

SHORT-VIDEO PERSUASION OF OLDER TOURISTS: AN INTEGRATED SOURCE CREDIBILITY-UTAUT MODEL

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Abstract. This study investigates how short-video content influences older tourists' engagement with short-video platforms for travel-related information and decision-making. Drawing on the Unified Theory of Technology Acceptance and Use (UTAUT) and Source Credibility Theory, the research develops an integrated model to explain how technology-related perceptions and credibility cues jointly shape behavioral intention and actual usage in algorithmic-recommendation environments. Using survey data from older Chinese users of Douyin, structural equation modeling was employed to test the proposed relationships. The findings indicate that performance expectancy and source attractiveness are the strongest predictors of behavioral intention, highlighting older users' pragmatic orientation and reliance on visually salient cues in short-video contexts. Social influence remains significant but comparatively weaker, suggesting that algorithmic recommendation mechanisms may partially substitute traditional interpersonal influence. The study is limited by its cross-sectional design and single-platform focus, which may constrain the generalizability of the results. Nevertheless, it offers important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it extends tourism communication research by integrating technology acceptance and credibility perspectives within short-video platforms. Practically, the results suggest that platforms should optimize interface clarity, while content creators should enhance visual credibility cues to reduce cognitive burden and uncertainty for older tourists.

Keywords: *older tourists, Douyin (TikTok), short-video platform, source credibility*

Introduction

China is undergoing two profound and simultaneous transformations: rapid digitalization and accelerated population aging (Zhang et al., 2025). According to the China Internet Network Information Center, China had over one billion short-video users by 2024, making short-video platforms a dominant form of online engagement (Fan et al., 2026). At the same time, data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China show that individuals aged 60 and above account for more than one-fifth of the total population, signaling the arrival of a deeply aging society. These structural shifts are reshaping consumption patterns, including tourism decision-making. Short-video platforms, particularly Douyin, have become influential channels through which destinations, travel products, and experiential narratives are disseminated (Yin et al., 2024; Du et al., 2022). For older adults, who increasingly access digital media through smartphones, short videos offer vivid, intuitive, and socially embedded travel cues that may reduce information barriers and enhance confidence in travel planning (Hargittai et al., 2019). However, despite the growing economic importance of the "silver tourism"

market, systematic research on how and why short-video cues persuade older tourists remains limited.

This gap is especially salient in the Chinese context. Much of the existing literature on older adults' digital behavior and tourism engagement has been conducted in Western societies, where technological infrastructure, intergenerational dynamics, and media ecosystems differ substantially from those in China. Moreover, prior studies often treat older adults as technologically passive or resistant users, emphasizing digital divide issues rather than active adoption motivations. In China, however, older users are increasingly integrated into platformized digital life through algorithmic recommendations, social sharing functions, and influencer-driven content ecosystems. The persuasive power of short-video cues, such as creator expertise, trustworthiness, visual vividness, and peer endorsement, may operate differently among older tourists who balance risk aversion with a growing desire for leisure consumption and social participation. Thus, a context-sensitive theoretical explanation is urgently needed. Existing research offers partial insights but remains theoretically fragmented. On the one hand, Source Credibility Theory highlights how perceived expertise and trustworthiness of information sources shape persuasion outcomes. This perspective is particularly relevant in short-video environments, where content creators, travel bloggers, and peer users serve as quasi-opinion leaders. On the other hand, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) explains technology adoption through performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions. While UTAUT has been widely applied to examine older adults' technology use, it primarily focuses on functional evaluations of technology rather than the persuasive qualities of content embedded within platforms. Conversely, studies grounded in source credibility often overlook the technological affordances and adoption mechanisms that condition message reception (Chen et al., 2024). As a result, prior research tends to analyze either media credibility or technology acceptance in isolation, leaving unclear how credibility perceptions and technology-use beliefs interact in shaping behavioral intentions, particularly in short-video tourism contexts.

Furthermore, the short-video environment introduces distinctive persuasive dynamics. Algorithmic curation, immersive audiovisual storytelling, and interactive features (e.g., comments, likes, and reposts) blur the boundaries between interpersonal and mass communication. For older tourists, who may rely more heavily on heuristic cues under conditions of information overload, source credibility signals embedded in short videos could significantly influence perceived usefulness and ease of use, thereby affecting travel intention. Yet empirical research rarely integrates persuasion theory with technology adoption frameworks to examine these joint mechanisms. The absence of such integration limits our understanding of how digital media environments transform tourism decision-making among aging populations. To address these gaps, this study develops an integrated Source Credibility–UTAUT model to examine why short-video cues persuade older tourists in China's Douyin context. By conceptualizing perceived source credibility as an antecedent that shapes core UTAUT constructs, the study explores how credibility evaluations interact with performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions to influence behavioral intention and tourism-related actions. This integrative approach advances theory in three ways. First, it extends UTAUT by embedding persuasive communication variables into its structure, thereby moving beyond a purely utilitarian view of technology adoption. Second, it refines Source Credibility Theory within algorithm-driven short-video

platforms, demonstrating how credibility perceptions operate under conditions of mediated interactivity and digital immersion. Third, it contributes to tourism and aging research by providing an empirically grounded, China-specific explanation of older adults' digital engagement, challenging deficit-oriented assumptions about elderly users.

Literature review

TikTok travel video

Short-video platforms have fundamentally reshaped tourism communication by transforming destination marketing from professionally produced promotional materials to user-generated, algorithmically curated audiovisual storytelling (Polat et al., 2023). As the international version of TikTok and its Chinese counterpart Douyin have grown rapidly, travel-related content has become one of the most popular categories, encompassing destination showcases, itinerary vlogs, food exploration, cultural experiences, and real-time travel tips. Unlike traditional online travel reviews or static images, TikTok travel videos combine short-form video, background music, subtitles, filters, and interactive features (e.g., likes, comments, shares), creating immersive and emotionally engaging experiences (Du et al., 2022). The algorithm-driven recommendation system further differentiates TikTok travel videos from earlier social media formats (Lee and Mai, 2025). Personalized feeds expose users to tailored travel content based on prior viewing behavior, thereby increasing exposure frequency and perceived relevance. This technological affordance intensifies the persuasive power of travel cues by repeatedly reinforcing specific destinations, attractions, or lifestyles (Zhou and Liu, 2026). In addition, content creators—ranging from professional influencers to ordinary users, act as visible and personalized sources of information, often presenting themselves as authentic narrators rather than commercial advertisers. Such hybridity blurs the boundary between interpersonal word-of-mouth and mass media communication. Existing research suggests that TikTok travel videos influence cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of tourist decision-making (Sallaku et al., 2025). Visually rich narratives enhance destination image formation; music and editing styles evoke emotional resonance; and embedded purchase links shorten the path from inspiration to transaction. However, much of the literature focuses on general user populations or young consumers, given the platform's perceived youth orientation. Comparatively less attention has been paid to how older adults interpret and respond to these multimodal travel cues, especially within China's rapidly aging digital environment.

The impact of TikTok travel video on older tourists

Older tourists represent an increasingly important segment in global and Chinese tourism markets due to higher discretionary time and growing consumption capacity (Wang et al., 2025). As digital literacy among seniors improves, short-video platforms have become accessible channels for travel information acquisition and leisure entertainment. On Douyin, older users not only passively consume content but also actively engage by liking, commenting, and sharing travel experiences within their social networks (Liu et al., 2024). From a psychological perspective, short-video travel content may exert distinctive influences on older adults (Du et al., 2022). First, audiovisual presentation reduces cognitive load compared with text-heavy online reviews, which may facilitate comprehension among users who prefer intuitive

information processing. Second, repeated algorithmic exposure may enhance familiarity and reduce perceived risk associated with unfamiliar destinations. Third, the presence of relatable content creators, particularly middle-aged or senior influencers, can increase perceived similarity and trustworthiness, strengthening persuasive impact. Nevertheless, older tourists often exhibit higher risk aversion and stronger concerns about safety, financial security, and service reliability. Therefore, they may rely more heavily on heuristic cues, such as source credibility, popularity indicators, and peer endorsements, when evaluating travel videos. While prior studies acknowledge that social media affects seniors' travel intentions and destination image perceptions, empirical evidence remains fragmented. Many studies conceptualize older adults primarily through the lens of the digital divide, emphasizing barriers rather than motivational drivers. Moreover, research rarely distinguishes between general social media usage and the unique affordances of short-video platforms, such as immersive storytelling and rapid information diffusion. Consequently, the specific mechanisms through which TikTok travel videos influence older tourists' perceptions and behavioral outcomes remain underexplored.

The mediating role of behavioral intention

Behavioral intention has long been recognized as a central mediator linking attitudes, perceptions, and actual behavior in technology adoption and consumer decision-making research (Bashir and Madhavaiah, 2015). Within the framework of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), behavioral intention mediates the effects of performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and social influence on actual usage behavior (Limbu et al., 2012). When applied to tourism contexts, behavioral intention often represents willingness to visit a destination, book travel products, or seek further information. In short-video environments, behavioral intention may serve as a crucial psychological bridge between exposure to persuasive cues and concrete travel actions (Limbu et al., 2012). Travel videos can shape perceived usefulness (e.g., providing practical information), perceived ease of use (e.g., intuitive platform navigation), and social influence (e.g., recommendations from peers or influencers). These perceptions, in turn, form intentions to engage in travel-related behaviors, such as saving destinations, consulting travel agencies, or making bookings. Particularly for older adults, intention formation may involve additional cognitive evaluation, balancing hedonic enjoyment with concerns about health, safety, and financial constraints (Lai and Chong, 2023). Although previous research confirms the mediating role of behavioral intention in technology adoption and tourism consumption, few studies explicitly test its function within short-video tourism contexts. Even fewer investigations focus on older users, whose intention-behavior relationship may be moderated by age-related factors such as perceived vulnerability or reliance on family support. Thus, examining behavioral intention as a mediating construct can clarify how technological perceptions and credibility assessments translate into tangible tourism outcomes among senior users.

Research gap

Despite growing scholarly attention to social media and tourism, several theoretical and empirical gaps remain. First, existing studies on TikTok travel videos largely concentrate on destination image, electronic word-of-mouth, or influencer marketing among younger demographics, overlooking the rapidly expanding older user segment in

China. Second, research on older tourists often emphasizes general internet adoption or online booking platforms, without considering the distinctive persuasive affordances of short-video ecosystems characterized by algorithmic recommendation and immersive audiovisual design. Third, theoretical integration remains insufficient. Studies grounded in technology adoption models such as UTAUT tend to prioritize functional evaluations of platform usability, whereas research based on persuasion or source credibility theories focuses on message characteristics and communicator traits. Rarely are these perspectives combined to examine how credibility cues embedded in travel videos interact with technology-use perceptions to shape behavioral intention. This fragmentation limits comprehensive understanding of how short-video cues persuade older tourists.

Materials and Methods

Research design and instrument development

This study adopted a cross-sectional quantitative research design to empirically test the integrated Source Credibility–UTAUT framework and examine the mediating role of behavioral intention in older tourists’ responses to short-video travel cues. The research was conducted in Handan City, Hebei Province, China, a typical prefecture-level city with a steadily aging population and increasing digital penetration. Focusing on users of Douyin aged 60 and above, the study aimed to capture real-world patterns of short-video consumption and tourism-related decision-making among elderly users. A structured questionnaire was developed by integrating constructs from Source Credibility Theory and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). The instrument consisted of three sections: (1) demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, education, travel frequency), (2) Douyin usage patterns (e.g., frequency of watching travel videos, interaction behaviors), and (3) core latent variables. Eight key constructs were operationalized, including perceived expertise, perceived trustworthiness, performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, behavioral intention, and tourism behavior. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Measurement items were adapted from validated scales in prior studies and carefully reworded to fit the short-video tourism context and the cognitive characteristics of older respondents. Detailed scale sources and item descriptions are presented in *Table 1*.

Table 1. *The scale items.*

Constructs	Measurement items
Attractiveness	The travel videos on Douyin present visually appealing tourism experiences The production quality of these videos appears professional and polished The content showcases destinations in an aesthetically pleasing manner The video editing techniques enhance my desire to visit the locations
Expertise	This Douyin travel video offers professionally valuable tourism guidance The destination information is detailed and accurate for trip planning The creator demonstrates first-hand travel experience The production reflects professional competence in tourism
Trustworthiness	The travel information appears accurate and verifiable I believe the videos provide unbiased representations of destinations The content creators seem genuinely committed to sharing truthful experiences I would rely on these videos when making actual travel plans
Performance Expectancy	Using Douyin helps me obtain travel information effectively Douyin enables me to find travel information faster Using Douyin increases my efficiency in planning trips

	Douyin improves my chances of planning better travel
Effort Expectancy	My interaction with Douyin is clear and easy to understand I quickly became proficient at using Douyin It was easy to use Douyin to find travel videos Operating Douyin is easy for me
Social Influence	People important to me think I should use Douyin for travel information People who influence me expect me to use Douyin for travel planning I have people around me who can help me with Douyin My family supports my use of Douyin for travel information
Behavioral Intention	I intend to continue using Douyin I intend to keep using Douyin to search for travel videos I will use Douyin frequently for travel information in the future I will recommend using Douyin for travel information to others
Use Behavior	I often use Douyin. I often use Douyin to search for travel videos. I have continued to use Douyin for travel information I plan to keep using Douyin for travel information

Pre-test and pilot testing

To ensure the reliability and validity of the measurement instrument, a multi-stage validation procedure was implemented. First, two scholars with expertise in tourism management and digital media research evaluated the questionnaire to assess content validity, construct clarity, and contextual appropriateness. Their feedback led to revisions in wording, item sequencing, and conceptual alignment with the integrated model. Second, a cognitive pretest was conducted with several elderly Douyin users to identify potential comprehension difficulties, ambiguous phrasing, or culturally inappropriate expressions. Based on their responses, minor adjustments were made to simplify language and improve readability. Third, a pilot test was administered to 42 eligible participants who met the sampling criteria. Reliability analysis indicated strong internal consistency across all constructs, with Cronbach's α values ranging from 0.824 to 0.907, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70. These results confirmed satisfactory reliability and preliminary construct validity, providing a solid foundation for the formal large-scale survey.

Sampling strategy and participants

The target population of this study comprised individuals aged 60 and above in Handan City, Hebei Province, who regularly used Douyin to access travel-related content. Handan was selected as a representative prefecture-level city characterized by moderate economic development, a steadily aging demographic structure, and increasing digital media penetration among older adults. This setting provides a meaningful context for examining senior users' engagement with short-video tourism content in non-metropolitan China. To ensure statistical adequacy, the required sample size was calculated based on Yamane (1973) formula, which suggested a minimum of approximately 400 respondents. This threshold also aligns with the sample size recommendation of Morgan (1970), which indicates that at least 384 cases are necessary for large populations to achieve acceptable representativeness. A structured snowball sampling strategy was adopted. Initial respondents were recruited through community centers, senior activity groups, and social networks, and were then asked to refer other eligible participants who met the screening criteria (i.e., aged 60+, active Douyin users, and viewers of travel-related videos). This approach facilitated access to elderly respondents who might otherwise be difficult to reach through purely online recruitment methods.

Data collection

Formal data collection was conducted from October 1 to October 31, 2025. Questionnaires were distributed via a professional online survey platform, with research assistants providing on-site guidance when necessary to help participants complete the survey independently. This hybrid approach ensured both efficiency in data aggregation and inclusivity for elderly participants with varying levels of digital literacy. The study strictly adhered to established ethical principles for research involving human subjects. Before participation, respondents were informed of the research objectives, procedures, and voluntary nature of the study. They were assured that no personal risks were involved and that the collected data would be used solely for academic purposes. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. To protect privacy, all responses were anonymized during data processing and analysis. A total of 603 questionnaires were collected. After rigorous quality screening, including checks for incomplete responses, excessive missing data, and uniform response patterns, 412 valid questionnaires were retained, resulting in a validity rate of 68.3%. The final sample size exceeded the recommended minimum for structural equation modeling analysis, thereby ensuring sufficient statistical power and robustness for hypothesis testing within the integrated Source Credibility–UTAUT framework.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics

The final sample consisted of 412 active users of Douyin aged 60 and above, all of whom reported prior travel experience. Gender distribution was relatively balanced. The majority of respondents were concentrated in the 71–75 and 76–80 age groups, indicating that digital participation extends beyond the younger segment of the elderly population. In terms of educational background, 58.3% had completed junior high school or below, while 18.7% held a bachelor's degree or higher. Most participants were married and retired, with monthly incomes primarily ranging between RMB 3,001 and 6,000. These demographic characteristics suggest that the sample represents older adults with sufficient leisure time, moderate disposable income, and meaningful digital engagement capacity. Detailed demographic statistics are presented in *Table 2*.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics results.

Characteristic	Items	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	206	50%
	Female	206	50%
Age	60-65 years old	41	10.0%
	66-70 years old	90	21.8%
	71-75 years old	148	35.9%
	76-80 years old	94	22.8%
	81 years old and above	39	9.5%
Education Level	Junior high school and below	240	58.3%
	High school	95	23.1%
	Bachelor's Degree	44	10.7%
	Master's Degree	22	5.3%
	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)	11	2.7%
Marital status	Married	365	88.6%
	Single	18	4.4%
	Divorced	29	7.0%
Occupations	Employed	62	15.0%
	Unemployed	89	21.6%
	Retired	230	55.8%
	Others	31	7.5%

Monthly salary	No income	25	6.1%
	Less than 3000RMB	63	15.3%
	3000-5000RMB	126	30.6%
	5001-6000RMB	117	28.4%
	6001-8000RMB	65	15.8%
	Above 8001RMB	16	3.9%

Douyin usage patterns

Analysis of usage behavior revealed consistently high engagement with travel-related content. Among the 412 respondents, 64.8% reported spending one to three hours daily watching short videos, indicating strong habitual use. Furthermore, 59.4% stated that they “always” or “almost always” browsed travel videos each week, and 61.6% regularly followed travel influencers. Interaction behaviors displayed a hierarchical structure. Low-effort engagement activities, such as liking videos and reading comments, were significantly more frequent than high-effort activities, such as posting comments. This pattern suggests that older users prefer low-barrier forms of participation while still maintaining active content consumption and observational interaction. Overall, the findings indicate that Douyin has become a central platform for older tourists, serving both informational and social functions. The strong reliance on influencer-generated travel content and peer interaction highlights the relevance of source credibility cues in this demographic group. These usage characteristics are broadly consistent with established patterns of elderly social media engagement, reinforcing the platform’s importance in shaping travel-related perceptions and behaviors.

Measurement model assessment

To evaluate the measurement model, reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were systematically assessed. Reliability and convergent validity were examined through standardized factor loadings, Cronbach’s α coefficients, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). All item loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 and were statistically significant in *Table 3*. Cronbach’s α values ranged from 0.704 to 0.930, indicating strong internal consistency. Additionally, all AVE values surpassed the minimum criterion of 0.50, confirming adequate convergent validity. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio. In accordance with the Fornell–Larcker standard, the square root of each construct’s AVE exceeded its correlations with other constructs, demonstrating satisfactory discriminant validity. Furthermore, all HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.90, as recommended in prior methodological research, confirming the distinctiveness of the latent constructs. Overall, the measurement model demonstrated strong psychometric properties, supporting further structural model evaluation.

Table 3. *Construct reliability and validity.*

Category	Cronbach’s alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
BI	0.910	0.910	0.937	0.787
EE	0.778	0.781	0.857	0.600
PE	0.909	0.909	0.936	0.785
SCA	0.915	0.917	0.940	0.797
SCE	0.928	0.928	0.948	0.821
SCT	0.930	0.932	0.950	0.826
SI	0.704	0.717	0.817	0.528

UB	0.912	0.916	0.938	0.791
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Directing and Mediating effect testing

To examine the directing effect and the mediating role of behavioral intention, a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was conducted in SmartPLS. The results in *Table 4* and *Table 5* indicate that behavioral intention significantly mediated all hypothesized relationships between antecedent variables and actual use behavior. Among the indirect effects, performance expectancy exhibited the strongest mediation effect on use behavior ($\beta = 0.167$), suggesting that perceived functional utility is the most influential driver of older users' engagement with travel-related content. Source credibility–attractiveness showed the second strongest indirect effect ($\beta = 0.127$), followed by trustworthiness ($\beta = 0.097$). These findings highlight the persuasive importance of visually appealing and trustworthy content creators in the short-video environment. Social influence ($\beta = 0.092$) and effort expectancy ($\beta = 0.074$) also demonstrated significant, though comparatively smaller, mediation effects. Source credibility–expertise yielded the weakest indirect effect ($\beta = 0.068$), with a confidence interval approaching zero, indicating relatively limited practical influence compared to other credibility dimensions. All mediation paths were statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. These findings underscore the central role of behavioral intention in translating credibility perceptions and technology-use beliefs into actual platform use and tourism-related actions. The results suggest that older users are primarily motivated by functional value and visually persuasive cues, while social and ease-of-use factors play supportive but secondary roles.

Table 4. The result of directing effect.

Category	Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
BI→UB	0.611	0.610	0.035	17.646	0.000
EE→BI	0.122	0.122	0.043	2.845	0.004
PE→BI	0.273	0.272	0.051	5.325	0.000
SCA→BI	0.207	0.205	0.049	4.238	0.000
SCE→BI	0.111	0.114	0.050	2.212	0.027
SCT→BI	0.159	0.160	0.047	3.419	0.001
SI→BI	0.150	0.153	0.040	3.797	0.000

Table 5. Results of the mediating effect of behavioral intention.

Category	Original sample	T statistics	P values	2.5%	97.5%
EE→BI→UB	0.074	2.782	0.005	0.023	0.127
PE→BI→UB	0.167	5.031	0.000	0.103	0.234
SCA→BI→UB	0.127	4.001	0.000	0.066	0.188
SCE→BI→UB	0.068	2.194	0.028	0.007	0.130
SCT→BI→UB	0.097	3.450	0.001	0.041	0.153
SI→BI→UB	0.092	3.648	0.000	0.046	0.144

The findings confirm that behavioral intention (BI) is the most powerful predictor of actual use behavior ($\beta = 0.611$), reinforcing its central mediating role within the integrated Source Credibility–UTAUT framework. For older users of Douyin, platform engagement is not primarily habitual or entertainment-driven, as often observed among younger cohorts. Instead, their use is more purpose-oriented and travel-specific. Older adults tend to evaluate the practicality of the platform and the reliability of travel information before forming usage decisions. This goal-directed evaluation process strengthens the explanatory power of behavioral intention: it not only predicts subsequent use behavior but also serves as a psychological mechanism that transforms credibility perceptions and technological assessments into concrete participation. In this

sense, behavioral intention operates as a deliberate decision filter rather than a passive attitudinal outcome. Within the UTAUT dimensions, performance expectancy (PE) exerts the strongest influence on behavioral intention, highlighting older users' pragmatic orientation in digital travel contexts. Seniors appear particularly sensitive to whether short-video content enhances travel efficiency, reduces uncertainty, and provides actionable guidance. This utilitarian emphasis aligns with age-related preferences for functional value and risk reduction. Although social influence (SI) remains statistically significant, its effect is comparatively weaker. This suggests an important boundary condition in algorithm-driven environments: traditional interpersonal normative pressure may be partially replaced by personalized content recommendation systems. In other words, influence is increasingly embedded in platform architecture rather than direct peer persuasion. This shift implies that the conceptualization of social influence in classical UTAUT may require refinement when applied to highly personalized short-video ecosystems.

A particularly noteworthy contribution concerns the relative dominance of attractiveness within the source credibility dimensions. Attractiveness emerges as the second strongest predictor of behavioral intention, surpassing both trustworthiness and expertise. This finding advances source credibility theory in two respects. First, in short-video formats characterized by rapid information flow and limited attention spans, visually salient and affectively appealing cues function as efficient heuristic signals. Older users may rely on such surface-level indicators to make quick judgments about destination desirability. Second, the comparatively weaker role of expertise suggests that detailed professional knowledge is less influential in short-form audiovisual contexts. Rather than engaging in systematic evaluation of technical accuracy, senior users appear to prioritize clarity, reliability, and visual comfort. These results indicate that the relative weighting of credibility components is media-contingent and audience-dependent, calling for contextual recalibration of classical credibility theory. From a broader tourism communication perspective, the results reveal a structural transformation in persuasive mechanisms within short-video platforms. Contrary to the common assumption that digital media enhance persuasion primarily through information richness and depth, this study demonstrates that effectiveness may instead derive from cognitive economy. Short-video travel content succeeds not by providing exhaustive comparisons or detailed itineraries, but by simplifying decision environments, reducing cognitive burden, and offering emotionally reassuring cues. This mechanism is particularly salient among older adults, who often prioritize convenience, clarity, and psychological comfort over extensive analytical processing. Therefore, tourism promotion in short-video contexts should be conceptualized less as comprehensive information transmission and more as strategic decision support that minimizes cognitive load while maximizing perceived usefulness and emotional resonance.

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of rapid population aging and digital platform expansion in China, this study developed and tested an integrated Source Credibility–UTAUT model to explain why short-video travel cues persuade older tourists in the context of Douyin. The empirical findings reveal a clear dual-evaluation mechanism underlying elderly users' platform engagement: a technological evaluation path (centered on performance

expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions) and a credibility evaluation path (centered on perceived attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise). These two evaluative processes converge through behavioral intention, which functions as the strongest predictor of actual use behavior. Among all antecedents, performance expectancy emerges as the most influential driver of behavioral intention, indicating that older tourists are primarily motivated by functional utility and perceived travel-related benefits. At the same time, within the source credibility dimensions, attractiveness exerts a stronger influence than trustworthiness and expertise. This finding suggests that in short-video environments characterized by rapid exposure and audiovisual immersion, visually salient and emotionally appealing cues serve as efficient heuristics for older users. In contrast, expertise, although statistically significant, plays a comparatively weaker role, indicating that detailed professional authority is less decisive in fast-paced visual media contexts. Social influence, while significant, demonstrates a relatively moderate effect. The results imply that in algorithm-driven ecosystems, interpersonal normative pressure may be partially embedded within platform recommendation mechanisms. Behavioral intention ultimately mediates all major relationships, confirming its central role in transforming technological perceptions and credibility assessments into concrete tourism-related actions. Overall, the study clarifies the hierarchical structure and interaction logic of persuasion mechanisms affecting older tourists in short-video contexts.

The findings offer several actionable implications for tourism marketers, platform designers, and policymakers. First, destination marketing strategies targeting older tourists should prioritize functional value communication. Travel videos should clearly demonstrate practical benefits such as itinerary convenience, cost transparency, safety assurance, and accessibility. Emphasizing usefulness aligns with seniors' pragmatic decision orientation and strengthens performance expectancy. Second, visual presentation and narrative style should be carefully optimized. Since attractiveness plays a critical persuasive role, content creators should focus on high-quality visuals, clear storytelling, emotionally warm tones, and relatable presenters—especially middle-aged or senior influencers who enhance perceived similarity. Rather than overloading audiences with technical details, videos should reduce cognitive complexity and present information in concise, intuitive formats. Third, platform operators such as Douyin may consider enhancing senior-friendly interface design, including simplified navigation, larger fonts, and clearer booking pathways. Algorithmic recommendation systems could also incorporate indicators related to credibility and travel safety to better support elderly users' decision-making needs. Finally, policymakers aiming to promote inclusive digital participation should strengthen digital literacy programs for older adults. Improving seniors' ability to critically evaluate online travel content can further enhance informed consumption and reduce vulnerability to misleading information.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference. Although structural equation modeling identifies significant relationships, longitudinal studies are needed to examine how persuasion mechanisms evolve over time and whether behavioral intention consistently translates into sustained travel behavior. Second, the sample was drawn from a single city in China and focused exclusively on one platform: Douyin. While this platform represents a dominant short-video ecosystem, future research should adopt cross-regional and cross-platform comparisons, including international contexts such as TikTok, to enhance generalizability. Cultural differences in aging, technology adoption, and

tourism consumption may yield different credibility weightings and social influence dynamics. Third, although this study integrates source credibility and UTAUT constructs, other potentially relevant variables were not included. For instance, digital literacy, perceived risk, health status, and family support may moderate the relationship between behavioral intention and actual behavior among older adults. Future research could incorporate these factors to deepen theoretical refinement. Additionally, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews or experimental designs could provide richer insights into cognitive processing patterns underlying short-video persuasion.

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Conflict of interest

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

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