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The Influence of Social Media on Travel Intention of International Students in Nanjing

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International Students, Nanjing, Perceived ease of use, Social Media, Social Media Preference, Trust, Travel Intentions.

ABSTRACT

Due to the increasing number in the count of international students in China, the foreign student sector has evolved into a significant segment within the tourism industry in China. The utilization of social media platforms such as WeChat, Instagram, or Facebook has a notable impact on inspiring other students to contemplate traveling in China by facilitating the sharing of travel experiences. This study aims to determine how social media influence the travel intentions of international students domiciled in Nanjing based on perceived ease of use, social media preference, and trust in social media variables. This research examined by using questionnaire and analyzed via PLS-SEM model. Results indicate perceived ease of use variable is not significant affecting international students' travel intention in Nanjing meanwhile social media preference and trust in social media variables are significantly impacting the travel intention of international student in Nanjing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Initiated in 2013, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has gained reaction of more than 100 countries, regions, and international organizations. Linking countries and people, promoting not only trade but also engagement of cultural exchange is the core point of the BRI. Cultural exchange is deemed essential for enhancing transnational cooperation across all domains. Meanwhile, within the framework of BRI, the significant part from cultural exchange is on studying in China (Shih & Cao, 2022; H. Sun et al., 2023). According to China's Ministry of Education, number of international students who pursuing their study in China by 2018 is 492,200 international students, coming from 196 countries and regions around the world. It's increasing 12,3% year on year.

Bound by common lifestyles and traditional cultural values, students from BRI countries maintain close connections. The rise of social media has facilitated their communication and interaction, solidifying their role in China's tourism market (Wu & Zhang, 2018). Social media, as a novel communication tool, significantly aids international students in promptly sharing information about their studies, daily lives, and travel experiences. It fosters stronger connections among them,

leading to the formation of influential network communities. Social media has indeed revolutionized global communication and interaction, influencing various facets of human communication, including tourist behaviour. Its impact is far-reaching, connecting people across borders and shaping how we engage with the world. In the modern era, social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok have seamlessly woven themselves into the fabric of daily life for a wide range of users, including tourists. These platforms serve as vital tools for acquiring in-depth information about tourist destinations, enabling traveller to explore, learn, and connect with the world (Armutcu et al., 2023).

Social media has become a crucial information source in people's daily lives due to the widespread use of smart mobile devices and the progress of information and communication technologies (ICTs)(Shabnoor & Tajinder, 2016). Social media is an Internet-based platform that allows users to share information and connect with others (Nga & Basak, 2011). Social media is a digital platform that allows people to connect with each other through social networking sites and blogs (Shabnoor & Tajinder, 2016). Social media consists of platforms like; instant message such as Whatsapp, WeChat, Mesenger, Photo sharing e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Video sharing e.g. Youtube, Tiktok, Blibli, Social News likes Tencent News, TouTiao, Reddit, Community/Blog such as Twitter, Xiaohongshu, Microblog, and also platform that are specifically designed to offer travel related services, such as TripAdvisor, Ctrip, and Fliggy (Zhang et al., 2023). Social media has had a significant impact on the travel industry by transforming the way travel information is created, shared, and accessed, especially since the transportation sector relies heavily on information (Tan & Chen, 2012; Zhang et al., 2023).

However, the tourism market for international students in China faces challenges due to instability and imbalance. These hurdles are compounded by significant variations in students' perceptions, emotions, and attitudes toward China. As a result, the expansion of the tourism market segment for international students in China encounters obstacles (X. Sun et al., 2019). Therefore, with help of social media, shared experiences of travelling in China through platforms like WeChat, Instagram, or Facebook, play a significant role in inspiring other students to consider for traveling. Their posts create a virtual bridge, allowing curious minds to glimpse the rich culture, vibrant landscapes, and educational opportunities that await in this fascinating country (Dai et al., 2021). Social media revolutionized the way traveller and tourist search for, discover, read, and analyze information regarding tourism and their destinations (Kim et al., 2017). Social media's information environment mechanism can convert the created 'community' into the actual 'public-opinion' of tourist, which then influences potential tourists' decision-making and travel intentions (Dai et al., 2021). Social media's impact on tourism is primarily on how tourists search for and utilize information about tourism destinations, which aligns with the concept of perceived ease of use (Dai et al., 2021) and social media preferences (Armutcu et al., 2023). In addition to social media influence, customer confidence in the tourist destination, in other words "trust" is also a crucial factor (Khoa et al., 2021) in tourist's perceptions and behaviour of particular travel intentions. More specifically, this study aims to explore the significance between perceived ease of used of social media to travel intentions of international students in Nanjing as well as social media preference and trust in social media to travel intentions of international students in Nanjing.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

2.1. Perceived ease of use

From the perceived ease of use of social media, studies showed how tourists' attitude towards social media affect their behavioural intention and behaviour (Eunjung & Jin Ki, 2014; Jian et al., 2020). Research revealed that the perceived ease of use plays a crucial role in shaping visitors' attitude toward utilizing social media, thereby impacting their travel intentions and decision-making behaviours (Dae Young et al., 2008; Dai et al., 2021). In the scope of this research, the term "perceived ease of use (PEU)" is defined as the degree which traveler perceived ease of consuming information from social media.

2.2. Social media preference

The ability for users to communicate with one another is among the most cutting-edge aspects of the Internet (Butler & Peppard, 1998). These opportunities allow consumers to share their product and service-related knowledge and experiences via social media and online applications. In most cases, tourist took the experiences and opinions of others into consideration when searching for online information related to the destination in a country (Armutcu et al., 2023). Sharing on social media lead more digital interactions (Ning & Jiayi, 2021) which the positive emotions significantly can influence the decision-making (Armutcu et al., 2023).

2.3. Trust in social media

The increasing of traveler's content in social media is influencing travel intentions of others. The majority of readers believe that travel reviews are more likely to provide accurate, pleasant, and up-to-date information than travel service providers (Khanh & Thanh Khoa, 2020). Peer reviews are seen as prevalent by traveler, who are bound to be well impacted. As stated above, mostly the travelers checked online feedback while planning their travelling.

2.4. Research hypothesis

The growing importance of social media in the hotel and tourism industry is attracting the attention of researchers. Previous studies have shown that social media has a positive impact on tourists' travel intention and decision making. The use of social media can influence tourists' travel intentions and behaviours. Tourists' behavioural intentions are influenced by the information sources they receive. Chen et al., 2014 argued that not all social media can have the same impact on tourists, for instance blogs. Only novel, understandable and relevant content can influence the behaviour of tourists. Traveller opt to refer to social media platforms when they are looking for information to inform their travel choices, assess destinations, and evaluate tourism offerings (Dai et al., 2021). Besides, trust was recommended as positive attitude of individual towards something. Therefore, trust in social media is also pointed out in this research. This research proposed a research model with three components consist of perceived ease of use, social media preference and trust in social media toward travel intentions. The conceptual framework and research hypothesis are presented in Fig. 1. This study addressed the following hypothesis:

H1: Perceived ease of use of social media has positive impact on travel intentions of international students in Nanjing

H2: Social media preference of social media has positive impact on travel intentions of international students in Nanjing

H3: Trust in social media has positive impact on travel intentions of international students in Nanjing

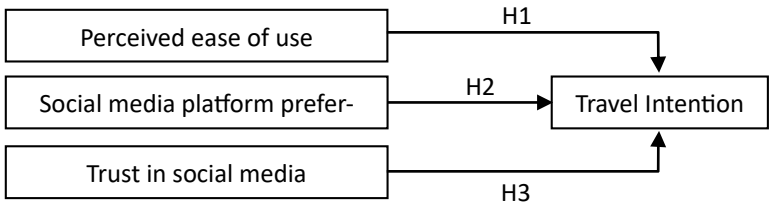

Fig. 1. Conceptual framework and research hypothesis

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1. Method

The research approach used in this research is a quantitative approach. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is used in this study by using WarpPLS software to analyze outer model and inner model. The inner model represents the structural relationships between latent variables (Hair et al., 2009). The analysis of inner model was conducted by using goodness of fit criteria and bootstrapping to show the strength and significance of the relationships. The goodness of fit in WarpPLS showed as the model fit and quality indices. Bootstrapping was conducted by evaluating p-value and path coefficient of each variable. Meanwhile the outer model was conducted for validity and reliability test of research instruments. The outer model was evaluated by convergent validity, discriminant validity and reliability.

The data used in this research is primary data obtained from distributing questionnaires via WeChat. To gather data for testing the hypothesis, a questionnaire in English was created using prior literature and a maturity scale that is widely accepted. The questionnaire content consists of two parts. The first part is demographic characteristics, including gender, age, education, whether international student or not, and studying in Nanjing or not. The second part is the measurement items of latent variables. The questionnaire period was from November to December 2023.

3.2. Participants

This research used a non-probabilistic purposive sampling method. Participant were international students who study in Nanjing. The total number of collected respondent was 121 respondents through online questionnaire shared on WeChat. After verifying the data, total valid respondent is 118 respondent, 3 respondent is not valid due to the location is not based in Nanjing. The characteristic of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The characteristic of respondent (n=118).

Characteristics		*Frequency*	*%*
Gender	*Male*	*67*	*56.78*
	Female	*51*	*43.22*
Age	*≤20 years old*	*26*	*22.03*
	21-25 years old	*52*	*44.07*
	26-30 years old	*25*	*21.19*
	31-35 years old	*12*	*10.17*
	>36 years old	*3*	*2.54*
Education	*Bachelors*	*45*	*38.14*
	Masters	*62*	*52.54*
	PhD	*11*	*9.32*
International Students	*Yes*	*118*	*100.00*
	No	*0*	*0.00*
Study in Nanjing	*Yes*	*118*	*100.00*
	No	*0*	*0.00*

3.3. Measurements

The formal questionnaire items for latent variables were created after conducting an extensive literature review and preliminary investigation. Questions are measured using a Likert scale with a scale of 1-5, where (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. Measurement items are shown in Table 2.

3.4. Data processing

The data is processed by using WarpPLS 8.0 software to analyze the Partial Least Squares Structure Equation Model (PLS-SEM). The procedures to be performed evaluating the outer model (validity and reliability) and inner model (p-value and path coefficient) The analysis of data using WarpPLS 8.0 conducted through the following steps; Step 1: Read the raw data, Step 2: Pre-process the data for analysis, Step 3: Define the variables and links in the model, Step 4: Perform the analysis and results.

Table 2. Measurement items for model variable.

Latent variable	*Item no.*	*Measurement item*	*References*
PEU	*PEU 1*	*It's easy to use social media*	*Zhang et al., 2023*
	PEU 2	*It's easy to get travel information from social media*	
	PEU 3	*It's easy to understand content of travel information in social media*	
SMP	*SMP 1*	*I use social media to search information about tourism destinations*	*Armutcu et al., 2023*
	SMP 2	*I use social media to read other people's experiences and opinions about tourism destinations*	
	SMP 3	*I use social media to find people's recommendations about tourism destinations*	
TSM	*TSM 1*	*I trust travel information on social media because it's up to date*	*Yuke et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023*
	TSM 2	*I trust travel information on social media because the accuracy is high*	
	TSM 3	*I trust travel information on social media because it is very rich*	
TI	*TI 1*	*After viewing the contents of tourist destinations on social media, I'm convinced to go for travelling*	*Zhang et al., 2023*
	TI 2	*After viewing the contents of tourist destinations on social media, I will save my time and money for travelling*	

4. Results

The first analysis conducted was goodness of fit criteria. Table 3 shows the result of goodness of fit criteria. It consists of average path coefficient (APC), average R-squared (ARS), average adjusted R-square (AARS), average block VIF (AVIF), average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF), Tenenhaus GoF (GoF), Sympson's paradox ration (SPR), R-squared contribution ration (R-SCR), statistical suppression ration (SSR) and nonlinear bivariate causality direction ratio. As we can see the value of APC, ARS and AARS are below 0.5, which means accepted. AVIF and AFVIF has the amount of value <3 which categorized ideally and accepted. The GoF value is 0.473 which >0.36 categorized as large, means the strength of model explanation so it is accepted. And the rest SPR, RSCR, SSR and nonlinear bivariate causality direction ration is acceptable if >= 0.7, ideally =1 and the result of all those index' is 1, so all are acceptable. Hence, it can be concluded that the Goodness of Fit criteria were met, indicating that the model in this study is suitable for hypothesis testing.

The results of the calculation of the value of Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Cronbach's Alpa Coefficients (CA), and Composite Reliability (CR) can be seen in Table 4. The AVE measurement is used to assess the convergent validity of the construct. The AVE value for all constructs on table 4 are valid and exceeds the value suggested by Fornell & Larcker, 1981, which is above 0.50. Reliability analysis was carried out by testing composite reliability and Cronbach's Alpha. A construct is declared reliable if it has a composite reliability value above 0.7. Based on Table 4, the value show that the composite reliability value for all constructs has a high value and is above 0.7, which shows that all constructs in the model meet the composite reliability criteria. Reliability test can also be strengthened with Cronbach's Alpha. The recommended Cronbach's alpha value must be greater than 0.70. According to Table 4, all construct values are more than 0.7. Therefore, the result shows the scales are reliable and it achieve convergent validity.

Table 3. Goodness of fit criteria

Index	*Value*	*Criteria*	*Conclusion*
Average path coefficient (APC)	*0.212*	*P = 0.004*	*Acceptable*
Average R-squared (ARS)	*0.304*	*P<0.001*	*Acceptable*
Average adjusted R-square (AARS)	*0.286*	*P<0.001*	*Acceptable*
Average block VIF (AVIF)	*1.721*	*acceptable if <= 5, ideally <= 3.3*	*Acceptable*
Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	*1.450*	*acceptable if <= 5, ideally <= 3.3*	*Acceptable*
Tenenhaus GoF (GoF)	*0.473*	*small >= 0.1, medium >= 0.25, large >= 0.36*	*Large*
Sympson's paradox ratio (SPR)	*1.000*	*acceptable if >= 0.7, ideally = 1*	*Acceptable*
R-squared contribution ratio (RSCR)	*1.000*	*acceptable if >= 0.9, ideally = 1*	*Acceptable*
Statistical suppression ratio (SSR)	*1.000*	*acceptable if >= 0.7*	*Acceptable*
Nonlinear bivariate causality direction ratio	*1.000*	*acceptable if >= 0.7*	*Acceptable*

Table 4. Convergent Validity and Reliability

Variable	*AVE*	*CR*	*CA*
PEU	*0.655*	*0.850*	*0.735*
SMP	*0.741*	*0.895*	*0.824*
TSM	*0.729*	*0.890*	*0.814*
TI	*0.819*	*0.900*	*0.779*

Besides testing convergent validity by AVE, researcher also use cross-loadings and square roots of AVE to analyse discriminant validity. Discriminant Validity is used to measure the level of differentiation of an indicator in measuring instrument constructs. For cross loading, the model has good discriminant validity if the cross-loading value of each indicator of a latent variable has the largest loading value compared to the loading value of other variables. In this study, cross loading on the construct has good discriminant validity as presented in Table 5.

According to Fornell & Larcker (1981), the square root value of AVE for each construct must be greater than the correlation value between constructs in the model. In this research, Table 6 shows that all constructs have a root AVE value that is greater than the correlation between variables and the construct AVE value is above 0.50. Therefore, it shows that the variables in this study have good discriminant validity.

Table 5. Pattern loadings and cross-loadings.

	PEU	*SMP*	*TSM*	*TI*
PEU 1	***0.928***	*-0.235*	*-0.158*	*0.121*
PEU 2	***0.874***	*0.064*	*-0.063*	*-0.109*
PEU 3	***0.632***	*0.152*	*0.213*	0.000
SMP 1	*0.069*	***0.671***	*0.043*	0.157
SMP 2	*-0.025*	***0.993***	*-0.094*	-0.050
SMP 3	*-0.037*	***0.900***	*0.059*	*-0.091*
TSM 1	*-0.135*	*0.150*	***0.840***	*-0.003*
TSM 2	*-0.008*	*-0.020*	***0.899***	*0.002*
TSM 3	*0.149*	*-0.134*	***0.821***	*0.000*
TI 1	*0.077*	*0.089*	*0.048*	***0.817***
TI 2	*-0.077*	*-0.089*	*-0.048*	***0.992***

Table 6. Analysis results of discriminant validity.

Correlations	*PEU*	*SMP*	*TSM*	*TI*
PEU	***0.809***			
SMP	*0.443*	***0.861***		
TSM	*0.419*	*0.467*	***0.854***	
TI	*0.246*	*0.383*	*0.498*	***0.905***

Note: The bold shown square roots of average variances extracted (AVEs).

The linearity test can be used to determine the algorithm used in the inner model. The purpose of the linearity test is to determine whether there is a linear relationship between two latent variables or if the relationship is insignificant. This research results presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Linearity test result

Variable	*Path coefficient*	*p-value*	*Significance*	*Hypothesis*
PEU → TI	*0.028*	*0.381*	*Not significance*	*H1 Rejected*
SMP → TI	*0.180*	*0.022*	*Significance*	*H2 Accepted*
TSM → TI	*0.428*	*<0.001*	*Significance*	*H3 Accepted*

The p-values provided are measures of the statistical significance of the relationships between the latent variables in the model. By assumming a significance level of 5%, the p-value must be smaller than 0.05 to conclude that the relationship under consideration is significant at the 5% level. Value of path coefficient is used to evaluate the strength of direct and indirect relationships between variables. Path coefficient between 0.05-0.09 is considered weak or insignificance, 0.10-0.29 is moderate and >0.30 is strong path coefficient.

The p-value for the relationship between PEU and TI is 0.381, which indicates that this relationship is not statistically significant also path coefficient is 0.028 means weak/insignificance. Therefore, H1 "*Perceived ease of use of social media has positive impact on travel intentions of international students in Nanjing"* is rejected. The p-value for the relationship between SMP and TI is 0.022, which indicates that this relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level with moderate

path coefficient (0.180) shows a positive association between SMP and TI. So, H2 "*Social media preference has positive impact on travel intentions of international students in Nanjing*" is accepted. The p-value for the relationship between TSM and TI is less than 0.001, which indicates that this relationship is statistically significant at the 0.001 level with strong path coefficient which is 0.428. "*Trust in social media has positive impact on travel intentions of international students in Nanjing"*, H3 is also accepted.

Table 8 shows the result of VIF, R^2 and Q^2. The variance inflation factors (VIFs) are measures of how much the variance of an independent variable is inflated due to its correlation with other independent variables. VIF of all the independent variables are less than 2, the highest is TSM which is 1.612 and lowest is 1.340 for PEU. Hence, it means that the multicollinearity does not exist in this research model. R^2 coefficient in Table. 8 shows that latent independent variables influenced dependent variable by 30,4% and the rest is influenced by other factors outside that were not tested in this research. The prediction coefficient Q^2 of the theoretical model is also valid at 0.296, which greater than 0.

Table 8. Analysis results of PLS-SEM evaluation.

Variable	*VIF*	*R^2*	*Q^2*
PEU	*1.340*		
SMP	*1.467*		
TSM	*1.612*		
TI	*1.383*	*0.304*	*0.296*

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This research results have shown insignificant and significant relationship between variables in research model. Firstly, the empirical result showed insignificant relationships between perceived ease of use of travel information in social media and travel intention of international students in Nanjing. Dai et al., 2021 study has shown that the perceived ease of use plays a vital role in influencing visitors' attitudes towards adopting social media, consequently affecting their travel intentions and decision-making behaviours. Zhang et al., 2023 research also shown perceived ease of use travel information can increase the traveler' perception thus affecting the travel intentions. However, this research result shows perceived ease of use is not significant affecting the travel intention among international student in Nanjing. This indicates that for international students in Nanjing, the perceived ease of use travel information in social media doesn't affect their intention for traveling.

Besides, social media preference and trust in social media is positively significant in affecting their travel intention in Nanjing. The result from Armutcu et al., 2023 also prove that social media significantly influence traveler's decision making. Tourists incorporated the experiences and opinions of others into their decision-making process while searching for online information related to a destination. Additionally, they also trust the social media because they believe it's up-to date, high accuracy, and rich of information. This is in line with Khanh & Thanh Khoa, 2020 research. In conclusion, the social media preference and their trust in social media can increase those international students' intention to travel in Nanjing.

There are several practical implications from this study. The results showed that those international students' travel intention affected by social media preference, the use of social media to search information, to find people's experiences/opinions, recommendations about tourism destinations can improve their travel intention to that destination. Therefore, this can be practical implication for managers to understand the influence of social media by utilizing social media to promote their tourism business. Moreover, manager of the tourism can encourage its visitors to provide some photos, videos, reviews or share their experience as well as tag the business account. The results also showed that they trust in social media due to the updated and rich information and the accuracy is high. Posts of travel experienced share by others visitors can obtain trust and thus positively impacting the travel intentions. So, besides utilizing the social media, related parties of

tourism should keep updated the information given as well as updated any changes on the tourism. It might increase international students' travel intention. Therefore, tourism destinations should pay attention to social media marketing and the content given. The content is not only provided by the tourism itself but the most important is kind of review, real experienced shared by visitors regarding specific destinations.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has limitations and provides some directions for future research. First, conducting an online questionnaire has certain constraints regarding the representativeness of our samples. Despite the efficiency and convenience of this method for gathering data, the composition of the sample may be restricted to a specific area in Nanjing. Although the survey respondents represented the target population of our research, we should acknowledge the limitation of this study. The future study is suggested to expand the sample size of data with a greater variety of respondents. Besides, the future studies could add more variables in the research model or having some moderating variable in the research model.

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