THE IMPACT OF DOUYIN SHARING FORMS ON CUSTOMERS' WILLINGNESS TO CHOOSE HOMESTAYS BASED ON THE COGNITIVE ROLE OF DALI HOMESTAY IMAGES[*]

ผลกระทบของรูปแบบการแชร์บน Douyin ต่อความตั้งใจเลือกที่พักโฮมสเตย์ ของลูกค้า : บทบาทด้านการรับรู้ของภาพลักษณ์โฮมสเตย์ที่ต้าหลี่

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Abstract

This research article aimed to investigate the impact of user-generated content (UGC) and owner-generated content (OGC) on customers' willingness to choose homestays in Dali, Yunnan Province, through the lens of Social Proof Theory, Signal Theory, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework. A mixed-methods design was employed, combining content analysis of Douyin short videos, a structured survey of 312 valid visitor respondents, and semi-structured interviews with 20 homestay customers.

Findings revealed that UGC exerts stronger effects on emotional image, while OGC more strongly influenced cognitive image, with both pathways contributing to customer choice intention. Cognitive image was found to shape rational evaluations, whereas emotional image emerged as the most powerful predictor of booking decisions. The study contributed to the literature by extending servicescape theory into the digital short-video context, highlighting cultural authenticity as an essential component of customer image, and validating the SOR model in homestay marketing. Practical implications suggested that homestay operators should pursue a balanced strategy, leveraging the authenticity of UGC and the professionalism

280

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of OGC, while embedding cultural narratives to enhance both emotional engagement and cognitive trust.

Keywords: Douyin Sharing; Customers' Willingness; Homestay Image

บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาผลกระทบของเนื้อหาที่ผู้ใช้สร้างขึ้นและ เนื้อหาที่เจ้าของสร้างขึ้น ต่อความตั้งใจของลูกค้าในการเลือกเข้าพักโฮมสเตย์ในเมืองต้าหลี่ มณฑลยูนนาน ภายใต้กรอบแนวคิดทฤษฎีการพิสูจน์ทางสังคม ทฤษฎีสัญญาณ และกรอบ แนวคิดกระตุ้น - สิ่งมีชีวิต - การตอบสนอง งานวิจัยนี้ใช้วิธีวิจัยแบบผสมวิธี เพื่อวิเคราะห์ เนื้อหาของวิดีโอสั้นในแพลตฟอร์ม Douyin แบบสอบถามเชิงโครงสร้างจากผู้เข้าพัก 312 คน และการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกแบบกึ่งโครงสร้างกับลูกค้าโฮมสเตย์ จำนวน 20 คน

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า เนื้อหาที่ผู้ใช้สร้างขึ้นมีผลกระทบต่อภาพลักษณ์ด้านอารมณ์ ในขณะที่ เนื้อหาที่เจ้าของสร้างขึ้นส่งผลมากกว่าต่อภาพลักษณ์ด้านการรับรู้ และเนื้อหาทั้ง 2 แบบล้วนมีส่วนต่อความตั้งใจเลือกของลูกค้า ภาพลักษณ์ด้านการรับรู้มีบทบาทในการ สร้างการประเมินเชิงเหตุผล ขณะที่ภาพลักษณ์ด้านอารมณ์เป็นตัวทำนายที่ทรงพลังที่สุด ต่อการตัดสินใจจองที่พัก การศึกษานี้ได้ขยายทฤษฎี Servicescape ในบริบทสื่อดิจิทัล ประเภทวิดีโอสั้น โดยเน้นให้เห็นถึงความแท้ทางวัฒนธรรม เป็นองค์ประกอบสำคัญของ ภาพลักษณ์ลูกค้า และได้ยืนยันการประยุกต์ใช้กรอบแนวคิด SOR ในการตลาดโฮมสเตย์ ข้อเสนอเชิงปฏิบัติ แนะนำให้ผู้ประกอบการโฮมสเตย์ดำเนินกลยุทธ์ที่สมดุล โดยผสาน ความแท้จริงของเนื้อหาที่ผู้ใช้สร้างขึ้น เข้ากับความเป็นมืออาชีพของเนื้อหาที่เจ้าของสร้าง ขึ้นและบูรณาการเรื่องราวทางวัฒนธรรมเพื่อเสริมสร้างทั้งการมีส่วนร่วมทางอารมณ์และ ความเชื่อมั่นเชิงการรับรู้ของลูกค้า

คำสำคัญ: การแชร์บนโต่วอิน; ความตั้งใจของลูกค้า; ภาพลักษณ์โฮมสเตย์

Introduction

The rapid rise of short-video platforms has transformed consumer behavior in tourism and hospitality. In China, Douyin (the domestic version of TikTok) has emerged as a dominant platform, boasting more than 600 million daily active users. Unlike traditional promotional channels, Douyin provides both user-generated content (UGC) and owner-generated content (OGC), allowing consumers to access diverse, multimedia narratives that influence perceptions and decisions. This is particularly significant in the homestay

sector, where authenticity, aesthetics, and cultural resonance strongly determine consumer choice.

Homestays in Dali, Yunnan Province, provide a distinctive research setting. Renowned for its natural landscapes, notably Erhai Lake, and rich Bai ethnic heritage, Dali has become a hub for domestic tourism and a hotspot for Douyin-driven travel marketing. Customers frequently consult short videos before booking, not only to evaluate tangible features such as facilities and location, but also to anticipate the emotional and cultural value of their stay. However, the mechanisms through which UGC and OGC on Douyin shape customer willingness to choose homestays remain insufficiently understood. During the study period, Dali City attracted approximately 15 million tourist visits (as of 2016).

Prior studies on tourism marketing have examined social media's role in shaping destination image and tourist satisfaction (Gao & Sun, 2022; Lee & Kim, 2021). Yet, much of the literature treats UGC and OGC independently, overlooking their potential complementarities in influencing both cognitive image (rational evaluations of quality, environment, and service) and emotional image (feelings of enjoyment, authenticity, and belonging). Furthermore, little attention has been given to the mediating roles of these images in explaining how content exposure translates into booking intention.

This study seeks to fill these gaps by integrating Social Proof Theory, Signal Theory, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model into a unified framework. Specifically, it examines how different forms of Douyin sharing UGC and OGC affect cognitive and emotional images, and how these, in turn, influence customers' willingness to choose homestays in Dali. By applying a mixed-method approach, the research contributes both theoretical insights into the dual-path influence of short-video content and practical implications for homestay operators seeking to optimize digital marketing strategies.

Literature Review User-generated content (UGC) refers to photos, videos, reviews, and live streams created and shared by consumers rather than businesses. In the tourism and hospitality context, UGC is valued for its

authenticity and peer credibility, offering firsthand perspectives that reduce uncertainty and perceived risk (Filieri et al., 2015). According to Social Proof Theory (Cialdini, 2009), individuals often look to others' experiences to guide their own choices, particularly in high-involvement decisions such as accommodation booking. On Douyin, UGC such as candid vlogs, unfiltered reviews, or scenic recordings of Erhai Lake has been shown to enhance trust and stimulate booking intention (Zhang & Liu, 2022). By presenting realistic depictions, UGC influences not only cognitive evaluations of service quality but also emotional connections with the destination.

Owner-generated content (OGC) includes promotional videos, live-streamed tours, and curated imagery produced by homestay operators. From the perspective of Signal Theory (Spence, 1973), OGC conveys cues about service reliability, professionalism, and brand values, helping customers reduce information asymmetry. High-quality videos, drone photography, and cultural storytelling serve as signals of investment and competence. While OGC strengthens cognitive trust by clarifying facilities and services, overly polished content may reduce perceptions of authenticity (Chen, 2019). Thus, the effectiveness of OGC depends on its balance between professional signaling and relatable communication.

Tourism image research distinguishes between cognitive image rational evaluations of a destination's or service's tangible and functional attributes and emotional image, which captures affective responses such as pleasure, arousal, and attachment (Gartner, 1994; Pike & Ryan, 2004). Cognitive image shapes tourists' evaluations of service quality, physical environment, and cultural offerings, while emotional image influences attachment, satisfaction, and loyalty (Gao & Sun, 2022). In the short-video context, UGC often enhances emotional images through relatable and entertaining storytelling, whereas OGC tends to strengthen cognitive images by providing structured and reliable information. Both dimensions are critical to understanding customer decision-making.

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model provides a robust theoretical lens to explain how digital content shapes consumer behavior

(Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). In this framework, UGC and OGC function as stimuli, influencing customers' internal states the organism, represented here by cognitive and emotional images which then generate behavioral responses, such as willingness to choose a homestay. This model has been widely applied in hospitality and tourism to understand the psychological mechanisms underlying consumer decision-making (Han & Ryu, 2009). By integrating SOR with Social Proof Theory and Signal Theory, the present study conceptualizes a dual-path model where UGC drives authenticity and emotional resonance, while OGC transmits professional signals that enhance cognitive trust.

While prior studies have established the significance of UGC and OGC in shaping tourism experiences, most treat them in isolation rather than examining their complementary roles. Moreover, the mediating functions of cognitive and emotional images in the short-video environment remain underexplored. Given the prominence of Douyin in Chinese tourism marketing and the cultural uniqueness of homestays in Dali, there is a need for empirical research that integrates UGC, OGC, and destination image into a unified explanatory model. This study seeks to address these gaps by testing a framework that captures both the direct and mediated effects of UGC and OGC on customers' willingness to choose homestays.

Research Objectives

1. Examine the influence of user-generated content (UGC) and owner-generated content (OGC) on customers' cognitive and emotional images of homestays in Dali.

2．Investigate the mediating roles of cognitive and emotional images in the relationship between content exposure (UGC/OGC) and customers' willingness to choose homestays.

3．Compare the relative effects of cognitive versus emotional images in shaping customer choice intention.

4. Provide theoretical insights and practical implications for leveraging short-video platforms, particularly Douyin, in homestay marketing strategies.

284

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Methodology

1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to examine how user-generated content (UGC) and owner-generated content (OGC) on Douyin influence customers' willingness to choose homestays in Dali, Yunnan Province. A combination of quantitative surveys, content analysis, and qualitative interviews was used to ensure robust findings and enhance the validity of results.

2. Populations and Samples and Key Informants

The target population comprised customers who had recently engaged with homestay services in Dali and who actively use Douyin as part of their travel decision-making process. Eligible respondents were individuals who had either stayed in or booked a homestay within the past 12 months. A stratified random sampling strategy was adopted to capture variation across different types of homestays (e.g., traditional Bai-style, modern boutique, and budget options). A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed through multiple channels, including Douyin groups, online travel communities, and homestay operators' social media pages. After screening for completeness and validity, 312 usable responses were retained, yielding a response rate of approximately 90%. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 homestay customers to validate survey interpretations and provide qualitative insights into the mechanisms linking content exposure with booking decisions.

3. Research Instrument

Content analysis, structured questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews were employed as research instruments. A systematic review of both UGC and OGC related to Dali homestays on Douyin was performed to identify dominant themes, presentation styles, and engagement features. Structured questionnaires were administered both online and offline to measure constructs such as UGC, OGC, cognitive image, emotional image, and customer choice intention. All measurement items were adapted from validated scales in prior literature and contextualized to the homestay and

Douyin setting. Items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). UGC and OGC items were adapted from Lee and Kim (2021); cognitive image items from SERVQUAL dimensions (Parasuraman et al., 1988); emotional image items from Gao & Sun (2022); and customer choice intention from Oliver (1997) and Zeithaml et al. (1996). The instrument was reviewed by three academics specializing in service marketing and tourism and two industry practitioners from the homestay sector. A pilot test with 30 respondents confirmed clarity and reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70.

4. Data Collection

During the main study, questionnaires were distributed to customers who had engaged with homestay services in Dali and used Douyin for travel decisions. Content analysis of UGC and OGC on Douyin was conducted alongside the survey. Semi-structured interviews with 20 homestay customers were performed to validate quantitative interpretations and provide qualitative insights.

5. Data analysis Statistics Used to Analyzed the Data

Measurement reliability and validity were assessed through Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio. The hypothesized model was tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was applied to assess the significance of path coefficients and indirect effects. Descriptive statistics were generated to profile the sample, and content analysis findings were integrated with quantitative results for richer interpretation.

Results

Descriptive results for the study variables are presented in Table 1. All constructs had mean values above the midpoint of the five-point Likert scale, ranging from 3.72 (OGC) to 4.05 (Choice Intention), indicating that respondents held overall positive perceptions of both UGC and OGC, as well as favorable

attitudes toward booking homestays. Standard deviations were within acceptable ranges (0.60–0.72), suggesting moderate variability across responses.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max
UGC	3.85	0.68	1	5
OGC	3.72	0.72	1	5
Cognitive Image	3.9	0.65	1	5
Emotional Image	3.95	0.7	1	5
Choice Intention	4.05	0.6	1	5

Table 2 summarizes the reliability and validity results. Cronbach's alpha values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.86 to 0.91, demonstrating strong internal consistency. Composite reliability (CR) values also exceeded 0.89, confirming the robustness of the constructs. Average variance extracted (AVE) values were above the 0.50 threshold, indicating adequate convergent validity. These results provide strong support for the measurement model.

Table 2 Reliability and Validity

Construct	α	CR	AVE
UGC	0.88	0.9	0.64
OGC	0.86	0.89	0.61
Cognitive Image	0.89	0.92	0.68
Emotional Image	0.91	0.93	0.7
Choice Intention	0.87	0.9	0.66

Structural model testing was conducted using PLS-SEM with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. Table 3 reports the path coefficients, t-values, and significance levels for the hypothesized relationships.

UGC Effects: UGC had significant positive effects on both cognitive image ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < .001$) and emotional image ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < .001$). A smaller but significant direct effect on choice intention was also observed ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < .01$).

OGC Effects: OGC significantly predicted cognitive image ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < .001$) and emotional image ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < .001$). A direct effect on choice intention was also significant ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < .01$).

Mediating Roles: Both cognitive image (β = 0.40, p < .001) and emotional image (β = 0.52, p < .001) were strong predictors of choice intention. Indirect effects confirmed that these images mediated the relationships between UGC/OGC and choice intention.

Table 3 Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	β	t	p
H1: UGC $\longrightarrow$ Cognitive Image	0.42	9.21	<0.001
H2: OGC $\longrightarrow$ Cognitive Image	0.38	8.45	<0.001
H3: UGC $\longrightarrow$ Emotional Image	0.45	10.12	<0.001
H4: OGC $\longrightarrow$ Emotional Image	0.33	7.85	<0.001
H5: Cognitive Image $\longrightarrow$ Choice	0.4	8.92	<0.001
H6: Emotional Image $\longrightarrow$ Choice	0.52	11.23	<0.001
H7: UGC $\longrightarrow$ Choice Intention	0.21	4.15	<0.01
H8: OGC $\longrightarrow$ Choice Intention	0.19	3.98	<0.01

The analysis began with an assessment of the measurement model. Reliability and validity were established across all constructs. Cronbach's alpha values ranged between .88 and .92, confirming internal consistency. Composite reliability values were all above the .70 threshold, ranging from .92 to .95, and the average variance extracted (AVE) ranged from .69 to .75, confirming

Discussion

The present study explored how different forms of Douyin sharing user-generated content (UGC) and owner-generated content (OGC) influence customers' willingness to choose homestays in Dali, China. By integrating Social Proof Theory, Signal Theory, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model, this research provides new insights into the dual-path mechanisms through which short-video content shapes consumer decision-making in the tourism and hospitality sector. The finding that UGC exerts stronger effects on emotional images aligns with prior studies showing that consumer-generated content enhances affective attachment and authenticity in tourism marketing (Gao & Sun, 2022; Zhang & Liu, 2022). Conversely, the result that OGC more strongly influences cognitive images resonates with previous research

highlighting the signaling role of professionally produced content in reducing perceived risk and clarifying service quality (Chen, 2019).

The results also corroborate Lee and Kim (2021), who demonstrated that short-video marketing effectively shapes tourist decision-making by simultaneously addressing functional and emotional dimensions. Furthermore, the dominance of emotional image in predicting choice intention reinforces earlier findings that affective responses often outweigh rational evaluations in determining consumer loyalty and booking decisions (Gartner, 1994; Pike & Ryan, 2004). By confirming and extending these insights in the Douyin-driven homestay context, this study contributes both empirical evidence and theoretical refinement to the literature on social media tourism marketing.

Body of Knowledge

The body of knowledge derived from this study was designed through a systematic synthesis of quantitative and qualitative findings. Using PLS-SEM analysis, the research identified the significant paths linking user-generated content (UGC) and owner-generated content (OGC) with cognitive and emotional images, and subsequently with customers' willingness to choose homestays. Qualitative insights from interviews were then integrated to enrich the model with cultural and contextual nuances. The result is a conceptual model in which UGC primarily stimulates emotional images through authenticity and relatability, while OGC strengthens cognitive images through professionalism and reliability; both image types, in turn, drive customer choice intention.

This model can be applied in practice by homestay operators to design balanced digital marketing strategies that combine authentic customer storytelling with professional promotional content. Policymakers and tourism authorities can also use the model as a framework for training programs that guide operators in leveraging social media effectively. Moreover, researchers may adapt the model for future studies to test its applicability in other destinations or platforms, thereby advancing theoretical understanding of short-video marketing in tourism.

Recommendations

1. The findings demonstrate that UGC exerts a stronger influence on emotional image, whereas OGC more strongly predicts cognitive image. This confirms the differentiated but complementary roles of the two content types. Consistent with Social Proof Theory (Cialdini, 2009), UGC builds credibility by showcasing authentic guest experiences and relatable narratives. This authenticity stimulates affective responses such as trust, enjoyment, and cultural resonance, thereby strengthening emotional images.

2. This study also emphasizes the importance of cultural context in servicescape and digital marketing. In Dali, where ethnic traditions intersect with modern tourism, customers value both visual aesthetics and cultural resonance. UGC and OGC that highlight local heritage can differentiate homestays from generic accommodation, transforming them into immersive cultural experiences. This adds nuance to servicescape theory by illustrating how cultural authenticity functions as an additional dimension of both cognitive and emotional imagery in digital content.

3. Although the findings are robust, several limitations warrant attention. First, the data were collected in Dali and may not generalize to other destinations with different cultural or market dynamics. Future studies should compare across regions or countries to test external validity. Second, this study employed cross-sectional data; longitudinal or experimental designs would provide stronger causal evidence of content influence. Third, while Douyin is the focus here, future research could explore platform comparisons (e.g., Douyin vs. Xiaohongshu or TikTok international) to assess cross-platform consistency.

4. This study recommends that tourism authorities and local governments promote the strategic use of social media platforms such as Douyin by providing training and guidelines for homestay operators, particularly on balancing user-generated and owner-generated content. Practically, homestay providers should adopt a dual strategy that leverages authentic UGC to enhance emotional engagement and professional OGC to build cognitive trust, while embedding cultural narratives such as local

traditions and rituals to strengthen both attachment and differentiation. Future research should extend these findings by conducting comparative studies across different regions or platforms, employing longitudinal or experimental designs to validate causal relationships, and exploring cross-platform effects to deepen understanding of short-video marketing in tourism.

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