

From Content to Connection: How Social Media Features

Drive PSI and e-WOM on TikTok

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received:03 Sept 2025 Revised:05 Oct 2025 Accepted:15 Oct 2025	Tourism organizations increasingly rely on social media to shape destination impressions and influence consumer behavior. However, there is a challenge in how tourism organizations develop social media content to successfully attract consumers' attention, induce their psychological interaction with the destination, and motivate their E-WOM behavior. This study investigates the direct and indirect effects of three social media content features on consumer behavioral responses, with parasocial interaction (PSI) as a key mediating mechanism. This study adopted the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to construct content features in social media, and collected research data from 396 Malaysian TikTok users and applied PLS-SEM for model testing. Findings show that information quality significantly predicts both PSI and E-WOM, while source credibility only directly affects E-WOM. Interactivity had no significant impact. These findings extend the ELM framework by highlighting the mediating role of PSI in tourism branding and offer practical guidance for destination brands to optimize content strategies in social media platform. Keywords: social media marketing, parasocial interaction, ELM, tourism destination brand, content features,

1. Introduction

In today's digital environment, social media plays an important role in tourism information dissemination and consumer decision-making. Social media content posting not only allow brands to deliver value, but also important for users to build brand impressions and relationships (Penttinen, 2023). It has a profound impact on users' psychological perception and behavioural responses (Hudson et al., 2016). Consumers are more likely to engage in behaviors like purchasing, repurchasing, or recommending a brand after going through a deep cognitive and emotional evaluation process (Gavilanes et al., 2018). High-quality, engaging, and credible content strengthens brand perception, drives E-WOM, and enhances brand loyalty (Kim & Kim, 2017; Kang & Park, 2018; Molina et al., 2020).

Despite this strategic importance, many destination management organizations (DMOs) still face challenges in designing effective social media strategies that resonate with users (Pino et al., 2019).

With the expansion of digital interactions, parasocial interaction (PSI) has emerged as a core mechanism through which users form one-sided relationship with media figures or brands (Kim & Kim, 2017; Bi et al., 2021). In social media context, when users perceive personal involvement or humanized information from a brand, they are more likely to form PSI (Hassanzadeh et al., 2022; Song & Zinkhan, 2008). PSI is especially relevant for marketing, where emotional engagement with a destination brand can influence perceptions and future behaviors (Kim & Kim, 2017; Ma et al., 2023). While social media enables two-way communication (Leung et al., 2019; Bi et al., 2021), brands are often unable to engage every user in online dialogue. Under such circumstance, PSI serves as a psychological mechanism, allowing users to feel attached to a brand even in the absence of real-time interaction (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). High-quality, credible, and interactive content is more likely to foster PSI, which in turn strengthens brand commitment and encourages positive e-WOM (Labrecque, 2014a; Yuksel & Labrecque, 2016). Thus, PSI is not just a psychological response but an important mechanism through which brand content drives user behavior.

According to Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), individuals process information through either the central route or the peripheral route, depending on their motivation and ability (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) pointed out that individuals process persuasive messages via two routes: the central route, involving logical scrutiny, and the peripheral route, involving emotional or heuristic cues (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In the tourism context, detailed, useful information acts as a central cue, encouraging deeper cognitive processing and forming rational impressions (Zha et al., 2018a; Tseng et al., 2022). On the other hand, source credibility and interactivity operate as peripheral cues that facilitate emotional bonding without requiring significant cognitive effort (Camilleri & Kozak, 2022; Pereira et al., 2022).

By applying ELM, researchers have explored how different content features influence consumers' decision-making processes (Abbasi et al., 2023). To be more specific, information quality is regarded as central route cues that lead to deeper cognitive thinking and judgement. In contrast, source credibility and content interactivity are more likely to be processed as peripheral cues ((Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006; Cyr et al., 2018; H. Wang & Yan, 2022). Together, these two types of cues contribute to both cognitive and emotional engagement, gradually fostering a sense of intimacy and familiarity with the brand, i.e., PSI (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). Current studies have mainly focused on the outcome variables of PSI, but less on its antecedent (Yuan et al., 2021). Furthermore, studies integrating ELM with PSI theory to examine how content features influence brand relationships on social media are still scarce (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Although PSI was originally studied in traditional media contexts, its relevance has expanded with social media, especially where consumers develop imagined relationships with brand representatives or influencers (Lee & Lee, 2017; S. Yuan & Lou, 2020). Recent studies show that PSI fosters brand trust, user engagement, and destination brand commitment (Aljuhmani et al., 2022; Du et al., 2022; Su et al., 2023). Brands can effectively stimulate PSI by enhancing the interactivity of their social media content, source credibility, and the frequency of responding to user comments (Voorveld et al., 2013; Kim et al.,

2021; Fazli-Salehi et al., 2022). Although many studies have explored the impact of information quality (e.g., (Chang et al., 2015; Zha et al., 2018), source credibility (e.g., (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020; Sharma, 2023), and interactivity (e.g., (Voorveld et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2023) on user attitudes and behavioral intentions, Nonetheless, limited research has explored how content features systematically affect PSI formation in tourism contexts. (Hays et al., 2013; Molina et al., 2020; Swani et al., 2017). Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by investigating the role of information quality, source credibility, and interactivity in shaping PSI and how PSI mediates their effects on e-WOM and brand commitment.

2. Literature Review

2.1 ELM

The Extended Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) has been extensively used as a theoretical framework in research studies that examine persuasive scenarios, including advertising, online purchasing, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and online reviews (Schivinski et al., 2016; Swani et al., 2017; Jun & Yi, 2020; Moradi & Zihagh, 2022). According to this model, there are two paths to persuade consumers to form and change their attitudes: the core and peripheral paths (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The central path refers to consumers' careful evaluation of message content, leading to attitude formation or change through rational analysis. The peripheral path relies on cues such as brand image or source attractiveness (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). In the context of persuasion, individuals using the peripheral route tend to minimize cognitive exertion and instead depend on heuristic and peripheral clues to form simplified judgments about the perceived value of the message (Kim et al., 2017). Peripheral elements are used in order to create simpler assumptions. Message elaborations often include a combination of central and peripheral elements (Petty et al., 1983; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Studies have used the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) as a theoretical framework to comprehend the mechanism via which marketing activities cause alterations in the attitudes and behavioral intentions (Geng et al., 2022). For example, Zheng et al. (2015) have used the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) in their research to study the process by which readers judge online users' continuance intention of mobile health applications. Information from a reputable source (e.g., influencer credibility) is regarded as a belief that the anticipated product or service will be provided (i.e., positive expectation), thus affecting one's attitudes and/or behavior (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Schimmelpfennig & Hunt, 2020).

This study develops a content-feature-driven persuasion framework to explore how content features influence consumer behavior in the context of social media tourism marketing. Instead of strictly applying the traditional dual-path model, this study extends ELM model to examine how three content features-information quality, source credibility, and interactivity- influence the formation of parasocial interaction (PSI) and brand loyalty. Specifically, information quality acts as a central cue that triggers deeper user thinking. When tourism information is detailed and useful, users are more likely to engage in cognitive elaboration (Zha et al., 2018; Tseng et al., 2022). This helps them form a clear and rational impression of the destination, enhancing their perceived informativeness ((Filieri et al., 2018; Cheung et al., 2021). As a result, users begin to feel one-sided connection with the destination brand that can lead to parasocial interaction (PSI) (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; Lee & Lee, 2017)). This cognitive

engagement reflects the central route of persuasion described in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), where information quality serves as a key antecedent of message effectiveness in tourism contexts (Zha et al., 2018).

In contrast, source credibility and interactivity work as affective cues. When users are not motivated to think systematically, they tend to rely on simple cues like credible source or interactive features such as comments and shares (Li et al., 2023). These features serve as emotional triggers, helping users feel connected and build trust without much effort (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Camilleri & Kozak, 2022). Likewise, interactive features like comments and replies increase users' sense of social presence and mutual exchange, which promotes parasocial interaction (Labrecque, 2014; Xiao et al., 2018).

Social media marketing is essentially a persuasion process. Therefore, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) provides a robust theoretical basis for the present study. Previous studies have used attitude change and behavioral intention as measures to assess persuasion results (Petty et al., 1983). Many studies focus on attitude change as a predictor of behavior; however, other studies, including earlier work on the ELM (Petty et al., 1983) and recent information system studies (Farivar et al., 2023; Leong et al., 2019; Zhou, 2022), have examined the direct effect of persuasion factors on behavioral constructs without regard for attitude constructs.

2.2 PSI

Parasocial interaction (PSI) was first introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956), refers to a one-sided, imagined relationship where individuals feel as if they are socially interacting with a media person. Unlike social relationship, PS does not contain reciprocity between media personae and audiences (Lee, 2020). Traditionally, PSI was studied in the context of television and radio, where audiences developed attachments to media figures through repeated exposure (Perse & Rubin, 1989).

However, social media blurs the line between real and imagined interactions by allowing users to actively engage with content through likes, comments, shares, and follows (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Wijayanti et al., 2021). These interactive features that simulate dialogue, increasing the sense of closeness between users and media personae (Waqas et al., 2021). As a result, brands and influencers can now foster PSI in social media more effectively than in traditional mass media, not only by broadcasting content but also by creating emotional connections that resemble real relationships (Labrecque, 2014; Kim et al., 2021). Research suggests that such interactions promote trust and familiarity with media figures, encouraging deeper psychological engagement (Oliver et al., 2019).

PSI has already been explored in various settings, such as celebrity endorsement (Chung & Cho, 2017), media character (Aytulun & Sunal, 2020), and corporate communications (Tsai & Men, 2017). In tourism marketing, PSI is particularly relevant, as users often form destination impressions based on online content. Research has shown that PSI can enhance destination appeal and influence travel intention, particularly when the content comes from credible sources like influencers or official tourism accounts (Dedeoglu et al., 2020; Yilmazdoğan et al., 2021). These findings highlight PSI as an important psychological mechanism that connects content exposure with consumer behavior in tourism.

Though previous research has confirmed PSI's impact on user brand love, loyalty, purchase intentions, and consumer attitudes (Gong & Li, 2017; Zhang et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), the mechanisms by which content features facilitate PSI in tourism contexts remain underexplored. This study fills this

gap by developing a content-feature-driven persuasion framework. It examines how the three key content features—information quality, source credibility, and interactivity—influence PSI through distinct cognitive and emotional routes, and how PSI, in turn, fosters user engagement and brand loyalty.

2.3 Hypotheses development

2.3.2 Social media content features and parasocial interaction

Based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model, individuals process persuasive communications via two different mechanisms: one that involves deep, thoughtful consideration of arguments (central route), and another that depends on peripheral cues such as credibility (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The selection of the processing route depends on the individual's level of motivation and their capacity to interpret the message. Within ELM framework, information quality, source credibility, and interactivity are key cues that guide users toward central information processing (Allison et al., 2017). Consumers often form idealized perceptions of brands on social media, which makes affective projection more likely to occur (Labrecque, 2014; Chen et al., 2022;).

Information quality refers to the completeness, accuracy, and timeliness of content shared on social media (Zha et al., 2018). High-quality information not only improves consumers' clarity of brand perception and trust but also enhances their behavioral intentions (Chen & Chang, 2018). In the context of tourism marketing, when faced with an overload of online information, tourists prefer clear and accurate content information (Li, et al., 2022). Research suggests that when users perceive content as accurate, relevant, and well-organized, they tend to engage in detailed cognitive evaluation via the central route of ELM (Allison et al., 2017). This central processing enhances their perception of the brand's credibility and fosters a stronger psychological connection between users and the destination brand (Zha et al., 2018a; Tseng et al., 2022).

Source credibility includes perceptions of expertise, reliability, and honesty (Ohanian, 1990). Previous studies showed that a credible source not only improves users' acceptance of information but also strengthens trust and identification (Zhou et al., 2016), which may lead to stronger emotional connections and parasocial interaction (PSI). For instance, Choi et al. (2019) found that trustworthy images of travel bloggers or official destination accounts could enhance PSI between users and destination brands. Similarly, Yilmazdoğan et al. (2021) demonstrated that PSI significantly mediates the relationship between source credibility and travel intention. This indicates that credibility not only serves as a heuristic cue in content evaluation but also personifies the brand, fostering a sense of familiarity and closeness.

Interactivity is another core feature that distinguishes social media from traditional media. It refers to the degree of timely, responsive, and personalized communication between users and brands (Camilleri & Kozak, 2022). Interactivity gives audiences the impression that a media persona or brand is personally engaging with them, often through content that simulates two-way communication (McMillan & Hwang, 2002; Song & Zinkhan, 2008; Abbasi et al., 2023). Labrecque (2014) found that using words like “you” and replying to comments helps users feel heard and builds parasocial interaction. Lee and Shin (2014) found that contents in Twitter created a stronger sense of direct conversation than traditional media, even with identical information. Liao et al. (2022) found that high

levels of live stream interactivity significantly boosted viewer immersion and PSI. Fazli-Salehi et al. (2022) further suggested that interactivity enhances users' perception that the brand is addressing their individual needs, which helps establish PSI.

In summary, information quality, source credibility, and interactivity influence how users process social media content and also promote parasocial interaction (PSI) through emotional response. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Information quality of social media content positively influences consumers' parasocial interaction.

H2: Source credibility of social media content positively influences consumers' parasocial interaction.

H3: Interactivity of social media content positively influences consumers' parasocial interaction.

2.3.4 Social media content features and E-WOM

ELM is appropriate for social media analysis since message cues play an important role in message processing and attitude formation (Segev & Fernandes, 2023). According to Abbasi et al. (2023), ELM provides a theoretical framework for analysing social media content features (e. g., central and peripheral cues). Chen et al. (2018) examined users' continued use of mobile health apps, looking at both quality-related factors and peripheral cues such as reputation and institutional assurance. Similar outcomes were found among online website context, the argument quality (central route), image appeal and connectedness (peripheral route) have been found to influence consumers' information adoption (Cyr et al., 2018).

Previous studies show that consumers are more likely to support their decisions with content that have higher levels of perceived source credibility (Banerjee et al., 2017; Srivastava & Kalro, 2019). Abbasi et al. (2023) suggest that the credibility and informativeness has a positive impact on customer E-wom of a tourism destination. In tourism studies, organizations post images to provide destination-related information, which helps consumers gain value and make travel-related decisions (He et al., 2022). According to Hovland and Weiss (1951), the information sender's credibility is crucial for determining the persuasiveness of information (Schimmelpfennig & Hunt, 2020), which are essential indicators for judging information's usefulness (Gilal et al., 2020). Information quality is specifically important for experience products like tourism product, while more aroused design and information would be key factor for search products (Cheng et al., 2020). Previous study finds that content interactivity helps drive consumer WOM, such as shares (Moran et al., 2019). Therefore, the present study proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: Information quality of social media content positively influences E-WOM.

H5: Source credibility of social media content positively influences E-WOM.

H6: Interactivity of social media content positively influences E-WOM.

2.3.3 Social media content features, parasocial interaction and E-WOM

Building on the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), both central cues and peripheral cues may not only directly affect E-WOM but also indirectly shape it through parasocial interaction. In tourism context, PSI can be built through influencers, virtual tours, or destination-related content, which helps users develop emotional connections and loyalty (Kim & Kim, 2017; Bi et al., 2021; Haobin Ye et al., 2021). Recent studies suggest that PSI not only strengthens brand attachment but also encourages users to

express positive emotions and engage in word-of-mouth (E-WOM). For example, Hwang and Zhang (2018) confirmed that parasocial relationships influence followers' willingness to engage in E-WOM behaviors, while Yuan et al (2021) reported that users who feel emotionally close to a destination are more likely to recommend it to others. These findings suggest that PSI can act as a mediating mechanism that translates social media content features into behavioral outcomes. Therefore, the present study proposes the following hypothesis:

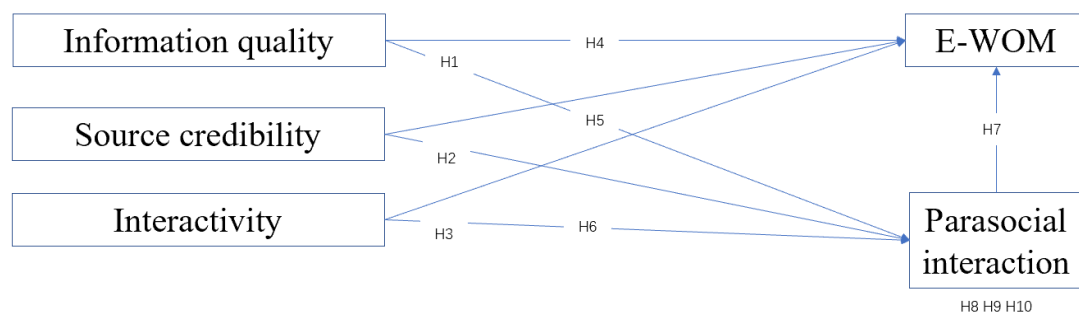
H7: Parasocial interaction has a positive effect on tourists' word-of-mouth (WOM).

H8: Parasocial interaction mediates the relationship between information quality and E-WOM.

H9: Parasocial interaction mediates the relationship between source credibility and E-WOM.

H10: Parasocial interaction mediates the relationship between interactivity and E-WOM.

Figure 1. Propose research model



3. Methodology

3.1 Research Context and Sample

This study adopted a quantitative research design using an online questionnaire targeting TikTok users in Malaysia. Respondents were required to have prior exposure to tourism-related destination content on the platform. The platform's highly interactive nature and vividness characteristic make it suitable for studying parasocial interaction (PSI) and its impact on tourism marketing outcomes.

To identify relevant respondents, four representative tourism-related TikTok accounts were selected based on follower count and activity level: VisitMalaysia, SabahTravel, PenangTourism, and an influencer-led destination travel account with over 500,000 followers. A questionnaire was developed using the existing measurement scales from previous research (table 1). The measurements for information quality are adapted from Bhattacharjee & Sanford.(2006) and Yu et al. (2020). The measurements for source credibility are adapted from Camilleri (2022). The current study builds on prior research that examined interactivity as a single dimension Camilleri & Kozak (2022) and Yoo et al. (2017). Parasocial interaction are adapted from Choi et al.(2019) and Lee & Lee (2017). E-WOM are adapted from Seo & Park. (2018) and Su et al.(2016).

Table 1. Measurements of items

Items	Constructs
The information in the social media platform is useful	
The information in the social media platform is complete	

The information in the social media platform is timely	Information quality (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006; Yu et al., 2020)
The information in the social media platform is correct	
The information in the social media platform is easy to understand	
I trust the content that is featured in the social media platform	Source credibility (Camilleri, 2022)
The content that is featured in the social media platform is truthful	
The destination brand has a great amount of experience in the curation of online content	
The destination brand is skilled in developing online content	
The destination brand offers a variety of content.	Interactivity (Camilleri & Kozak, 2022; Yoo et al., 2017)
The destination brand in the social media platform keep my attention	
The destination brand provides immediate answers to my questions	
It is easy to use the social media platform	
This destination brand makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend	Parasocial interaction (Choi et al., 2019; S. A. Lee & Lee, 2017b)
I can relate to this destination brand	
I hope this destination brand can achieve its goals	
I care about what happens to this destination brand	
I feel as if this destination brand and I could have a real conversation	
I am likely to say positive things about this destination.	E-WOM (Seo & Park, 2018; L. Su et al., 2016)
I would recommend this destination to my friends and relatives	
I will post positive opinions about this destination brand in the social media.	
If my friends were looking for a destination of this type, I would recommend to them	

The survey link was distributed through social media accounts' comment sections, fan groups, and reposted by travel influencers to invite active users to participate in the study. The questionnaire was conducted online and available in both English and Malay.

3.2 Data Collection and analysis

The data collection was conducted over a 6-week period from March to April 2025. Respondents were required to have at least three months of experience following one or more of the selected accounts and to have interacted (e.g., liked, commented, or shared content) with the content during the past month. A screening question was used to filter qualified participants before they proceeded to the full questionnaire. All participants were informed of the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation.

A total of 452 responses were collected, after removing incomplete or invalid submissions, 396 were considered valid. The sample consisted of 216 females and 180 males. In terms of age, the majority (78.3%) were between 18 and 30 years old, 13.9% were between 31 and 45, and 7.8% were over 45.

Regarding social media usage, more than 82% of respondents reported spending at least 6 hours per week on TikTok. Most participants had experience following tourism-related accounts and interacting with branded content.

The present research adopts partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) for factor and path analysis. PLS-SEM handles complex models well (J. F. Hair et al., 2014). Internal reliability is tested with CR and rho. Validity is assessed through convergent and discriminant tests. Once measurement validity is confirmed, hypotheses are tested with the structural model.

3.2 Common method variance

Table 1 shows VIF values for multicollinearity assessment. All VIFs were less than five, suggesting no serious multicollinearity issues (Hair et al., 2017). Therefore, common method bias is not a concern in this study.

3.3 Measurement model results

As presented in Table 2, the results confirmed a reliable level of internal consistency as Cronbach's alpha and the CR of each construct were greater than 0.7 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). In addition, the loadings of individual items exceeded 0.7. The AVE of all constructs were greater than the recommended 0.50 threshold, thus confirming convergent validity (Hair et al., 2017). Furthermore, as presented in Tables 3 and 4, the square roots of the AVEs for the latent constructs were larger than the corresponding latent-variable correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), while the values of HTMT ratio of all of the constructs in the research model are smaller than the threshold value of 0.90 (Henseler et al., 2015), thus confirming discriminant validity.

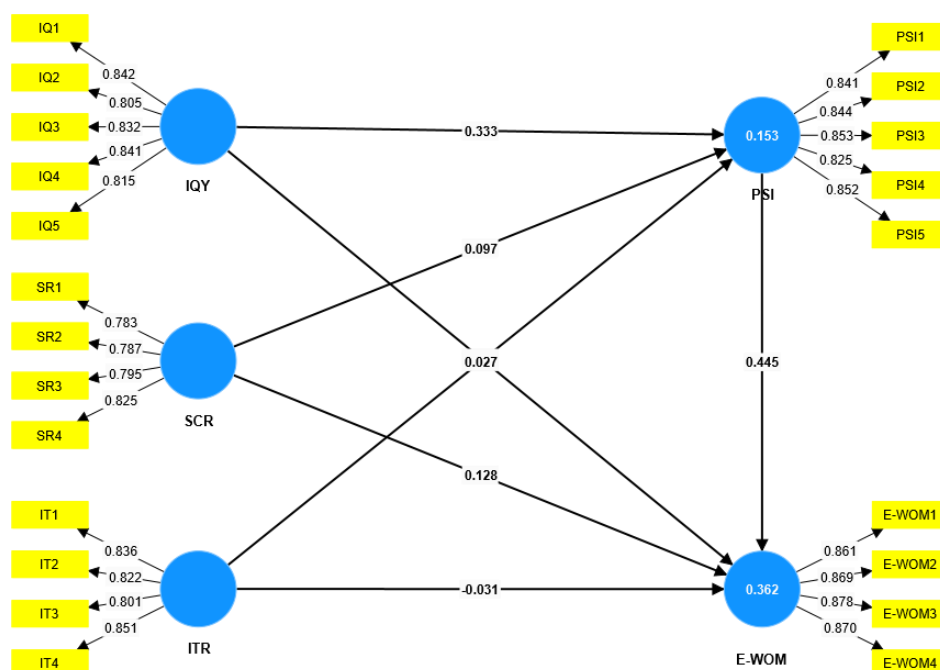


Table 2 Measurement model

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Average variance extracted (AVE)	VIF
Information quality	IQ1	0.842	0.885	0.89	0.684	2.132
	IQ2	0.805				2.02
	IQ3	0.832				2.09
	IQ4	0.841				2.181
	IQ5	0.815				2.091
Source credibility	SR1	0.783	0.81	0.819	0.636	1.649
	SR2	0.787				1.595
	SR3	0.795				1.704
	SR4	0.825				1.669
Interactivity	IT1	0.836	0.849	0.871	0.685	1.995
	IT2	0.822				1.891
	IT4	0.801				1.91
	IT5	0.851				1.796
Parasocial interaction	PSI1	0.841	0.898	0.899	0.711	2.203
	PSI2	0.844				2.305
	PSI3	0.853				2.401
	PSI4	0.825				2.144
	PSI5	0.852				2.375
E-WOM	WOM1	0.869	0.892	0.893	0.756	2.397
	WOM22	0.861				2.352
	WOM3	0.878				2.486
	WOM4	0.87				2.338

Table 3 Fornell-Larcker criterion

	E-WOM	IQY	ITR	PSI	SCR
E-WOM	0.869				
IQY	0.413	0.827			
ITR	0.119	0.263	0.827		
PSI	0.547	0.379	0.141	0.843	
SCR	0.308	0.406	0.275	0.24	0.798

Note: square root of AVE is shown in bold in the diagonal.

Table 4. Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT)

	E-WOM	IQY	ITR	PSI	SCR
E-WOM					
IQY	0.462				
ITR	0.134	0.309			
PSI	0.609	0.419	0.156		
SCR	0.36	0.479	0.33	0.275	

3.4 Structure model

A total of 396 valid samples were used to test the research model. Bootstrapping was performed with 5,000 samples and a 95% confidence interval to assess the statistical significance of constructs. Table 5 present the results of the hypotheses testing. In particular, First, information quality (IQY) has a significant positive effect on both parasocial interaction (PSI) ($\beta = 0.333$, $t = 6.778$, $p < 0.001$) and E-EOM ($\beta = 0.200$, $t = 4.160$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that high-quality content enhances users' psychological engagement with the brand and motivates them to share or recommend the content.

Second, PSI has a strong and significant influence on E-EOM ($\beta = 0.445$, $t = 10.592$, $p < 0.001$), confirming its mediating role in the persuasion process.

In contrast, interactivity (ITR) does not show a significant impact on either PSI ($\beta = 0.027$, $t = 0.552$, $p = 0.581$) or E-WOM ($\beta = -0.031$, $t = 0.729$, $p = 0.466$), indicating that content interaction features alone are not enough to foster meaningful engagement or communication intention in this context.

Source credibility (SCR) positively affects E-WOM ($\beta = 0.128$, $t = 2.851$, $p = 0.004$), suggesting that perceived credibility enhances users' willingness to engage in word-of-mouth behaviors. However, the effect of SCR on PSI is only marginally significant ($\beta = 0.097$, $t = 1.830$, $p = 0.067$), implying that credibility alone may not strongly influence the formation of psychological bonds.

Table 5 Results of hypothesis testing

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
IQY -> E-WOM	0.2	0.199	0.048	4.16	0.000
IQY -> PSI	0.333	0.332	0.049	6.778	0.000
ITR -> E-WOM	-0.031	-0.028	0.043	0.729	0.466
ITR -> PSI	0.027	0.032	0.048	0.552	0.581
PSI -> E-WOM	0.445	0.447	0.042	10.592	0.000
SCR -> E-WOM	0.128	0.128	0.045	2.851	0.004
SCR -> PSI	0.097	0.099	0.053	1.83	0.067

Table 5 Results of hypothesis testing

Model Path	Indirect Effect Coefficient	Bootstrap 95% CI			Supported
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound	P	
IQY → PSI → E-EOM	0.148	0.101	0.203	0.000	No
SCR → PSI → E-EOM	0.043	-0.002	0.092	0.077	No
ITR → PSI → E-EOM	0.012	-0.032	0.051	0.582	Yes

The bootstrapping resampling method was used to test the mediation role of emotional engagement. The mediation analysis shows the significant mediating role of parasocial interaction (PSI) in the relationship between information quality and E-EOM. Specifically, the indirect effect of $IQY \rightarrow PSI \rightarrow E-EOM$ was significant ($\beta = 0.148$, $p < 0.001$). This finding confirms the mediating role of PSI in the $IQY \rightarrow COMM$ relationship, suggesting that high-quality content enhances users' psychological attachment to brands, which subsequently promotes favorable e-WOM behaviors. In contrast, the indirect effects of source credibility and interactivity on E-EOM via parasocial interaction were not statistically significant ($SCR \rightarrow PSI \rightarrow E-EOM$: $\beta = 0.043$, $p = 0.072$; $ITR \rightarrow PSI \rightarrow E-EOM$: $\beta = 0.012$, $p = 0.589$). These results indicate that the influence of source credibility and interactivity on E-WOM is either minimal or not substantially transmitted through PSI.

Therefore, all the hypotheses H1, H3, H4, H5 and H7 were supported, and H2, H6 was not supported.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored how different content features on TikTok influence user behavior through the lens of parasocial interaction in the context of tourism marketing. Drawing on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), we examined how three types of content features—information quality, source credibility, and interactivity—act as persuasive elements that affect users' communication intentions, both directly and indirectly through parasocial interaction (PSI).

The findings reveal that information quality plays a significant role in enhancing both parasocial interaction and E-WOM. When users perceive content as informative and well-structured, they are more likely to process the message carefully. This is consistent with the central route of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). When users find the content relevant and trustworthy, they are more likely to think carefully about the message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Prior studies have also confirmed that content informativeness enhance user engagement and trust, which foster parasocial interaction with consumer (Zha et al., 2018; Tseng et al., 2022). Moreover, research by Jiang et al. (2023) revealed that high information quality also increases users' willingness to share and recommend the content.

In contrast, while source credibility positively affects consumer E-WOM, its indirect effect through PSI is only marginal. This indicates that while a credible source can increase their willingness to share content, it may not trigger a psychological connection with the brand. One possible explanation is that credibility works as a peripheral cue in ELM theory. It influences attitudes through quick and heuristic

thinking instead of a deep message processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). When users are not highly motivated or mentally engaged, they tend to rely on simple cues like source credibility to make quick decisions (Camilleri, 2022; Hussain et al., 2022). This means consumers may trust the content but not form deeper emotional bonds. Because parasocial interaction often needs more attention and repeated engagement. This supports earlier studies showing that credibility alone is not enough to build long-term relationships with users. Lasting connections need consistent interaction and personal cues (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Interestingly, **interactivity** also did not have significant effects on both PSI or consumer E-WOM. A possible explanation is that platforms like TikTok, interactive features (likes, comments, reactions) have become ubiquitous and may no longer carry strong persuasive power. Furthermore, the asynchronous and one-sided nature of interactions in such environments may limit users' perception of social connectedness, thus reducing the effectiveness of interactivity in fostering PSI. This contradicts earlier findings (e.g., Xiao et al., 2018), highlighting the need to reconsider the contextual role of interactivity across different platform types.

Interestingly, the present study shows that interactivity did not have a significant impact on parasocial interaction (PSI) and E-WOM. One possible reason is that on platforms like TikTok, interactive features such as likes, comments, and shares have become a normal behavior. Therefore, consumers may no longer consider such simple interaction as persuasive and engaging (Sundar et al., 2015; Wohn et al., 2018). This weakens the sense of real-time connection, which is important for developing parasocial bonds. These findings differ from earlier research (e.g., Xiao et al., 2018), where interactivity showed a strong impact. This suggests that the role of interactivity may depend on the platform type and user expectations. Future studies should examine how different forms of interaction function across media environments.

As for the mediating role of parasocial interaction, our results demonstrate that PSI significantly mediates the relationship between information quality and E-WOM. However, PSI does not significantly mediate the effects of source credibility and interactivity. This shows that not all content features are equally effective in stimulating emotional bonds like PSI. While source credibility may enhance users' trust, it is often seen as a peripheral cue. Therefore, source credibility is not always able to foster emotional bond (Camilleri, 2022; Hussain et al., 2022). Similarly, interactivity on short-form video platforms may be perceived as routine. Parasocial connections cannot be formed without reciprocity between brand and consumers (Labrecque, 2014; Sundar et al., 2015).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study provides the following theoretical implications. First, the present study extends the application of ELM theory by applying in a tourism social media context. In tourism social media, this study finds that consumers pay more attention to information quality than other content features. It has a stronger effect on parasocial interaction than interactivity or source credibility. Second, the study examined the mechanism of parasocial interaction (PSI) theory. The results show that not all types of content features lead to PSI. Only high-quality information helps consumers to build a stronger

personal connection with the brand. These findings help clarify the psychological process behind PSI and explain why some brand content creates stronger user relationships than others.

For practical implications, tourism marketers should pay more attention to increase their content information quality. High-quality content not only improves the emotional bonding of PSI but also increases consumer E-WOM. Source credibility should be kept to increase consumer trust, but it may not be enough on its own to build deeper user-brand connections. Marketers should also rethink how they use interactive features on social media platforms. Simple interactions such as Likes, comments, and shares is not enough to promote positive consumer behavior.

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