The Impact of TikTok on Tourists' Choice of Travel Destinations

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Abstract: *With the rapid development of mobile internet, short-video platforms are playing an increasingly important role in people's lives. As a highly influential short-video application, TikTok, with its rich travel-related content, exerts a significant impact on tourists' travel decisions. This paper aims to explore the mechanisms through which TikTok influences tourists' choice of travel destinations. By analyzing the characteristics of the TikTok platform, the dissemination patterns of travel content, and changes in tourists' behaviors, it reveals TikTok's role in the tourism market. The study shows that through content display, social interaction, and personalized recommendations, TikTok stimulates tourists' interest, alters their information-acquisition methods, and thus affects their decision-making in selecting travel destinations. This research provides new perspectives and strategic references for travel destination marketing and the development of the tourism industry.*

Keywords: TikTok; Travel destination choice; Short videos; Travel decision-making.

1. Introduction

In the era of information explosion, the popularization of the internet and mobile devices has profoundly changed the way people obtain information and make decisions. As an important leisure activity, the tourism industry has also been impacted by the digital wave. The rise of short-video platforms has opened up new channels for the dissemination of travel information and the promotion of travel destinations. As the world's leading short-video social platform, TikTok boasts a huge user base and a rich content ecosystem, with travel-related content occupying a significant position. Travel short videos on TikTok, characterized by their vividness, intuitiveness, and attractiveness, have attracted a large number of users' attention. They not only provide tourists with abundant travel inspiration but also affect their perception and choice of travel destinations to a certain extent.

Statistics show that the playback volume of travel-related topics on TikTok has reached hundreds of billions. With the help of TikTok's communication power, many travel destinations have rapidly increased their popularity and become popular tourist check-in spots (Tuominen, M., & Sippo, A., 2025). For example, Hongya Cave in Chongqing, due to its widespread dissemination on Douyin, has transformed from a relatively niche attraction into a popular travel destination desired by tourists at home and abroad. Its unique night view and Bayu culture have attracted a large number of tourists to visit, driving significant growth in the local tourism economy. This phenomenon has triggered in-depth thinking in academia and the tourism industry about TikTok's role in travel communication: How exactly does TikTok influence tourists' choice of travel destinations? What are its influence mechanisms and underlying logic? This not only relates to how travel destinations can use the TikTok platform for effective marketing but also is of great significance for understanding changes in tourists' behaviors in the digital age.

2. Characteristics of the TikTok Platform and Travel Content Ecosystem

2.1 Technology and User Base of the TikTok Platform

TikTok relies on advanced algorithm recommendation technology, which can accurately analyze users' interest preferences based on their browsing history, likes, comments, and other behavioral data, and push personalized content to users. This personalized recommendation mechanism enables users to quickly access travel content that matches their interests, greatly improving the efficiency and accuracy of information acquisition. As of 2024, TikTok's global monthly active users have exceeded 1 billion, and such a huge user base provides a broad space for the dissemination of travel content (Tuominen, M., & Sippo, A., 2025). Users of different ages, genders, and regions share their travel experiences, insights, and feelings on TikTok, forming a rich and diverse travel content ecosystem. From high-quality travel guide videos carefully produced by professional travel bloggers to casual check-in videos of tourist attractions shot by ordinary users, various types of travel content are widely spread on TikTok, meeting the needs of different users for travel information.

2.2 Diversity and Presentation Forms of Travel Content on TikTok

Travel content on TikTok covers tourist destinations around the world, including popular tourist cities, niche attractions, natural scenery, cultural relics, food experiences, and other aspects. These contents are presented in various forms such as short videos, live broadcasts, and photo albums. Short videos are the main form of travel content on TikTok, usually ranging from 15 seconds to 1 minute. They can focus on displaying the essence of tourist destinations, such as beautiful scenery, unique cultural activities, and tempting food, attracting users' attention with strong visual impact (Liu, C., Jiang, M., & Muhammad, Z. A., 2024). Live broadcasts provide users with real-time and immersive travel experiences. Users can follow the anchor's camera to feel the atmosphere of the tourist destination in real time, interact with the anchor and other viewers, and obtain more authentic and comprehensive travel information. For example, some scenic spots will show their four-season beauty and characteristic activities through TikTok live broadcasts, allowing users to intuitively understand the scenic spots without leaving home and stimulating their travel interest. Photo albums display wonderful moments of tourist destinations in a static way. Users can browse photos of attractions from different angles by sliding the pictures, thus gaining a more detailed understanding of the tourist destinations.

2.3 Dissemination and Interaction Mechanisms of Travel Content on TikTok

TikTok's dissemination mechanism is characterized by rapid fission. Once a high-quality travel short video or live broadcast receives likes, comments, and shares from users, it is likely to spread rapidly on the platform. Users' social networks have become important channels for the dissemination of travel content. An interesting travel content may be widely spread in users' social circles such as Moments and fan groups through sharing, attracting more users' attention and discussion. At the same time, TikTok has rich interactive functions, allowing users to interact with content creators and other users through likes, comments, and reposts. This interaction not only enhances users' sense of participation and identity in travel content but also promotes the dissemination and exchange of travel information. For example, when watching a travel video, users can leave messages in the comment area to ask for more information about the tourist destination, and content creators or other users familiar with the destination will reply in a timely manner, forming a good interactive atmosphere. In addition, TikTok also offers interactive features such as topic challenges and duets, encouraging users to participate in the creation and dissemination of travel content. For example, some travel destinations will launch topic challenges related to local characteristics, attracting users to shoot related videos to participate in the challenges, and further expanding the popularity and influence of the travel destinations through users' spontaneous creation and dissemination.

3. Mechanisms of TikTok's Influence on Tourists' Choice of Travel Destinations

3.1 Stimulating Travel Interest and Desire

The rich and colorful travel content on TikTok showcases the world's beautiful scenery, unique cultures, and interesting travel experiences in a vivid and intuitive way, which can effectively stimulate tourists' interest and desire to travel. Those stunning natural scenery videos, such as the unique peaks and rocks in Zhangjiajie and the colorful lakes in Jiuzhaigou, make users feel as if they are on the scene, full of yearning for these places; cultural display videos full of exotic customs, such as traditional festival celebrations of ethnic minorities in Yunnan and religious cultural activities in Tibet, arouse users' curiosity and desire to explore different cultures; tempting food videos, such as Chengdu's spicy hotpot and Guangzhou's morning tea culture, stimulate users' taste buds, making them eager to go to the local area to taste the food. Through continuous exposure to these travel contents, users' inner desire to travel is gradually ignited, and they begin to actively consider traveling to relevant tourist destinations.

3.2 Changing the Way of Obtaining Travel Information

In the traditional travel decision-making process, tourists mainly obtain travel information through travel agency brochures, travel websites, and recommendations from relatives and friends. However, these information-acquisition methods have problems such as information overload, content homogenization, and lack of real-time performance. The emergence of TikTok has changed this situation and become an important new channel for tourists to obtain travel information. The sources of travel content on TikTok are extensive, including not only information released by professional tourism institutions and bloggers but also more real travel experiences and real-time insights shared by ordinary users. This information is more authentic, vivid, and close to reality, and can provide tourists with more comprehensive and personalized travel references. For example, tourists can learn about the specific location, opening hours, travel strategies of a niche attraction in a tourist destination, and real reviews from other tourists through TikTok, which helps tourists make more accurate travel decisions. In addition, TikTok's search and recommendation functions enable tourists to quickly find travel information they are interested in, greatly improving the efficiency of information acquisition.

3.3 Influencing the Cognition and Image Construction of Travel Destinations

In the process of dissemination, travel content on TikTok will have an important impact on tourists' cognition and image construction of travel destinations. A large number of travel short videos and live broadcasts show the characteristics of tourist destinations from different angles, including natural landscapes, cultural customs, urban styles, and tourism facilities. This information gradually pieces together the image of the tourist destination in the minds of users. For example, through many videos about Xi'an on Douyin, users' cognition of Xi'an is no longer limited to the ancient capital in history textbooks, but a vibrant city with not only historical relics such as ancient city walls and terracotta warriors but also lively Muslim streets and fashionable Datang Never Sleeps City. This image construction will affect tourists' choice of travel destinations, and they are more inclined to choose those tourist destinations with distinct and attractive images on TikTok. Moreover, users' comments and interactions on TikTok will also affect the reputation and image of travel destinations. Positive comments and shares will enhance the attractiveness of travel destinations, while negative comments may reduce users' interest in the destination (González-Rodríguez, M. R., Martínez-Torres, R., & Toral, S., 2016).

3.4 Social Influence and Herd Psychology

As a social platform, TikTok's social attributes have a significant impact on tourists' choice of travel destinations. Travel content posted by travel bloggers, relatives, friends, and users on TikTok often has strong influence. With their professional knowledge and rich travel experience, travel bloggers recommend travel destinations through vivid and interesting video content, and their recommendations can often attract users' attention and imitation. Travel experiences shared by relatives and friends are more likely to resonate and be trusted by users due to their authenticity and intimacy, prompting them to choose the same travel destinations. In addition, the popularity of popular travel topics and check-in spots on TikTok will also trigger users' herd psychology. When a large number of users share content related to a certain travel destination, other users will feel that the destination is popular and worth visiting, thus following the trend to choose to go there. For example, after a well-known internet cafe became popular on TikTok, it attracted many users to check in, and this herd behavior improved the popularity of the travel destination to a certain extent.

4. Changes in Tourists' Travel Destination Choice Behavior Under the Influence of TikTok

4.1 Greater Emphasis on Personalization and Unique Experiences

Under the influence of TikTok, tourists are no longer satisfied with traditional mass tourist destinations and conventional travel routes, but pursue more personalized and unique travel experiences. The rich and diverse travel content on TikTok allows tourists to see various unique travel destinations and ways of playing around the world, stimulating their desire to explore the unknown and pursue individuality. They are more inclined to choose characteristic travel destinations that can meet their specific interests and hobbies, such as niche art villages, characteristic theme homestays, and extreme sports resorts. For example, some tourists who are passionate about photography will go to places with unique natural scenery or cultural landscapes according to the recommendations of photography check-in spots on TikTok to take distinctive photos; tourists who like outdoor sports will pay attention to outdoor adventure videos on TikTok and choose travel destinations suitable for hiking, rock climbing,

diving and other sports.

4.2 Faster Decision-Making and More Flexible Itinerary Planning

The immediacy and convenience of TikTok enable tourists to quickly obtain a large amount of travel information, which to a certain extent accelerates their travel decision-making speed (Li, X., Zeng, B., Zhang, H., Song, Z., Yang, Y., Ma, B., ... & Wang, N., 2024). When users see interesting travel content on TikTok, they may decide to travel to the tourist destination in a short time. Different from the traditional travel decision-making process that requires a lot of time to collect information and compare and analyze, TikTok provides tourists with intuitive and comprehensive travel information, allowing them to make decisions more quickly. At the same time, real-time travel information shared by other tourists on TikTok, such as the number of visitors to the scenic spot, weather conditions, and traffic conditions, also helps tourists flexibly adjust their itineraries during the trip. For example, on the way to a scenic spot, tourists may learn through TikTok that the number of visitors to the scenic spot is too large that day, and may temporarily change their itinerary and choose to visit other relatively less popular but equally interesting nearby attractions.

4.3 Enhanced Socialization Trend of Tourism

The social attribute of TikTok makes tourism no longer just a personal behavior, but has stronger social characteristics. Tourists share their travel experiences, photos, and videos on TikTok, interact with other users, hoping to show their lifestyle and personality through tourism and gain attention and recognition from others. At the same time, they will also refer to travel experiences and suggestions shared by other users on TikTok, closely combining travel decisions with social interaction. During the trip, tourists will also find travel partners through TikTok to share the joy of travel together. For example, some users will post information on TikTok to find travel partners, inviting people with the same travel interests to travel together; at the tourist destination, tourists will also search for local travel experts or other tourists through TikTok and make appointments to play and check in together, increasing the fun and social experience of travel.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Research Conclusions

This study explores the impact of TikTok on tourists' choice of travel destinations. By analyzing the characteristics of the TikTok platform, the travel content ecosystem, and changes in tourists' behaviors, the following conclusions are drawn: With its advanced technology, huge user base, rich and diverse travel content, and strong social interaction functions, TikTok has a profound impact on tourists' choice of travel destinations in many aspects. It stimulates tourists' interest and desire to travel, changes the way they obtain travel information, affects the cognition and image construction of travel destinations in their minds, and promotes their travel decisions through social influence and herd psychology. Under the influence of TikTok, tourists' choice of travel destinations shows the characteristics of paying more attention to personalization and unique experiences, faster decision-making speed and more flexible itinerary planning, and enhanced socialization trend of tourism. Many cases show that TikTok has played an important role in promoting the popularity of tourist destinations and the development of the tourism industry, and has become an important driving force for the dissemination of tourism information and the development of the tourism market (Zheng, S., 2025).

5.2 Implications for the Development of the Tourism Industry

For tourist destinations, they should fully recognize the important value of short-video platforms such as TikTok in tourism marketing and actively use the TikTok platform for tourism promotion. They should carefully plan and produce attractive travel short videos and live broadcast content, highlight the characteristics and advantages of tourist destinations, display unique travel experiences, and attract the attention of more potential tourists. At the same time, they should strengthen interaction with TikTok users, reply to users' comments and questions in a timely manner, actively participate in topic discussions and interactive activities on TikTok, and improve the reputation and influence of tourist destinations on the TikTok platform. In addition, tourist destinations can also carry out precision marketing with the help of the TikTok platform, formulate targeted marketing strategies according to the interest preferences and behavior data of TikTok users, and improve marketing effectiveness.

For tourism enterprises, they should adapt to changes in tourists' behaviors under the influence of TikTok and

innovate tourism products and services. Develop more personalized and characteristic tourism products to meet tourists' demand for unique experiences; provide more flexible travel itinerary arrangements and customized services to adapt to tourists' characteristics of making quick decisions and flexibly adjusting itineraries; strengthen the integration of tourism and socialization, and provide more opportunities and platforms for social interaction for tourists, such as organizing TikTok offline activities with tourism themes and creating tourism products with social functions.

5.3 Research Prospects and Limitations

In the future, with the continuous development of mobile internet technology and the continuous innovation of short-video platforms such as TikTok, their impact on the tourism industry will be more far-reaching. Subsequent research can further focus on new trends and phenomena in the integrated development of TikTok and the tourism industry, such as the application of virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and other technologies in the creation and dissemination of TikTok's travel content, as well as the changes in tourists' travel experience and the marketing methods of tourist destinations brought about by this. At the same time, it can deeply study the differences in travel destination choice behaviors among different types of tourists (such as different ages, genders, and cultural backgrounds) under the influence of TikTok, providing more targeted theoretical support for tourism market segmentation and precision marketing.

This study also has certain limitations. Due to the limitations of research methods and data collection, some aspects of TikTok's influence on tourists' choice of travel destinations may not be analyzed in depth and comprehensively. For example, in the quantitative analysis of the relationship between TikTok content characteristics and tourists' behavior decisions, there may be certain deviations in the integrity and accuracy of the data; the research on the deep psychological mechanism of TikTok's influence on the image construction of tourist destinations is not thorough enough. In future research, more scientific and comprehensive research methods can be adopted, combined with big data analysis, psychological experiments and other means, to further deepen the research in this field and provide more practical research results for the development of the tourism industry.

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