

Peer-to-peer branding co-creation: the salient attributes of ski resorts in Argentina

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explores how electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) contributes to the co-creation of Argentine ski resort brands by identifying salient attributes and examining how they are articulated in tourists' online discourse within a competitive snow-tourism market.

Design/methodology/approach – Using 1,750 Spanish-language Google Maps reviews from seven leading ski resorts (2015–2022), the study applies text-mining techniques, including term frequency analysis, n-gram extraction, word co-occurrence networks and clustering, to uncover salient attributes and the patterns connecting them.

Findings – The findings show that attributes related to snow quality, resort services, scenic views and landscape dominate tourists' e-WOM. Beyond their individual relevance, these attributes are interconnected through recurrent co-occurrence patterns, revealing how brand meanings emerge relationally across experiential dimensions and are collectively reinforced through shared online discourse.

Research limitations/implications – The analysis is limited to Spanish-language reviews on Google Maps; future research could extend the approach to other platforms, languages and stakeholder groups.

Practical implications – Destination managers can strengthen brand positioning by amplifying the attributes most frequently articulated by visitors and aligning service improvements with tourists' own language and narratives.

Originality/value – By integrating Brand Co-Creation Theory and Product-Attribute Theory within a snow-tourism context, this study demonstrates how peer-generated discourse functions as an active mechanism of brand co-creation and offers a reproducible methodological approach for analysing destination branding through large-scale e-WOM.

Keywords Text mining, e-WOM, Brand co-creation, Ski tourism, Destination attributes, Ski resort

Paper type Research article

Introduction

Global travel trends indicate a significant digital transformation of tourism destinations. Travellers are progressively embracing technology with reduced human interaction (Smartvel, 2023), while purchasing processes are undergoing increased digitalisation, with a surge in mobile searches and bookings for tourism services (Expedia Group, 2023). In this context, tourism destinations operate within digitally mediated environments where brand meanings are increasingly shaped through online interactions.

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Within this evolving digital ecosystem, and in line with the concept of digital tourism territories (Zanfardini, 2022), branding has shifted from a firm-controlled activity to a dynamic and socially constructed process involving multiple stakeholders, including tourists (Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019). This shift challenges traditional branding models by positioning tourists as active contributors to brand meaning rather than passive recipients. As a result, brand meanings are increasingly co-created through interactions among stakeholders, generating representations that are perceived as more authentic and credible (Giannopoulos *et al.*, 2021).

This article focuses on the role of tourists' online reviews in shaping the co-creation of ski resort brands through electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). As a form of peer-to-peer communication in the digital era (Tussyadiah and Zach, 2017), e-WOM encompasses consumption-related discourse facilitated by digital platforms (Babić Rosario *et al.*, 2020). Beyond acting as an information source, e-WOM functions as a central mechanism through which brand meanings are constructed and negotiated collectively.

Within a brand co-creation perspective, tourists' online reviews should not be understood merely as post-consumption evaluations, but as active contributions to brand meaning. Digital platforms amplify consumers' roles as brand stakeholders, enabling peer-to-peer interactions that shape how destinations are interpreted and valued (Hatch and Schultz, 2010; Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019). Through e-WOM, tourists articulate experiences, emphasise particular destination attributes and circulate narratives beyond firm-controlled communication channels. These organic and unsolicited contributions, grounded in personal experience, are widely recognised as highly credible sources of information (Gartner, 1993; Babić Rosario *et al.*, 2020).

Previous studies have examined e-WOM and branding across multiple tourism sectors, including hotels (Krishnamurthy and Kumar, 2018), restaurants (Okumus *et al.*, 2018), airlines (Hoffmann, 2022) and tourist destinations more broadly (Toral *et al.*, 2018; Bigne *et al.*, 2025).

Systematic reviews further confirm the growing relevance of digital and social media environments in destination branding, highlighting user-generated content as a key mechanism through which brand meanings are shaped and disseminated (Mandagi *et al.*, 2024). However, research focusing specifically on ski resorts remains limited and largely restricted to single-case studies (Luque Martínez *et al.*, 2019; Saveleva and Melnik, 2019).

In addition, a key gap concerns the identification of destination attributes that shape ski resort branding from a tourist perspective. While product attributes theory (Lancaster, 1966; Gwin and Gwin, 2003) provides a foundational framework for understanding consumer value, its application to ski tourism branding remains limited. Although recent studies have identified key ski resort attributes (Islam *et al.*, 2023; Shang *et al.*, 2022), their role in brand co-creation processes has not been explicitly examined. This reveals a lack of empirical research linking destination attributes, e-WOM and brand co-creation processes in ski tourism. To address this gap, the present study leverages tourists' e-WOM to identify salient attributes and examine how they contribute to ski resort brand differentiation.

From this standpoint, destination attributes are conceptualised as emergent elements of brand co-creation rather than predefined managerial inputs. Through repeated and socially validated references in user-generated discourse, attributes become salient features of brand identity, reflecting shared meanings constructed by tourists themselves (Pralhad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Zenker *et al.*, 2017). In line with product attributes theory, these attributes represent the experiential elements that generate value for consumers and contribute to brand differentiation through collective narration (Giannopoulos *et al.*, 2021).

To translate this conceptualisation into empirical analysis, destination attributes in this study are operationalised as recurrent nouns in tourists' online reviews (e.g. snow, service, landscape), which function as the core carriers of shared brand meaning, while adjectives and verbs are used to interpret evaluations and activities associated with those attributes.

Building on brand co-creation theory and product attributes theory, this study aims to analyse how tourists' online reviews contribute to the co-creation of ski resort brands in Argentina. Specifically, it pursues two objectives: (1) to identify the most salient attributes of

ski resorts as expressed in e-WOM and (2) to examine how these attributes shape brand differentiation across destinations.

This study offers three main contributions. First, it provides empirical evidence of how e-WOM operates as a mechanism of brand co-creation in the underexplored context of ski tourism. Second, it advances the application of product attributes theory by identifying and systematising the attributes that underpin ski resort brand perceptions. Third, it contributes methodologically by applying text mining techniques to uncover patterns in user-generated content, enabling a deeper understanding of how brand meanings emerge from collective discourse.

Branding co-creation through e-WOM

Effectively conveying a brand image to a target market remains a fundamental marketing task. Strategic brand management entails selecting, implementing and monitoring a brand image over time (Park *et al.*, 1986). The conventional paradigm of brand management, as articulated by de Chernatony (1999), highlights two pivotal and interconnected concepts: brand identity and brand image. Brand identity originates from tourism companies or destinations through the creation of a differentiated product with unique attributes, while brand image represents consumer perceptions, encompassing the set of benefits they associate with the brand (Nandan, 2005).

While these foundational approaches provide a valuable basis for understanding brand identity and image, recent research indicates that these constructs are increasingly shaped within digital environments. In particular, systematic reviews show that brand-related perceptions are no longer formed solely through firm-controlled communication, but emerge from ongoing interactions across digital platforms and user-generated content (Ghorbani *et al.*, 2022).

Within these digital environments, brand meaning is increasingly mediated by a variety of online actors beyond the firm itself. Systematic reviews on social media marketing highlight the growing role of influential users and digitally visible actors in shaping brand perceptions and narratives, reinforcing the shift towards more distributed and socially constructed branding processes (Vrontis *et al.*, 2021).

Additionally, Gartner (1993) distinguishes three sources of information that influence brand image formation: induced agents, autonomous agents and organic agents. Of these, organic agents hold the greatest credibility for users, as their information is based on personal experiences or comments from family and friends – this includes word of mouth, a peer-to-peer-based communication.

The proliferation of digital networks and their rapid adoption by users as one of the key brand stakeholders have facilitated the co-creation of brands (Hatch and Schultz, 2010). Co-creation, defined as the process where consumers and service providers collaborate to create value (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2018), advocates a shift from a company-centric view of products and services to personalised consumer experiences. In the online context, users' reviews can create, reshape and even devastate online reputation, significantly affecting a brand's image (Borges-Tiago *et al.*, 2021).

The e-WOM is defined as “consumer-generated, consumption-related communication that employs digital tools and is directed primarily at other consumers” (Babić Rosario *et al.*, 2020, p. 427). Through this organic, unsolicited communication, informed, networked, empowered and active consumers are increasingly co-creating value with brands (Harmes-Liedtke and Gianetti, 2019). e-WOM generated by consumers about a brand has a significant impact on brand engagement, regardless of the type of product (Srivastava and Sivaramakrishnan, 2021).

In the context of a tourism destination, branding as a co-created process assumes that various stakeholders, including tourists, are involved in shaping both brand identity and brand image (Zenker *et al.*, 2017). This aligns with the service ecosystem perspective on destination branding, where co-creation is seen as a dynamic interaction between various actors, including tourists, who actively contribute to the brand's development (Giannopoulos *et al.*, 2021),

and with [Kirmani et al.'s \(1999\)](#) description of brand involvement, which refers to the level of an individual's interest and personal connection to a brand, influenced by their values, self-perception or objectives.

The impact of e-WOM on the marketing of tourism services, as well as the factors influencing e-WOM, has been recently studied by several researchers ([Ababneh, 2022](#)). Also, the study of [Baber et al. \(2024\)](#) informed that, except for economic value, all the exogenous (emotional, social and altruistic) values have a positive influence on the e-WOM intentions. In exploring the co-created experiences of the ski-chalet community, [McLeay et al. \(2019\)](#) explain that WOM and e-WOM, based on the experience of the ski-chalet holiday, are vital for creating a buzz. Additionally, the social aspects of the ski-chalet gathering, including social emotions, play a key role in shaping the co-created consumer experience. At national parks in mountain destinations, [Zolfaghari and Choi \(2023\)](#) used visitor reviews to extract the service and experience quality attributes.

While these studies demonstrate the relevance of e-WOM and online reviews for understanding tourism experiences and destination attributes, they tend to focus on specific contexts or evaluative outcomes. The present study builds on this body of work by explicitly conceptualising tourists' online reviews as a mechanism of brand co-creation and by analysing how brand-related attributes emerge through collective discourse across multiple ski resorts.

Conceptual framework on snow tourism and ski resort attributes

Snow tourism is predominantly developed in mountain destinations where natural conditions, infrastructure and services converge to shape tourist experiences. From a marketing perspective, ski resorts can be understood as complex tourism products composed of multiple attributes that jointly generate value for visitors ([Lancaster, 1966](#); [Islam et al., 2023](#)).

From this perspective, this study approaches tourists' online reviews as a site of brand co-creation, where brand-related meanings emerge through collective discourse rather than managerial design. Within this perspective, co-creation becomes empirically observable through the attributes that tourists recurrently highlight when describing their experiences.

According to product attributes theory ([Lancaster, 1966](#); [Gwin and Gwin, 2003](#)), consumers do not derive utility from products *per se*, but from the bundle of attributes they offer. In tourism contexts, these attributes encompass both functional elements (e.g. infrastructure, accessibility, services) and experiential dimensions (e.g. scenery, atmosphere, natural conditions), which together influence destination choice, satisfaction and brand perception. Recent methodological contributions further demonstrate how salient product attributes can be empirically extracted from large-scale user-generated textual data, reinforcing the relevance of attribute-based approaches in digital environments ([Fernando and Aw, 2023](#)).

In destination marketing, identifying salient attributes is essential for differentiation and competitive positioning. [Buhalis \(2000\)](#) highlights core destination attributes such as attractions, amenities, activities and ancillary services, while [Truong et al. \(2018\)](#) emphasise the strategic relevance of distinctiveness in shaping tourist satisfaction and brand identity. In snow tourism, these attributes are particularly sensitive to environmental conditions and seasonality, which increasingly drive strategic diversification beyond winter-only offerings ([Gilani et al., 2018](#)).

Empirical studies on ski resorts consistently identify snow quality, slopes, infrastructure, pricing and natural scenery as central attributes shaping tourist experiences ([Saveleva and Melnik, 2019](#); [Shang et al., 2022](#); [Islam et al., 2023](#)). While these studies provide valuable insights into attribute importance, they typically address attributes as isolated evaluative factors rather than as elements embedded in broader branding processes.

Building on this literature, the present study adopts a branding co-creation perspective and conceptualises ski resort attributes as emergent and socially constructed through tourists'

e-WOM. Rather than being predefined by destination managers, salient attributes are identified through recurrent patterns in user-generated discourse, reflecting shared meanings that contribute to brand identity formation and differentiation in competitive snow tourism markets.

Grounded in a brand co-creation perspective, the following research questions guide the analysis by examining how brand-related meanings emerge from tourists' online reviews.

RQ1. What are the most salient attributes of ski resorts in Argentina according to tourists' online reviews?

Beyond identifying key attributes, it is crucial to understand how these elements contribute to the branding and differentiation of ski resorts. e-WOM has become a determining factor in the tourism industry, influencing destination reputation and consumer choices (Shang *et al.*, 2022). Unlike traditional marketing strategies, which rely on promotional content controlled by businesses, e-WOM is built through authentic consumer experiences shared on digital platforms. For ski resorts, positive or negative online reviews can directly impact their brand perception, competitiveness and visitor inflow.

Accordingly, this study analyses review clusters, examining how tourists associate key attributes with different ski resorts. This approach allows us to identify destination-specific brand narratives and differentiation patterns emerging from online discourse. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for enhancing marketing strategies and destination management. Therefore, this study also seeks to answer the following question.

RQ2. How does e-WOM contribute to the co-creation and differentiation of ski resorts through patterns in tourists' online reviews?

Method

Text mining e-WOM

As part of understanding the dynamics of branding co-creation and snow tourism experiences, it is imperative to delve into the realm of e-WOM communication. This form of digital discourse not only shapes tourist perceptions but also significantly influences destination branding strategies. Employing text mining techniques to analyse e-WOM offers a powerful tool for extracting valuable insights from vast amounts of unstructured textual data (Jo, 2018). By exploring patterns expressed in online reviews, blogs and social media posts, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how tourists engage with snow tourism destinations and ski resorts in an unintrusive practice.

Text mining is regarded as a special type of data mining (Tan, 1999) and the most used instances are the term-based method, phrase-based method (also known as compound words) and pattern taxonomy method (Gaikwad *et al.*, 2014) (see Supplementary Figure S1). The term-based method counts word occurrences and applies statistical measures like term frequency (TF) and inverse document frequency, but lacks contextual depth. The phrase-based method analyses word sequences, capturing dependencies for better context, but is more computationally demanding. The taxonomy-based method organises terms into hierarchical structures, offering a semantically rich analysis but requiring prior domain knowledge to implement.

The increasing importance of text mining stems from the dominance of textual data over numerical ones in the real world, underscoring the need to understand its basic concepts and explore them (Jo, 2018). In tourism research, text mining has been applied mainly in studies of destination image through the analysis of websites and newspaper news (Stepchenkova *et al.*, 2009), online travel communities and social travel guides (Bigne *et al.*, 2025; Költringer and Dickinger, 2015) and online reviews (Kim *et al.*, 2017; Liu *et al.*, 2020; Zolfaghari and Choi, 2023).

Study context and data collection

Assuming that brand co-creation in ski resorts is significantly shaped by tourists' e-WOM and that user-shared experiences play a crucial role in forming the brand image, this study examines online reviews of seven major ski resorts in Argentina: Catedral, Chapelco, Bayo, Castor, Las Leñas, Caviahue and Penitentes. These resorts are located along the Argentine Andes, spanning the main snow tourism regions of Patagonia (Catedral, Chapelco, Bayo, Castor and Caviahue) and Cuyo (Las Leñas and Penitentes), which host the country's principal snow tourism infrastructure. In terms of scale, Caviahue and Penitentes can be considered small-sized resorts, Bayo and Castor medium-sized, and Catedral, Chapelco and Las Leñas large-scale destinations, based on their infrastructure and skiable domain. We posit that the attributes highlighted by visitors reflect their expectations and preferences, providing valuable insights for destination managers to strengthen brand positioning in the digital space. These ski resorts were selected based on their infrastructure complexity and visitor demand, as well as the size of their skiable domain, understood as the extent and diversity of slopes and lift systems available to visitors.

The skiable domain is a commonly used criterion in snow tourism to characterise the scale and operational capacity of ski resorts and to distinguish major destinations from smaller or emerging ones.

Tourist reviews were collected from the Google Maps profiles of these resorts, as Google Maps has become a leading review platform in the industry, surpassing competitors like Facebook and TripAdvisor in user growth ([Mathayomchan and Taecharungroj, 2020](#)). From all available Spanish-language reviews, we selected the 250 most relevant per resort, spanning 2015 to 2022, resulting in a total of 1,750 reviews. Data was extracted using the free software Outscraper on 7 June 2022.

Unit of analysis and data preprocessing

The collected reviews underwent several preprocessing steps to prepare them for analysis. First, the unit of analysis was defined as each ski resort's "most relevant" review on Google Maps, as automatically classified by the platform. Reviews are ranked using a proprietary system that may consider factors such as visibility, engagement and recency, although the precise weighting of these elements remains undisclosed.

In the database, each record included the title of the review, the textual content, self-reported ratings, and metadata such as the review ID, author name, date, time, and number of likes. Next, tokenisation was applied to divide the textual content of reviews into meaningful units, such as words or phrases, resulting in 31,597 tokens and 3,660 word types. Following this, stop words (e.g., "a" and "the") were removed, reducing the text to 23,465 tokens and 3,424 word types. The data then underwent POS tagging, where each word was assigned a part of speech based on context. Finally, lemmatisation was applied to reduce words to their root form, for example, transforming "going" and "gone" into "go". [Supplementary Figure S2](#) illustrates the distribution of the TF in the data set. The mean TF is 6.85 (i.e., words appear almost 7 times on average) with a standard deviation of 23.29. As represented by the long tail in the distribution plot, about 99% of words appear less than 100 times in the data set.

Analysis software and techniques

The text mining analysis was conducted using KH Coder ([Higuchi, 2017](#)), a software package specifically designed for quantitative content analysis and text mining. Word co-occurrence networks were employed to identify significant relationships between key terms within the data, revealing, for instance, a strong association between the concepts of "good" and "service". Each network comprises nodes (frequent words) and edges (connections between words) based on the Jaccard Coefficient ([Equation 1](#)), which measures the similarity between word pairs.

$$J(A, B) = \frac{|A \cap B|}{|A \cup B|} \quad (1)$$

Cluster analysis was then performed to group similar reviews based on their linguistic features, enabling the identification of distinct customer experience topics. We used CLARA (Clustering Large Applications) with Euclidean distance as the similarity measure (Equation 2), as it allows for efficient processing of large datasets, making it particularly suitable for handling a relatively high number of documents (Kaufman and Rousseeuw, 2009).

$$d(A, B) = \sqrt{\sum (A_i - B_i)^2} \quad (2)$$

We used the nouns with the highest probability of occurrence in each cluster to characterise the topics discussed within each group.

Results and discussion

Frequent keywords and n-grams in tourist reviews of ski resorts

The most frequent keywords in the dataset reveal distinct patterns across parts of speech. Nouns primarily refer to mountain features, resort-related attributes and elements of the overall experience, while verbs capture visitor actions and typical activities. Adjectives, in turn, predominantly express positive evaluations of both the destination and the experience. These patterns are summarised in [Supplementary Table S1](#).

In addition to individual keywords, the analysis of compound terms provides further insight into how tourists articulate their experiences. The most relevant compound words are largely associated with positive evaluations of the place, the resort, and the overall experience, as well as with specific attributes related to snow conditions. Most compound terms are bigrams, typically combining adjectives and nouns or pairs of nouns (e.g. ski resort, ski lifts), as detailed in [Supplementary Table S2](#).

Word co-occurrence network

The word co-occurrence analysis explores the relationships between frequently mentioned terms, providing insights into how tourists collectively perceive and articulate their experiences at ski resorts.

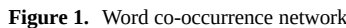
[Figure 1](#) visualises the 60 most frequently co-occurring word pairs in a network where node size reflects word frequency, edge thickness indicates the strength of associations and colours represent distinct word communities or subgraphs.

The network reveals several thematic subgraphs that capture core experiential dimensions of ski resort visits. Snow-related experiences are primarily represented in Subgraphs 01 and 02, centred on terms such as snow, place, slope and evaluative descriptors. Service-related aspects emerge in Subgraphs 03 and 04, highlighting the role of service quality and meal services in shaping visitors' assessments. Scenic and landscape attributes are prominently articulated in Subgraphs 05 and 09, where terms related to "views", "landscape" and "beauty" dominate the discourse. Finally, temporal and seasonal dimensions are reflected in Subgraphs 07, 10 and 11, capturing references to high season, daytime visits and seasonal variation.

Together, these subgraphs illustrate how tourists describe ski resort experiences through interconnected themes rather than isolated attributes, highlighting the relational structure of e-WOM discourse.

Clusters of the reviews

The hierarchical cluster analysis identified four distinct clusters of reviews, each focused on different topics: Cluster 1: View (515 reviews), Cluster 2: Snow (301 reviews), Cluster 3: Ski



The “View” cluster reflects how tourists value the scenic views of the resort and the visual appeal of the surroundings, emphasising their importance in the overall experience. The most prominent word is “view”, indicating its relevance as a representative attribute, while terms like “good” and “beauty” reinforce associations with positive evaluations. References to “summer” and “winter” suggest that views are appreciated across different seasons, highlighting their year-round appeal. This result is consistent with previous research on the importance of visual aesthetics in ski tourism (Saveleva and Melnik, 2019; Shang *et al.*, 2022). Beyond confirming their relevance, the findings show that views are discursively intertwined with services and snow conditions, contributing to co-created brand meaning through shared narratives in e-WOM.

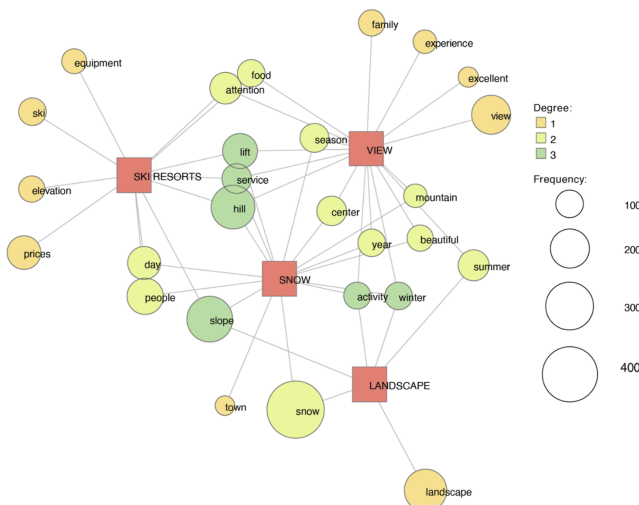
The “Ski Resort Services” cluster relates to service provision and infrastructure. Terms such as “slope” and “hill” dominate the cluster, emphasising terrain characteristics, while

“price” and “lift” point to affordability and infrastructure. Words such as “people” and “day” reflect experiential and usage-related aspects. These results are consistent with studies highlighting the importance of service quality and supporting facilities in ski tourism (McLeay *et al.*, 2019; Shang *et al.*, 2022). Extending prior research, the analysis shows that service-related attributes are embedded within broader experiential narratives, contributing to brand co-creation through their recurrent association with environmental and experiential dimensions in e-WOM.

The “Landscape” cluster captures the symbolic and experiential relevance of natural scenery. The term “landscape” stands out as the core attribute, accompanied by evaluative adjectives such as “beautiful”, “incredible” and “unique”. References to “summer” and “place” further indicate the enduring appeal of landscape attributes across seasons. These findings support previous research on the experiential value of natural environments in mountain destinations (Saveleva and Melnik, 2019; Zolfaghari and Choi, 2023). Beyond evaluation, landscape attributes are actively co-articulated with snow and service elements, reinforcing a collectively constructed brand image through tourists’ online discourse.

Figure 2 illustrates the interrelationships between clusters through a co-occurrence network of nouns extracted from ski resort service reviews. This visualisation simplifies the analysis by focusing exclusively on nouns, enabling a clearer understanding of how key concepts interconnect across clusters. In this network, Degrees indicate the number of clusters with which a given noun is associated: Degree 1 refers to nouns linked to a single cluster, Degree 2 to nouns shared between two clusters and Degree 3 to nouns that appear across three clusters, reflecting increasing levels of cross-cluster connectivity.

The network reveals strong interconnections between the Snow, View, Landscape, and Resort Services clusters. Degree 3 nouns such as “slope”, “hill”, “service” and “activity” act as bridges linking environmental, service and experiential dimensions, while Degree 2 nouns such as “summer”, “winter”, “year” and “mountain” connect seasonal and environmental aspects across clusters. By contrast, Degree 1 nouns (e.g. “prices”, “equipment”, “family”, “experience”) remain cluster-specific, reflecting more context-dependent aspects of the visit.



Note: Node size represents word frequency. Colours indicate Degree, defined as the number of clusters with which each noun co-occurs (Degree 1 = one cluster; Degree 2 = two clusters; Degree 3 = three clusters)

Figure 2. Word-clusters co-occurrence network

Overall, the distribution of degrees highlights how certain attributes function as shared reference points across clusters, illustrating the interconnected and co-constructed nature of tourists’ representations of ski resorts. The presence of Degree 2 and Degree 3 nouns empirically supports a co-creation perspective, demonstrating that brand meaning emerges through relational patterns rather than isolated attributes (Hatch and Schultz, 2010; Giannopoulos *et al.*, 2021).

Figure 3 illustrates the crosstab analysis between clusters and ski resorts, uncovering distinct patterns across the destinations. Catedral and Las Leñas stand out due to the prominence of the “views” and “landscape” clusters, reflecting the high value visitors place on the scenic beauty these resorts offer.

Caviahue is notably associated with the “snow” cluster, likely due to its exceptional snow conditions. Its elevation, ranging from 2,045 to 1,640 meters, combined with favourable precipitation, ensures consistent snow quality throughout the winter. Additionally, its unique setting on a volcano, surrounded by ancient Araucaria Millenaris trees, adds a distinctive charm unmatched by other Argentine ski resorts.

Bayo is celebrated for its breathtaking views of Patagonian lakes and forests, which are visible from several slopes. It also features prominently in the “ski resort services” cluster, as the resort is well-known for its personalised attention, a defining element of its visitor experience.

Castor and Chapelco display a strong association with the “ski resort services” cluster. These resorts offer highly integrated services, including ski and snowboard equipment rentals, passes and lessons, all managed by the same provider, enhancing convenience for visitors.

Finally, Penitentes and Las Leñas experience challenges with snowfall during certain winter periods, a recurring issue noted in the “snow” cluster. Visitors frequently mention this scarcity in a negative context, underscoring its impact on their overall experience.

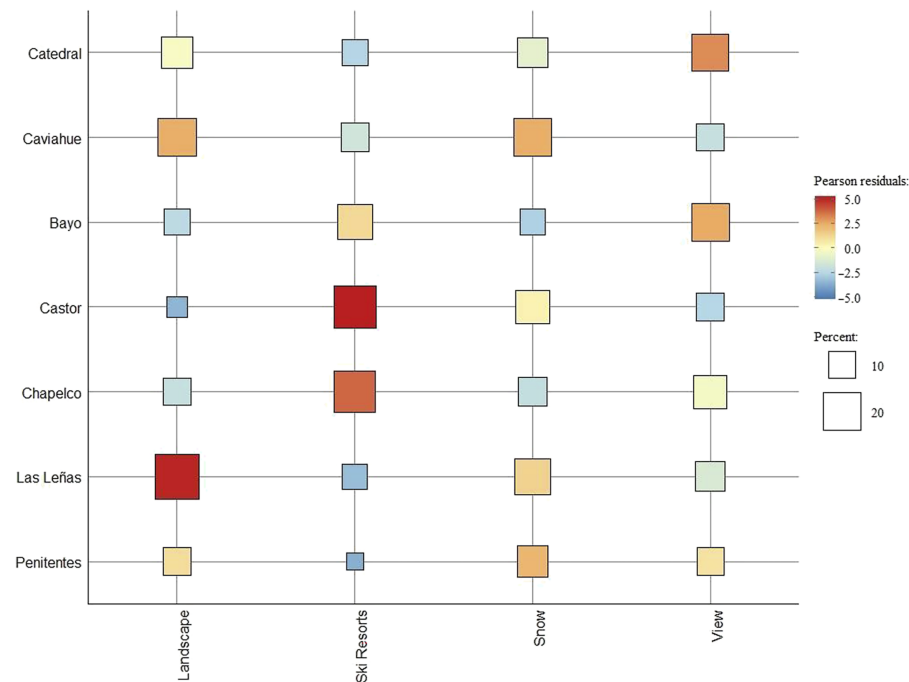


Figure 3. Crosstab between clusters and ski resorts

Beyond identifying salient attributes, the results demonstrate how brand-related meanings are collectively stabilised through repetition, co-occurrence and cross-cluster connectivity in tourists' online discourse. This process-oriented perspective advances existing research on e-WOM in tourism by empirically operationalising brand co-creation as a discursive and relational phenomenon, rather than as the aggregation of individual evaluations.

Conclusions

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of the salient attributes of ski resorts in Argentina and the mechanisms through which electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) contributes to their differentiation in the tourism market. In relation to RQ1, the findings show that attributes such as snow quality, ski resort services, scenic views and landscape play a central role in shaping tourists' perceptions, empirically derived from recurrent patterns in e-WOM. These results are consistent with prior research highlighting the relevance of both functional and experiential attributes in ski tourism (Saveleva and Melnik, 2019; Islam *et al.*, 2023).

In line with Buhalis (2000), the analysis confirms that infrastructure-related attributes – such as slopes, lift services and pricing – are key components of brand identity and visitor satisfaction. The strong associations between these attributes indicate that brand identity emerges from the interaction of functional and experiential dimensions, rather than from isolated features, reinforcing the importance of integrated branding strategies.

Addressing RQ2, the study illustrates how e-WOM contributes to brand co-creation by generating destination-specific narratives embedded in tourists' online reviews. The clustering of attributes into dimensions such as view, snow, resort services and landscape highlights how each ski resort is associated with distinctive experiential meanings. For example, Caviahue is primarily linked to snow quality, Bayo to scenic views and personalised service, and Cerro Castor to well-integrated resort services, while seasonality emerges as a salient theme in destinations such as Las Leñas. These findings support previous research on destination distinctiveness and peer-to-peer communication in tourism (Truong *et al.*, 2018; McLeay *et al.*, 2019; Shang *et al.*, 2022).

Overall, the study demonstrates that e-WOM operates as a mechanism of brand co-creation, through which shared meanings are stabilised via repetition, co-occurrence and relational patterns in tourists' discourse.

By explicitly linking e-WOM, destination attributes, and brand co-creation processes, this research addresses the gap identified in the introduction and provides a more process-oriented understanding of how ski resort brands are collectively constructed. From a managerial perspective, aligning branding and operational priorities with the attributes most frequently articulated in e-WOM can strengthen competitive positioning and enhance consistency between communicated and experienced value. Moreover, leveraging year-round offerings and embracing seasonal diversity may contribute to more resilient and adaptive branding strategies, in line with existing calls to reduce seasonality in snow tourism (Gilani *et al.*, 2018; Zach *et al.*, 2021). Ultimately, the findings reinforce the view of branding as a co-created and dynamic process, in which shared meanings articulated through tourists' online discourse play a central role in building authentic and competitive destination brands (Giannopoulos *et al.*, 2021).

Theoretical implications

This study advances the understanding of branding dynamics in snow tourism by addressing a gap in the literature on e-WOM and brand co-creation in ski resorts. While prior research has extensively examined e-WOM in sectors such as hotels, restaurants and airlines (Hoffmann, 2022; Krishnamurthy and Kumar, 2018; Okumus *et al.*, 2018), studies focusing on ski resort branding remain scarce and are often limited to single-case analyses (Luque Martínez *et al.*,

2019; Saveleva and Melnik, 2019). By examining tourists' online reviews across multiple destinations, this study extends existing knowledge on branding in snow tourism and provides empirical evidence of how brand co-creation unfolds through user-generated discourse.

Building on brand co-creation theory (Hatch and Schultz, 2010; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004), the findings empirically demonstrate how tourists act as active stakeholders in shaping ski resort brand identity through e-WOM. User-generated content is shown to function as a credible and observable mechanism through which brand meanings are collectively constructed and stabilised.

In addition, drawing on product attributes theory (Gwin and Gwin, 2003; Lancaster, 1966), the study shows how attributes such as snow quality, resort services, natural landscapes and infrastructure function not only as evaluative criteria, but also as key elements of brand differentiation in competitive ski tourism markets. This reinforces the strategic relevance of destination-specific attributes as emergent components of brand identity formation (Buhalis, 2000; Truong *et al.*, 2018).

From a methodological perspective, the study contributes to tourism and branding research by demonstrating how text-mining techniques can be used to operationalise and empirically capture brand co-creation processes in large-scale textual data. The analysis of word frequencies, co-occurrence networks and clusters reveals how cognitive and emotional dimensions of tourist experiences are articulated through recurrent patterns in e-WOM. These findings highlight the importance of analysing relational patterns between attributes, rather than isolated evaluative statements, to better understand how brand narratives are collectively constructed.

Beyond the snow tourism context, the results contribute to broader discussions on digital branding by emphasising the processual and relational nature of brand construction in digital environments, where organic, peer-to-peer discourse complements firm-controlled branding strategies. Grounded in the empirical patterns observed, particularly the clustering structure and cross-cluster relationships, the study suggests that branding in digitally mediated environments increasingly depends on the capacity of organisations to engage with, and learn from, user-generated content. This perspective supports more adaptive and sustainable branding approaches, particularly in sectors where seasonality and experiential attributes play a central role (Gilani *et al.*, 2018; Zach *et al.*, 2021).

Managerial and policy implications

The managerial and policy implications derived from this study are directly grounded in the empirical patterns identified across the clusters and the co-occurrence network, ensuring consistency between findings and recommendations. The findings provide actionable insights for ski resort managers and destination-level stakeholders seeking to leverage e-WOM as a strategic resource in brand co-creation processes.

One key implication is the necessity to evaluate the role of electronic organic images – such as those derived from online reviews – in shaping the perceptions of both current and potential visitors. Based on the prominence of user-generated discourse across the identified clusters, these organic images, formed through user-generated content, are critical for implementing effective positioning strategies, particularly when promotional resources are limited.

Marketers should leverage the textual data analysed in this study to design more precise and impactful marketing campaigns. The relevance of the View, Snow, Ski Resort Services and Landscape clusters identified through text-mining analysis supports the use of tourists' own lexicon in digital communication strategies. For example, campaigns on social media platforms can incorporate the specific wording used by tourists in their reviews. Keywords such as “snow”, “view”, “landscape” and “service”, as well as frequent compound terms such as “beautiful place” and “good slopes”, can inform the creation of engaging copy and the selection of targeted hashtags. This approach not only resonates with visitors' existing perceptions but also reinforces the authenticity of the brand's digital presence.

Additionally, crafting personalised experiences that align with tourists' most valued attributes – such as scenic views, snow conditions and resort services – can enhance customer satisfaction and foster brand loyalty. As evidenced by the clustering of reviews around distinct experiential dimensions, clusters of reviews highlight attributes central to visitors' experiences. For instance, resorts like Caviahue can emphasise their exceptional snow quality, while Cerro Castor can leverage its well-integrated service offerings in promotional materials. From a managerial standpoint, this suggests the value of aligning operational priorities with the attributes most frequently articulated in tourists' online discourse, ensuring consistency between service delivery and brand communication. Tailoring messages to emphasise these distinctive attributes can strengthen differentiation and appeal across diverse target audiences.

Finally, developing collaborative promotional programmes that integrate user-generated content and encourage engagement with local stakeholders can amplify the authenticity of the brand. The co-occurrence analysis further indicates that several attributes function as cross-cutting elements within tourists' discourse, suggesting that shared narratives play a central role in brand co-creation. Such efforts may include sharing tourists' visual and textual reviews in marketing materials, alongside user-curated hashtags and geotags, to foster a sense of community and credibility. This strategy not only enriches the destination's appeal but also builds deeper connections between the resort and its visitors, solidifying its position within the broader tourism landscape.

From a policy perspective, these findings highlight the importance of coordinated destination governance in ski tourism. Public institutions and destination management organisations can support brand co-creation by facilitating the integration of user-generated content into official communication channels, promoting shared branding guidelines and encouraging collaboration between ski resorts and local stakeholders to ensure coherent and credible destination narratives.

Limitations and future research

This study has limitations that open lines of future research. The data collection was limited to Google Maps reviews, which, while significant, excludes insights from other prominent platforms such as TripAdvisor or other online travel communities. Expanding the analysis to these platforms could provide a more comprehensive understanding of tourist experiences and perceptions.

In this context, the selection of reviews relied on Google Maps' proprietary relevance-ranking system, whose criteria are not publicly disclosed. While this approach aligns with the study's focus on highly visible e-WOM content shaping brand co-creation, the lack of transparency limits deeper insights into the mechanisms underlying review visibility. Future research could explore alternative review-selection strategies to assess the robustness of the findings. Additionally, only Spanish-language reviews were analysed, omitting feedback from international tourists using other languages, which could further enrich the findings and contribute to global positioning strategies.

A key limitation is the study's exclusive focus on tourists as stakeholders in the co-creation process. While this approach provides valuable insights, it overlooks the roles of other critical stakeholders, such as local communities, destination managers and service providers, whose contributions could offer a more holistic understanding of brand co-creation dynamics. Moreover, the analysis concentrated on seven Argentine ski resorts, limiting the generalisability of findings. Future research could investigate how Argentine ski resorts compete within the South American market, identifying differentiation strategies to enhance their appeal. Additionally, exploring the influence of emerging digital consumer behaviours on brand image formation would provide actionable insights for snow tourism destinations seeking to adapt to evolving online engagement trends.

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