

อิทธิพลของคุณลักษณะเนื้อหาบนสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ที่มีต่อความตั้งใจเดินทางมาประเทศไทย
ของชาวจีน เจเนอเรชันซี: บทบาทตัวแปรคั่นกลางของความผูกพันทางอารมณ์

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT CHARACTERISTICS ON CHINESE
GENERATION Z TRAVELERS' INTENTION TO VISIT THAILAND:

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTION ENGAGEMENT

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาอิทธิพลของลักษณะของเนื้อหาบนสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ส่งผลต่อความตั้งใจในการเดินทางมายังประเทศไทย ของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวจีน เจเนอเรชันซี โดยมีตัวแปรความผูกพันทางอารมณ์เป็นตัวแปรส่งผ่าน เพื่ออธิบายกลไกทางจิตวิทยาที่อยู่เบื้องหลังความสัมพันธ์ดังกล่าว ซึ่งงานวิจัยนี้ได้รวบรวมข้อมูลจากนักท่องเที่ยวกลุ่มตัวอย่างเจเนอเรชันซี จำนวน 511 คน ในเมืองกว่างโจว สาธารณรัฐประชาชนจีน โดยใช้แบบสอบถามออนไลน์ การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลใช้วิธีแบบจำลองสมการโครงสร้างกำลังสองน้อยที่สุดบางส่วน (PLS-SEM) เพื่อทดสอบสมมติฐานงานวิจัย

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ลักษณะของเนื้อหาบนสื่อสังคมออนไลน์มีอิทธิพลต่อความตั้งใจในการเดินทางมายังประเทศไทย อย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติทั้งทางตรงและทางอ้อม ผ่านความผูกพันทางอารมณ์ ผลการศึกษานี้ช่วยขยายองค์ความรู้ด้านการตลาดผ่านสื่อสังคมออนไลน์และพฤติกรรมนักท่องเที่ยว โดยเนื้อให้เห็นถึงความสำคัญของคุณลักษณะของเนื้อหาและความผูกพันทางอารมณ์ในการกำหนดการตัดสินใจเลือกจุดหมายปลายทางด้านการท่องเที่ยวและผ่านความผูกพันทางอารมณ์ นอกจากนี้ผลการวิจัยยังค้นพบข้อมูลเชิงประจักษ์ที่เป็นประโยชน์ต่อผู้ทำการตลาดด้านแหล่งท่องเที่ยว และผู้ประกอบการวิชาชีพในอุตสาหกรรมท่องเที่ยวในการพัฒนากลยุทธ์การสื่อสารผ่านสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ให้มีประสิทธิภาพมากยิ่งขึ้น

คำสำคัญ: คุณลักษณะเนื้อหาบนสื่อสังคมออนไลน์, ความผูกพันทางอารมณ์, การตั้งใจเดินทาง, เจเนอเรชันซี, แบบจำลองสมการโครงสร้างกำลังสองน้อยที่สุดบางส่วน

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to study the influence of social media content on Chinese tourists' intentions to travel to Thailand. To explain the psychological mechanisms behind such relationships, this study collected data from a sample of Generation C travelers. 511 people in Guangzhou People's Republic of China using an online questionnaire. Data analysis uses the partially least quadratic structure equation model (PLS-SEM) method to test

research hypotheses. The results showed that the nature of social media content influenced the intention to travel to Thailand. statistically significant, both directly and indirectly, through emotional attachment.

The findings of this study help to broaden our knowledge of social media marketing and travel behavior, highlighting the importance of content and emotional engagement in determining travel destination decisions and through emotional engagement. In addition, the results of the research also found empirical data that is useful for tourism marketers and tourism industry professionals to develop more effective communication strategies through social media.

Keywords: Social Media Content Characteristics, Emotional Engagement, Travel Intention, Generation Z, PLS-SEM

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an integral part of contemporary tourism information environments. In the tourism context, social media platforms are no longer merely communication tools; rather, they function as important sources of travel inspiration, information search, and destination evaluation throughout the tourism decision-making process (Leung et al., 2013; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Through travel-related photos, videos, reviews, and personal narratives shared on social media platforms, potential tourists are continuously exposed to destination information generated by other users. Such content often provides vivid, experiential, and socially endorsed representations of destinations, thereby shaping how individuals perceive and evaluate potential travel choices (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Consequently, social media has become a critical communication channel through which potential tourists discover, interpret, and evaluate travel destinations (Chung & Koo, 2015; Hudson & Thal, 2013).

Generation Z, generally defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s (Priporas et al., 2017), has grown up in a highly digitalized environment. Compared with previous generations, Generation Z travelers rely heavily on social media platforms to discover destinations, obtain travel-related information, and share travel experiences. Social media platforms have therefore become key channels through which young travelers gain inspiration for international travel destinations, including popular destinations in Asia such as Thailand. Prior research has shown that social media plays an important role in shaping young travelers' destination perceptions and travel intentions (Hudson et al., 2015; Wang & Park, 2023; Zhou et al., 2023). As digital natives, Generation Z users are particularly responsive to visually engaging and interactive content distributed through social media. The importance of social media among Chinese Generation Z is further reflected in the rapid growth of Internet usage in China.

According to the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC, 2025), the number of Internet users in China reached 1.1 billion by the end of 2024, with an Internet penetration rate of 78.6%. The widespread adoption of mobile Internet and digital platforms has further strengthened the role of social media as a primary source of information acquisition, entertainment, and travel inspiration among younger generations. As a result, social media has become an increasingly influential channel in shaping destination perceptions and travel-related decision-making among Generation Z users.

Thailand has long been one of the most popular international tourism destinations for Chinese tourists (Arlt, 2013; Yang & Wong, 2012). The country's rich cultural heritage, natural attractions, and relatively convenient travel accessibility have made it especially attractive to younger travelers. With the increasing popularity of digital platforms, many Chinese tourists now rely on social media to explore travel-related information about Thailand before making travel decisions (Leung et al., 2013; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Travel-related content shared on social media—such as destination reviews, travel experiences, and short travel videos—can significantly influence how potential tourists perceive Thailand and evaluate it as a travel destination. Recent tourism statistics further highlight the importance of the Chinese market for Thailand. According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT, 2025), Chinese tourists remained one of the largest international visitor groups to Thailand, with more than 6.7 million arrivals in 2024. During the first five months of 2025, approximately 1.9 million Chinese tourists visited Thailand, making China the largest source market during this period. These figures demonstrate the continued importance of Chinese travelers to Thailand's tourism industry and underscore the need to better understand the factors influencing their travel intentions.

Despite the growing body of literature examining the role of social media in tourism decision-making, several important research gaps remain. First, much of the existing research has focused on social media platforms or electronic word-of-mouth in general rather than examining the specific characteristics of social media content that may influence tourists' behavioral intentions. Although previous studies recognize the importance of online information sources, relatively limited attention has been paid to how particular attributes of social media content—such as credibility, informativeness, and entertainment value—shape tourists' perceptions and destination-related decisions. Second, although prior research suggests that social media content may influence travel intention, the underlying psychological mechanisms through which this influence occurs remain insufficiently explored. Tourism decisions are often driven not only by cognitive evaluations but also by emotional responses. Emotionally engaging content can strengthen individuals' affective connections with destinations and shape their travel motivations. However, relatively few studies have examined how emotional engagement functions as a mediating mechanism linking social media content characteristics and travel-related behavioral intentions. Third, existing studies have rarely

examined these relationships within the context of Chinese Generation Z travelers and destination-specific tourism settings. As one of the fastest-growing segments in the global tourism market, Generation Z travelers rely heavily on digital platforms for travel inspiration and information search. At the same time, Thailand represents a major international destination for Chinese tourists. Nevertheless, empirical research investigating how social media content characteristics influence Chinese Generation Z travelers' intention to visit Thailand remains limited.

To address these gaps, the present study develops and tests a research model that examines how three key characteristics of social media content—content credibility, perceived informativeness, and entertainment value—influence travel intention toward Thailand. In addition, emotional engagement is proposed as a mediating variable that explains the psychological mechanism through which social media content affects tourism decision-making. This study contributes to the tourism and social media literature in three main ways. First, it shifts the focus from social media platforms to specific characteristics of social media content, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of how content attributes influence travel intentions. Second, the study highlights the mediating role of emotional engagement, revealing the psychological mechanism through which social media content affects tourism decision-making. Third, by focusing on Chinese Generation Z travelers and travel intention toward Thailand, the study provides context-specific empirical insights into how younger tourists interpret and respond to social media content in international tourism contexts.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the research objectives of the study. Section 3 reviews the relevant literature and develops the research hypotheses. Section 4 describes the research methodology, including the population, sampling, research instrument, and data analysis procedures. Section 5 reports the empirical results, including the demographic profile of respondents, measurement model assessment, discriminant validity, structural model evaluation, and mediation analysis. This is followed by a discussion of the findings in Section 6. Section 7 concludes the study, while Section 8 provides theoretical implications, practical implications, and suggestions for future research.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To address the identified research gaps and achieve the purpose of this study, the following research objectives are proposed:

1. To examine the effects of content credibility, perceived informativeness, and entertainment value on emotional engagement among Chinese Generation Z travelers.
2. To examine the effects of content credibility, perceived informativeness, and entertainment value on travel intention toward Thailand among Chinese Generation Z travelers.

3. To investigate the effect of emotional engagement on travel intention toward Thailand.

4. To examine the mediating role of emotional engagement in the relationships between social media content characteristics and travel intention toward Thailand.

Based on these research objectives, the following section reviews the relevant literature and develops the study hypotheses concerning the relationships among social media content characteristics, emotional engagement, and travel intention toward Thailand.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

1. The relationship between Social Media Content Credibility and Travel Intention toward Thailand

In the context of international tourism, credible social media content about specific destinations such as Thailand can play an important role in shaping potential tourists' perceptions and travel intentions. The credibility of information has long been recognized as a critical factor influencing individuals' acceptance and use of online content. In tourism contexts, travelers frequently rely on social media platforms to obtain destination-related information, including travel experiences, recommendations, and reviews shared by other users. Because these sources are often perceived as more authentic and experiential than traditional promotional materials, their credibility can significantly shape tourists' perceptions and behavioral intentions (Ayeh et al., 2013; Leung et al., 2013; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Prior research has shown that when travelers perceive online travel information as credible, they are more likely to trust the information and incorporate it into their travel decision-making processes. Credible information reduces uncertainty associated with travel planning and helps potential tourists evaluate destinations more confidently. In the context of social media, credibility may stem from factors such as perceived authenticity, consistency across sources, and the perceived expertise of content creators (Chung & Koo, 2015).

Empirical studies have demonstrated that the perceived credibility of online travel information positively influences tourists' attitudes toward destinations and their intention to visit them (Ayeh et al., 2013). When users believe that social media content provides reliable and trustworthy information about a destination such as Thailand, they are more likely to form favorable impressions and develop intentions to travel there. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Content credibility positively influences travel intention toward Thailand.

2. The relationship between Perceived Informativeness and Travel Intention toward Thailand

Another important attribute of social media content is the extent to which it provides useful and informative details about a destination. Perceived informativeness refers to the

degree to which information helps individuals understand a product, service, or place and supports their decision-making process. In tourism settings, potential travelers often seek detailed information about attractions, local culture, accommodation, transportation, and travel experiences before making travel decisions (Chung & Koo, 2015).

Social media platforms provide abundant user-generated information that can help travelers reduce information asymmetry and uncertainty. Compared with traditional marketing materials, social media content frequently contains firsthand experiences and practical travel tips that users may find particularly valuable. As a result, informative content can enhance travelers' knowledge about destinations and facilitate travel planning (Leung et al., 2013).

Previous studies have suggested that information quality and informativeness significantly influence tourists' perceptions and behavioral intentions. When social media content is perceived as informative, it can improve users' understanding of a destination and increase their confidence in choosing it as a travel destination (Ayeh et al., 2013). In the context of international tourism, informative social media content about Thailand may therefore encourage potential tourists to evaluate the destination more positively and consider visiting it. Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Perceived informativeness positively influences travel intention toward Thailand.

3. The relationship between Entertainment Value and Travel Intention toward Thailand

In addition to providing information, social media content often serves an entertainment function. Entertainment value refers to the degree to which content is perceived as enjoyable, interesting, or emotionally stimulating. Tourism-related content on social media platforms frequently includes visually appealing photos, engaging short videos, and storytelling that can capture users' attention and evoke positive emotions (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014).

Research in digital marketing and tourism has shown that entertaining content can significantly influence users' attitudes and behavioral intentions. Enjoyable experiences while interacting with content can enhance users' engagement and create positive associations with the featured destination (Hudson et al., 2015). In the context of tourism marketing, visually appealing and entertaining content related to destinations such as Thailand may stimulate curiosity and inspire users to imagine themselves visiting the destination.

For Generation Z in particular, entertainment-oriented content plays a crucial role in social media usage. This generation tends to prefer visually rich and emotionally engaging content, especially on short-video platforms and social media networks. As a result, entertainment value may serve as an important driver of travel-related inspiration and intention. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Entertainment value positively influences travel intention toward Thailand.

4. The relationship between Emotional Engagement and Travel Intention toward Thailand

Tourism decisions are not solely driven by rational evaluation; emotional responses also play a central role in shaping travel behavior. Emotional engagement refers to the degree to which individuals experience emotional connection, excitement, or affective involvement when interacting with content or brands (So et al., 2014).

In digital environments, emotionally engaging content can foster stronger relationships between users and destinations. When individuals feel emotionally connected to a destination through social media content, they may develop more favorable attitudes and stronger intentions to visit that destination. Previous research in tourism marketing suggests that emotional responses generated by digital content can significantly influence behavioral intentions, including travel intention and word-of-mouth behavior (Hudson et al., 2015).

In the context of tourism promotion, emotionally engaging social media content about destinations such as Thailand may strengthen individuals' psychological connection with the destination and increase their intention to visit.

Therefore, emotional engagement may serve as an important predictor of travel intention toward Thailand in social media contexts.

H4: Emotional engagement positively influences travel intention toward Thailand.

5. The relationship between Social Media Content Characteristics and Emotional Engagement

While social media content can directly influence travel intention, it may also affect users through emotional processes. Content that is perceived as credible, informative, or entertaining may evoke emotional reactions that strengthen users' connection with a destination.

First, credible information may enhance emotional engagement by increasing users' trust and confidence in the destination. When travelers perceive social media content as authentic and reliable, they are more likely to develop positive emotional responses toward the destination being presented (Ayeh et al., 2013).

Second, informative content may deepen users' understanding of a destination and make the travel experience appear more vivid and appealing. Detailed and useful information can help users imagine themselves visiting the destination, which may lead to stronger emotional involvement.

Third, entertaining content often generates positive emotions such as enjoyment, excitement, and curiosity. These emotional responses can strengthen users' affective connection with the destination and increase their level of emotional engagement with the content (Hudson et al., 2015). Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Content credibility positively influences emotional engagement.

H6: Perceived informativeness positively influences emotional engagement.

H7: Entertainment value positively influences emotional engagement.

6. The Mediating Role of Emotional Engagement

Although social media content characteristics may directly influence travel intention, their effects may also occur through psychological mechanisms. Emotional engagement represents one such mechanism that may link social media content exposure with behavioral outcomes.

When users encounter credible, informative, or entertaining content related to a destination such as Thailand, they may first experience emotional responses such as excitement, inspiration, or curiosity. These emotional reactions can enhance their psychological connection with the destination, which in turn increases their intention to visit.

Previous studies in tourism and digital marketing have highlighted the mediating role of emotional engagement in shaping consumer behavior in online environments (Cabiddu et al., 2014; Harrigan et al., 2017). Extending this perspective to social media tourism contexts, it is reasonable to expect that emotional engagement mediates the relationship between social media content characteristics and travel intention toward Thailand. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H8a: Emotional engagement mediates the relationship between content credibility and travel intention toward Thailand.

H8b: Emotional engagement mediates the relationship between perceived informativeness and travel intention toward Thailand.

H8c: Emotional engagement mediates the relationship between entertainment value and travel intention toward Thailand.

Based on the preceding literature review and hypothesis development, this study proposes a conceptual framework that explains how social media content characteristics influence travel intention toward Thailand. Specifically, three key attributes of social media content—content credibility, perceived informativeness, and entertainment value—are expected to directly influence travel intention toward Thailand. In addition, these content characteristics may also shape travel intention indirectly through emotional engagement. Emotional engagement is proposed as a mediating mechanism that explains how individuals' emotional responses to social media content translate into destination-related behavioral intentions. The proposed research model and hypothesized relationships among the study variables are illustrated in Figure 1 Conceptual Framework.

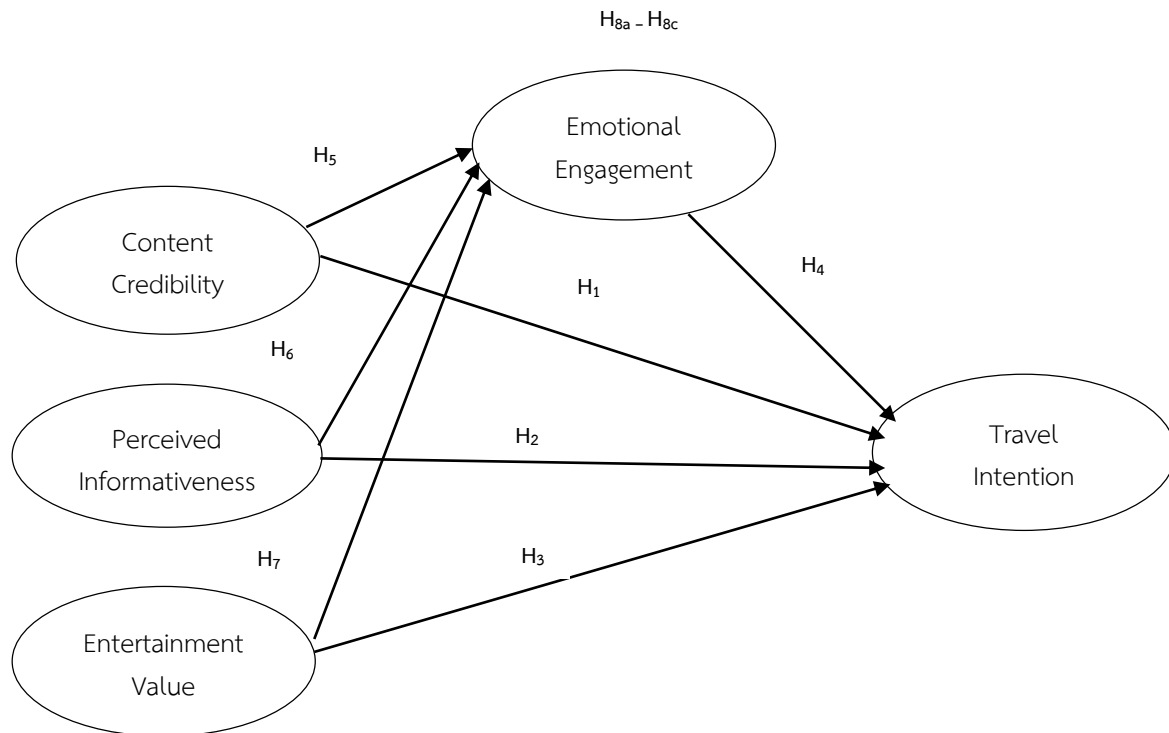


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine how social media content characteristics influence travel intention toward Thailand among Chinese Generation Z. A questionnaire-based survey was employed to collect empirical data, as this method is widely used in tourism and marketing research to measure individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral intentions.

The proposed research model investigates the relationships between three social media content attributes, including content credibility, perceived informativeness, entertainment value, and travel intention toward Thailand. In addition, emotional engagement is incorporated as a mediating variable to explain the psychological mechanism through which social media content may influence travel-related behavioral intentions.

1. Population and Samples

The target population of this study consists of Chinese Generation Z respondents in Guangzhou, China. This group was selected because Generation Z represents one of the most active user groups of social media platforms and plays an increasingly important role in international tourism markets. The final sample size is considered adequate for structural equation modeling. According to the commonly accepted "10-times rule" in PLS-SEM, the minimum sample size should be at least ten times the maximum number of structural paths directed at any latent construct in the model (Hair et al., 2022). In the present study, the

maximum number of paths directed at a single endogenous construct is four, indicating a minimum required sample size of 40. Therefore, the final sample of 511 respondents substantially exceeds the recommended threshold and provides sufficient statistical power for testing the proposed hypotheses. In addition, the sample size also exceeds the general recommendation of 200 cases for SEM-based analysis (Kline, 2023).

2. Research Instrument

The questionnaire was designed to capture respondents' demographic characteristics, social media usage behavior, perceptions of Thailand-related social media content, emotional engagement, and travel intention toward Thailand.

The first section collected demographic and contextual information, including gender, age, education level, prior travel experience, and social media usage behavior. Respondents were also asked to indicate which social media platforms they typically use to search for travel-related information and which platforms they use for travel planning, with up to three options allowed for each question. These items provide contextual insights into respondents' tourism-related social media usage patterns.

The second section measured the core constructs in the proposed model. Social media content was operationalized through three dimensions: content credibility, perceived informativeness, and entertainment value, with four items for each dimension. Emotional engagement was measured using four items, while travel intention toward Thailand was assessed using three items. All construct items were evaluated using a five-point Likert agreement scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

An optional open-ended question was included at the end of the questionnaire to capture additional comments regarding Thailand tourism content on social media.

3. Data Collection

Data were collected through an online questionnaire survey administered via Wenjuanxing, a widely used online survey platform in China. The survey was conducted between September and November 2025. A total of 553 questionnaires were received. After removing incomplete and invalid responses, 511 valid questionnaires were retained for the final analysis. Participants were invited to complete the questionnaire voluntarily, and responses were collected anonymously. Respondents were informed that the data would be used only for academic research purposes.

4. Development and Validation of Research Instruments

The measurement items were adapted from established scales reported in prior tourism and social media studies and were translated into Chinese to ensure respondents' clear understanding of the questionnaire items. The instrument included five constructs: content credibility, perceived informativeness, entertainment value, emotional engagement,

and travel intention toward Thailand. All construct items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Content validity was assessed using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method with expert evaluation. The IOC values for all measurement items ranged from 0.80 to 1.00, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Rovinelli & Hambleton, 1977; Turner & Carlson, 2003), which indicates satisfactory content validity.

A pilot test was conducted with 31 respondents prior to the main survey to assess the reliability of the research instrument. The results show that the overall scale achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.958, indicating excellent internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha values for the individual constructs were 0.909 for content credibility, 0.901 for perceived informativeness, 0.879 for entertainment value, 0.926 for emotional engagement, and 0.913 for travel intention toward Thailand. All values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2022), confirming satisfactory reliability of the instrument.

5. Data Analysis

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to test the proposed research model and hypotheses. PLS-SEM was chosen because it is suitable for complex research models and prediction-oriented studies, particularly when the research aims to explore theoretical relationships and includes mediating constructs (Hair et al., 2022). Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4 (Version 4.1.1.6).

The data analysis was conducted in two stages. First, the measurement model was assessed to evaluate the reliability and validity of the constructs. This stage involved examining Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) to ensure internal consistency and convergent validity. Second, the structural model was analyzed to examine the hypothesized relationships among the study variables and to test the mediating role of emotional engagement. Bootstrapping procedures were applied to assess the significance of the path coefficients and mediation effects.

RESULTS

1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. A total of 511 valid responses were included in the analysis. In terms of gender distribution, 52.3% of the respondents were female ($n = 267$) and 47.7% were male ($n = 244$).

Regarding age distribution, the respondents were relatively evenly distributed across the age groups. Specifically, 26.6% of respondents were aged 27–29 years ($n = 136$), followed by 24–26 years (26.4%, $n = 135$), 21–23 years (25.2%, $n = 129$), and 18–20 years (21.7%, $n = 111$).

In terms of educational background, nearly half of the respondents were undergraduate students (48.9%, $n = 250$). In addition, 37.6% of respondents were below undergraduate level ($n = 192$), while 13.5% had postgraduate education or above ($n = 69$).

Furthermore, regarding prior travel experience, 66.9% of respondents reported having previously visited Thailand ($n = 342$), whereas 33.1% indicated that they had not visited Thailand before ($n = 169$).

These descriptive statistics provide an overview of the sample characteristics and indicate that the respondents adequately represent the target population of Chinese Generation Z travelers in Guangzhou.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents ($N = 511$)

Variables	Category	Amount	Percentage
Gender	Male	244	47.70
	Female	267	52.30
Age	18–20 years	111	21.70
	21–23 years	129	25.20
	24–26 years	135	26.40
	27–29 years	136	26.60
Education	Below undergraduate level	192	37.60
	Undergraduate	250	48.90
	Postgraduate and above	69	13.50
Prior visit to Thailand			
	Yes	342	66.90
	No	169	33.10
	Total	511	100.00

2. Measurement Model

The measurement model was assessed by examining outer loadings, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity. As shown in Table 2, all outer loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.795 to 0.875, indicating satisfactory indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2022).

Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). As reported in Table 2, Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.816 to 0.845, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Similarly, composite reliability values range from 0.889 to 0.896, indicating strong internal consistency for all constructs.

Convergent validity was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE). The AVE values range from 0.668 to 0.730, all exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50. These results suggest that the measurement model demonstrates satisfactory convergent validity.

Table 2. Outer Loading, VIF, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, AVE

Latent Variables	Item	Outer Loading (> 0.708)	VIF	Cronbach's alpha (> 0.70)	CR* (> 0.70)	AVE** (> 0.50)
Content Credibility				0.834	0.889	0.668
	CC1	0.842	1.966			
	CC2	0.814	1.763			
	CC3	0.807	1.845			
	CC4	0.805	1.666			
Perceived Informativeness				0.844	0.895	0.681
	PI1	0.815	1.898			
	PI2	0.838	1.936			
	PI3	0.834	1.901			
	PI4	0.815	1.811			
Entertainment Value				0.835	0.890	0.669
	EV1	0.850	2.053			
	EV2	0.821	1.826			
	EV3	0.806	1.684			
	EV4	0.795	1.723			
Emotional Engagement				0.845	0.896	0.683
	EE1	0.831	1.973			
	EE2	0.842	1.963			
	EE3	0.827	1.913			
	EE4	0.805	1.756			
Travel Intention toward Thailand				0.816	0.890	0.730
	TI1	0.846	1.669			
	TI2	0.843	1.862			
	TI3	0.875	1.958			

Note: VIF = Variance Inflation Factor; CR* = Composite Reliability; AVE** = Average Variance Extracted

3. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. As shown in Table 3, the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct is greater than

the correlations between that construct and the other constructs in the model. Also, the value of heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) is less than 0.85 (Hair et al., 2021). As represented in Table 4, all HTMT values range from 0.412 to 0.586, and all HTMT values are below the recommended threshold of 0.85. Thus, this indicates that each construct shares more variance with its associated indicators than with other constructs. Therefore, the results confirm that discriminant validity is established for all constructs in the measurement model.

Table 3 Discriminant Validity (Fornell–Larcker criterion)

	CC	PI	EV	EE	TI
CC	0.817				
PI	0.347	0.825			
EV	0.465	0.399	0.818		
EE	0.449	0.432	0.423	0.827	
TI	0.411	0.421	0.428	0.489	0.855

Note: The bold numerical values represent the square root of AVE ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$).

CC = Content Credibility; PI = Perceived Informativeness; EV = Entertainment Value; EE = Emotional Engagement; TI = Travel Intention toward Thailand

Table 4 Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)

	CC	PI	EV	EE	TI
CC					
PI	0.412				
EV	0.556	0.474			
EE	0.533	0.508	0.503		
TI	0.494	0.504	0.515	0.586	

Note: CC = Content Credibility; PI = Perceived Informativeness; EV = Entertainment Value; EE = Emotional Engagement; TI = Travel Intention toward Thailand

4. Structural Model

The structural model was evaluated by examining collinearity, the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2_{predict}), and the significance of the path coefficients obtained through the bootstrapping procedure. Prior to evaluating the structural model, collinearity among the predictor constructs was assessed using the variance inflation factor (VIF). As shown in Table 5, all VIF values ranged from 1.239 to 1.461, which are well below the recommended threshold of 3.3 (Kock, 2015). These results indicate that multicollinearity was not a concern in the structural model.

Table 5 Collinearity Assessment

Predictor Constructs	Emotional Engagement (VIF)	Travel Intention toward Thailand (VIF)
Content Credibility	1.328	1.433
Perceived Informativeness	1.239	1.339
Entertainment Value	1.390	1.445
Emotional Engagement	—	1.461

Note: VIF = Variance Inflation Factor

The explanatory power, predictive relevance, and effect sizes of the structural model were evaluated using R^2 , Q^2_{predict} , and f^2 , respectively. As presented in Table 6, the R^2 values indicate moderate explanatory power for both endogenous constructs. In addition, all Q^2_{predict} values were greater than zero, suggesting satisfactory predictive relevance. The f^2 results indicate that all predictor constructs exhibited small effect sizes on the endogenous constructs according to Hair et al. (2022).

Table 6 Structural Model Evaluation

Construct	R^2	Q^2_{predict}	Emotional Engagement (f^2)	Travel Intention toward Thailand (f^2)
Content Credibility			0.079	0.022
Perceived Informativeness			0.081	0.039
Entertainment Value			0.040	0.031
Emotional Engagement	0.316	0.304	—	0.077
Travel Intention toward Thailand	0.344	0.282	—	—

Note: R^2 = coefficient of determination; Q^2_{predict} = predictive relevance assessed using PLSpredict; f^2 = effect size

The path coefficients and hypothesis testing results are presented in Table 7. The results indicate that content credibility has a significant positive effect on travel intention toward Thailand ($\beta = 0.145$, $p = 0.001$), supporting H1. Similarly, perceived informativeness ($\beta = 0.184$, $p < 0.001$) and entertainment value ($\beta = 0.172$, $p < 0.001$) both have significant positive effects on travel intention toward Thailand, supporting H2 and H3, respectively.

Furthermore, emotional engagement significantly influences travel intention toward Thailand ($\beta = 0.272$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H4.

With regard to the antecedents of emotional engagement, content credibility ($\beta = 0.267$, $p < 0.001$), perceived informativeness ($\beta = 0.262$, $p < 0.001$), and entertainment value ($\beta = 0.195$, $p < 0.001$) all have significant positive effects on emotional engagement. Therefore, H5, H6, and H7 are supported.

Table 7 Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Content Credibility → Travel Intention toward Thailand	0.145	3.245**	0.001	Supported
H2	Perceived Informativeness → Travel Intention toward Thailand	0.184	4.111**	<0.001	Supported
H3	Entertainment Value → Travel Intention toward Thailand	0.172	3.749**	<0.001	Supported
H4	Emotional Engagement → Travel Intention toward Thailand	0.272	5.715**	<0.001	Supported
H5	Content Credibility → Emotional Engagement	0.267	5.870**	<0.001	Supported
H6	Perceived Informativeness → Emotional Engagement	0.262	6.130**	<0.001	Supported
H7	Entertainment Value → Emotional Engagement	0.195	4.194**	<0.001	Supported

**p-value < 0.01, p-value < 0.05

5. Mediation Analysis

To examine the mediating role of emotional engagement in the relationship between social media content characteristics and travel intention toward Thailand, a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was conducted. The results of the specific indirect effects are presented in Table 8.

The results indicate that emotional engagement significantly mediates the relationship between content credibility and travel intention toward Thailand ($\beta = 0.073$, $t = 3.870$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H8a.

Similarly, emotional engagement significantly mediates the relationship between perceived informativeness and travel intention toward Thailand ($\beta = 0.071$, $t = 3.911$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H8b.

In addition, emotional engagement also significantly mediates the relationship between entertainment value and travel intention toward Thailand ($\beta = 0.053$, $t = 3.221$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H8c.

These results indicate partial mediation because both the direct and indirect effects are statistically significant. In other words, when users perceive social media content as credible, informative, and entertaining, they are more likely to develop emotional engagement with the destination, which subsequently increases their intention to visit Thailand.

Table 8 Indirect Effects (Mediation Analysis)

	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H8a	Content Credibility $\rightarrow$ Emotional Engagement $\rightarrow$ Travel Intention toward Thailand	0.073	3.870	<0.001	Supported
H8b	Perceived Informativeness $\rightarrow$ Emotional Engagement $\rightarrow$ Travel Intention toward Thailand	0.071	3.911	<0.001	Supported
H8c	Entertainment Value $\rightarrow$ Emotional Engagement $\rightarrow$ Travel Intention toward Thailand	0.053	3.221	0.001	Supported

**p-value < 0.01, p-value < 0.05

According to all hypotheses H1 to H8, as represent in Picture 1

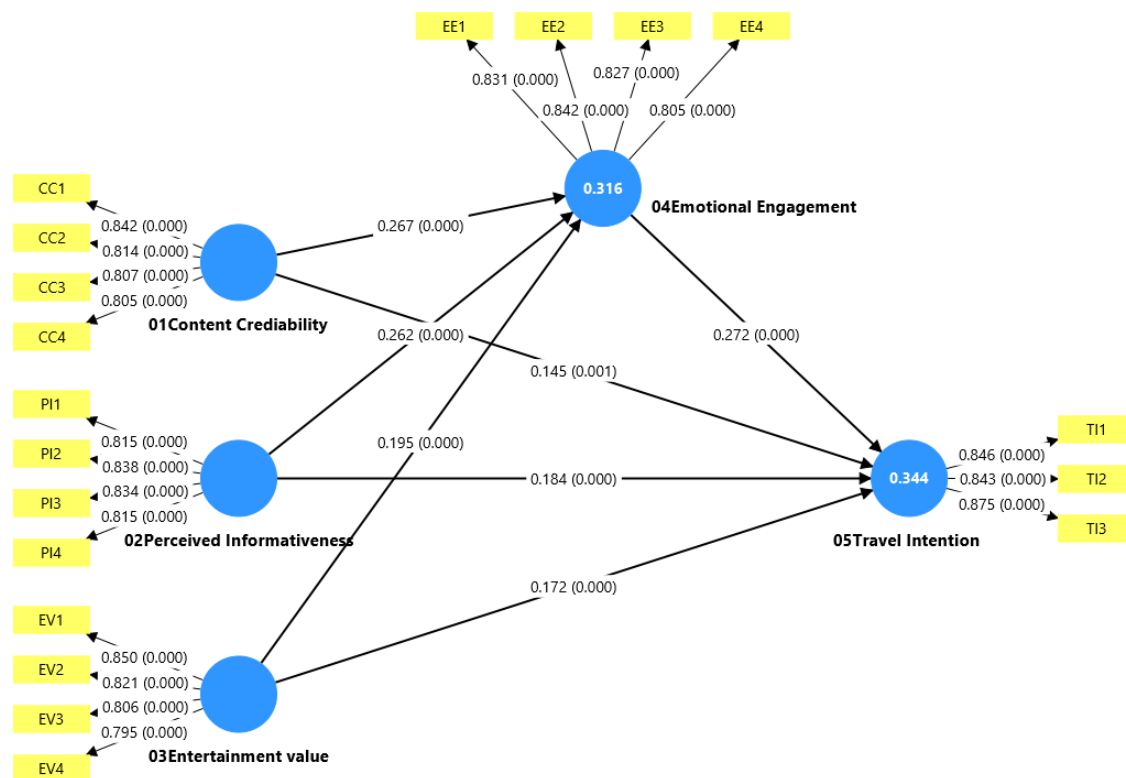


Figure 1 Structural Model of all constructs: content credibility, perceived informativeness, entertainment value, emotional engagement and travel intention

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study provide important insights into how social media content characteristics influence travel intention toward Thailand among Chinese Generation Z, with emotional engagement serving as a mediating mechanism. Based on survey data collected from Generation Z respondents in Guangzhou and analyzed using PLS-SEM, several important findings emerged regarding the role of social media content in tourism decision-making.

The significant effects of content credibility, perceived informativeness, and entertainment value suggest that Chinese Generation Z travelers evaluate tourism destinations through both cognitive and affective processing when interacting with social media content. Among these factors, perceived informativeness shows the strongest standardized coefficient on travel intention, indicating that practical and useful travel information plays a particularly important role in reducing uncertainty and supporting destination evaluation for international travel. This finding is consistent with Chung and Koo (2015), who emphasized the importance of information quality in online tourism information search, and with Wang and Park (2023), who reported that informative social media content strengthens destination evaluation and behavioral intention. The present findings extend previous research by demonstrating that informative social media content remains an important determinant of travel intention among Chinese Generation Z travelers in the context of outbound tourism to Thailand.

Emotional engagement emerged as an important predictor of travel intention, suggesting that destination decisions are influenced not only by rational evaluations of online information but also by users' emotional responses toward tourism content. When individuals develop positive emotional connections with destination-related content, they are more likely to translate online experiences into travel intentions. This finding is consistent with Hudson et al. (2015) and So et al. (2014), who emphasized that emotional experiences strengthen tourists' behavioral intentions. The result also supports the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework by demonstrating that emotional engagement serves as the internal psychological state through which external social media stimuli influence travel intention.

Another important finding is that content credibility, perceived informativeness, and entertainment value significantly influence emotional engagement. Credible information increases users' confidence in the destination, informative content reduces uncertainty during travel planning, and entertaining content enhances enjoyment and curiosity. This may be because destination-related social media content provides both functional information and emotional stimulation before actual travel, allowing potential tourists to develop favorable perceptions of the destination. These findings are generally consistent with previous studies that highlighted the role of social media content in stimulating users' emotional involvement (Hudson et al., 2015; Harrigan et al., 2017). The results further suggest that emotional engagement represents an important mechanism through which destination-related content influences subsequent travel decisions.

The finding that emotional engagement partially mediates the relationships between social media content characteristics and travel intention suggests that social media influences destination choice through both direct and indirect pathways. While high-quality content directly shapes travelers' perceptions of Thailand, it also stimulates emotional responses that further strengthen travel intention. This result supports the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, which proposes that external environmental stimuli affect behavioral responses through individuals' internal psychological states. The partial mediation observed in this study indicates that emotional engagement complements rather than replaces the direct influence of social media content characteristics on travel intention.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how social media content characteristics influence travel intention toward Thailand among Chinese Generation Z travelers. Using survey data collected from 511 respondents and applying PLS-SEM analysis, the findings indicate that content credibility, perceived informativeness, and entertainment value all positively influence travel intention. In addition, emotional engagement was found to play a significant mediating role in the relationships between social media content characteristics and travel intention. These

findings demonstrate that social media content plays a critical role in shaping travel-related decision-making among Generation Z travelers. By highlighting the mediating role of emotional engagement, the study provides a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanism through which social media content influences tourism destination choices.

The study contributes to the tourism and social media literature in several ways. First, it extends existing research by shifting the focus from social media platforms to specific characteristics of social media content, offering a more nuanced understanding of how content attributes influence travel intentions. Second, the findings highlight the importance of emotional engagement as a mediating mechanism linking social media content characteristics with travel-related behavioral intentions. Third, by focusing on Chinese Generation Z travelers and travel intention toward Thailand, the study provides context-specific empirical insights into how younger tourists interpret and respond to social media content in international tourism settings.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer useful implications for tourism marketers and destination management organizations. Tourism marketers should pay greater attention to developing credible, informative, and entertaining social media content in order to attract the attention of potential tourists and strengthen their emotional engagement with destinations. For destinations such as Thailand that rely heavily on international tourism markets, leveraging engaging social media content may help enhance destination attractiveness and influence travel decision-making among younger travelers.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample focused on Chinese Generation Z travelers in Guangzhou, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or geographic contexts. Future studies could examine similar relationships in different countries or among different generational groups. Second, this study focused on three specific characteristics of social media content; future research could explore additional content attributes or platform-related factors that may influence travel intentions. Finally, longitudinal studies could further examine how social media exposure influences travel decision-making over time.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the tourism and social media literature in several ways.

1.1 The findings extend previous research on social media influence in tourism decision-making by shifting the focus from social media platforms themselves to the specific characteristics of social media content. While many prior studies have examined the general role of social media or electronic word-of-mouth in tourism contexts, fewer studies have systematically investigated how particular content attributes shape travel intentions. By

examining content credibility, perceived informativeness, and entertainment value simultaneously, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how different aspects of social media content influence tourism behavior.

1.2 This research contributes to the growing body of literature on emotional processes in tourism decision-making. Tourism experiences are inherently emotional, and travelers often rely on affective impressions when evaluating destinations (Hudson et al., 2015). The results demonstrate that emotional engagement serves as an important psychological mechanism linking social media content and travel intention. This finding reinforces the importance of integrating emotional and experiential perspectives into tourism marketing research.

1.3 This study provides empirical evidence from the context of Chinese Generation Z travelers, a group that is increasingly influential in global tourism markets. As digital natives, Generation Z travelers are highly engaged with social media and frequently rely on online content when exploring travel destinations. By focusing on this demographic group, the study enriches existing tourism literature by offering insights into how younger travelers interpret and respond to social media content in destination-related decision-making.

1.4 By examining travel intention toward a specific international destination (Thailand), this research contributes to destination-focused tourism studies. The findings highlight how social media content can shape perceptions and intentions toward particular destinations, thereby providing a more context-specific understanding of social media influence in tourism.

2. Practical Implications

The findings of this study also offer several practical implications for destination marketers, tourism organizations, and social media content creators promoting tourism destinations such as Thailand.

2.1 Tourism marketers should prioritize enhancing the credibility of social media content related to destinations. Travelers are more likely to trust and respond to information that appears authentic and reliable. Destination marketing organizations can collaborate with credible influencers, travel bloggers, and experienced travelers to share authentic travel experiences and trustworthy information about Thailand.

2.2 The results highlight the importance of providing informative content on social media platforms. Potential travelers often seek practical travel information before making decisions, including details about attractions, transportation, accommodation, and local experiences. Providing clear and useful information can help reduce uncertainty and increase potential tourists' confidence in selecting a destination.

2.3 Tourism marketers should also focus on creating entertaining and visually appealing content. Short videos, immersive storytelling, and visually engaging images can

capture users' attention and stimulate positive emotional responses. Such content is particularly effective for attracting Generation Z users, who tend to prefer interactive and visually rich media formats.

2.4 The findings emphasize the importance of fostering emotional engagement in destination marketing strategies. Social media campaigns that evoke emotions such as excitement, curiosity, and inspiration may strengthen users' psychological connections with destinations. By creating emotionally engaging content, destination marketers can enhance potential travelers' interest and motivation to visit destinations like Thailand.

3. Suggestions for Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged.

3.1 The study focuses specifically on Chinese Generation Z respondents in Guangzhou, China, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations or geographical contexts. Future research could examine similar research models in different cities, regions, or countries to determine whether the observed relationships remain consistent across cultural contexts.

3.2 The data were collected using a cross-sectional survey design, which captures respondents' perceptions at a single point in time. Although this approach is widely used in tourism research, longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how social media exposure influences travel intentions over time.

3.3 The study examines three key characteristics of social media content—credibility, informativeness, and entertainment value. However, other factors such as visual aesthetics, influencer characteristics, or user interaction features may also play important roles in shaping emotional engagement and travel intentions. Future studies could incorporate additional content attributes to further enrich the understanding of social media influence in tourism contexts.

3.4 The current research focuses on travel intention toward Thailand as a destination. Future research may explore how social media content influences travel intentions toward different types of destinations, such as cultural tourism sites, nature-based tourism destinations, or urban tourism experiences.

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