAI?
	Use across different cultures and languages.

Mitigating Bias	How does the biased data affect the information provided by GAI?
	What are the implications of the lack of transparency?
	Can GAI induce inclusivity in WOM processes?
User-Centric Evaluation and Experience	What are the privacy implications of GAI integration into syWOM?
	What are the perceived risks related to user-centric evaluation of the information generated by GAI?
Responsible Use of GAI	What is the responsible use of GAI in the context of syWOM?
	What are the major challenges related to the ethical utilization of GAI?
Buying Behaviour	How does information retrieved and generated by GAI influence purchasing decisions?
	What factors will affect the effectiveness of Information retrieved and generated by GAI?
	What metrics are suitable to measure the effectiveness of syWOM?
Motivation	What motivating factors trigger users to use GAI in information seeking/providing/forwarding?
	Are these factors similar to the usage of online review platforms?
	How can marketers encourage users to rely more on GAI?
Policy	What kind of policies and regulations should be developed to organize the domain of information generation via GAI?
Formats of eWOM executed via ChatGPT	What implications would GAI have on various formats of eWOM?
	How can GAI assist in the production of audio-visual syWOM?
	What implications would various formats of syWOM have on consumers?
	How can GAI integrate with AR and VR?

Limitations

This study had a few limitations. The most pronounced is that it is a conceptual contribution that urges rigorous empirical verification of the proposed concept. Therefore, studies that would triangulate travelers' behavior are needed in the future. Please refer to Table 4. Second, in conceptualizing syWOM, we presume that travelers use GAI to retrieve, curate, or generate WOM, which may not fully correspond to reality. One of the central topics is the adoption of GAI in retrieving, generating, and curating syWOM.

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