

The influence of Chinese social media users' sharing behavior on consumers' purchase intentions for tourism services

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Abstract

This research Article show the digital era, social media has become a key driver of consumer behavior, particularly in the tourism sector. This study investigates how social media sharing (SMS) influences tourism service purchase intention (TSPI) among Chinese consumers. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative analysis using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with qualitative insights from 20 interviews and focus group discussions. Data were gathered from 400 active Chinese social media users via online surveys. Quantitative results show that SMS significantly impacts TSPI. Moreover, perceived behavioral control (PBC), social media credibility (SMC), and content attractiveness (CA) are strong predictors of SMS behavior. Multi-channel information consistency (MIC) plays a moderating role, reinforcing the effect of SMS on purchase intention when users encounter consistent content across platforms. The SEM model shows a good fit (CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.04), explaining 49% of the variance in TSPI and 61% in SMS. Qualitative findings support these results, revealing that emotional motivation, platform trust, and peer influence strongly affect both sharing and purchasing behaviors. Participants emphasized the power of authentic and visually appealing content in inspiring travel intentions. Repeated exposure across platforms enhanced confidence and decision-making. The study contributes a culturally relevant framework for understanding digital influence in the Chinese market. It integrates emotional, behavioral, and social drivers within a digital context, offering theoretical value and practical recommendations for tourism marketers to refine their strategies and strengthen consumer engagement. Finally, marketers should make it easier for consumers to participate by offering intuitive content creation tools and travel-sharing features. Cultural sensitivity is also vital in the Chinese context, where group influence strongly

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shapes decision-making. Personalized recommendations based on user data and socially aligned content can help tourism providers better connect with consumers and convert engagement into action.

Keywords: Social Media Sharing, Tourism Service Purchase Intention, User-Generated Content, Digital Marketing, Structural Equation Modeling, Multi-Channel Consistency

Introduction

In the digital era, social media has become a powerful force shaping consumer behavior across industries. In China, where internet penetration is high and digital culture is rapidly evolving, social media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, Xiaohongshu, and Douyin have become essential to everyday life (Statista, 2023). These platforms have transformed communication patterns, information acquisition, and consumer decision-making processes, especially within the tourism industry, a sector characterized by high involvement and experiential consumption. (Somthawinpongsai, C., et.al.2022).

The convergence of social media and tourism has given rise to a dynamic, mutually reinforcing relationship. Tourism service providers increasingly utilize social media as a tool for marketing, brand building, and customer engagement (Leung, D. et.al., 2013). Simultaneously, consumers are more inclined to share their travel experiences via various forms of user-generated content (UGC), including images, videos, and real-time reviews. These shared experiences significantly affect how potential tourists perceive destinations, evaluate services, and make purchase decisions (Zeng B., & Gerritsen, R., 2014).

Unlike traditional media, social media enables two-way, interactive, and real-time communication. The authenticity and emotional resonance of peer-generated content often result in higher credibility compared to commercial advertisements (Hudson, S., et. al., 2015). As a result, shared experiences on platforms like Xiaohongshu or Douyin have a profound impact on shaping consumer trust and reducing perceived risks, particularly in high-stakes decisions such as travel planning.(Somthawinpongsai, C., et.al.,2024).

Although many studies have highlighted the impact of social media on consumer behavior, few have addressed the specific cultural and behavioral context of Chinese users.



Chinese consumers tend to value peer recommendations, group consensus, and social approval, which are all amplified through the design and functionality of local social media platforms (S. C., & Choi, S. M, 2011). These factors necessitate a localized theoretical framework to understand how social media sharing behavior influences purchase intentions in the tourism sector.

This study aims to investigate how travel-related user-generated content on Chinese social media platforms affects the purchase intentions of potential consumers. Specifically, it seeks to analyze the mechanisms of influence, including emotional engagement, trust formation, and social identity building, within the Chinese cultural context. The findings will contribute to theoretical discussions on tourism marketing and offer practical implications for digital strategy development among tourism service providers in China.

Research Objectives

This study aims to investigate how social media sharing behavior influences consumers' purchase intentions for tourism services. Specifically, it examines (1) the role of demographic factors such as age, gender, education, occupation, and social media usage time; (2) group differences under controlled variables; (3) the direct impact of shared travel content on purchase intentions; and (4) the moderating effect of multi-channel information consistency. The goal is to better understand consumer decision-making in a digital context and provide strategic insights for tourism marketing.

Research Hypothesis

From the conceptual framework, the suggested research hypothesis follows:

- H1: Job satisfaction and organizational management have a robust correlation.
- H2: Direct job satisfaction and intention to change employment depend on the surroundings.
- H3: Between job circumstances and contentment, personal emotions operate as a mediator.
- H4: External appraisal influences the intention of job change driven by contentment.
- H5: Reducing the intention to shift occupations mostly depends on self-fulfillment.
- H6: Individual traits help to moderate the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to leave employment.



Scope of research

The influence of Chinese social media users' sharing behavior on consumers' purchase intentions for tourism services have Scope of research content; Tourism Service Purchase Intention (TSPI); The main independent variable, Social Media Sharing (SMS); The main independent variable, Social Media Sharing (SMS);, Multi-channel Information Consistency (MIC)

Literature Review and Concepts

This study is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posits that behavior is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, I. 1991). In the tourism context, perceived behavioral control (PBC) reflects users' belief in their ability to act on travel intentions after engaging with content.

Tourism Service Purchase Intention (TSPI) refers to the likelihood that consumers will purchase tourism services after being exposed to social media content. According to Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (1975), behavioral intention is a strong predictor of actual behavior, particularly when influenced by peer communication and shared experiences (Hudson, S. et al., 2015).

The main independent variable, Social Media Sharing (SMS), refers to the act of posting or recommending tourism-related content on digital platforms. As Mangold W. G., & Faulds, D. J. (2009) explain, user-generated content functions as a hybrid between personal expression and word-of-mouth marketing, capable of creating emotional resonance (Zeng B., & Gerritsen, R., 2014).

Social Media Credibility (SMC) represents the degree of trust users place in online content. Studies show that credibility significantly impacts how people evaluate and act on information (A. J., & Metzger, M. J., 2007; Ayeh, J.K., et.al, 2013). Similarly, Content Attractiveness (CA)—including the emotional, visual, and interactive appeal of posts—strengthens message engagement and behavioral influence (De Vries, L., et. al., 2012).

Lastly, Multi-channel Information Consistency (MIC) moderates the relationship between SMS and TSPI. Consistent messaging across platforms enhances brand trust and reinforces purchasing decisions (Edelman, D. C. 2010).



Conceptual Framework

This study adopts the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Ajzen, I. (1991) as its primary theoretical foundation, focusing on how social media influences consumer intention to purchase tourism services. The dependent variable, Tourism Service Purchase Intention (TSPI), reflects a consumer's willingness to book tourism services after encountering shared travel content online. This aligns with the concept of behavioral intention from TPB, which has been widely used to predict decision-making in tourism (Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. 1975).

The main independent variable is Social Media Sharing (SMS), referring to user behaviors such as posting travel experiences or recommendations. According to Mangold W. G., & Faulds, D. J. (2009), social media acts as a hybrid promotional tool where user-generated content (UGC) significantly impacts consumer attitudes. When consumers engage with emotionally resonant or peer-created content, their travel motivation and purchase intention tend to increase (Zeng B., & Gerritsen, R., 2014).

Three secondary independent variables are integrated into the model. First, Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)—also from TPB—captures users' perceived ease in sharing or acting on travel decisions. Second, Social Media Credibility (SMC) is derived from source credibility theory and refers to the trustworthiness of social platform content (Flanagin A. J., & Metzger, M. J., 2007). Third, Content Attractiveness (CA) is based on media richness theory, which suggests that visually and emotionally engaging content strengthens attention and behavioral responses (De Vries, L., et. al. 2012).

The study also includes a moderating variable: Multi-channel Information Consistency (MIC). Drawing from integrated marketing communication (IMC) theory, MIC refers to the alignment of messages across platforms (e.g., social media, websites, advertisements). Consistency enhances trust and reduces consumer confusion, while inconsistency can undermine decision-making (Liu Y., & Shrum, L. J., 2009; Edelman, D. C. 2010).

By integrating these variables, the study constructs a comprehensive framework to explain how social media content affects travel-related purchase decisions. It provides a theoretical basis for understanding consumer behavior in digital environments and supports tourism businesses in optimizing their social media marketing strategies.



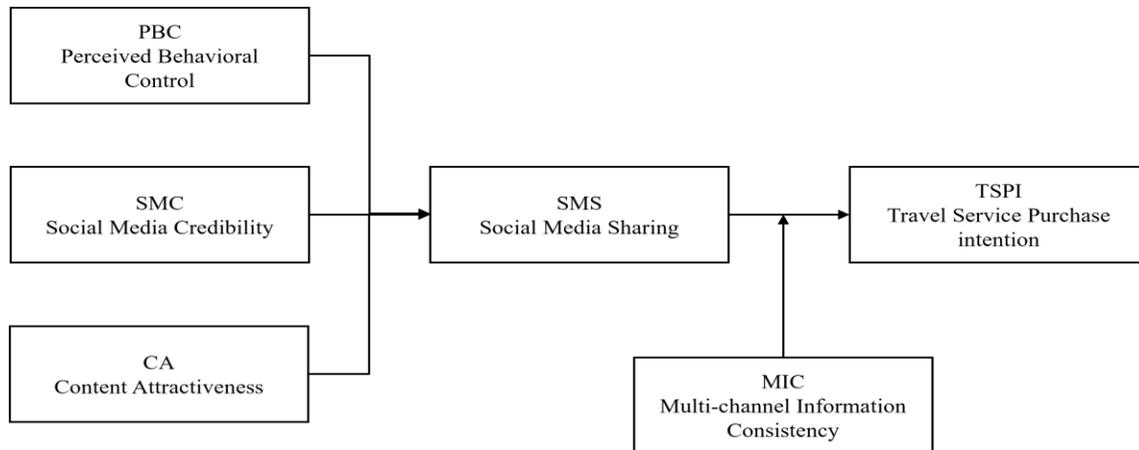


Figure 1 Research Conceptual Framework Model

Research Methodology

This study employs a **mixed methods research design**, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively address the research objectives at both structural and in-depth levels (Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L., 2011).

The **quantitative component** aims to analyze the causal relationships between social media sharing (SMS) and travel service purchase intention (TSPI), including the roles of perceived behavioral control (PBC), social media credibility (SMC), content attractiveness (CA), and multi-channel information consistency (MIC). Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to **400 social media users** in mainland China. The sample size follows the recommendations of Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010), who suggest that a minimum of 200–400 cases is appropriate for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The questionnaire captured users' sharing behavior, content engagement, and influencing factors related to purchase decisions. Data were analyzed using **SEM via AMOS**, addressing Research Objectives 1–4:1) Analyzing the demographic characteristics of the sample group, 2) Examining group differences under control variables, 3) Investigating the effect of social media sharing on purchase intention, and 4) Exploring the moderating role of multi-channel information consistency.

The qualitative component was designed to uncover the motivations, psychological mechanisms, and emotional reactions underlying users' travel-sharing behavior on social media.



This component helps explain consumer behavior that cannot be fully understood through quantitative analysis alone (Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S., 2011). Data were gathered from 20 in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions (6–8 participants per group), and used to reinforce findings under Objectives 3 and 4, especially regarding consumer attitudes, emotional involvement, and interpretation of travel-related content.

In addition, content analysis was conducted on tourism-related user-generated content (UGC) from Chinese platforms such as WeChat, Xiaohongshu, and Douyin. This method helped identify key communication themes, narrative patterns, and structural elements that influence tourism decision-making (Krippendorff, K. 2013). The integration of content analysis further supports the empirical validity of the conceptual model.

By focusing on mainland Chinese users, where social media is a dominant influence in tourism behavior, the study provides both theoretical and practical contributions. The findings offer strategic insights for tourism marketers seeking to develop precise and culturally aligned digital marketing and communication strategies.

Research Results

To investigate the proposed hypotheses and examine the structural relationships among latent variables, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted using AMOS. The analysis aimed to assess both the direct effects and the moderating role of multi-channel information consistency (MIC) in the relationship between social media sharing (SMS) and tourism service purchase intention (TSPI). Table 1 presents the standardized path coefficients (β), standard errors (SE), t-values, p-values, R^2 values for endogenous constructs, and diagnostic statistics including Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). Additionally, model fit indices are reported to confirm the overall adequacy of the structural model.

The results show that all hypothesized relationships are statistically significant and in the expected direction. Social media sharing (H1) has a positive and significant influence on tourism service purchase intention ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$). Perceived behavioral control (H2), social media credibility (H3), and content attractiveness (H4) significantly predict users' sharing behavior on



social media, with β values ranging from 0.29 to 0.43. Furthermore, the moderating effect of multi-channel information consistency (H5) on the relationship between SMS and TSPI is also supported ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that the consistency of information across channels strengthens the impact of sharing behavior on purchase decisions.

The R^2 values indicate that the model explains 49% of the variance in tourism service purchase intention and 61% of the variance in social media sharing behavior. The CR values for all latent constructs exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, and AVE values are above 0.50, demonstrating acceptable construct reliability and convergent validity. VIF values are below 2.1 for all predictors, indicating no issues with multicollinearity. The overall model fit is acceptable, with CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.04, and $\chi^2/df = 2.11$, indicating a well-fitting model.

These results support all proposed hypotheses and confirm the robustness of the conceptual framework

Table 1: Hypothesis Testing and SEM Statistical Results

| Hypothesis | Relationship Tested | β | SE | t-value | p-value | R^2 | CR | AVE | VIF | Model Fit Indices | Result |
|------------|---|---------|------|---------|---------|-------|------|------|-----|--|-----------|
| H1 | Social Media Sharing → Tourism Service Purchase Intention (TSPI) | 0.45 | 0.05 | 9.00 | < 0.001 | 0.49 | 0.88 | 0.62 | 1.8 | CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.04, $\chi^2/df = 2.11$ | Supported |
| H2 | Perceived Behavioral Control → Social Media Sharing | 0.43 | 0.06 | 7.17 | < 0.001 | 0.61 | 0.87 | 0.58 | 1.6 | CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.04, $\chi^2/df = 2.11$ | Supported |
| H3 | Social Media Credibility → Social Media Sharing | 0.34 | 0.07 | 4.86 | < 0.001 | 0.61 | 0.85 | 0.56 | 1.5 | CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.04, $\chi^2/df = 2.11$ | Supported |
| H4 | Content Attractiveness → Social Media Sharing | 0.29 | 0.06 | 4.83 | < 0.001 | 0.61 | 0.83 | 0.55 | 1.7 | CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.04, $\chi^2/df = 2.11$ | Supported |



| Hypothesis | Relationship Tested | β | SE | t-value | p-value | R ² | CR | AVE | VIF | Model Fit Indices | Result |
|------------|--|---------|------|---------|---------|----------------|----|-----|-----|--|-----------|
| H5 | SMS × MIC → Tourism Service Purchase Intention (Moderating Effect) | 0.26 | 0.08 | 3.25 | < 0.01 | 0.49 | - | - | - | CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.04, $\chi^2/df = 2.11$ | Supported |

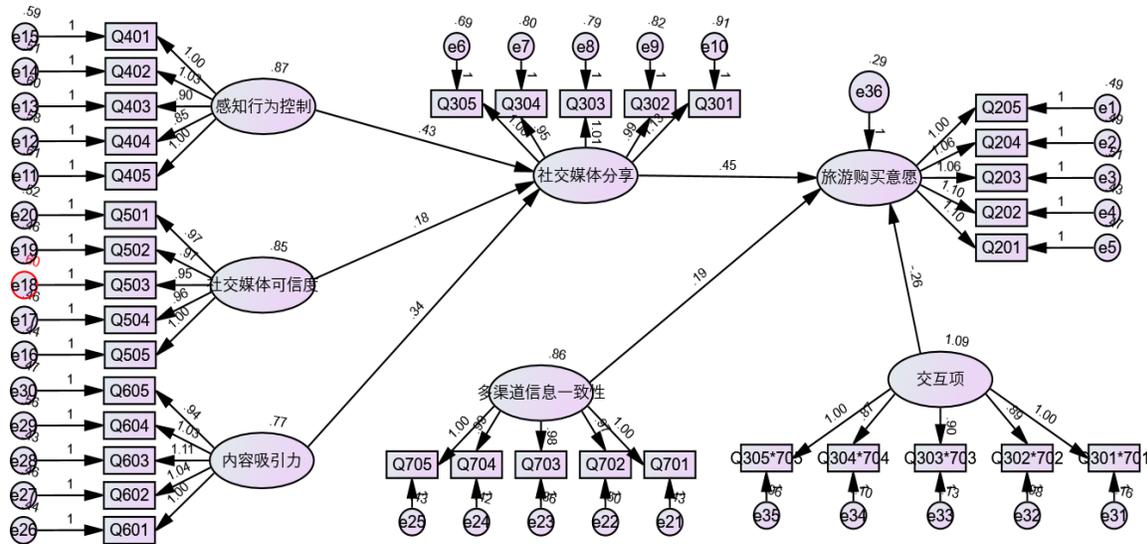


Figure 4. Structural equation model diagram

Additional Model Fit Indicators

- Factor loadings for all observed variables (Q-items) are above 0.7 in most cases, supporting **convergent validity**.
- No problematic correlations or cross-loadings were observed, confirming a well-fitting model structure.
- The interaction term was modeled via item multiplication (e.g., Q301*Q701), indicating moderation was handled properly using product indicator methodology.

Conclusion from SEM Analysis

The SEM model confirms that social media sharing significantly predicts consumers' purchase intention in tourism, with perceived behavioral control, platform credibility, and content attractiveness acting as key drivers. Moreover, the impact of sharing is amplified by the consistency



of information across platforms, underscoring the importance of integrated communication strategies for tourism marketers.

Qualitative Findings

To complement the quantitative findings, this study conducted 20 in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions with Chinese social media users to explore the psychological and behavioral mechanisms behind travel-related content sharing. Participants expressed that their motivation stemmed primarily from a desire to preserve memories, gain social recognition, and inspire others, especially on platforms like Xiaohongshu and Douyin. These insights affirm the role of perceived behavioral control (PBC), as digitally literate users were more likely to participate in travel content sharing. Trust and credibility also emerged as strong determinants of influence. Respondents indicated they were more likely to trust content shared via credible platforms such as WeChat and verified Weibo accounts. Many participants expressed skepticism toward overly promotional or sponsored posts, favoring authentic user-generated content (UGC) that conveyed sincerity and real experiences, which directly impacted their intention to act on tourism offers. Visually compelling and emotionally rich content, particularly videos with narratives and music, was found to trigger emotional engagement and a strong desire to travel. This highlights the importance of content attractiveness (CA) in driving both sharing and purchasing behaviors. The affective connection with travel stories enhanced users' immersion, making them more susceptible to influence and decision-making. Multi-channel consistency (MIC) played a moderating role in reinforcing purchase intention. When users encountered the same travel content across multiple platforms, such as social media, ads, and websites, the repeated exposure increased trust and decision confidence. In contrast, inconsistent messaging led to hesitation and information fatigue, reducing user intent.

Lastly, the cultural context of collectivism was evident. Many users noted that travel plans were often made as a group, and social sharing served as a way to guide and align group opinions. Peer validation and social norms significantly shaped users' willingness to engage in travel decisions. These qualitative findings support the structural model, illustrating that social media functions not only as a marketing tool but also as a platform for identity expression, emotional bonding, and collective decision-making



Summarize Discussion and Recommendations

Summarize

The findings of this study offer comprehensive insights into the dynamics of how social media sharing behavior influences tourism service purchase intention among Chinese consumers. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the research reveals a robust and multi-dimensional perspective that enhances our understanding of digital consumer behavior in the tourism sector.

Discussion

The quantitative analysis using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) confirms that social media sharing (SMS) has a significant and direct effect on consumers' intention to purchase tourism services ($\beta = 0.45, p < 0.001$), supporting the central hypothesis (H1). This aligns with previous research emphasizing the influential role of user-generated content (UGC) in shaping consumer decisions in high-involvement services such as tourism (Xiang Z., & Gretzel, U., 2010; Hudson S., & Thal, K. 2013).

Three antecedent variables—perceived behavioral control (PBC), social media credibility (SMC), and content attractiveness (CA)—were found to be significant predictors of SMS, with standardized coefficients ranging from 0.29 to 0.43. This reflects that users are more likely to share content when they (a) feel capable of doing so, (b) trust the platform, and (c) find the content visually and emotionally engaging. These findings echo the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, I. 1991), which posits that perceived behavioral control strongly influences intention-related actions. The result also aligns with studies by Erkan I., & Evans, C. (2016), who found that credibility significantly impacts electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) effectiveness.

Importantly, the moderating role of multi-channel information consistency (MIC) was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.26, p < 0.01$), highlighting that consistent messaging across platforms strengthens the effect of SMS on purchase decisions. This reflects growing consumer expectations for cohesive brand narratives across social media, websites, and advertising, in line with integrated marketing communication theory (Kitchen P. J., & Burgmann, I., 2015).

Qualitative findings complement and deepen the quantitative results. Interview participants frequently cited emotional resonance, trust in real user experiences, and visual appeal as key factors influencing their engagement and purchase intentions. This underscores



the affective dimension of digital content, where narratives and aesthetics stimulate not only cognition but also desire and impulsive travel behavior (Tussyadiah I. P., & Fesenmaier, D. R., 2009). Participants also reported that repeated exposure across multiple channels fostered confidence in their purchase decisions, affirming the importance of MIC found in the quantitative model.

Another notable theme from the qualitative data is the role of social influence and collectivism in Chinese consumer behavior. Many respondents noted that sharing travel content was also a tool to gain peer recognition or to coordinate group decision-making, consistent with the findings of Chu, S. C., & Choi, S. M. (2011) on peer influence in Asian digital cultures. This cultural nuance reinforces the necessity of contextualizing consumer behavior models within local values and media ecosystems.

In summary, the study reinforces the idea that social media is not merely a medium for information exchange but a strategic space for emotional engagement, identity performance, and trust formation, all of which are critical drivers in shaping tourism-related consumption behavior. The combination of behavioral, cognitive, and affective mechanisms suggests that tourism marketers should adopt a more human-centered and emotionally resonant communication strategy, supported by consistent and trustworthy multi-platform messaging.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, tourism businesses should prioritize the creation of emotionally engaging and visually attractive content to enhance user interaction. Content that reflects authentic user experiences, particularly in the form of short videos, narrative posts, or aesthetic visuals, has been shown to significantly influence consumers' sharing behavior and purchase intention. Platforms like Xiaohongshu and Douyin offer ideal environments for such strategies.

Trust and credibility also play a critical role. Businesses are encouraged to promote genuine user-generated content (UGC), collaborate with micro-influencers, and maintain transparency in promotional messages. At the same time, ensuring message consistency across channels—social media, websites, and advertising—helps reinforce brand trust and decision confidence, especially in the context of multi-channel information consistency (MIC).



Finally, marketers should make it easier for consumers to participate by offering intuitive content creation tools and travel-sharing features. Cultural sensitivity is also vital in the Chinese context, where group influence strongly shapes decision-making. Personalized recommendations based on user data and socially aligned content can help tourism providers better connect with consumers and convert engagement into action

New Knowledge form Research

This study contributes both theoretically and practically to the understanding of consumer behavior in the digital tourism landscape, particularly within the Chinese social media context. By integrating quantitative and qualitative methods, it establishes a comprehensive framework linking social media sharing (SMS) to tourism service purchase intention (TSPI), influenced by behavioral control (PBC), content attractiveness (CA), platform credibility (SMC), and moderated by multi-channel information consistency (MIC). Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, I. 1991) the study expands digital marketing theory by incorporating emotional and cultural dimensions of consumer interaction on platforms such as WeChat, Xiaohongshu, and Douyin.

Moreover, the research provides practical guidance for tourism marketers by emphasizing the importance of authentic storytelling, consistent cross-platform messaging, and user-centered engagement strategies. It highlights how peer influence, emotional resonance, and digital trust drive tourism decisions, especially in collectivist cultures like China. This work offers a localized perspective that complements global models of digital influence and sets the stage for future cross-cultural and experience-based marketing studies in the era of social media globalization.

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