TikTok, Gen Z, and the Overtourism Dilemma: The Role of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how TikTok content shapes Generation Z's travel decision-making by exploring the roles of perceived destination image, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and perceived overtourism within the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework. A quantitative survey of 300 international Gen Z tourists aged 18–27 with prior travel experience or the intention to visit Thailand was conducted, and structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesized relationships. The findings reveal that the informativeness of TikTok travel content significantly enhances both perceived destination image and FOMO. While destination image strongly predicts destination choice intention and mediates the relationship between informativeness and intention, FOMO does not exert a significant direct effect on travel decisions. Notably, perceived overtourism moderates two key pathways: it weakens the positive impact of informativeness on destination image and diminishes the effect of destination image on choice intention. These results highlight the cognitive primacy of destination image in Gen Z's travel planning and underscore the moderating role of sustainability concerns. The study advances the theoretical understanding of digital media's influence on tourism behavior and offers practical implications for destination marketers seeking to engage socially-conscious travelers through content strategies that balance inspiration with responsibility.

RESUMEN

Este estudio examina cómo el contenido de TikTok influye en la toma de decisiones de viaje de la Generación Z, explorando el papel de la imagen percibida del destino, el miedo a perderse algo (FOMO) y la percepción de sobreturismo dentro del marco Estímulo-Organismo-Respuesta (S-O-R). Se realizó una encuesta cuantitativa a 300 turistas internacionales de la Generación Z, de entre 18 y 27 años, con experiencia previa en viajes o intención de visitar Tailandia, y se empleó un modelo de ecuaciones estructurales (SEM) para comprobar las relaciones hipotéticas. Los hallazgos revelan que el carácter informativo del contenido de viajes de TikTok mejora significativamente tanto la imagen percibida del destino como el FOMO. Si bien la imagen del destino predice con fuerza la intención de elección del destino y media la relación entre el carácter informativo y la intención, el FOMO no ejerce un efecto directo significativo en las decisiones de viaje. Cabe destacar que la percepción de sobreturismo modera dos vías clave: debilita el impacto positivo del carácter informativo en la imagen del destino y disminuye su efecto en la intención de elección. Estos resultados resaltan la importancia cognitiva de la imagen del destino en la planificación de viajes de la Generación Z y subrayan el papel moderador de las preocupaciones sobre la sostenibilidad. El estudio profundiza en la comprensión teórica de la influencia de los medios digitales en el comportamiento turístico y ofrece implicaciones prácticas para los profesionales del marketing de destinos que buscan conectar con viajeros con conciencia social mediante estrategias de contenido que equilibren inspiración y responsabilidad.

1. INTRODUCTION

TikTok has rapidly transformed how destinations are discovered and imagined, particularly among Generation Z. Unlike traditional marketing channels or even earlier social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube, TikTok's short-form, algorithm-driven content facilitates immersive and viral storytelling that captivates young audiences (Qiu, Li, & Choi, 2024). As destinations are increasingly framed through these curated digital narratives, tourist behavior is being shaped in more nuanced ways than previously understood (Tham, Chen, & Durbidge, 2024). Gen Z, characterized by their digital nativity and socially conscious values, often engages with travel content that strikes a balance between entertainment and practicality (Seyfi, Hall, & Strzelecka, 2025). While visually appealing content on TikTok may spark a desire to travel, it can also contribute to overexposure and crowding at specific destinations, a phenomenon now widely recognized as overtourism (Gössling et al., 2020). This paradox creates a psychological tension: the desire to follow trends and avoid missing out (FOMO) versus the concern for sustainability and authenticity (Tandon et al., 2021). To cope with anxiety and maintain social connections, individuals often feel a strong urge to imitate others and conform to group behavior (Elhai et al., 2016). This tendency is closely linked to the fear of missing out, which stems from two key psychological drivers: the desire to belong—rooted in the need for interpersonal relationships (Beyens et al., 2016)—and the fear of social exclusion, or being isolated from the mainstream (Przybylski et al., 2013; Alt, 2015). Understanding how these forces interact is essential for predicting travel decision-making in a post-digital landscape.

Thailand, one of the world's most tourism-dependent economies, offers a compelling backdrop for this investigation. In 2024, tourism accounted for approximately 12% of Thailand's GDP, with over 35.5 million international arrivals generating around USD 52.81 billion in revenue (Puthong, 2025). Post-pandemic recovery strategies have placed a heavy emphasis on social media marketing, with the Tourism Authority of Thailand actively leveraging platforms like TikTok to rejuvenate international tourist interest (Tourism Thailand, 2023). TikTok has emerged as a particularly powerful tool due to its ability to rapidly popularize lesser-known destinations and promote themed campaigns targeting younger demographics. However, this strategy has also accelerated challenges related to overtourism as viral content often directs overwhelming numbers of tourists to ecologically sensitive or culturally saturated sites.

Thailand currently lacks a coherent regulatory framework governing the intersection of social media and tourism marketing which has produced mixed outcomes. On the positive side, platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and travel blogs have greatly increased visibility for Thailand's destinations, fueling demand, creating jobs, and boosting local incomes, especially in peripheral or rural areas. The Tourism Authority of Thailand's recent launch of "TAT Connex," a platform linking influencers with tourism businesses, reflects attempts to harness this potential more systematically (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2024).

However, the absence of regulation around influencer marketing, manipulated content, and transparency has contributed to negative consequences. Overtourism in hotspots such as Phuket, Yaowarat (Bangkok's Chinatown), and

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other heritage areas strains infrastructure, degrades natural environments, raises the cost of living for locals, and erodes cultural authenticity (Sirikulpisut & Weerasophon, 2025). Regulatory gaps include the lack of specific laws requiring influencers to label promotional or manipulated content clearly, weak oversight of environmental carrying capacities at popular sites, and limited policy instruments to distribute tourist flows more evenly. Going forward, Thailand needs targeted regulations for influencer disclosures, stricter enforcement of accommodation and environmental standards, and policies that balance growth with the protection of cultural, environmental, and social systems.

The case of Thailand vividly illustrates the dual-edged sword of TikTok-driven tourism. For example, environmental damage caused by excessive tourism led to the closure of Maya Bay (Koh & Fakfare, 2020), a situation recent analyses link, in part, to viral social media content (Tham, Chen, & Durbidge, 2024). Numerous locations across Thailand, including Maya Bay and Phi Phi Leh, are facing pressures from visitor numbers that sometimes exceed their capacity (Peeters et al., 2018). This makes Thailand a compelling case study for investigating the psychological tension between aspirational travel fueled by social media and growing concerns about sustainability.

Simultaneously, the increasing awareness of environmental degradation and overcrowding at popular destinations underscores the importance of understanding how the perception of overtourism influences Gen Z's travel choices. This generation is becoming a dominant force in the travel industry, with a significant majority (66%) using social media platforms to discover and plan their trips (Karlovitch, 2025), highlighting the critical role of social media in shaping their decisions. In addition,

according to WYSE's New Horizons 5 study (2025), youth and student travelers account for 23% of international arrivals, more than 296 million trips in 2023, underscoring the growing significance of global youth travel.

To explore these dynamics, this study employs the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Within this framework, the informativeness of TikTok content acts as the stimulus. The organismic variables are perceived destination image and FOMO. Finally, destination choice intention represents the behavioral response. Furthermore, this study investigates whether perceived overtourism acts as a moderator, influencing how destination image affects travel intentions. This moderating effect will shed light on how Gen Z's growing commitment to sustainability and ethical tourism values might temper the allure of popular, potentially overcrowded destinations. Ultimately, the findings will contribute valuable insights for destination management organizations and tourism stakeholders seeking to engage with this influential demographic responsibly and sustainably. This is particularly significant for many countries in Southeast Asia, such as Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia, as well as countries in Europe, such as Italy and Spain, which rely heavily on the tourism industry as a major source of national income (Eurostat. (n.d.).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

TikTok's Ascendancy in Shaping Tourism Decisions: Evidence from Thailand

Generation Z's digital fluency has propelled platforms like TikTok into a central role in shaping how this demographic approaches tourism decision-making. These global dynamics are vividly illustrated in Thailand, where iconic sites such as

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Maya Bay and Chiang Mai's Old City have seen dramatic visitor surges following viral TikTok trends (Koh & Fakfare, 2020). The appeal of TikTok to Gen Z lies in its format of short-form, visually compelling videos, which, as Băltescu and Untaru (2025) suggested, effectively blend perceived authenticity with aspirational travel experiences. This shift represents a significant departure from traditional tourism marketing, where information was primarily disseminated through brochures, websites, and advertisements. TikTok's innovation lies in its ability to empower everyday users and influencers to share travel narratives characterized by authenticity, relatability, and spontaneity—attributes that Kozinets et al. (2010) highlighted as crucial in shaping perceptions and travel intentions. Beyond mere inspiration, TikTok functions as a primary source of information during the early stages of travel planning for younger audiences. Research by Jeong and Shin (2020) further emphasized the impact of personalized and interactive content on user satisfaction, suggesting that these elements accelerate content spread within dynamic online environments. Given this influence is particularly salient among Gen Z, whose digital familiarity aligns seamlessly with TikTok's content delivery and algorithmic personalization, it is crucial to acknowledge Gen Z's preference for brief, visually engaging, and easily digestible content. TikTok's distinctive features, such as short-form video, integrated editing tools, and powerful algorithms, have transformed how information is shared and consumed (MacKinnon et al., 2021). Research shows that the platform's format supports the adaptation of news content to its unique trends and logic, making it more engaging for younger audiences (Cheng & Li, 2023; Conner, 2023; Klug & Autenrieth, 2022). With its global reach and strong visual appeal, TikTok is well-

positioned to deliver news effectively across diverse demographic groups (Truong & Kim, 2023). Yamagishi et al. (2023) suggested that user-generated content (UGC) can significantly shape their decision-making processes by eliciting both emotional and cognitive responses. Building on this, studies by Fong et al. (2024) indicated that TikTok videos, especially those featuring influencers and educational content, play a critical role in shaping destination preferences and travel intentions among Gen Z. TikTok's personalized feed curation enhances user engagement by presenting travel content tailored to individual interests, thereby deepening the emotional connection to the showcased destinations.

The impact of UGC on travel perceptions and choices cannot be overstated. Huang et al. (2024) noted that the virality of travel-related posts is often amplified by the trust users place in content created by peers and influencers, which is perceived as more authentic and reliable than traditional advertisements. This is echoed in Wijaya et al. (2024), who confirmed that UGC enhances destination imagery and positively influences tourists' intentions to visit. In Thailand's competitive tourism landscape, leveraging authentic UGC has become a strategic imperative for destination marketers seeking to both attract and manage visitor flows (World Tourism Organization et al., 2019). Thus, UGC is increasingly vital in contemporary destination marketing strategies.

Despite the growing body of research on the influence of social media in tourism decision-making, academic inquiry has historically concentrated on platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, where visually driven storytelling has long been recognized as central to influencing travel aspirations (Thakur et al., 2024). However, while

these platforms share visual elements with TikTok, a gap remains in the literature regarding TikTok's unique impact. One key distinction is the contrast between UGC and content produced by official tourism boards. Wang et al. (2020) argued that UGC is often perceived as more authentic and relatable than official promotional content, which may be viewed as polished and commercially biased, potentially diminishing its impact on prospective travelers. Martins et al. (2025) further highlighted the credibility of UGC as a pivotal factor influencing modern travel decision-making, underscoring its role in shaping destination images and travel intentions.

Theoretical Framework: Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R)

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) in environmental psychology, is a valuable tool for understanding how external stimuli affect internal psychological states, which then influence behavior. In digital tourism, especially on platforms like TikTok, the Stimulus is the informativeness and emotional engagement of short-form video content. These user-generated videos capture attention through visual appeal and immersive storytelling, drawing viewers into a destination's narrative (Hossain, Sheikh, & Islam, 2025). The Organism phase refers to psychological responses triggered by these stimuli, particularly in regard to how they shape perceived destination image. As Baloglu and McCleary (1999) noted, destination image is critical in travel decisions, and user-generated content such as travel vlogs and influencer posts can strongly influence it by offering authentic, relatable depictions. Moreover, the FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) effect, amplified by TikTok's viral nature,

heightens emotional responses, motivating viewers to act on their desire to experience what they see (Bui et al., 2022). The final phase, the Response, is destination choice intentions—the likelihood an individual will choose to visit a location based on stimuli and internal states (Deng, Lin, & Chen, 2021).

However, the stimulus-organism-response relationship is not always direct. External factors, like concerns about overtourism, can moderate this process. As Jang and Park (2020) suggested that heightened overtourism awareness—especially when amplified by negative UGC or media—can reduce the desire to visit, even if the initial stimulus (appealing content) is strong. Thus, the S-O-R framework, with these adaptations, offers a comprehensive theoretical approach to understanding how digital travel content, internal perceptions, and contextual factors interact to shape tourists' destination choices.

Stimulus: Informativeness

In digital tourism marketing, informativeness is a pivotal content attribute that significantly shapes tourist perceptions and behavioral responses. Defined by the depth, clarity, and usefulness of content, informativeness enhances cognitive fluency, strengthens credibility assessments, and aids in the formation of clear destination impressions. For example, Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, and Arcodia (2017) highlighted that a lack of reliable information increases uncertainty, hindering travelers' ability to form clear destination impressions. On platforms like TikTok, informativeness becomes especially impactful when practical travel insights, such as lodging options, tips, and cultural experiences, are embedded in visually engaging short-form videos.

For instance, Thailand's diverse cultural sites, such as Chiang Mai's temples or Phuket's beaches, are often highlighted in TikTok content, providing potential visitors with helpful travel tips and destination information. This synthesis of utility and entertainment provides concrete cues that reduce ambiguity, foster trust, and strengthen perceived destination image (Abbasi et al., 2023).

For Generation Z, who value authenticity, transparency, and functional content, informativeness is central in forming favorable attitudes toward travel destinations (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Moreover, informative TikTok content can trigger emotional responses such as fear of missing out (FOMO), particularly when framed within aspirational, peer-driven narratives. In Thailand's competitive tourism landscape, where certain destinations like Maya Bay or Bangkok's urban attractions are frequently featured, the intensity of FOMO can influence Gen Z's emotional engagement with destination-related content. Przybylski et al. (2013) associated FOMO with emotional urgency and unmet social connection needs, while Tandon et al. (2021) emphasized its amplification through social comparison. For Gen Z, such content intensifies the desire to replicate shared travel experiences, fostering emotionally driven perceptions and feelings. This is particularly relevant for Thailand, where viral TikTok content often amplifies interest in specific destinations among Gen Z audiences. Thus, informativeness plays a dual role, influencing both cognitive evaluations and emotional responses in the digital tourism context. Based on this discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Informativeness in TikTok travel content positively influences Gen Z's perceived destination image.

H2: Informativeness in TikTok travel content positively influences Gen Z's FOMO among Gen Z viewers.

Organism: Perceived Destination Image and FOMO

In the context of Gen Z's travel behavior, particularly in destinations like Thailand, where sites such as Maya Bay and Chiang Mai frequently go viral on TikTok, perceived destination image and fear of missing out (FOMO) serve as key psychological mechanisms influencing decision-making. Perceived destination image is a multifaceted construct that encompasses cognitive (knowledge), affective (emotional), and symbolic (associative) impressions that individuals form about a place (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). On TikTok, these impressions are shaped by visually engaging, short-form, and emotionally charged content. The app's algorithm facilitates the rapid spread of viral travel imagery, which can amplify both positive attributes, such as natural beauty or cultural charm, and negative aspects, such as overcrowding or overhyped destinations. For example, Thailand's Maya Bay experienced a sudden influx of visitors following viral videos, contributing to its temporary closure to allow ecological recovery (Koh & Fakfare, 2020). For instance, research on Barcelona and Chinese tourists highlighted a potential link between social media exposure and overtourism, revealing how online popularity can contribute to real-world congestion (Alonso-Almeida, Borrajo-Millán, & Liu, 2019). These dynamics suggest that destination image is no longer formed solely through traditional media, but is also actively reconstructed via social media's visual narratives. When framed positively, such imagery can enhance travel intentions (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991).

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TikTok's influence also extends into the emotional realm through FOMO, a psychological response triggered by the perception that others are enjoying rewarding experiences without you (Przybylski et al., 2013). FOMO is particularly salient among Gen Z, a demographic deeply immersed in social media culture. The constant flow of peer-generated content generates urgency and fosters a strong desire to replicate these shared travel experiences (Tandon et al., 2021). In the Thai context, trending clips of street-food tours in Bangkok or island hopping in Krabi often spark intense FOMO among young travelers, with the allure of trending travel moments showcased in user-generated content (UGC) often prompting impulsive travel decisions (Yamagishi et al., 2023). This emotional drive can sometimes overshadow rational considerations, such as environmental sustainability or concerns about destination saturation (Harahap et al., 2024).

Together, perceived destination image and FOMO represent dual cognitive-emotional pathways through which TikTok shapes Gen Z's travel decisions. While destination image reflects how attractive or fitting a destination appears based on visual and informational cues, FOMO adds urgency and emotional weight to the decision-making process. These intertwined mechanisms help explain why Gen Z travelers are drawn to destinations frequently showcased on TikTok. These intertwined mechanisms are especially pronounced in Thailand, where viral content can transform quiet towns into overcrowded hotspots almost overnight. Furthermore, perceived destination image and FOMO may serve as mediators in the relationship between informativeness in TikTok content and destination choice intention. The informative content

not only shapes these psychological responses, but also amplifies their influence on travel decisions. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Perceived destination image positively influences Gen Z's destination choice intention.

H4: FOMO positively influences Gen Z's destination choice intention.

H5: Perceived destination image mediates the relationship between informativeness in TikTok travel content and Gen Z's destination choice intention.

H6: FOMO mediates the relationship between informativeness in TikTok travel content and Gen Z's destination choice intention

Response: Destination Choice Intention

Destination choice intention, representing the behavioral "Response" in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, marks the final stage in the decision-making process where external stimuli, such as the informativeness of TikTok content, are processed through internal evaluations like perceived destination image and emotional reactions such as FOMO. Defined as the conscious likelihood or predisposition to select and visit a destination featured in social media content, it is a key precursor to actual travel behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). This destination choice intention may manifest through making travel plans, researching destinations, checking availability, or sharing content, indicating a strong interest (Phau, Quintal, & Shanka, 2014).

A central element of destination choice intention is its dependence on positive destination perceptions, often shaped by engaging and informative content on

platforms like TikTok. Prior studies found a strong link between favorable destination images and increased visit intentions (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). In Thailand, content showcasing street-food tours in Bangkok or temple explorations in Chiang Mai exemplifies how positive visuals can boost the intention to visit. This link is further reinforced by FOMO, which heightens the desire to replicate social media experiences, especially when they appear enjoyable and widely shared (Tandon et al., 2021). For Gen Z, who are highly responsive to social media content, the blend of informative videos and emotional appeal significantly strengthens destination choice intention.

Although not equivalent to actual travel, destination choice intention is a valuable early indicator of potential tourism demand, reflecting the initial phase where external cues and emotional evaluations begin to shape travel considerations (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). This initial inclination, driven by factors like destination image, precedes the stronger commitment of travel intention, which involves concrete actions such as booking, as highlighted by the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In Thailand, understanding these early intentions is vital for managing peak seasons and sustainable planning. Furthermore, tourism research supports the notion that a positive destination image significantly influences this preliminary choice intention (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991), while the emotional pull of experiences showcased on platforms like social media, often linked to FOMO, can also strongly sway these initial considerations (Tandon et al., 2021). Understanding these early influences on destination choice intention, particularly those driven by readily accessible stimuli like social media content, is crucial for marketers aiming to identify and engage potential travelers before they reach the stage of firm travel plans.

Moderator: Perceived Overtourism

Perceived overtourism, which refers to travelers' recognition of overcrowding, environmental degradation, and mass visitation's negative impacts on destination quality, can significantly weaken the appeal of even highly-rated destinations (Capocchi et al., 2019). For instance, Thailand's Maya Bay and Phi Phi Islands have faced severe congestion, leading to policy-driven management interventions, including government-mandated temporary closures and access regulations (Koh & Fakfare, 2020). Overtourism has become a prominent global challenge over the past two decades, evolving from localized congestion to a recognized issue with significant environmental and social consequences that necessitate regulatory and institutional responses, rather than direct economic effects in isolation. In many destinations, these consequences are addressed through legally grounded governance mechanisms, such as visitor caps, zoning regulations, and conservation policies, which indirectly shape tourism market conditions. As online content increasingly features popular spots, viral TikTok videos of Thai hotspots like the Full Moon Party on Koh Phangan can amplify perceptions of crowding even before travel is planned (Tham, Chen, & Durbidge, 2024). For Gen Z travelers, known for their heightened social and environmental consciousness, frequent online exposure to certain destinations fosters awareness of regulation-driven sustainability concerns such as overcrowding (World Tourism Organization et al., 2019).

While informative TikTok content generally enhances a destination's image by offering valuable insights and reducing uncertainty, the presence of overtourism cues—such as packed spaces, environmental stress, or lost local charm—can create cognitive dissonance that undermines this effect (Yousaf et al., 2021). Gen Z viewers, particularly attuned to sustainability concerns, may discount informative content that simultaneously portrays the negative consequences of mass tourism. Thus, perceived overtourism may moderate the relationship between informativeness and perceived destination image by weakening the positive influence informativeness when concerns about overtourism are high. This awareness, coupled with their values, can then influence their intention to visit such destinations (Dolnicar, 2020). When individuals perceive a destination as suffering from overtourism—through visible congestion, pollution, or loss of authenticity—it may weaken the positive effect of a favorable destination image on their travel intentions. Research indicates that perceived crowding and environmental degradation can reduce satisfaction and willingness to visit or revisit a destination (Papadopoulou, Ribeiro, & Prayag, 2022).

Perceived overtourism also moderates the relationship between perceived destination image and travel intention. While an appealing or culturally rich image stimulates interest, a high level of overtourism perception introduces a conflicting evaluation, potentially prompting travelers to reconsider their choices due to anticipated negative experiences. In Thailand, recent sustainable tourism initiatives in places like Krabi and Chiang Mai have aimed to mitigate these effects by promoting off-peak travel and ecotourism (World Tourism Organization et al., 2019). For Gen Z, who increasingly embrace ethical consumption and sustainability, these perceptions serve as important decision-making filters (Wang et al., 2020). Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H7: Perceived overtourism negatively moderates the relationship between informativeness in TikTok travel content and Gen Z's perceived destination image, such that the positive effect of informativeness on perceived destination image is weaker when overtourism concern is high.

H8: Perceived overtourism negatively moderates the relationship between perceived destination image and destination choice intention, such that the positive influence of perceived destination image on destination choice intention is weaker when overtourism concern is high.

Following extant literature on social media–driven travel decision-making and emotional response mechanisms, this study develops a research framework proposing that the informativeness of TikTok travel content positively influences Gen Z's perceived destination image and FOMO, which in turn affect destination choice intention. While these relationships imply potential mediation, mediation hypotheses (H5–H6) are assessed analytically using indirect effects derived from the estimated structural paths. Additionally, perceived overtourism is proposed as a negative moderator, weakening the effects of informativeness on perceived destination image and the influence of perceived destination image on destination choice intention. The proposed framework is illustrated in Figure 1.
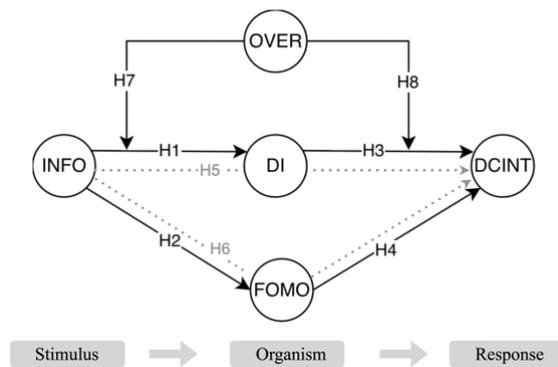
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Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Model

3. METODHOLOGY

Research Design and Sample

This study employed a quantitative approach using a structured online survey to investigate Gen Z's destination image formation and overtourism sensitivity in the context of short-form video platforms. A sample of 300 respondents was chosen to facilitate structural equation modeling (SEM) and to enable valid testing of mediation and moderation effects within the model (Hair et al., 2019). The target population comprised international Gen Z tourists aged 18–27 who were active users of relevant short-form video platforms with either prior travel experience in Thailand or an expressed intention to visit. Focusing exclusively on adults (18+) simplified ethical approval as all participants were able to provide informed consent independently.

Participants were recruited primarily from countries with high outbound tourism to Thailand. Based on recent data, key source markets included China (6.73 million visitors), South Korea (1.44 million), and Japan (1.2 million) from the Asia-Pacific region, as well as long-haul markets such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Germany (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2020). To ensure balanced representation from both regional and international markets, the 300 participants were evenly divided: 150 from high-volume neighboring countries (China, South Korea, Japan) and 150 from major long-haul markets (United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Germany). This sampling strategy reflects the combined influence of proximity and global interest in Thailand's tourism landscape and aligns with Gen Z's engagement patterns with short-form video content.

Demographic and Usage Profile

The initial dataset comprised 317 responses. After data cleaning, screening for completeness, relevance, and eligibility, 9 responses were excluded due to missing data or ineligibility based on the screening question: "Have you seen TikTok content about Thai tourism, and have you visited, or do you plan to visit Thailand?" This yielded 308 valid cases (retention rate: 97.16%).

Among these, 157 respondents (50.97%) were from neighboring markets: China (n=67, 21.75%), South Korea (n=50, 16.23%), and Japan (n=40, 12.99%). The remaining 151 (49.03%) were from long-haul markets: United States (n=38, 12.34%), United Kingdom (n=37, 12.01%), Australia (n=38, 12.34%), and Germany (n=38, 12.34%). Gender distribution was balanced, with 150 female (48.70%) and 158 male (51.30%) respondents. Most participants were aged 26–28 (n=166, 53.90%), followed by those aged 22–25 (n=124, 40.26%) and 18–21 (n=18, 5.84%). Motivations for using TikTok included entertainment (n=218), trends/challenges (n=194), and seeking travel inspiration (n=190). Multiple responses were permitted. A majority of participants used TikTok several times a day (n=182, 59.09%), with typical session durations most commonly falling between 31 and 60 minutes (n=188, 61.04%). Use of TikTok for travel information was widespread, with 241 participants

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(78.25%) reporting frequent use, and another 49 (15.91%) using it occasionally.

This sample provides a demographically and behaviorally robust foundation for analyzing the impact of TikTok on travel-related perceptions and decision-making. Full demographic and behavioral profiles are detailed in Table 1

Category	Item	n	%
Country of Origin			
	China	67	21.75
	South Korea	50	16.23
	Japan	40	12.99
	United States	38	12.34
	United Kingdom	37	12.01
	Australia	38	12.34
	Germany	37	12.01
Gender			
	Female	150	48.7
	Male	158	51.3
Age Group			
	18-21 years old	18	5.84
	22-25 years old	124	40.26
	26-28 years old	166	53.9
Primary Reasons for TikTok Use	Entertainment (fun videos, memes, etc.)	218	70.78
	Following trends and challenges	194	62.99
	Finding travel ideas and inspiration	190	61.69
	Learning or educational content	40	12.99
	Connecting with friends/community	16	5.19
TikTok Usage Frequency	Several times a day	182	59.09
	Once a day	50	16.23
	Several times a week	24	7.79
	Once a week	2	0.65
	Less than once a week	1	0.32
Typical Session Length	10-30 minutes	35	11.36
	31-60 minutes	188	61.04
	1-2 hours	44	14.29
Searched for Travel Info/Inspiration on TikTok	Yes, frequently	241	78.25
	Yes, occasionally	49	15.91
	No	0	0

Table 1. Demographic and TikTok Usage Profile of Respondents

Data Collection Instruments

A structured online questionnaire was utilized to collect data from the participants. The questionnaire was designed to measure constructs related to destination image formation, overtourism sensitivity, platform engagement (TikTok or Douyin), FOMO, and destination choice intentions towards Thailand. For respondents residing in most of the targeted countries (the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, South Korea, and Japan), the questionnaire focused on TikTok as the primary short-form video platform. These participants were asked about their exposure to Thailand-related content on TikTok and its influence on their perceptions and intentions.

Given the inaccessibility of TikTok in mainland China, a modified version of the questionnaire was administered to Chinese respondents. This adapted instrument replaced all references to TikTok with Douyin (抖音), the Chinese equivalent of TikTok. While functionally similar to TikTok, Douyin operates under a distinct regulatory and content environment within China. The use of Douyin as a comparable platform is justified by the fact that both applications are short-form video sharing platforms owned by the same parent company (ByteDance) and share similar user interfaces, content formats, and algorithmic features. Therefore, Douyin serves as the most relevant equivalent for studying the influence of such platforms on Chinese Gen Z's perceptions of Thailand.

A three-step screening process ensured participant eligibility: (1) confirmation of exposure

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to Thailand-related videos on TikTok/Douyin, (2) verification of country of residence, and (3) age verification (18–28). Ethical approval was obtained, and informed consent was given by participants. Responses were anonymized, and the data were securely stored with limited access to the research team.

Measurement Scale

The measurement scales in this study are designed to capture key constructs related to tourist behavior and perceptions. Informativeness is assessed using three items adapted from Ho and See-To (2018), which focus on the utility and relevance of online promotional content. The perceived destination image is evaluated through a cognitive dimension, which encompasses factual beliefs and knowledge about the destination. This cognitive image is measured using six items, adapted from Guo and Pesonen (2022). The affective aspect of destination image is represented by the construct of fear of missing out (FOMO), which captures emotional responses influenced by social media and its psychological impact on destination choices. FOMO is assessed with three items adapted from Zaman (2024). Destination choice intention is measured using three items based on Kim et al. (2012), focusing specifically on travel intentions related to Thailand. Finally, perceived overtourism is measured with three items adapted from García-Buades et al. (2022), evaluating tourist perceptions of overcrowding and the negative effects of overtourism on local communities. All scales used a 1-5 Likert scale, ensuring consistency. Demographic and TikTok/Douyin usage data were also collected to explore the influence of social media engagement on perceptions and intentions. The full questionnaire is provided in the Appendix, while Table 2 summarizes

the measurement items and their corresponding sources.

Construct	Items	Source
Informativeness	TikTok travel videos provide valuable information about Thai travel destinations.	Ho and See-To (2018)
	TikTok travel videos offer relevant and practical details about visiting places in Thailand.	
	TikTok travel videos present up-to-date information about Thai attractions and experiences.	
Perceived Destination Image	Thai locals are friendly and welcoming toward tourists.	Guo and Pesonen (2022).
	Thailand offers delicious and attractive local food options.	
	Traveling in Thailand offers good value for the money spent.	
	Thailand provides a variety of comfortable accommodation options.	
	Thailand offers a wide range of interesting tourist sites and activities.	
	Traveling in Thailand provides exciting opportunities for adventure	
Fear of Missing Out	I feel ignored or forgotten by my social groups when I miss travel experiences.	Zaman (2024)
	I feel anxious knowing that something exciting might be happening when I miss travel opportunities.	
	I feel regretful when I miss chances to travel.	
Destination Choice Intention	I hope to visit Thailand in the future.	Kim et al. (2012)
	The possibility of me visiting Thailand in the future is high.	
	If I have the opportunity to travel, I intend to visit Thailand.	
Perceived Overtourism	This area is overcrowded with tourists.	García-Buades et al. (2022)
	I feel that tourism has overwhelmed the local way of life in this area.	
	I am aware of the overtourism issues in this destination before my visit.	

Table 2: Measurement Scales and Sources

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Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred in three steps: descriptive statistics, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Descriptive statistics summarized the demographics and assessed normality. CFA validated the measurement model by assessing factor loadings, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for reliability and validity. Model fit was evaluated using CFI, RMSEA, and SRMR. After validating the measurement model, SEM tested the hypothesized relationships among latent constructs, examining path coefficients, significance, and R-squared values.

4. RESULTS

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA): Assessing

Model Fit and Validity

CFA was conducted using maximum likelihood estimation with a sample of 307 and 48 estimated parameters. Model fit was good, with CFI = 0.965, TLI = 0.957, RMSEA = 0.057 (90% CI: 0.047–0.067), and SRMR = 0.045. All factor loadings were significant ($p < .001$) and ranged from 0.652 to 0.886, indicating strong indicator-construct relationships. Composite reliability (CR) and internal consistency (α, ω) exceeded 0.80 for most constructs. Average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.543 to 0.709, supporting convergent validity. These results affirm the reliability and validity of the measurement model. Detailed CFA results are shown in Table 3.

Construct	Item	Cronbach's Alpha	CR & Omega	AVE	Standardized Factor Loading
INFO	INFO1				0.797
	INFO2	0.867	0.869	0.689	0.878
	INFO3				0.817
DI	DI1	0.874	0.879	0.709	0.818
	DI2				0.886
	DI3				0.814
	DI4				0.725
	DI5				0.846
	DI6				0.850
FOMO	FOMO1				0.856
	FOMO2	0.824	0.830	0.621	0.766
	FOMO3				0.734
DCINT	DCINT1				0.855
	DCINT2	0.874	0.874	0.701	0.851
	DCINT3				0.800
OVER	OVER1				0.788
	OVER2	0.770	0.780	0.543	0.768
	OVER3				0.652

Table 3. CFA Fit Indices, Factor Loadings, and Reliability Statistics

Structural Model Fit and Evaluation

Building upon the validated measurement model, the structural equation model (SEM) was estimated using maximum likelihood with the same sample. The overall model fit was acceptable, with a chi-square statistic significant as expected for the sample size χ^2 (309, N=307) = 884.32, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.912, TLI = 0.907, RMSEA = 0.078 (90% CI = 0.072–0.084), and SRMR = 0.066. While some indices suggest room for improvement, these values indicate a reasonable fit to the data. Most of the structural paths were significant, and factor loadings remained strong, most above 0.70, confirming the robustness of the model. The model accounted for substantial variance in key constructs, with R^2 values ranging from 0.34 to 0.67. Attempts to improve model fit by removing items with relatively lower factor loadings did not result in improved fit indices as item removal reduced construct validity and internal consistency, indicating that the original measurement structure was more robust. Therefore, no model modifications were implemented. Overall, the SEM results support the hypothesized relationships and the adequacy of the proposed model.

Hypothesis Testing Results

The structural model was tested to examine the proposed hypotheses, and the results largely supported the conceptual framework. The informativeness of TikTok travel content had a strong, positive, and significant effect on perceived destination image (β = 0.878, p < .001), supporting H1. Similarly, informativeness also significantly predicted FOMO (β = 0.807, p < .001), confirming H2. In turn, perceived destination image positively influenced destination choice intention (β = 0.793, p = .030), providing support for H3. However, the direct effect of FOMO on destination choice intention was not significant (β = 0.096, p = .392), thus, H4 was not supported. Regarding mediation, the indirect effect of informativeness on destination choice intention through perceived destination image was significant (β = 0.492, p = .048), supporting H5. In contrast, the mediating role of FOMO in this relationship was not statistically significant (β = 0.077, p = .400), and therefore, H6 was not supported.

For the moderation hypotheses, perceived overtourism was found to negatively moderate the relationship between perceived destination image and destination choice intention as indicated by a significant negative interaction term (β = -0.590, p = .032), supporting H7. Additionally, overtourism also negatively moderated the relationship between informativeness and perceived destination image (β = -0.473, p = .004), confirming H8. These findings emphasize the importance of both cognitive and emotional mechanisms in driving Gen Z's travel intentions while also highlighting the moderating role of overtourism concerns in shaping perceptions and behavioral responses. For a comprehensive overview of the statistical details, including standardized regression coefficients and p-values for all hypothesized paths, refer to Table 4. Figure 2, conversely, provides a clear visual representation of the standardized path coefficients for the direct and moderation effects.

Hypothesis	Path	Std. Beta	p-value	Status
H1	INFO → DI	0.878	< .001**	Yes
H2	INFO→ FOMO	0.807	< .001**	Yes
H3	DI → DCINT	0.793	0.030*	Yes
H4	FOMO→ DCINT	0.096	0.392	No
H5	INFO → DI → DCINT	0.492	0.048*	Yes
H6	INFO→ FOMO → DCINT	0.077	0.400	No
H7	INFO × OVER → DI	-0.473	0.004**	Yes
H8	DI × OVER → DCINT	-0.590	0.032*	Yes

Table 4: Summary of Structural Model Results
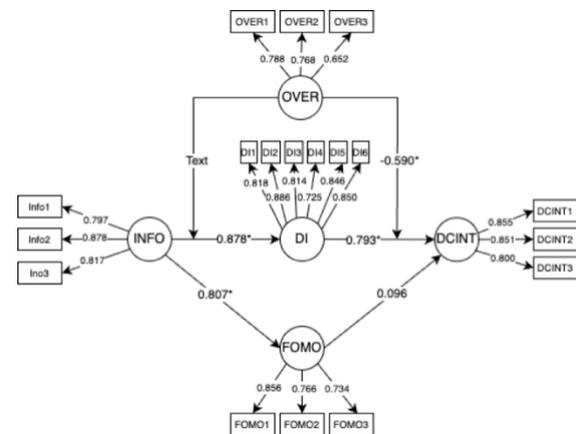(*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001)

Figure 2: Path Analysis Results with Standardized Coefficients

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated how TikTok content influences Gen Z's travel decision-making, employing the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model. Content informativeness was

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conceptualized as the stimulus, influencing perceived destination image and FOMO as organismic variables, which in turn shaped destination choice intention as the response. The structural model largely supported the conceptual framework, revealing TikTok's strong impact on destination image and subsequent travel intention. Informativeness significantly predicted both destination image and FOMO; however, only destination image significantly mediated the link between informativeness and choice intention. FOMO did not exert a meaningful influence on travel intention. Crucially, perceived overtourism moderated two key relationships: it weakened both the effect of destination image on choice intention and the impact of informativeness on destination image. These findings suggest that while TikTok's persuasive power remains strong, Gen Z's growing sustainability values may diminish the appeal of overcrowded destinations. Overall, the results highlight the dual nature of social media travel content—as a powerful influence on behavior, but also subject to ethical scrutiny in an era of conscious tourism.

The informativeness of TikTok content had a strong, positive, and significant effect on perceived destination image (H1: $\beta=0.878, p<.001$), indicating that clear, detailed, and vivid content helps shape how users mentally visualize and evaluate a travel destination. This result aligns with previous research emphasizing the role of content richness and authenticity in social media, where destination images are shaped through both cognitive and emotional evaluations. Specifically, a study by Wang and Yan (2022) found that the quality of social media tourism information significantly impacts travel intention by influencing trust (a cognitive evaluation) and self-congruity (an emotional connection), thus

highlighting how well-crafted content facilitates these crucial consumer responses. This dynamic is particularly salient for Generation Z, a cohort that gravitates toward immersive, real-time, and visually engaging media. For these digital natives, informative TikTok content not only delivers relevant travel information, but also enhances emotional resonance and personal relevance, leading to more meaningful and memorable impressions of potential destinations.

Informativeness also demonstrated a strong, positive, and significant effect on fear of missing out (FOMO) (H2: $\beta=0.807, p<.001$). The emotional resonance of aspirational travel content on TikTok is especially powerful for Gen Z users, who often experience heightened FOMO when exposed to idealized portrayals of their peers' experiences. This phenomenon, explored in depth by Djafarova and Kim (2025), highlights how constant exposure to curated, visually compelling travel narratives can evoke a sense of social exclusion and inadequacy. For digital-native audiences like Gen Z, who place high value on social connectedness and experiential consumption, such content not only fosters a desire to participate in similar experiences, but can also intensify emotional pressure to keep up. As TikTok's algorithm amplifies this effect by continually serving personalized, high-engagement travel videos, the platform becomes a powerful catalyst for both destination interest and comparative self-evaluation.

Perceived destination image was found to have a significant positive effect on destination choice intention (H3: $\beta=0.793$, $p=.030$), indicating a substantial relationship. This finding aligns with the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posit that attitudes and beliefs guide behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). A strong destination

image—reflecting both practical benefits (e.g., safety, accessibility) and emotional appeal—increase the likelihood of choosing that destination. For Gen Z, digital media, particularly through user-generated content and influencer narratives, strongly shape these evaluations, thereby reinforcing the critical importance of image in their travel decision-making process.

A significant mediating effect of perceived destination image was found in the relationship between informativeness and destination choice intention (H5: β=0.492, p=.048). This indicates that the influence of informative TikTok content on travel behavior does not occur directly; instead, it works through the development of a favorable mental image of the destination. This finding is consistent with consumer decision-making models in tourism, which indicate that content exposure leads to cognitive appraisals that subsequently influence behavioral outcomes. A foundational work by Moutinho (1987), for instance, explored the complex internal and external processes influencing consumer behavior in tourism, including various determinants of behavior and perceived risks, ultimately illustrating tourist behavior modeling. Further supporting this perspective, recent research by Vo, Dang, Tran, and Nguyen (2025) on destination choice intentions in the cinematic era also identified that film-related electronic word-of-mouth (a form of content exposure) influences destination choice intention through the mediating role of destination brand image (a construct closely aligned with perceived destination image), along with destination familiarity and attitude.

Perceived overtourism significantly weakened the relationship between informativeness and perceived destination image (H7: β = −0.473, p = .004). This suggests that when a destination is

perceived as overcrowded or environmentally degraded, even highly informative content may lose its effectiveness or potentially backfire by reinforcing concerns related to overuse rather than enhancing appeal. This finding is consistent with Liu and Zhang's (2025) study on blind box tourism, which demonstrates that positive emotional contexts, such as the excitement and curiosity elicited by elements of surprise, can substantially increase tourists' purchase intentions. Collectively, these studies highlight the critical moderating role of contextual factors in shaping the effectiveness of destination marketing: positive emotional framing can enhance consumer engagement, whereas negative perceptions, such as overtourism, can attenuate or negate the promotional impact. Consequently, the efficacy of tourism marketing efforts hinges not only on the intrinsic quality of content but also on its resonance with tourists' broader sociocultural and environmental perceptions.

Finally, perceived overtourism significantly weakened the relationship between perceived destination image and choice intention (H8: β=−0.590, p=.032). This indicates that even when a destination is viewed positively, concerns about overtourism can reduce the intention to visit. This reflects Gen Z's growing sensitivity to sustainability, environmental impact, and ethical travel. Indeed, Schönherr and Pikkemaat (2024) revealed that Gen Z's environmental attitudes are shaped by social pressure and social media, directly influencing their responsible behavioral intentions, including a focus on climate-friendly travel and broader sustainability considerations within socially and institutionally governed tourism systems, encompassing social outcomes and policy-mediated economic implications in tourism. Crowding, ecological damage, or disruption to local communities can

therefore undermine otherwise favorable impressions, showing that travel decisions are shaped not only by what is desirable, but also by what is responsible.

However, the study revealed that not all hypothesized relationships were supported, particularly concerning the role of FOMO. Specifically, neither the direct effect of FOMO on destination choice intention (H4: $\beta = 0.096$, p = .392) nor its mediating role in the relationship between informativeness and destination choice intention (H6: $\beta = 0.077$, p = .400) was statistically significant. This indicates that while informative social media content effectively elicits FOMO, as confirmed in H2, this emotional response does not directly or indirectly translate into destination choice intention within the current model.

Several factors may explain this divergence. FOMO, though a potent motivational factor, can often lead to an action-intention gap, where the emotional desire to participate does not necessarily overcome practical constraints such as cost, time, or competing priorities—common barriers in complex decision-making contexts like travel. This gap aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which underscores the importance of perceived behavioral control in bridging intentions and actual behavior. Moreover, while FOMO is frequently associated with impulsive actions, it may also stimulate indirect behaviors such as information seeking, saving content for future reference, or sharing with others—responses that reflect deeper consumer engagement rather than immediate booking (Alfina, Hartini, & Mardhiyah, 2023). These findings suggest that the influence of FOMO in high-involvement contexts, such as tourism, may be more nuanced or context-dependent than a direct driver of immediate destination choice. Supporting

this, Wut, Lee, and Wan (2024) found that certain types of FOMO—specifically social FOMO—do not significantly affect travel intentions, underscoring that the mere presence of FOMO may not invariably lead to actionable travel decisions. Overall, these results point to a more complex and indirect understanding of the influence of FOMO on travel behavior among Generation Z consumers.

Theoretical Implications

This study refines the Stimulus Organism Response (S-O-R) model in digital tourism by showing that not all internal responses equally mediate external stimuli and behavior. Unlike prior S-O-R applications assuming parallel pathways from stimulus through affective and cognitive states to response, this study finds selective mediation: only cognitive evaluation, via perceived destination image, consistently mediates content informativeness and destination choice intention. This challenges the uniform organismic influence assumption and calls for nuanced models distinguishing the behavioral effects of affective versus cognitive responses in digital media contexts. The findings deepen understanding of destination image formation within TikTok's short-form, visually immersive environment. Perceived informativeness significantly enhances destination image, highlighting its importance in travel decisions. While prior theories emphasized media richness and message authenticity (Wang & Yan, 2022), this study highlights how platform-specific formats influence cognitive processing among digital natives, suggesting destination image theories must evolve with emerging media.

The study also challenges assumptions about the behavioral immediacy of affective states like FOMO. Although informativeness strongly triggers

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FOMO, this emotional arousal does not lead to destination choice intention. This reveals an action intention gap in high-involvement contexts such as travel, where emotional responses drive interest without directly influencing choice. This finding calls for re-examining how affective constructs like FOMO operate in behavioral models, suggesting their role may be peripheral, indirect, or context dependent. Finally, perceived overtourism emerges as a key moderating variable. It weakens the effects of informativeness on destination image and of destination image on choice intention, embedding sustainability values as critical boundary conditions in digital persuasion. This extends theories by incorporating ethical and environmental concerns, aligning tourism behavior models with Gen Z's growing social responsibility and sustainability focus.

Together, these contributions advance digital tourism theory by emphasizing the complexity of cognitive and affective processes, the role of media format, and the need to integrate sustainability in understanding travel behavior.

Managerial Implications

This study's findings offer important insights for Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), content creators, and social media platforms aiming to effectively engage Generation Z travelers through TikTok while responding to emerging concerns about sustainability and overtourism. While prior research has established the general importance of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) in fostering destination appeal and emotional attachment (e.g., Destination Love), this study refines that understanding by focusing specifically on the younger Generation Z demographic and the short-form platform TikTok. In contrast to studies suggesting that visually appealing or emotionally arousing content is sufficient to stimulate travel desire, the present findings demonstrate that Gen Z travelers place greater weight on content informativeness than on aesthetic or aspirational cues alone. The strong positive effect of content informativeness on perceived destination image underscores the necessity for DMOs to prioritize the development and dissemination of clear, vivid, and authentic travel content that goes beyond superficial portrayals. Consequently, DMOs should strategically allocate resources to co-create such content in partnership with local communities and influencers, fostering authenticity that appeals to Gen Z's preference for genuine and immersive narratives. This approach aligns with emerging consumer expectations and helps to differentiate destinations in a highly saturated digital environment.

Moreover, the mediating role of destination image highlights that marketing efforts must transcend ephemeral emotional triggers such as FOMO, which, while elicited by aspirational TikTok content, does not directly translate into travel intentions. This finding contrasts with influencer marketing narratives that treat FOMO as a primary conversion mechanism. Instead, the results suggest that FOMO functions as a secondary, engagement-oriented response rather than a decisive motivator of travel choice. This understanding suggests that marketers should reconceptualize FOMO from a direct conversion tool into a catalyst for sustained consumer involvement and brand community development, employing diversified calls to action like saving content or exploring sustainable travel practices.

Crucially, perceived overtourism acts as a moderating factor that weakens the influence of both informativeness and destination image on travel

intentions. This result stands in sharp contrast to traditional tourism marketing logic, which assumes that stronger destination images universally enhance travel intention. For Generation Z, even highly attractive destinations lose appeal when they are associated with overcrowding or environmental degradation. Thus, destination attractiveness alone is no longer sufficient; ethical and sustainability considerations actively constrain consumer decision-making. This is important because it suggests that even strong pull factors—such as high-quality natural attractions that typically enhance destination appeal and destination love in other tourism segments—can be undermined by travelers' fear of overcrowding (Nuh, Rizan, & Sadat, 2024). This finding signals a need for DMOs to transparently communicate not only the attractive features of destinations, but also ongoing efforts to mitigate overcrowding and environmental impact. Integrating sustainability messaging into TikTok campaigns, promoting lesser-known attractions, and encouraging off-peak visitation can align marketing with responsible tourism values increasingly held by younger travelers. Such transparency not only builds trust, but may also prevent the backlash associated with overtourism, which can undermine otherwise positive destination perceptions.

Notably, Governments can support responsible tourism by collaborating with Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) to ensure transparent communication in regard to sustainability efforts. They should help to regulate and promote messaging that highlights environmental initiatives, disperses tourist flows by encouraging visits to lesser-known areas, and incentivizes off-peak travel. By setting guidelines and offering support for digital campaigns, especially on platforms like TikTok, governments can help to align tourism promotion

with long-term sustainability goals and the values of younger travelers (Nuh, Rizan, & Sadat, 2024).

Content creators and influencers on TikTok also play a pivotal role by shaping perceptions and must therefore prioritize depth and authenticity over idealized portrayals that risk exacerbating FOMO or overtourism issues. By incorporating educational and responsible storytelling elements, highlighting local conservation initiatives, ethical businesses, and sustainable travel tips, influencers can contribute meaningfully to reshaping destination images in ways that resonate with socially conscious Gen Z users. Additionally, fostering awareness about overtourism and promoting alternative travel options helps to balance destination demand and supports long-term destination viability.

Finally, social media platforms, particularly TikTok, bear a growing responsibility to support informative and sustainable travel content through algorithmic adjustments and feature enhancements. This challenges the conventional view of platforms as neutral intermediaries and positions them instead as active gatekeepers of tourism demand. Platforms might consider developing dedicated spaces for responsible tourism content, providing DMOs and creators with advanced analytics on audience attitudes toward overtourism, and incorporating contextual information overlays to inform users about optimal travel timing and sustainability efforts. By incentivizing creators who consistently produce content aligned with these values, platforms can encourage a more balanced and ethical travel discourse, ultimately benefiting destinations, travelers, and host communities alike.

Moreover, these considerations extend beyond TikTok to other short-form platforms such as Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, which similarly influence destination perceptions and

travel behavior. Comparative analysis of platform-specific features, audience engagement patterns, and algorithmic promotion strategies could provide insights into how different digital ecosystems contribute to sustainable tourism communication.

In sum, this study highlights the dual imperative for the tourism industry: harnessing the persuasive power of TikTok's informative content to shape compelling destination images while concurrently embracing transparent, sustainability-centered marketing strategies that address the concerns of the socially and environmentally conscious Generation Z traveler. Recognition of the comparative strengths and limitations of various short-form platforms is essential in developing cross-platform marketing strategies that consistently promote responsible travel behaviors. Achieving this balance will be critical to fostering responsible travel behaviors and ensuring the longevity of destination appeal in an increasingly digital and ethically aware marketplace.

Limitations and Future Research

The exclusive focus on TikTok as the primary short-form video platform represents a notable limitation of this study. While TikTok's popularity among Generation Z justifies its selection, this focus may overlook variations in user experience, content style, and engagement on platforms like Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, and Snapchat Spotlight. For example, Snapchat's ephemeral nature fosters immediacy while Instagram Reels offers curated, feed-integrated content, both potentially shaping destination image and travel intentions differently. Future research should compare multiple platforms to better understand how diverse media environments influence tourism behavior.

Another limitation is the narrow focus on Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as the sole emotional construct. While relevant, FOMO captures only one aspect of the emotional spectrum. Other factors, such as social comparison, travel anxiety, or emotional contagion, may also influence decision-making but were not addressed. Future studies should expand emotional and motivational variables, possibly distinguishing between types of FOMO.

A further limitation is the use of both English and Chinese versions of the questionnaire to accommodate international participants. Despite careful translation and back-translation procedures, subtle cultural and linguistic differences may have affected how items were interpreted. Additionally, platform-specific behaviors and algorithmic differences across cultural contexts could have influenced responses. Consequently, these factors may limit generalizability to other linguistic or cultural groups.

Some general limitations include a small sample size, which may reduce generalizability; the use of self-reported data, which may introduce bias; and a cross-sectional design, which limits causal inference. Future studies could also improve SEM model fit by incorporating additional constructs, exploring alternative mediation pathways, or using larger and more diverse samples to better capture the complexity of Gen Z travel behavior, including participants' sustainability values and ethical travel behaviors. This would clarify how personal environmental attitudes interact with digital content and influence travel choices, thereby enhancing theoretical models connecting media influence with ethical tourism behavior.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None

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Appendix

Appemdix A: Survey instrument in English

Screening Question

Have you ever seen TikTok videos related to traveling to Thailand?

Yes   No

Which age group do you belong to?

Under 18   18-28

29-37   38 or above

Which country do you currently reside in?

China   South Korea

Japan   United States

Australia   United Kingdom

Germany   Other

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding tourism in/to Thailand. (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

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Informativeness

TikTok travel videos provide valuable information about Thai travel destinations.

TikTok travel videos offer relevant and practical details about visiting places in Thailand.

TikTok travel videos present up-to-date information about Thai attractions and experiences.

Perceived Destination Image

Thai locals are friendly and welcoming toward tourists.

Thailand offers delicious and attractive local food options.

Traveling in Thailand offers good value for the money spent.

Thailand provides a variety of comfortable accommodation options.

Thailand offers a wide range of interesting tourist sites and activities.

Traveling in Thailand provides exciting opportunities for adventure.

Travel Fear of Missing Out

I feel ignored or forgotten by my social groups when I miss travel experiences.

I feel anxious knowing that something exciting might be happening when I miss travel opportunities.

I feel regretful when I miss chances to travel.

Destination Choice Intention

I hope to visit Thailand in the future.

The possibility of me visiting Thailand in the future is high.

If I have the opportunity to travel, I intend to visit Thailand.

Perceived Overtourism

This area is overcrowded with tourists.

I feel that tourism has overwhelmed the local way of life in this area.

I am aware of the overtourism issues in this destination before my visit.

Appendix B: Survey instrument in Chinese
Screening Question

您是否看过与泰国旅游相关的抖音/TikTok 视频？

是　　　　　　　　否

您的年龄属于以下哪个范围？

18岁以下　　　　　18–28

岁　　　　29–37岁　　　　38岁及

以上

您目前居住在哪个国家？

中国　　　　　　韩

国　　　　日本　　　　　美国

澳大利亚　　　英国

德国　　　　其他

请您对以下有关泰国旅游的陈述表示您的同意程度。

(1 = 非常不同意，2 = 不同意，3 = 中立，4 = 同意，5 = 非常同意）

信息价值

TikTok 旅游视频提供了关于泰国旅游目的地的有价值信息。

TikTok 旅游视频提供了关于在泰国旅游的相关且实用的细节。

TikTok 旅游视频呈现了关于泰国景点和旅游体验的最新信息。

感知目的地形象

泰国当地人对游客友好且热情。

泰国提供美味且具有吸引力的本地美食。

在泰国旅行具有良好的性价比。

泰国提供多种舒适的住宿选择。

泰国有丰富多样的有趣景点和活动。

在泰国旅行能提供令人兴奋的探险机会。

旅游错失恐惧感（FOMO)

当我错过旅游经历时，我觉得被社交圈忽视或遗忘
。

当我错过旅游机会时，想到可能会发生令人兴奋的事
情，我感到焦虑。

当我错过旅游的机会时，我感到后悔。

目的地选择意图

我希望未来能够访问泰国。

我未来访问泰国的可能性很高。

如果我有旅行的机会，我打算去泰国。

感知过度旅游

这个地区的游客太多，过于拥挤。

我觉得旅游业已经对该地区的当地生活方式造成了冲
击。

在我访问前，我已经意识到这个目的地存在过度旅游
的问题。

Ariyaporn Sakulsom. Enlightening Tourism. A Pathmaking Journal, Vol 16, No 1 (2026), pp. 13-39

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