

DESTINATION IMAGE IN DOUYIN CONTENT AND INFORMATION ADOPTION AMONG CHINESE GEN Z TRAVELLERS

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Abstract. Against the backdrop of the rapid development of short-video platforms, increasingly Chinese Generation Z travellers seek information by watching Douyin short videos before travelling, and in the process influence decisions about the perception of travel. Although existing literature has extensively explored digital travel communication, this literature has mainly focused on users' attitudes towards short video-generated content and how attitudes affect user credibility. However, there is still a lack of literature that focuses on the image of the destination presented by Douyin short video content, and in particular the impact of this specific factor on the information adoption of Gen Z tourists. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine the role of destination image in the relationship between short video content and tourism information adoption among Chinese Gen Z tourists. This study was a quantitative cross-sectional survey and the data was conducted in SPSS 27.0. The results show that there is a significant positive correlation between the content of Douyin's short videos on destination image, and users' adoption of travel information. This study not only makes a practical contribution to the development of mass communication in digital tourism, but also provides an empirical basis for the literature in related fields.

Keywords: *Douyin content, destination image, generation Z travellers, information adoption*

Introduction

According to Kaye et al. (2021), short video platforms are growing in popularity relying on various media channels. Among them, Douyin, a platform that publishes travel information, has been adopted by more Gen Z travellers (Wang and Park, 2023). Unlike traditional travel communication, the immersive experiences and interactions contained in Douyin content make it an important tool for influencing users' travel decisions (Zhou et al., 2023). Although digital travel communication is well-discussed in the existing literature, there is still limited literature on how Douyin content influences users' information adoption by depicting destination images. Understanding this mechanism is necessary to improve the effectiveness of digital travel communication. Therefore, this study aims to identify the influence of destination image in Douyin content on travel information decisions of Chinese Gen Z travellers. In order to achieve the research objectives, the following 2 research questions were formulated:

RQ1: What is the impact of Douyin content on information adoption among Chinese Generation Z travellers?

RQ2: What is the relationship between destination image presented in Douyin content and information adoption among Chinese Generation Z travellers?

Literature review

Douyin content and information adoption

Douyin, currently the dominant short-video platform in China, publishes content that has an impact on user behaviour, particularly in the areas of lifestyle and entertainment (Kaye et al., 2021). However, research on the travel domain remains fragmented, with more research attention focusing on communication strategies from digital travel, but ignoring the unique influence of short-video content. As Han et al. (2022) suggest, the visual and emotional appeal of Douyin content can change users' adoption of information. However, there is still a lack of research exploring the mechanisms of this influence. Therefore, the influence of personalised content curated by Douyin on travellers' travel decisions and information adoption deserves further exploration. Furthermore, according to Filieri and McLeay (2014), the persuasive power of communication often depends on the quality of the content as well as the actual engagement of users. However, the application of this model to Shakeology content remains currently unattainable, among other reasons because Douyin's entertainment priority still blurs the line between passive user acceptance and active information processing (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). That is, although the credibility of Douyin's content sources and perceived usefulness are its key factors influencing users' information adoption. However, these factors have not been tested across the full range of Douyin platforms. As Sussman and Siegal (2003) argue, users' credibility for information adoption comes through platform participation and is not established by expert authority. This study is based on the Information Adoption Model (IAM), regarding Douyin content as the information stimulus source and destination image as the key perceptual result formed by users in the information processing process, and further influencing the information adoption behavior. Furthermore, according to Kaye et al. (2021), the real purpose of Douyin algorithm has user-centred curation. In other words, Douyin content is presented with recommendations based on user preferences, and this algorithm will actually track user preferences in order to provide users with effective travelling suggestions. *Figure 1* illustrates the original Douyin algorithm. The resulting assumptions are:

H1: Douyin content has a positive impact on the information adoption of Chinese Gen Z travellers.

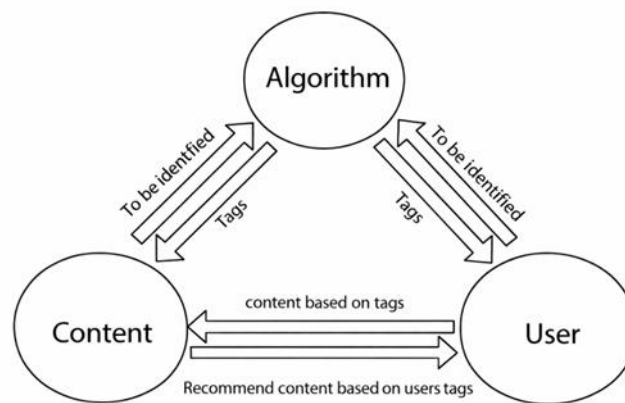


Figure 1. Conceptual illustration of Douyin content recommendation mechanism. Source: Kaye et al. (2021).

Destination image and information adoption

Destination image can not only appeal to users' perceptions, but also influence travelling decisions to some extent by affecting users' actual willingness to visit a location (Jalilvand et al., 2012). According to Kislali et al. (2016), the construction of destination image is related to media presentation and direct user experience. Chaulagain et al. (2019) argued that the destination image changes to the traveller's decision making and creates a significant difference from the destination that would have been visited. *Figure 2* illustrates the impact of destination image on travel intentions. However, in the context of the popularity of social media, destination image is constrained by user-generated content (Sultan et al., 2021). Previous research has examined the influence of social media on this specific factor, but failed to take into account the algorithm-driven nature of Douyin. This nature creates a completely different image formation mechanism than traditional social media, and this communication mechanism positively impacts user engagement. Although Douyin users have acknowledged that destination image is a key prerequisite in travel decisions, its relationship with information adoption remains under-explored (Han et al., 2022). Although Gan et al. (2023) argue that an appealing destination image to users leads to increased information adoption, this view is based on idealised social media platforms, some of which are still misleading with regard to describing destination images. This creates an unavoidable concern among users about the destination image portrayed by Douyin. Therefore, critically examining the relationship between destination image and user information adoption can fill the gap in the previous literature, resulting in the hypothesis:

H2: Destination image positively influences users' information adoption.

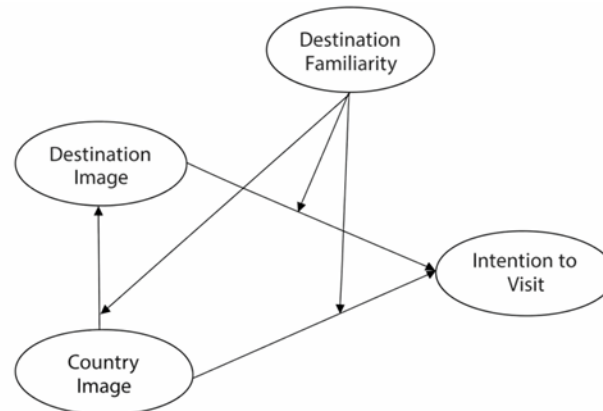


Figure 2. Impact of destination image on tourists' intention to travel
Source: Chaulagain et al. (2019).

Materials and Methods

Samples and data collection procedures

The research design of this study was quantitative, and a cross-sectional survey procedure was selected for the study, with the main objective of determining the impact of Douyin short video content on the adoption of information by Chinese Generation Z travellers. In order to ensure that the data for this study is representative and generalisable, the sample required for the study was drawn from high school and university students in southern China, with the age distribution of the target group ranging from 16 to 24 years old. Participants were highly active on the Douyin platform and had travelling intentions and plans. This study used a stratified approach based on city tiers to enhance sample diversity. Firstly, a systematic stratification was done according to the type of city (Tier 1, Tier 2 as well as Tier 3 cities) in which the selected schools were distributed. Then, respondents were randomly selected within each stratum. The reason for this was to determine the representativeness of the sample and to allow for an accurate reflection of the personal characteristics of the different regions and schools of the participating Gen Z travellers. Additionally, the selected respondents were tested and only those who had used the Douyin platform within the last 6 months and were interested in travel related content were taken into consideration, thus ensuring that these respondents had a deeper knowledge of the topic of this study. After identifying the respondents, the data collection procedure was primarily an online questionnaire. This questionnaire covered the dimensions of respondents' personal information, Douyin content, perceived destination image and information adoption. All questionnaires in the online survey were anonymous, and participants had the right to be informed about the research topic for which the questionnaire was used, to participate voluntarily and to withdraw at any time. The reason for this was to maximise the ethical nature of the survey. The average time required to complete the questionnaire was 15-20 minutes.

Measurement scale

The measurement scales for this study were set up with four variables designed for the analysis of the research data, mainly based on previous literature on information adoption and incorporating Douyin content and destination image perceptions. *Table 1*

shows the measurement scale design as well as the questionnaire questions in detail. Considering the inconsistency of respondents' background information and individual differences in null message adoption. Relevant questions based on demographic characteristics were designed for this study. *Table 2* demonstrates the demographic characteristics of this study. All questions about demographic characteristics take single ballots. Based on exploratory grouping of measurement items, Douyin content was analysed through three dimensions: frequency of exposure, interaction, and perceived content quality.

Table 1. Interpretation of research instruments.

Category	Description
Douyin Content (DC)	DC1: I watch short travel-related videos on Douyin every day. DC2: I watch short travel-related videos on Douyin every week. DC3: I usually watch Douyin short videos to get travel information before I travel. DC4: I will discuss the content with others after watching short Douyin travel videos. DC5: I will share my favourite videos or content after watching short Douyin travel videos. DC6: The short travel video content on Douyin is highly appealing. DC7: The travel information presented in Douyin's short videos was perceived as useful to me. DC8: Douyin's short-form travel content made it easier for me to learn about what the destination had to offer.
Destination Image (DI)	DI1: Douyin's short video showing the destination got me interested in wanting to visit. DI2: The destinations in Douyin's short video look very appealing and inspire me to travel. DI3: Watching Douyin short videos has given me a deeper understanding and interest in certain destinations. DI4: Douyin short videos show destinations that match the reality. DI5: I believe the destinations shown in Douyin's short videos are authentic and not overly embellished. DI6: The image of the destination in Douyin's short video enhanced my overall impression of the place.
Information Adoption (IA)	IA1: After watching Douyin short videos, I am more inclined to choose the destinations shown in the videos as my travel destinations. IA2: The information in Douyin's short videos makes it easier for me to make travel decisions. IA3: I considered visiting certain new destinations based on the travel advice in Douyin's short video. IA4: The travel information in Douyin's short videos has influenced my plans for travelling. IA5: I have taken a travel plan based on the information provided in Douyin's short videos. IA6: Having watched the short Douyin video, I have considered the travel activities shown in that video.

Table 2. Demographics profile.

Items	Characteristics
Gender	Male Female
Age	16-18 years 19-21 years 22-24 years
Educational level	High school and below Bachelor degree Master degree and above
Type of city	First-tier cities Second-tier cities Third-tier cities and below
Do you often use Douyin for travel information?	Yes No

Reliability test

Prior to the formal launch of the questionnaire and the collection of data to address the research questions, a sample of 10 per cent of the respondent population was selected for this study, which included 60 Gen Z travellers similar to the formal sample, which covered a variety of regions. The purpose of the pilot test was to determine the reliability of the questionnaire and to find out how well the participants understood the content, in order to identify problems with the questionnaire, and to investigate how

well the questionnaire matched the Gen Z travellers and how clearly it was written. The results of the pilot test showed that participants could easily understand the content. However, respondents consistently indicated that the questions related to ‘Douyin content’ were not clear. Based on this issue, the researchers modified some of the questions to avoid ambiguity. Cronbach's alpha coefficients between 0.6 and 0.8 are indicative of the questionnaire's credibility when measuring its reliability. *Table 3* demonstrates the reliability test scale of this study. All constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Table 3. Reliability test scale.

Item	Cronbach Alpha	No of items
DC	0.793	8
DI	0.803	6
IA	0.846	6

Results and Discussion

This section focuses on the results of the data analysed in this study and builds on them in a systematic way. By analysing the data from the questionnaire mentioned above, this study aims to determine the impact of Douyin content, destination image on users' information adoption. The procedure of data analysis covered both descriptive and regression analyses.

Descriptive analysis

After the questionnaire was officially released, a total of 513 valid questionnaires were received. The respondents were mainly from the Generation Z group in China, of which 40% were male and 60% were female. The largest number of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 22, accounting for 72% of the total sample. In addition, the educational attainment of the participants was balanced, with 70% having a bachelor's degree or above and 30% having a high school degree or below. Finally, in the special demographic of city type, 45% of participants are from first-tier cities, 35% from second-tier cities, and 20% from third-tier cities and below. *Table 4* demonstrates the results of the descriptive analyses of gender and age used for demographics in this study. The questionnaire about Douyin content (DC) was set up to investigate the respondents on the frequency of exposure to short videos. The results showed that 76% of the participants were very active and watched travel-related short video content almost every day, 19% had a frequency of exposure of once a week, while only 5% indicated that they basically did not watch it. Additionally, the findings related to Destination Image (DI) were that the majority of participants found short travel-related Douyin videos to be engaging, with 82% of this group. And 67 per cent of participants believe that ‘the destinations shown in Douyin short videos are authentic and reliable’. As for respondents' views on information adoption (IA), 61% of this group felt that they would consider travelling to a recommended location after watching a short video. 47 per cent of those respondents did change their travel plans.

Table 4. Demographics (N=513).

Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	206	39.9

	Female	307	59.8
Age	16-18 years	144	28.0
	19-21 years	205	39.9
	22-24 years	164	31.9

Regression analyses

The results of multiple regression analysis in this study are mainly to verify the significance of hypothesis H1 and H2, and to analyze the relationship between Douyin content and destination image and traveler information adoption. *Table 5* clearly shows the regression analysis of Douyin content and information adoption. The results of the regression model are as follow. The results of the regression analysis were systematically collated to show that there was a significant positive effect of Douyin short video content on travellers' information adoption ($p < 0.001$). In particular, the content quality of the short videos ($\beta = 0.315$) clearly indicates that the higher the participants rated the quality of the short videos they watched, the more likely they were to have the intention of information adoption. In other words, the respondents' participation in Douyin interactive behaviour had a positive effect on influencing their travel decisions. The results of the regression analyses included in *Table 5* detail the results of this study regarding the relationship between destination image and information adoption.

Table 5. Regression analyses.

Variables	Regression coefficient (β)	Standard Error (SE)	t-value	p-value
Frequency of exposure to Douyin content	0.302	0.045	6.711	<0.001
Douyin interaction	0.217	0.050	4.340	<0.001
Quality of Douyin content	0.315	0.048	6.563	<0.001
Destination attractiveness	0.439	0.038	11.553	<0.001
Destination authenticity	0.305	0.044	6.943	<0.001

The regression analysis resulted in a significant positive correlation ($p < 0.001$) between destination image and travellers' information adoption (*Table 5*). The attractiveness of the destination ($\beta = 0.439$) has the highest degree of influence. That is, a highly attractive destination image significantly increases travellers' interest. In addition, the authenticity of the destination ($\beta = 0.305$) also proves that users have equally high requirements for the authenticity and reliability of the place. The results of this study support hypotheses H1 and H2 and provide further validation of the importance of Douyin content on travellers' information adoption. The results of the study suggest that high quality short-sighted content positively influences travellers' decision-making. This is in line with the findings of Gan et al. (2023) that short-video platforms need more high-quality videos in order to make systematic recommendations for more travelling decisions. In addition, destination image plays an important role in social media, suggesting that travel-based short videos can be used to construct a destination image, thereby increasing the likelihood that travellers will be receptive to the information and that they will adopt it. This finding is similar to that of Han et al. (2022), and to some extent demonstrates the influence of destination image as a factor in travel decision-making.

Conclusion

This study aims to systematically identify the effects of Douyin content, destination image on information adoption by Chinese Gen Z tourists. The results of the study show that Douyin content significantly influences tourists' information adoption behaviour. Specifically, the content quality and interactive nature of short videos are more likely to allow users to use the information in their travel decisions. Second, destination image can effectively stimulate tourists' interest in travelling, thus influencing information adoption. In order to increase the information adoption rate, relevant media should pay attention to the quality of short videos and deliver valuable information so as to attract more users. The introduction of the destination should ensure authenticity so as to enhance the communication effect. Although this study provides unique insights into the field of mass communication and digital travelling, there are still limitations. Firstly, this study only focuses on Gen Z travellers and the findings may not be applicable to a wider population. Additionally, this study is a cross-sectional survey and does not apply to the long-term impact of travel decisions. Future research could contribute to digital travel communication by extending the group of travellers to a wider population and conducting relevant longitudinal studies.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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