

## **THE ROLE OF TIKTOK CONTENT AUTHENTICITY IN SHAPING MALAYSIAN DOMESTIC TOURISTS' TRAVEL INTENTION**

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### **Article History:**

Received : 27<sup>th</sup> October 2025

Revised : 1<sup>st</sup> November 2025

Published : 18<sup>th</sup> November 2025

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### **To cite this article:**

Siti Mahera, A. A. & Dziela, M. P. (2025). THE ROLE OF TIKTOK CONTENT AUTHENTICITY IN SHAPING MALAYSIAN DOMESTIC TOURISTS' TRAVEL INTENTION. *Journal of Business Innovation*, 10(1), 131-146.

### **ABSTRACT**

*The factors influencing customer loyalty among residents in Denai Alam who had gone with Umrah travel. The rapid rise of TikTok as a leading social media platform has significantly transformed the way travel information is produced and consumed. This study explores the role of TikTok content authenticity in shaping the travel intentions of Malaysian domestic tourists. With the increasing influence of user-generated content, authenticity has emerged as a crucial determinant of trust, engagement, and decision-making in tourism marketing. Drawing upon the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the Source Credibility Model, this research examines how perceived authenticity in TikTok travel videos influences tourists' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control toward travelling within Malaysia. Data were collected from a sample of Malaysian TikTok users who actively engage with travel-related content. The findings reveal that authentic and relatable TikTok content significantly enhances viewer trust and emotional connection, which in turn positively impacts travel intention. The study highlights the importance for tourism marketers and content creators to prioritise authentic storytelling, real experiences, and transparent communication when promoting destinations on social media. Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on digital tourism marketing and offers practical insights for leveraging TikTok as an effective platform for encouraging domestic travel in Malaysia.*

**Keywords:** TikTok, content authenticity, travel intention, domestic tourism, Malaysia, social media marketing

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The rise of short-form video platforms, particularly TikTok, has revolutionised how travel information is produced, discovered, and consumed. Since its global expansion, TikTok has emerged as a powerful tool for influencing consumer perceptions, especially among Generation Z and Millennials who prefer visual, authentic, and relatable content over traditional advertising (Jin & Ryu, 2023; Phua et al., 2022). The increasing consumption of travel-related videos on TikTok has positioned the platform as a significant channel for travel inspiration and destination marketing (Liu et al., 2023).

Authenticity in social media content has become a critical factor in shaping user trust, engagement, and behavioural intention. In the context of tourism, authentic storytelling and user-generated content foster emotional connections and influence decision-making processes (Rejón-Guardia et al., 2023; Sthapit & Jiménez-Barreto, 2022). Tourists today tend to rely on the experiences of real travellers shared through platforms like TikTok, perceiving them as more trustworthy than commercial promotions (Lim et al., 2022). Thus, content authenticity the perception that the creator is genuine, sincere, and credible plays a vital role in driving travel intention.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) provides a useful framework for understanding travel intentions influenced by social media. According to TPB, intention is determined by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Several scholars have extended this theory to the digital context, finding that exposure to authentic social media content significantly influences attitudes and norms toward travel (Han et al., 2021; Hapsari et al., 2023). In parallel, the Source Credibility Model explains how perceived trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness of online content creators affect persuasion and behavioural intention (Ohanian, 1990; Lou & Xie, 2021). When TikTok creators present real experiences without overt commercial bias, audiences are more likely to form positive attitudes toward visiting the featured destinations.

Recent studies highlight the strong relationship between perceived authenticity in social media content and consumer behaviour in tourism. For example, Chen et al. (2022) found that authentic influencer content enhances emotional attachment to destinations, while Li and Yu (2023) reported that perceived realism in travel videos on TikTok increases viewers' likelihood of visiting domestic destinations. Similarly, Rahman and Aziz (2022) confirmed that authenticity mediates the link between influencer credibility and travel intention among Malaysian youth.

Malaysia presents a particularly relevant context for this study. As the tourism industry recovers from post-pandemic challenges, domestic travel campaigns have gained momentum, with TikTok being actively used by Tourism Malaysia and regional destination marketers to engage local travellers (Tourism Malaysia, 2023). Moreover, Malaysians are among the most active TikTok users in Southeast Asia, and the platform has become a crucial digital space for shaping travel-related opinions and intentions (Statista, 2024). However, despite its growing influence, limited research has examined how TikTok content authenticity specifically affects Malaysian domestic tourists' travel intentions.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the role of TikTok content authenticity in shaping the travel intentions of Malaysian domestic tourists. It seeks to (1) identify the extent to which TikTok users perceive travel-related content as authentic; (2) examine how authenticity influences attitudes, trust, and travel intention; and (3) provide practical insights for tourism marketers in leveraging authentic content to strengthen domestic tourism engagement. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on digital tourism marketing by integrating the concepts of authenticity, source credibility, and behavioural intention within the Malaysian context.

## **2.0 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The increasing dominance of TikTok as a short-form video platform has transformed how people discover and evaluate travel destinations. Unlike traditional media, TikTok relies heavily on user-generated content (UGC), where authenticity and relatability often drive engagement more effectively than professional advertisements (Jin & Ryu, 2023). However, while TikTok's influence on consumer behaviour is widely recognised, the relationship between content authenticity and travel intention particularly within the context of Malaysian domestic tourism remains underexplored.

In recent years, Tourism Malaysia and other destination marketing organisations have turned to TikTok to revitalise domestic tourism following the COVID-19 pandemic (Tourism Malaysia, 2023). Despite these efforts, questions persist regarding how audiences perceive the authenticity of such content and whether this perception genuinely motivates travel decisions. Previous studies have found that authenticity significantly enhances trust and emotional engagement (Rejón-Guardia et al., 2023; Sthapit & Jiménez-Barreto, 2022), but most of this research focuses on Western markets or international tourism contexts. Hence, there is a geographical and cultural gap in understanding how authenticity operates in Malaysia, a market characterised by diverse cultures, digital-savvy youth, and high reliance on peer recommendations (Rahman & Aziz, 2022).

Furthermore, while models such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Source Credibility Model have been applied to explain travel intentions (Han et al., 2021; Lou & Xie, 2021), few studies integrate these frameworks to assess how perceived authenticity shapes attitudes, trust, and intention within social media environments like TikTok. The lack of empirical evidence on these interactions limits the ability of tourism marketers to design effective, trustworthy, and locally resonant digital strategies.

Therefore, the problem addressed in this study is the limited understanding of how TikTok content authenticity influences Malaysian domestic tourists' travel intentions. Specifically, there is a need to identify (1) how authenticity is perceived in TikTok travel videos, (2) how such perceptions affect users' attitudes and trust toward destinations, and (3) how these psychological responses translate into actual travel intentions. Addressing this gap is crucial for optimising digital tourism marketing strategies and ensuring that TikTok is used not only as an entertainment platform but also as a credible channel for stimulating domestic tourism in Malaysia.

### 3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, short-form video platforms particularly TikTok have emerged as significant drivers in tourism marketing and traveller decision making. TikTok's algorithmically curated, highly visual and engaging content invites viewers into quick, immersive experiences of destinations, often prompting spontaneous interest and travel intention. For domestic tourists in Malaysia, a market that continues to grow in the postCOVID era, understanding how TikTok content influences travel intention is especially important. Central to this inquiry is the concept of *authenticity* of content: the extent to which users perceive the videos as genuine, unfiltered and trustworthy representations of the destination.

This literature review examines the key constructs of three content authenticity, creator/source credibility, content attributes of short-form videos, and internal psychological reactions (such as flow, emotional involvement, trust). It then sets out the theoretical bases (Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR), Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) / Information Adoption Model (IAM)), reviews empirical findings, and identifies gaps relevant to Malaysian domestic tourists' perceptions of TikTok travel content authenticity, its influence on their attitudes, and the subsequent intention to visit destinations promoted through the platform.

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the relevant literature by critically examining existing studies related to the research topic. The review draws upon prior scholarly works to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem and to establish the theoretical foundation of the study. This examination is essential in highlighting the key insights, perspectives, and conceptual developments that inform and support the present research.

#### 3.1 Theory

For this conceptual study, the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model provides the most relevant and comprehensive theoretical foundation to explain how TikTok content authenticity influences Malaysian domestic tourists' travel intentions. Originating from environmental psychology, the SOR model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) posits that external environmental stimuli (S) trigger internal psychological and emotional states within individuals (O), which subsequently lead to behavioural responses (R). In the context of digital tourism marketing, this framework effectively captures how exposure to online media content shapes users' perceptions, emotions, and behavioural outcomes. Recent studies have successfully applied the SOR model to examine tourists' reactions to short-form video platforms such as TikTok, highlighting its ability to integrate multimedia stimuli with psychological mediators and behavioural intentions (Liu et al., 2024; Qiu et al., 2023).

Within this research, the stimuli (S) represent the external factors presented through TikTok travel content, specifically the creator or source credibility and the content attributes of short form videos. Creator credibility includes the perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and sincerity of TikTok content creators, all of which can enhance the believability and perceived authenticity of their posts. Content attributes refer to

characteristics such as entertainment value, informativeness, interactivity, and aesthetic quality features that make TikTok videos engaging and persuasive (Liu et al., 2024). These stimuli serve as critical cues that capture viewer attention and trigger further psychological processing.

The organism (O) component reflects the internal psychological reactions evoked by the stimuli. In this study, these reactions encompass viewers' perceived content authenticity, emotional engagement, and trust toward the destination or content creator. When tourists perceive TikTok content as genuine, unscripted, and personally relatable, they are more likely to experience positive emotions such as inspiration and excitement, which can strengthen their trust in both the message and the portrayed destination (Dong, 2023; Tham, 2024). These affective and cognitive reactions act as mediators that connect the external stimuli with the eventual behavioural outcomes.

Finally, the response (R) in this model represents the behavioural intention to travel to the featured destination. In this context, travel intention refers to the likelihood or willingness of Malaysian domestic tourists to visit the destination showcased in the TikTok videos. When positive internal states such as authenticity perception, trust, and emotional engagement are stimulated by credible creators and engaging content, viewers are more likely to develop favourable attitudes and intentions to visit the destination (Zhou, 2023).

The SOR model is particularly suitable for this study because it provides a holistic and flexible structure that accommodates multiple psychological processes between exposure to media stimuli and behavioural response. Unlike other theories such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) or the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which focus more narrowly on cognitive evaluation and persuasion routes, SOR integrates both emotional and cognitive pathways in explaining consumer behaviour (Liu et al., 2024). This is especially important for TikTok, where short form videos are highly sensory, affective, and immersive in nature. Moreover, the model aligns well with the experiential characteristics of social media use, where exposure to authentic, visually engaging, and interactive content often elicits spontaneous emotional responses that can translate into concrete behavioural intentions.

### **3.1 Significance of creator/source credibility in in shaping Malaysian domestic tourists' travel intention**

Creator or source credibility is a central construct in persuasion and media effects research and is highly relevant when examining how TikTok travel content influences Malaysian domestic tourists' travel intentions. Rooted in classic persuasion research, the concept was formalised by Hovland and Weiss (1951), who demonstrated that the credibility of a message source (i.e., perceived trustworthiness and expertise) strongly affects persuasive outcomes independent of message content. Source credibility theory thus provides a foundational rationale for expecting that TikTok creators who are seen as credible will exert greater influence on viewers' beliefs, attitudes, and intentions (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Contemporary interpretations extend the construct to include dimensions such as attractiveness/likability, similarity/identification, and perceived

authenticity or sincerity; all attributes that can be critical in the influencer context (Dominic et al., 2021; Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024).

Empirical evidence from tourism and influencer marketing research supports the importance of creator credibility for travel related outcomes. Studies across different cultural contexts have shown that creators' expertise, trustworthiness and perceived similarity positively influence destination image, perceived usefulness of the content, and ultimately travel intention (Charkhkard, 2024; Bulumulla, Epa, & Gamage, 2023). In the short form video domain, recent work applying SOR and source credibility perspectives finds that creator credibility enhances flow, trust and engagement, which mediate effects on behavioural intentions. For instance, Liu et al. (2024) report that TikTok content attributes and source cues increase flow experience and subsequent behavioural intent among younger cohorts, while Serrano-Malebrán et al. (2025) show that travel influencers on TikTok function as persuasive agent partly through credibility and argument quality when users treat platform posts as search engine like information sources. Collectively, these findings suggest that credible TikTok creators not only lend believability to content but also facilitate cognitive and affective responses (telepresence, emotional arousal, trust) that are precursors to intention.

Regional and platform-specific studies further underline the relevance of credibility in the Malaysian/domestic context. Research focused on Instagram influencers and domestic travel in Malaysia found that influencer source credibility (operationalised via attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise) is positively related to domestic travel intention, indicating that Malaysian audiences respond to credibility cues in familiar ways (Asyraff, 2025). Case analyses of TikTok marketing for Malaysian destinations (e.g., Penang) likewise highlight that local creators perceived as authentic and knowledgeable tend to generate more persuasive and actionable interest among domestic viewers (Tham, 2024). These contextual findings imply that creator credibility may operate similarly on TikTok for Malaysian domestic tourists, but with cultural nuances (e.g., collectivist tendencies, preference for local language/content) that merit empirical testing.

Operationalisation of creator/source credibility in tourism and influencer studies commonly follows multi-dimensional scales adapted from source credibility and influencer credibility literature. Typical dimensions include: (1) Trustworthiness (honesty, reliability), (2) Expertise/Knowledge (domain knowledge, experience), (3) Attractiveness/Likeability (appeal and presentation), and (4) Similarity/Identification (degree to which viewers perceive themselves as similar to the creator). Several recent empirical studies also measure perceived authenticity or sincerity as a facet or correlate of credibility in influencer contexts (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024; Charkhkard, 2024). Measurement typically uses multi-item Likert scales (3–7 items per dimension) validated via confirmatory factor analysis in SEM frameworks.

Despite substantive evidence linking creator credibility to travel outcomes, important gaps remain. First, much of the research combines credibility with other constructs (e.g., authenticity, entertainment) without clearly isolating the unique causal role of credibility cues in short-form video formats. Second, TikTok's distinctive features ; ultra-brief clips,

rapid feed consumption, algorithmic recommendation and native editing styles; may alter how credibility cues are signalled and perceived (e.g., micro-behaviours such as POV framing, on-screen captions, and real-time interaction). Third, few studies have experimentally manipulated creator credibility within TikTok-style stimuli to test causal pathways (credibility → organism mediators such as trust/flow → travel intention), and even fewer focus on Malaysian domestic tourists. Finally, disclosure practices (sponsored content labelling) and platform literacy may moderate credibility effects; as sponsorship disclosure increases, perceived trustworthiness can decrease unless creators maintain strong authenticity signals (recent trend analyses; Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024). For your study, creator/source credibility should therefore be treated as a key stimulus variable in the SOR framework: it is expected to have both direct effects on travel intention and indirect effects through organism variables such as perceived authenticity, trust, and flow.

### **3.2 Significance of content attributes of short form videos in shaping Malaysian domestic tourists' travel intention**

Content attributes of short form videos such as entertainment value, informativeness, interactivity, personalization (POV/first person framing), visual style, and perceived production authenticity play a central role in how viewers perceive and react to travel content on platforms like TikTok. In the SOR framing adopted for this study, these attributes function as stimulus cues that capture attention and trigger internal psychological states (organism) such as flow, emotional involvement, perceived usefulness, and perceived authenticity, which then influence response outcomes like travel intention (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Liu et al., 2024).

Entertainment is one of the most consistently reported content attributes driving engagement with short form videos. Entertaining videos (humour, surprise, novel editing) increase attention, positive affect, and sharing behaviours; these affective responses are important antecedents to favourable attitudes toward the featured destinations and thereby increase travel intention (Liu et al., 2024). Entertainment can also serve as a peripheral cue in persuasion (ELM), producing immediate but sometimes less durable intentions unless supported by substantive information. In contrast, informativeness practical details about cost, transport, opening hours, local tips facilitates central route processing and raises perceived usefulness of the content, which is strongly associated with intention formation in tourism contexts (Liu et al., 2024; Qiu et al., 2023). Short-form travel videos that combine entertaining form with useful content are therefore particularly persuasive because they satisfy both affective and cognitive needs of potential travellers.

Interactivity (e.g., comment threads, Q&A features, duets, real-time replies) amplifies engagement by creating social proof and immediate social cues (likes, comments, shares) that influence subjective norms and perceived popularity of the destination. Interactivity increases social presence and can strengthen trust and perceived destination attractiveness, particularly for domestic travellers who rely on peer evaluations and community endorsements (Zheng, Khatibi, & Tham, 2025). Personalization or POV/first person formats (creator speaking in first person, showing personal routines) tends to increase identification and parasocial intimacy; viewers often infer higher existential authenticity from personalized narratives, which in turn boosts emotional involvement

and behavioural intention (Tham, 2024; Zhou, 2023).

Visual style and production signals also matter, but their effects are nuanced. While polished, cinematic videos may enhance perceived professionalism and credibility, they may paradoxically reduce perceptions of authenticity if viewers interpret the content as staged or sponsored. Conversely, “raw” or lo-fi aesthetics (handheld shots, ambient sound, uncut reactions) often cue genuineness and lived experience important signals for destination authenticity and trust (Dong, 2023). This interaction between production value and perceived authenticity suggests a trade off: high production can raise aesthetic appreciation and source credibility, whereas lower production can raise perceived realism and existential authenticity. Empirical studies indicate both routes can lead to intention, but via different organism mediators professional production via credibility and informativeness; raw production via authenticity and emotional involvement (Liu et al., 2024; Dong, 2023).

Short form video attributes are also closely tied to flow and telepresence the sense of “being there” that video can create. Flow mediates the relationship between content attributes and behavioural intention in TikTok studies: highly engaging, immersive videos prompt focused attention and time-distortion, increasing intention to experience the place personally (Liu et al., 2024). In the Malaysian domestic context, where travellers often rely on peer suggestions and visual cues for short-break planning, flow induced by concise, vivid TikTok videos can be a powerful motivator for immediate booking or planning.

Measurement of content attributes typically adapts validated scales from online advertising and short video research. Example dimensions and sample items (5 point Likert) include: Entertainment (“The video was entertaining”), Informativeness (“The video provided useful travel information”), Interactivity (“I could easily interact or ask questions about the destination”), Personalization/POV (“The video felt personal and relatable”), and Perceived Production Authenticity (“The video appeared genuine and not overly staged”) (Liu et al., 2024; Qiu et al., 2023). Confirmatory factor analysis is recommended to ensure discriminant validity among closely related attributes.

Despite the growing evidence, gaps remain. First, most empirical work has been conducted in China or multi-country samples; research focused on Malaysian domestic tourists is limited, and cultural factors (language, collectivist norms, local travel infrastructures) may moderate how attributes translate into intention (Tham, 2024). Second, few studies experimentally manipulate individual attributes (e.g., same video edited into high- vs low-informativeness, or polished vs raw production) to establish causal pathways through mediators such as perceived authenticity and flow. Third, the interplay between content attributes and sponsor disclosure is under examined disclosure may attenuate or reframe authenticity cues depending on how creators maintain transparency and value (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024).



### 3.3 Significance of internal psychological reactions in shaping Malaysian domestic tourists' travel intention

Internal psychological reactions such as emotional arousal, perceived enjoyment, inspiration, and trust serve as mediating mechanisms between exposure to TikTok content and the intention to travel. Within the SOR paradigm, these internal states represent the “Organism” component, reflecting how individuals cognitively and emotionally process media stimuli before forming behavioral intentions (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Emotional engagement with travel content often triggers a desire to experience the showcased destination firsthand (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017).

Emotions play a central role in social media based persuasion. According to Lim and Phua (2020), emotionally charged travel videos elicit higher engagement and memory retention, which positively influence travel decisions. Similarly, Guo et al. (2021) found that enjoyment derived from viewing short form travel videos enhances tourists' inspiration and willingness to visit destinations. In the context of TikTok, interactive elements such as likes, comments, and duets create a sense of social presence and belonging, further strengthening psychological connection and perceived authenticity.

For Malaysian domestic tourists, internal psychological reactions such as nostalgia, excitement, and perceived self congruence strongly influence their travel intentions (Ahmad & Harun, 2023). For instance, videos highlighting local traditions or hidden rural attractions evoke cultural pride and curiosity, prompting tourists to explore domestic destinations. Thus, psychological responses serve as a bridge linking the external stimuli (credible creators and engaging content) to the behavioral response (travel intention). This suggests that internal psychological reactions not only mediate but also amplify the impact of TikTok content authenticity on travel behavior.

### 3.4 Conceptual Research Framework

Building upon the theoretical foundations of the Source Credibility Model, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, this study proposes that several characteristics of TikTok travel content significantly shape Malaysian domestic tourists' travel intentions. First, creator or source credibility referring to the perceived trustworthiness, expertise, and authenticity of the content creator is expected to enhance message acceptance and influence viewers' travel-related decision-making. Hence, **H<sub>1</sub>: Creator/source credibility positively influences Malaysian domestic tourists' travel intention.** Second, the attributes of short-form videos, including visual appeal, narrative clarity, and relevance, act as persuasive content cues that strengthen viewer engagement and evaluation of the promoted destination. Accordingly, **H<sub>2</sub>: Content attributes of short-form videos positively influence Malaysian domestic tourists' travel intention.** Third, internal psychological reactions such as trust, emotional involvement, and flow experience represent key affective and cognitive responses that arise while engaging with TikTok travel content. Consistent with SOR and TPB, these internal states are posited to directly shape behavioural intentions. Therefore, **H<sub>3</sub>: Internal psychological reactions positively influence Malaysian domestic tourists' travel intention.** Together, these hypotheses establish the conceptual framework as illustrated in Figure 3.5.1 guiding the present study.

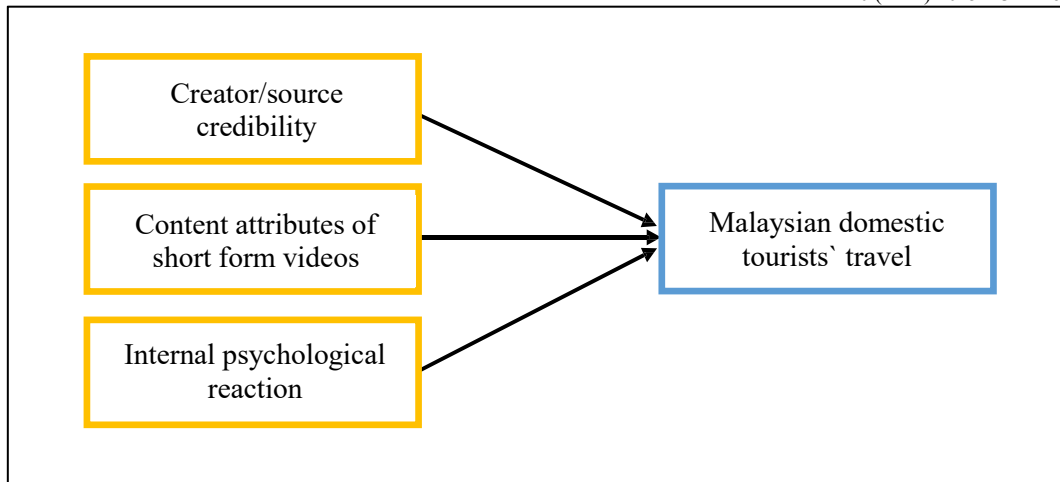


Figure 3.5.1 Conceptual Research Framework

## 4.0 METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Methods for collecting literature

Since this study is conceptual in nature, the primary data source consists of secondary information drawn from existing academic literature. The goal is to systematically review and synthesize previous findings related to TikTok content authenticity, source credibility, short-form video marketing, psychological reactions, and travel intention. Following Snyder (2019), a conceptual study requires a structured, transparent, and replicable literature review process to ensure scholarly rigor.

The process began with identifying and retrieving relevant peer reviewed studies from major academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Emerald Insight, Taylor & Francis Online, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. Search strings and keywords included combinations such as: TikTok” OR “short form video” OR “social media influencer” OR “content authenticity” OR “creator credibility” OR “user generated content” OR “travel intention” OR “domestic tourism” OR “Malaysia.”

Articles published between 2019 and 2024 were prioritized to ensure the review reflects recent developments in digital tourism and social media marketing. However, seminal works on foundational theories such as the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model, Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), and Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) were also included to provide theoretical depth. This systematic approach ensures that the conceptual framework is evidence-based, theoretically grounded, and aligned with contemporary research trends, providing a strong basis for future empirical validation.

### 4.2 Data collections for Future Research

Although the current study is conceptual, it lays a foundation for future empirical research designed to validate the proposed relationships among variables. Future studies can adopt a quantitative research design, complemented by qualitative insights, to test the conceptual framework empirically.

The target population would consist of Malaysian domestic tourists who actively use TikTok as a source of travel inspiration or decision making. Data could be collected through an online questionnaire survey, distributed via social media, travel-related forums, and university networks. The purposive sampling technique would be appropriate to identify TikTok users aged between 18 and 45 years, as this group represents the most active demographic on the platform (Statista, 2024).

Measurement scales for each construct could be adapted from validated prior studies:

- Creator/Source Credibility: Adapted from Ohanian (1990) and Ki et al. (2020), focusing on perceived trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness.
- Content Attributes of Short-Form Videos: Based on Li and Xue (2022), Xu et al. (2021), and Yang and Wang (2023), incorporating dimensions such as vividness, informativeness, and entertainment value.
- Internal Psychological Reactions: Drawn from Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) SOR model, capturing emotional arousal, enjoyment, and inspiration.
- Travel Intention: Derived from Kim and Fesenmaier (2017) and Phua et al. (2020), reflecting willingness and likelihood to visit a promoted destination.

Data collected in future research could be analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine causal relationships and test the overall goodness of fit of the conceptual model. Additionally, qualitative methods such as focus group discussions or content analysis of TikTok videos could be conducted to explore the nuances of authenticity perception and emotional engagement among Malaysian tourists.

Through this approach, the conceptual relationships proposed in this paper can be empirically tested and refined, contributing valuable theoretical and practical insights to the domains of digital tourism marketing, consumer psychology, and social media communication.

## **5.0 FINDINGS FROM LITERATURE**

The review of previous studies shows that TikTok has become a powerful platform influencing tourists' travel intentions, especially among Malaysian domestic travelers. Research highlights that the authenticity of TikTok content, the credibility of the creator, and the quality of short-form video attributes play an important role in shaping how viewers think, feel, and decide about travel.

Studies agree that authentic and genuine TikTok content helps audiences build trust and emotional connections with both the creator and the destination (Mariani et al., 2022; Li & Xue, 2022). When the videos show real experiences rather than commercial promotions, viewers are more likely to find them believable and relatable, which increases their interest in visiting the places featured.

The credibility of the creator also has a strong influence on audience behavior. When influencers are seen as trustworthy, knowledgeable, and sincere, their travel recommendations are more convincing (Ki et al., 2020; Phua et al., 2020). Malaysian tourists tend to respond better to local creators who share their personal travel stories and

authentic experiences (Ahmad & Harun, 2023). This sense of trust often leads to stronger engagement and a greater intention to travel.

In addition, short form videos on TikTok are designed to attract attention quickly through visual appeal, music, storytelling, and creativity. These elements make it easy for viewers to imagine themselves in the destination, creating a positive emotional connection (Guo et al., 2021; Yang & Wang, 2023). However, overly edited or exaggerated content can reduce authenticity and make viewers doubt the message.

The literature also shows that TikTok content can trigger emotional and psychological reactions such as excitement, curiosity, and inspiration. These emotions act as a bridge between exposure to content and the decision to travel, aligning with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) theory (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). When viewers feel inspired or emotionally moved by a TikTok video, they are more likely to plan or consider traveling to that destination (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017).

Overall, the findings suggest that TikTok content authenticity, creator credibility, and appealing video features encourage emotional engagement, which in turn influences travel intention. However, research focusing on Malaysian domestic tourists remains limited. Future studies should explore how these factors work together in the Malaysian cultural and tourism context to strengthen the understanding of digital travel behavior.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This conceptual paper explored how TikTok content authenticity, creator/source credibility, and content attributes of short-form videos influence Malaysian domestic tourists' travel intention, with internal psychological reactions serving as a mediating factor. Grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, the study proposed that TikTok content acts as a *stimulus* that triggers emotional and cognitive *responses* within viewers, which then lead to *behavioral intentions* such as traveling to featured destinations.

The review of previous studies confirms that authenticity is a key factor driving audience trust and emotional connection in social media tourism marketing. TikTok, as a short form video platform, allows creators to present destinations in a more spontaneous, personal, and relatable way. When viewers perceive the content and creator as authentic and credible, their engagement levels increase, leading to stronger travel intentions. Additionally, appealing video features such as music, storytelling, and visual aesthetics enhance emotional involvement and make the content more persuasive.

However, the literature also highlights a significant research gap in the Malaysian context. While many studies have examined the role of influencer credibility and video engagement globally, limited research focuses on how local culture, identity, and tourism preferences interact with TikTok content. Malaysia's diverse cultural background offers a unique setting for exploring how authenticity and emotional responses vary among domestic tourists.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing understanding of digital content authenticity and psychological engagement in tourism. It extends the application of the SOR model to the short-form video environment, emphasizing how emotional reactions mediate the link between media stimuli and travel behavior. Practically, it offers insights for tourism marketers, content creators, and destination management organizations (DMOs) to craft more authentic, emotionally engaging, and culturally relevant TikTok campaigns. Based on the conclusions drawn from this research, the following recommendations are proposed :

i. *Empirical Validation*

Future research should conduct quantitative studies to test the conceptual framework empirically. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) could be used to measure the strength of relationships among content authenticity, source credibility, emotional responses, and travel intention.

ii. *Qualitative Exploration*

To gain deeper insights, qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups can explore how Malaysian tourists interpret authenticity and credibility in TikTok content. This can uncover cultural and emotional nuances behind their perceptions.

iii. *Cross Platform Comparison*

Future studies could compare the influence of TikTok with other platforms like Instagram Reels or YouTube Shorts to understand how different video formats and community interactions shape travel decision making.

iv. *Incorporating Cultural and Demographic Factors*

Researchers should examine how age, ethnicity, and regional identity influence tourists' emotional responses to TikTok content, given Malaysia's multicultural population.

v. *Managerial and Marketing Implications*

Tourism agencies and influencers should collaborate to produce authentic and ethical content that reflects real experiences. Training local creators to highlight lesser-known destinations through honest storytelling may boost domestic tourism and destination loyalty.

In summary, this conceptual paper emphasizes that TikTok's growing popularity presents both opportunities and challenges for Malaysian tourism. Authentic and credible content has the potential to create emotional resonance, inspire exploration, and strengthen domestic travel behavior. By integrating the SOR theoretical perspective with current digital trends, the study provides a meaningful framework for understanding how psychological engagement transforms social media exposure into realworld travel intention. Future empirical research will be essential to validate and expand this framework, ensuring that Malaysia's tourism sector continues to thrive in the age of digital

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