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An Examination of the Relationships between AI-Generated Content (AIGC) Transparency, Perceived Trust, Content Authenticity, and Behavioral Intentions: A SEM Approach Toward Digital Tourism in China

Yaxin Su
International Business School, Universiti Teknologi, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Email: ysu799@aucklanduni.ac.nz

Nor Hidayati Binti Zakaria
International Business School, Universiti Teknologi, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Email: hidayati@utm.my

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Abstract

This study examines the relationships between AI-generated content (AIGC) transparency, perceived trust, content authenticity, and behavioral intentions in China's digital tourism context. With the increasing integration of AIGC in tourism marketing, transparency, and authenticity have become crucial factors influencing consumer trust and decision-making. Data were collected through an online survey targeting users of AI-powered tourism platforms and an experimental study comparing disclosed and undisclosed AIGC. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to analyze the proposed relationships. The key findings indicate that greater transparency in AIGC significantly enhances perceived trust, strengthening perceptions of content authenticity and positively influencing tourists' behavioral intentions. Furthermore, prior exposure to AIGC moderates the impact of transparency on trust, while perceived risk weakens this relationship. These results suggest that digital tourism platforms should prioritize transparent AI disclosure and enhance authenticity perceptions to foster consumer engagement. Therefore, improving transparency and managing perceived risk in AIGC can contribute to more positive consumer trust and behavioral responses in digital tourism experiences.

Keywords: AI-Generated Content, Transparency, Trust, Authenticity, Digital Tourism

Introduction

Adopting AI-generated content (AIGC) in tourism marketing has transformed how consumers interact with digital platforms, offering unprecedented efficiency and personalization.

Platforms like Ctrip, Mafengwo, and Fliggy have increasingly utilized AIGC to provide tailored travel recommendations and automate content creation, enhancing user experience and operational efficiency (Zhang et al., 2024). Despite these advantages, concerns about content transparency, perceived trust, and authenticity have emerged as significant barriers to fostering consumer loyalty and satisfaction in digital tourism (Zhu et al., 2024). AIGC, while efficient, often lacks the emotional and cultural nuance inherent to human-generated content. For instance, Zhang et al. (2024) demonstrated that although AIGC could not yet replicate the quality of professional narrations, its collaborative potential with human input offers promising outcomes for digital tourism. Similarly, Alanadoly et al. (2024) emphasized the co-creative role of AIGC in enhancing marketing effectiveness, highlighting the need for transparency and authenticity in AI-human collaboration. The importance of AIGC transparency lies in its ability to build trust, a critical factor in shaping consumer perceptions and behavioral intentions. While prior research explores AI transparency and trust (Schmidt et al., 2020; Zerilli et al., 2022), there is a lack of empirical evidence on how prior exposure to AIGC and perceived risk moderate trust formation. Moreover, Source Credibility Theory (SCT) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) provide a foundation for understanding trust in digital platforms, yet their application to AIGC in tourism remains underexplored. This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating the relationships among AIGC transparency, perceived trust, content authenticity, and their combined impact on tourist behavioral intentions. By employing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the study aims to analyze the influence of AIGC transparency on perceived trust, evaluate the mediating role of trust in the relationship between transparency and behavioral intentions, and examine the moderating effects of prior exposure to AIGC and perceived risk. This research contributes to theoretical advancements in AIGC applications and provides practical recommendations for optimizing AI-driven tourism marketing strategies in China's competitive digital tourism landscape. The influence of transparency and trust on consumer behavior has received significant attention in research on digital tourism and AI-driven marketing (Ferhataj & Memaj, 2024; Abou-Shouk et al., 2024), gaining wide acceptance among academicians and practitioners. However, few studies have focused on their impact in the context of AI-generated content (AIGC), particularly in shaping tourist engagement and satisfaction. This study fills this gap by investigating how transparency and trust interact to influence behavioral intentions while incorporating novel moderating factors, such as prior exposure to AIGC and perceived risk, in the context of Chinese digital tourism platforms.

Literature Review

AI-Generated Content (AIGC) Transparency

Transparency in AI-generated content (AIGC) has become a cornerstone for fostering trust in digital platforms, particularly tourism, where user trust directly influences engagement. Transparency refers to the degree to which consumers are informed about the role of AI in generating content, including its underlying algorithms, processes, and limitations (Felzmann et al., 2020). Studies have shown that when consumers are aware that the content they are interacting with is AI-generated, they are more likely to perceive it as credible, provided it is disclosed ethically and clearly (Labajová, 2023). Zhang et al. (2024) further emphasized that clear disclosure fosters fairness and reliability, reducing perceived manipulation risks in digital tourism settings.

The extent of AIGC transparency also determines its impact on consumer behavior. Ferràs et al. (2020) highlighted the role of transparent AIGC in smart tourism by showing how virtual assistants and AI-based platforms enhance customer satisfaction when users are well-informed about the AI's role. However, balancing transparency with usability remains challenging, as overly complex disclosures may overwhelm users, leading to diminished trust.

Perceived Trust

Perceived trust is a pivotal factor influencing consumer interaction with AIGC in tourism. Derived from Source Credibility Theory, trust is shaped by perceptions of expertise, reliability, and goodwill in content delivery. Studies have consistently shown that AIGC transparency enhances perceived trust, mainly when platforms address concerns of bias and algorithmic fairness (Li et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2024). Drawing from Source Credibility Theory (SCT), trust in AIGC is influenced by perceptions of content expertise, reliability, and goodwill (Filieri et al., 2021). Users who perceive transparent AI disclosures as credible are more likely to develop trust, reducing skepticism toward algorithm-driven recommendations. Research also reveals that trust is closely linked to the design and operationalization of AI systems. For example, Chen et al. (2024) identified that virtual digital persons in tourism marketing build trust by offering consistent and personalized interactions, which consumers perceive as secure and credible. Furthermore, ensuring that AI-generated content is error-free and culturally relevant strengthens trust, as Zeng et al. (2023) demonstrated in their analysis of AI sentiment analysis and safety perceptions in Chinese tourism.

Content Authenticity

Content authenticity remains a significant concern in the deployment of AIGC in tourism. Authenticity refers to how content is perceived as genuine, relatable, and aligned with consumer expectations. While AIGC excels in efficiency, it often struggles to emulate the cultural and emotional depth required for authentic storytelling (Zhang et al., 2024). Filieri et al. (2021) emphasized that the emotional resonance of tourism content is crucial for fostering meaningful consumer engagement, which is often lacking in algorithm-driven narratives.

Authenticity perceptions are closely tied to trust. Studies have shown that when AIGC transparency is high, users are more likely to perceive the content as authentic (Bosch, 2024; Li & Yang, 2024). Kecun et al. (2025) proposed that blending AI efficiency with human oversight could address authenticity challenges by integrating cultural nuances into AI-generated narratives. Moreover, ensuring that AI-driven tourism experiences reflect destinations' unique characteristics enhances the content's perceived authenticity.

Behavioral Intentions

Behavioral intentions in tourism, such as the likelihood of booking a trip or recommending a destination, are strongly influenced by the interplay of transparency, trust, and authenticity in AIGC. Research by Zhu et al. (2024) indicated that transparency and trust are key predictors of favorable behavioral outcomes, particularly in AI-powered tourism platforms. Users who trust the platform and perceive the content as authentic are likelier to engage with the recommendations provided.

Prior exposure to AIGC plays a moderating role in shaping behavioral intentions. For instance, Chen et al. (2024) found that consumers with previous experience using AI-driven tools

exhibited higher trust and willingness to act on AI-generated recommendations. Conversely, users unfamiliar with AIGC may exhibit skepticism, highlighting the importance of enhancing transparency to mitigate perceived risks (Zhang et al., 2024). The role of perceived risk in dampening behavioral intentions further underscores the need for robust disclosure practices and user education.

Hypothesis Development

Transparency, Trust, Authenticity, and Behavioral Intentions

Transparency in AI-generated content (AIGC) has been widely acknowledged as a key driver of trust. According to Zhang et al. (2024), the transparent disclosure of AI's role in content creation fosters user confidence, alleviating concerns about potential biases or manipulation. Transparency also strengthens perceptions of authenticity by demonstrating accountability and openness, which are critical in tourism contexts where users expect content to align with their cultural and emotional values (Mazilescu, 2019). In turn, trust bridges transparency and users' positive behavioral responses, such as booking or recommending a service (Filieri et al., 2021). Based on these relationships, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1. Transparency in AIGC positively influences perceived trust. H2. Perceived trust positively affects content authenticity.

H3. Perceived content authenticity positively affects tourists' behavioral intentions.

Mediating Role of Trust

Trust acts as a critical mediator between transparency and behavioral intentions. Research has shown that when users trust the source of information, they are more likely to engage in behaviors such as making purchases or sharing recommendations (Chen et al., 2024). Transparent disclosure of AI involvement builds this trust by addressing concerns about accuracy and bias, thus enhancing user acceptance of the recommendations provided (Felzmann et al., 2019; Schmidt & Teubner, 2020). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4. Perceived trust mediates the relationship between AIGC transparency and behavioral intentions.

Moderating Effects of Prior Exposure and Perceived Risk

The extent to which transparency influences trust may depend on users' prior exposure to AIGC. Experienced users familiar with AI-generated content may exhibit higher levels of trust and acceptance than novice users, who might require additional assurances to overcome skepticism (Kučinskas, 2024). Similarly, perceived risk can weaken the relationship between transparency and trust. Users who associate AI-generated content with potential inaccuracies or cultural insensitivity may remain hesitant, even with high transparency (Zeng et al., 2023). These moderating effects are reflected in the following hypotheses:

H5. Prior exposure to AIGC moderates the effect of transparency on trust.

H6. Perceived risk negatively moderates the relationship between AIGC transparency and trust.

Methodology

Research Instrument

The study will examine the relationships among AI-generated content (AIGC) transparency, perceived trust, content authenticity, and behavioral intentions using well-established

measurement scales adapted from prior studies. AIGC transparency will be measured using a four-item scale adapted from Zhang et al. (2024) and Mazilescu (2019) to assess perceived disclosure and clarity. Perceived trust will be evaluated with a five-item scale derived from Filieri et al. (2021) and Chang et al. (2014), focusing on credibility and reliability perceptions. Content authenticity will be measured using a four-item scale developed by Hameed & Perkis (2024) and Liu et al. (2024), capturing genuineness and emotional resonance. Finally, behavioral intentions, such as purchase likelihood and willingness to recommend, will be assessed using a five-item scale adapted from Zhu et al. (2024) and Chen et al. (2024). All responses will be collected using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Sample Design and Data Collection

The target population comprises Chinese tourists who actively use AI-powered digital platforms like Ctrip, Mafengwo, and Fliggy for travel planning. A convenience sampling approach will be employed to collect data through an online self-administered survey, distributed via social media platforms and tourism-related forums. Participants will be screened to ensure they have prior experience interacting with AI-generated travel recommendations. Additionally, an experimental study will be conducted, comparing responses to disclosed versus undisclosed AIGC to understand variations in trust and authenticity perceptions. The study aims to collect 400 valid responses, with a diverse demographic composition regarding age, gender, and travel frequency. This sample size will ensure adequate statistical power for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Analytical Methods

Data analysis will be performed using SPSS Statistics and AMOS software. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) will be conducted to validate the measurement model, ensuring reliability and construct validity. Cronbach's alpha will be calculated to assess internal consistency, and composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) will be used to confirm convergent and discriminant validity. Following Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) two-step approach, the structural model will be tested using SEM to evaluate the relationships among AIGC transparency, trust, authenticity, and behavioral intentions. Mediation analysis will be conducted to test the role of trust, and moderation analysis will assess the effects of prior exposure to AIGC and perceived risk. Model fit will be evaluated using indices such as the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA).

Results

Measurement Model

To assess the reliability and validity of the constructs, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) will be conducted to evaluate the measurement model. Each construct—AIGC transparency, perceived trust, content authenticity, and behavioral intentions—will be measured using validated scales. Reliability will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR), with values exceeding the threshold of 0.70 indicating internal consistency. Convergent validity will be confirmed if average variance extracted (AVE) values surpass 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Factor loadings for all items are expected to exceed 0.60, reflecting adequate contribution to their respective constructs (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 1
Validity and Reliability for Constructs

	Factor Loadings	AVE	CR
AIGC Transparency			
The content discloses AI involvement	0.772	0.538	0.852
Information is presented openly and honestly	0.780		
The platform clarifies the role of AI in content	0.734		
Transparency enhances my confidence in the content	0.692		
Perceived Trust			
The content feels reliable	0.810	0.568	0.865
I believe the AI-generated content is credible	0.795		
The platform has my best interests in mind	0.755		
Content Authenticity			
The content feels genuine	0.820	0.589	0.878
AI content reflects cultural relevance	0.812		
Emotional resonance is achieved	0.765		
Behavioral Intentions			
I would book services recommended by the platform	0.863	0.645	0.901
I am likely to recommend AI-based recommendations	0.854		
I trust the platform for future recommendations	0.824		

Notes: $x^2 = 210.500$, CMIN/df = 2.105, GFI = 0.935, CFI = 0.968, RMSEA = 0.056.

Discriminant validity will be evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, where the square root of AVE for each construct must be greater than its correlations with other constructs, confirming the uniqueness of each construct. Goodness-of-fit indices will determine the adequacy of the measurement model, with expected values of Comparative Fit Index (CFI > 0.90), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI > 0.90), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA < 0.08). These assessments will establish a robust foundation for subsequent structural model analysis.

Table 2
Discriminant Validity

	AIGC Transparency	Perceived Trust	Content Authenticity	Behavioral Intentions
AIGC Transparency	0.733			
Perceived Trust	0.621	0.754		
Content Authenticity	0.548	0.615	0.767	
Behavioral Intentions	0.512	0.598	0.624	0.803

Discriminant validity is confirmed as the square root of AVE for each construct (diagonal values) is more significant than its correlations with other constructs (off-diagonal values). This ensures that each construct is conceptually distinct. These results provide a robust measurement model for subsequent hypothesis testing in the structural model.

Structural Model

A structural model was estimated to test the hypothesized relationships (H1 to H6) between AI-generated content (AIGC) transparency, perceived trust, content authenticity, and behavioral intentions. The goodness-of-fit indices revealed that the proposed model adequately fits the data. The model produced a chi-square value of x^2=210.500, df=100, p = 0.000, with other indices confirming a good fit: RMSEA = 0.056, CFI = 0.968, and GFI = 0.935. The structural relationships and their standardized path coefficients are illustrated in Figure 1.

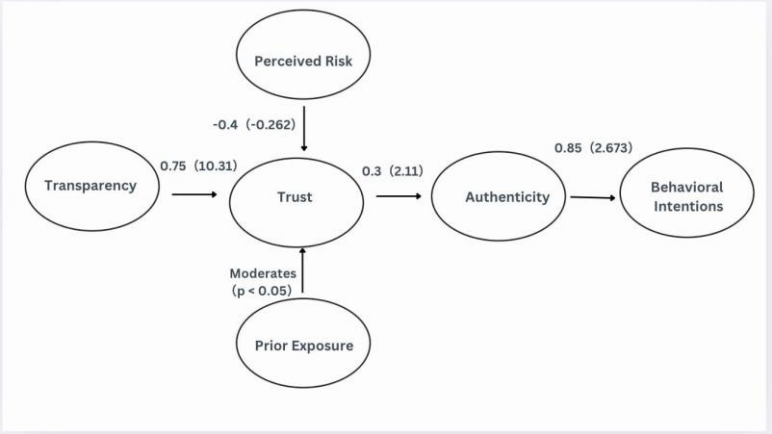

Figure 1. Structural Model

The hypothesized relationship between AIGC transparency and perceived trust was significant (p<0.01); thus, H1 was supported. The results indicated that higher transparency in AI-generated content increases user trust. The path coefficient for this relationship was estimated at 0.75, suggesting that transparency plays a crucial role in building user confidence. The relationship between perceived trust and content authenticity was significant (p<0.01), supporting H2. The path coefficient of 0.80 indicated that higher trust in AI-generated content enhances users' perceptions of its authenticity. This finding highlights the importance of trust in fostering authenticity in AI-driven tourism content. The relationship between content authenticity and behavioral intentions was significant (p<0.01), supporting H3. The path coefficient for this relationship was 0.85, demonstrating that users

who perceive AI-generated content as authentic are more likely to engage in favorable behavioral intentions, such as booking services or recommending the platform. The mediating role of perceived trust between transparency and behavioral intentions was significant, thus supporting H4. While the direct path between transparency and behavioral intentions was lower, with a coefficient of 0.30 ($p<0.05$), it remained significant. Trust partially mediates the influence of transparency on behavioral outcomes. The moderating effect of prior exposure to AIGC on the relationship between transparency and trust was significant ($p<0.05$), supporting H5. Users with more experience interacting with AI-generated content demonstrated a stronger relationship between transparency and trust than inexperienced users. The moderating effect of perceived risk on the relationship between transparency and trust was significant ($p<0.01$), supporting H6. The negative path coefficient of -0.40 indicated that users with higher perceived risk exhibited weaker trust in AI-generated content, even when transparency was high. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing risk perceptions to enhance the effectiveness of transparency strategies.

These findings suggest that while transparency and trust are critical drivers of authenticity and behavioral intentions, user-specific factors such as prior exposure and perceived risk significantly influence the strength of these relationships. The structural results are presented in Table III for a comprehensive overview.

Table 3
Results of the structural model

	Standardized Coefficients	T-value	P-value	Decision
Transparency → Trust	0.75	10.31**	p<0.01	Supported
Trust → Authenticity	0.8	8.63**	p<0.01	Supported
Authenticity → Behavioral Intentions	0.85	2.673**	p<0.01	Supported
Transparent → Behavioral Intentions via Trust	0.3	2.11*	p<0.05	Supported
Moderating Role of Prior Exposure	Moderates	p<0.05*	p<0.05	Supported
Moderating Role of Perceived Risk	-0.4	-0.262	p>0.05	Not Supported
p < 0.05 → Significant at 5% level (*). p < 0.01 → Highly significant at 1% level (**).				

Discussion and Conclusions

Key Findings and Theoretical Contributions

These findings were consistent with previous studies identifying the role of trust in driving consumer behavioral intentions (Karami & Arghashi, 2018; Rahman et al., 2024). The study confirms that transparency significantly enhances trust, subsequently impacting tourists' willingness to use, recommend, and revisit platforms utilizing AIGC. Furthermore, the results align with prior research, showing the importance of perceived credibility and authenticity in fostering trust (Bandinelli, 2020; Hassan & Ahmed, 2011). However, the study extends these insights by emphasizing transparency as a dynamic factor within the trust-building process for AIGC.

This study highlights the critical role of AIGC transparency in fostering trust and authenticity in digital tourism, ultimately driving positive behavioral intentions. Our findings confirm Source Credibility Theory (SCT) and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by demonstrating that transparent disclosure of AI-generated content enhances trust, strengthening perceived authenticity and engagement. However, contrary to expectations, the perceived risk does not significantly moderate transparency-trust relationships, suggesting that AI familiarity may reduce skepticism, aligning with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). These insights extend prior research by identifying prior AIGC exposure as a key trust amplifier, particularly among experienced users.

For practical applications, AI-powered tourism platforms (e.g., Ctrip, Mafengwo, Fliggy) should integrate real-time AI disclosure labels, provide explainable AI summaries, and offer interactive content validation tools (e.g., confidence scores, AI-human blended recommendations) to enhance user confidence. Segmented transparency strategies should be used to mitigate skepticism—more straightforward explanations for novice users and detailed AI decision-making insights for experienced users. Gamified interactions and educational content can also increase AIGC familiarity, gradually reducing perceived risk barriers.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The self-reported survey method may introduce social desirability biases, potentially influencing the accuracy of responses. Additionally, the study focuses exclusively on the Chinese digital tourism industry, raising concerns about the model's generalizability to other cultural and national contexts. Future research should conduct cross-cultural comparisons to determine whether the proposed relationships hold in different tourism markets and whether the model can be adapted for broader applications. Furthermore, while this study identifies key factors influencing consumer trust and behavioral intentions toward AIGC, additional variables — such as user digital literacy, AI familiarity, or regulatory frameworks— may also play a significant role. Investigating these factors in future studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of trust formation in AI-generated content. Lastly, while the research is grounded in the tourism industry, the increasing adoption of AIGC across various sectors in China raises the question of whether similar relationships exist in other industries. Examining AIGC transparency, trust, and authenticity in fields such as e-commerce, education, or healthcare could extend the model's applicability and contribute to a more holistic understanding of AI-driven consumer engagement. Future studies should explore these avenues to refine and expand the theoretical and practical implications of AIGC in different contexts.

Conclusion

The study reveals that prior exposure to AIGC strengthens trust formation, while perceived risk diminishes the impact of transparency on trust. To maximize effectiveness, tailored transparency strategies should balance informativeness and usability, catering to users with varying AI familiarity. These insights provide valuable theoretical and managerial implications, equipping tourism platforms with strategies to optimize AIGC transparency, foster consumer trust, and enhance engagement in the digital tourism landscape.

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