The Influence of Travel Bloggers' Personality Characteristics on Chinese Tourists' Travel Decision-Making: The Mediating Roles of Trust and Attitude*



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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the influence of travel bloggers' personality characteristics (TBP) on Chinese tourists' travel decision-making intentions through the mediating roles of trust and attitude. The objectives were: (1) to examine the direct influence of TBP on tourists' trust; (2) to examine the direct influence of TBP on tourists' attitudes; (3) to analyze the mediating role of trust; and (4) to analyze the mediating role of attitude in the relationship between TBP and travel decision-making intentions. The study adopted the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model as the theoretical framework. A quantitative method was employed, and data were collected from 356 Chinese domestic tourists who followed travel bloggers on social media platforms such as Weibo, Xiaohongshu, Douyin, and Bilibili. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and the Bootstrap method in AMOS to test mediation effects.

The results revealed that: 1) travel bloggers' personality characteristics (TBP) had a significant positive effect on tourists' trust; 2) TBP had a significant positive influence on tourists' attitudes; 3) trust partially mediated the relationship between TBP and travel decision-making intentions; and 4) attitude also partially mediated the relationship between TBP and travel decision-making intentions. These findings demonstrate that tourists' psychological responses are essential mechanisms through which bloggers' perceived personalities shape their behavioral intentions. The results confirm the applicability of the SOR framework in the digital tourism context and provide practical implications for tourism marketers and content creators. Enhancing bloggers' credibility and emotional engagement can strengthen tourists' trust, foster positive attitudes, and ultimately increase their intention to travel to promoted destinations.

Keywords: Travel Bloggers' Personality Characteristics; Trust; Attitude; Travel Decision-Making; Chinese Tourists

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Introduction

In the digital era, the rapid advancement of mobile Internet technology has reshaped how people communicate and make decisions, particularly in the tourism sector. The proliferation of mobile devices and social media platforms has transformed tourists from passive recipients of information into active participants in sharing and evaluating travel experiences. According to Canton (2021), more than 5 billion people worldwide are connected to the Internet, with over 2/3 accessing it via mobile devices. This digital transformation has given rise to new intermediaries of information—travel bloggers—who influence how tourists perceive destinations and make travel decisions.

In China, where social media use and online engagement are among the highest globally, travel bloggers have become key opinion leaders shaping tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions. Platforms such as Weibo, Xiaohongshu, Douyin, and Bilibili allow bloggers to create authentic, personalized content that connects emotionally with audiences. Through storytelling, visual experiences, and destination reviews, bloggers build trust among followers and play a crucial role in tourists' travel planning. The perceived personality characteristics of travel bloggers (TBP), such as authenticity, credibility, and approachability, affect how audiences evaluate travel information. When bloggers present themselves as sincere and knowledgeable, tourists are more likely to trust their recommendations and develop favorable attitudes toward the destinations being promoted (Hsu and Huang, 2012; Chung and Koo, 2015).

Despite the growing importance of digital influencers in tourism, research has paid limited attention to the psychological mechanisms underlying the link between bloggers' perceived personality and tourists' decision-making. Most prior studies have focused on surface-level factors such as content quality or message framing, but fewer have explored how bloggers' personalities influence the internal cognitive and affective processes that lead to travel intentions (Pop et.al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2024). Understanding these mechanisms is essential, as trust and attitude are recognized as key determinants of behavioral intention in the digital context. Trust represents tourists' confidence in the reliability and credibility of bloggers' information (Pavlou and Gefen, 2004), while attitude reflects their overall positive or negative evaluation of both the blogger and the recommended destination (Ajzen, 1991). These variables play a mediating role in transforming the external stimulus—TBP—into the behavioral response of travel decision-making.

To explain this relationship, the present study applies the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). The model posits that external stimuli (S), such as bloggers' personality characteristics, influence internal psychological states (O), represented by trust and attitude, which in turn shape behavioral responses (R), namely travel decision-making intentions. Within this framework, TBP functions as the external stimulus that initiates cognitive and emotional processes, leading to behavioral intentions. The SOR model

is particularly appropriate for understanding digital tourism behavior because it integrates both rational and emotional dimensions of decision-making. By applying this framework, the study clarifies how the perceived personality of bloggers stimulates internal psychological mechanisms that determine tourists' willingness to travel.

Empirically, this research focuses on Chinese domestic tourists in Shandong Province, a region that represents a significant portion of China's cultural and tourism economy. Shandong provides an ideal context for examining how social media communication shapes domestic travel decisions because of its diverse attractions and growing reliance on digital marketing. The study collects data from 356 valid respondents who actively follow travel bloggers and uses Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the proposed relationships among TBP, trust, attitude, and travel decision-making intention. Mediation analysis is conducted using the Bootstrap method in AMOS to examine indirect effects.

The significance of this study is twofold. Theoretically, it extends the application of the SOR model to the field of digital tourism by identifying trust and attitude as essential mediating mechanisms. It contributes to a deeper understanding of how influencer personality translates into psychological engagement and behavioral intention. Practically, the findings offer useful implications for tourism marketers and destination managers. By understanding how bloggers' perceived personalities shape tourists' trust and attitudes, tourism organizations can design more effective digital marketing strategies, select credible influencers, and foster stronger relationships with audiences.

In summary, this study investigates how the personality characteristics of travel bloggers influence Chinese tourists' travel decision-making through the mediating effects of trust and attitude. The findings are expected to enhance the theoretical understanding of tourists' psychological processes in the digital environment and provide practical insights for leveraging bloggers' influence in domestic tourism promotion.

Objectives of the Research

1. To examine the direct influence of travel bloggers' personality characteristics on tourists' trust.

2. To examine the direct influence of travel bloggers' personality characteristics on tourists' attitudes.

3. To analyze the mediating roles of trust in the relationship between travel bloggers' personality characteristics and tourists' travel decision-making intentions.

4. To analyze the mediating roles of attitude in the relationship between travel bloggers' personality characteristics and tourists' travel decision-making intentions.

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the influence of travel bloggers' personality characteristics on Chinese tourists' domestic travel decision-making, focusing on the mediating roles of trust and attitude. The research process consisted of the following seven steps:

The 1st Step: Documentary Study

A review of theoretical and empirical literature was conducted to construct the conceptual framework and research hypotheses. The Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974) served as the theoretical foundation, in which TBP was conceptualized as the stimulus (S), tourists' internal psychological responses (trust and attitude) represented the organism (O), and travel decision-making intention functioned as the response (R). Supporting theories, including the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and Trust Theory (Pavlou and Gefen, 2004), were integrated to explain the process through which external stimuli influence cognitive and affective mechanisms that lead to behavioral intentions. Prior research on digital tourism and influencer marketing was also reviewed to identify research gaps in the mediating roles of trust and attitude.

The 2nd Step: Field Study

A field survey was conducted among Chinese domestic tourists who actively follow travel bloggers on social media platforms such as Weibo, Xiaohongshu, Douyin, and Bilibili. Shandong Province was selected as the research area because of its rich cultural heritage and significance in domestic tourism. The participants were chosen to represent active social media users who rely on travel bloggers' content for travel-related decisions.

The 3rd Step: Participants

The study population consisted of Chinese tourists aged between 18 and 55 years who used social media for travel information. A purposive sampling method was applied to ensure that participants had prior experience engaging with travel bloggers. Based on the recommendations by Hair et al. (2010) for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), a minimum sample of 200 was required. To enhance representativeness, 400 questionnaires were distributed both online and offline, and 356 valid responses were retained, yielding an effective response rate of 89 percent. The sample represented diverse demographic backgrounds in terms of gender, age, and education.

The 4th Step: Research Instrument

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire developed from validated measurement scales in previous studies. It consisted of five sections: (1) demographic information; (2) TBP, measured as a single integrated construct reflecting tourists' overall perceptions of bloggers' personality traits; (3) trust; (4) attitude; and (5) travel decision-making intention. All items used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was translated into Chinese and back-translated into English to

ensure linguistic accuracy. Content validity was assessed by three experts, and the Item–Objective Congruence (IOC) values ranged between 0.80 and 1.00. A pilot test with 75 participants confirmed internal consistency, as Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs exceeded 0.70, indicating satisfactory reliability.

The 5th Step: Data Collection

Data collection was carried out between May and July 2024 through both online and offline surveys. The online version was distributed via Weibo and Xiaohongshu, while offline data were gathered at tourist sites in Jinan, Qingdao, and Tai'an. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity was maintained throughout the process. All incomplete or inconsistent questionnaires were excluded to ensure data accuracy. Ethical standards regarding informed consent and confidentiality were strictly followed.

The 6th Step: Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 25 and AMOS version 26. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic information and key variables. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the validity and reliability of measurement constructs, examining factor loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE ≥ 0.50), and Composite Reliability (CR ≥ 0.70). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was then used to test the hypothesized relationships among TBP, trust, attitude, and travel decision-making intention. The mediating effects of trust and attitude were examined using the Bootstrap method in AMOS (5,000 resamples, 95% bias-corrected confidence interval). This procedure tested the indirect effects between TBP and travel decision-making intention through the two mediating variables. The results were evaluated based on standard fit indices, confirming the model's adequacy and robustness.

The 7th Step: Presentation of Results

The research results were organized according to the study objectives. Descriptive statistics were reported in tables, while the CFA and SEM findings were presented with standardized factor loadings, path coefficients, and fit indices. The mediation results were displayed with Bootstrap confidence intervals, confirming the indirect effects of trust and attitude. All results were interpreted in relation to previous empirical evidence, and the analysis focused on the integrated construct of TBP rather than its individual dimensions.

Research Results

The results of this research are presented according to the research objectives. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS 26 was applied to examine the direct and indirect influences of travel bloggers' personality characteristics on tourists' trust, attitude, and travel decision-making intentions. The measurement model was evaluated to confirm the reliability and validity of each construct. The results indicated satisfactory levels of internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

Table 1: Summary of Measurement Model (Convergent Validity)

Construct	CR	AVE	Cronbach's α	Model Fit Indices
Travel Bloggers' Personality Characteristics (TBP)	0.872	0.561	0.854	χ^2/df = 2.135, RMSEA = 0.045, CFI = 0.936, TLI = 0.921
Trust	0.867	0.574	0.842	
Attitude	0.835	0.561	0.817	
Travel Decision-Making Intention	0.880	0.599	0.885	

As shown in Table 1, all constructs demonstrated Composite Reliability (CR) values above 0.70 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50, satisfying the recommended thresholds proposed by Hair et al. (2010). These results confirm adequate internal consistency and convergent validity for each construct. In particular, the integrated construct of Travel Bloggers' Personality Characteristics (TBP) exhibited high reliability (CR = 0.872, α = 0.854), indicating that the observed indicators consistently measured the same underlying latent variable. Similarly, the Trust, Attitude, and Travel Decision-Making Intention constructs also showed strong convergent validity, with AVE values ranging from 0.561 to 0.599, signifying that more than 50 percent of the variance in their indicators was explained by the latent constructs. The model fit indices (χ^2/df = 2.135, RMSEA = 0.045, CFI = 0.936, TLI = 0.921) further indicate that the measurement model achieved an acceptable level of goodness of fit, supporting the appropriateness of the constructs for subsequent structural equation modeling.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)

Construct	1	2	3	4
1. Travel Bloggers' Personality Characteristics (TBP)	0.749			
2. Trust	0.582	0.758		
3. Attitude	0.603	0.594	0.749	
4. Travel Decision-Making Intention	0.571	0.589	0.602	0.774

As shown in Table 2, the square roots of AVE (in bold on the diagonal) exceeded the inter-construct correlations, confirming acceptable discriminant validity among all constructs (Hair et al., 2010). Each variable was statistically distinct, indicating that the model's latent constructs captured separate theoretical dimensions without multicollinearity problems. The moderate correlations (r = 0.57–0.60) also suggest that the relationships among constructs were consistent with theoretical expectations under the SOR framework.

After verifying the measurement model, the structural model was tested to examine the hypothesized relationships. The overall model fit indices indicated a good fit with the data.

The 1st objective is to examine the direct influence of travel bloggers' personality characteristics on tourists' trust. From the research result, it was found that travel bloggers' personality characteristics (TBP) had a significant positive effect on tourists' trust (β = 0.471, C.R. = 7.728, p < .001). This indicates that when tourists perceive bloggers as credible, authentic, and reliable, they tend to develop higher trust in the travel information provided. The structural model supports the SOR framework, confirming that TBP functions as an external stimulus that activates cognitive responses in the form of trust. The corresponding statistical results for this objective are presented in Table 3.

The 2nd objective is to examine the direct influence of travel bloggers' personality characteristics on tourists' attitudes. From the research result, it was found that TBP significantly influenced tourists' attitudes (β = 0.438, C.R. = 6.636, p < .001). This means that when bloggers portray engaging, appealing, and trustworthy personalities, tourists develop more favorable attitudes toward both the blogger and the recommended destinations. This result aligns with the SOR model, suggesting that TBP also triggers affective responses that shape tourists' positive evaluations. The findings related to this objective are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Direct Effects (SEM Path Estimates)

Hypothesis	Path	β	S.E.	C.R.	p-value	Supported
H1	Travel Bloggers' Personality ⟶ Trust	0.471	0.061	7.728	< .001	Yes
H2	Travel Bloggers' Personality ⟶ Attitude	0.438	0.066	6.636	< .001	Yes
H3	Trust ⟶ Travel Decision-Making Intention	0.394	0.072	5.472	< .001	Yes
H4	Attitude ⟶ Travel Decision-Making Intention	0.421	0.069	5.986	< .001	Yes

The 3rd objective is to analyze the mediating role of trust in the relationship between TBP and travel decision-making intentions. From the research result, it was found that trust significantly mediated the relationship between TBP and travel decision-making intention, based on the Bootstrap method (indirect effect = 0.126, 95% CI [0.064, 0.215]). The confidence interval did not include zero, confirming partial mediation. This indicates that trust acts as a cognitive mechanism that translates bloggers' perceived personality into tourists' behavioral intentions by reducing uncertainty and increasing confidence in travel recommendations. The indirect effect associated with this objective is reported in Table 4.

The 4th objective is to analyze the mediating role of attitude in the relationship between TBP and travel decision-making intentions. From the research result, it was found

that attitude also significantly mediated the relationship between TBP and travel decision-making intention (indirect effect = 0.204, 95% CI [0.115, 0.324]). Since the confidence interval excluded zero, the mediation is statistically significant. This suggests that attitude serves as an emotional pathway through which TBP influences tourists' intention to visit the promoted destinations. The mediation results for this objective can be found in Table 4.

Table 4: Mediation Analysis (Bootstrap Indirect Effects)

Mediation Path	Indirect Effect	S.E.	95% Confidence Interval (Lower–Upper)	Significance
Travel Bloggers' Personality ⟶ Trust ⟶ Travel Decision-Making Intention	0.126	0.038	[0.064, 0.215]	Significant
Travel Bloggers' Personality ⟶ Attitude ⟶ Travel Decision-Making Intention	0.204	0.047	[0.115, 0.324]	Significant

The New Body of Knowledge

First, the study provides empirical evidence that TBP is a significant determinant of tourists' internal cognitive and affective states. When tourists perceive travel bloggers as authentic, credible, and engaging, they tend to develop stronger trust in the information provided and more favorable attitudes toward the destinations being promoted. This insight enhances theoretical understanding of how online influencers operate as psychological stimuli within digital communication environments. It confirms that the perceived personality of digital content creators is not merely a social or aesthetic attribute but a psychological mechanism capable of shaping behavioral intentions in tourism contexts.

Second, this study highlights trust and attitude as dual mediating mechanisms that explain how external stimuli are transformed into behavioral responses. The findings reveal that trust functions as a cognitive mediator that reduces uncertainty and strengthens confidence in bloggers' recommendations, whereas attitude serves as an affective mediator that translates trust and positive perceptions into behavioral intentions. By demonstrating these mediating relationships through Bootstrap analysis in AMOS, this research enriches the existing body of knowledge by integrating psychological processes into the study of influencer-driven tourism decision-making.

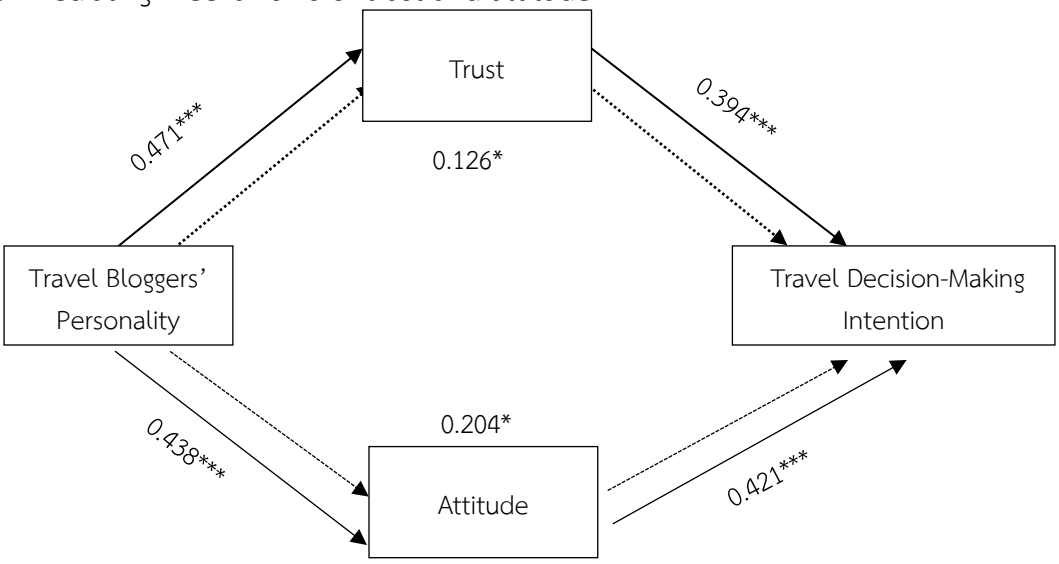
Third, the empirical validation of this structural model in the context of Shandong Province, China, provides context-specific insights that extend theoretical applications to domestic tourism in developing digital markets. The study confirms that the mechanisms underlying digital influence are consistent within the Chinese cultural and technological

environment, where social trust, credibility, and emotional engagement play pivotal roles in shaping consumer decisions. These findings contribute to the growing literature on digital consumer psychology, particularly in societies characterized by high social media engagement and rapid digitalization.

Finally, this research advances methodological contributions by employing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and Bootstrap-based mediation testing to simultaneously examine both direct and indirect effects of bloggers' influence on tourists' decision-making. The integration of these quantitative techniques demonstrates a robust analytical approach suitable for examining complex behavioral models in digital tourism studies.

In summary, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how the personality characteristics of travel bloggers influence tourists' psychological responses and decision-making behaviors. The findings contribute a theoretical extension of the SOR model to the digital tourism context, clarify the mediating roles of trust and attitude, and offer practical insights for destination marketers and tourism stakeholders. These contributions form a new body of knowledge that links personality perception, psychological mediation, and decision-making behavior within the modern mobile Internet environment.

The integrated framework is presented in Figure 1, which illustrates the new body of knowledge derived from this study. The model demonstrates how travel bloggers' personality characteristics influence travel decision-making intentions both directly and indirectly through the dual mediating mechanisms of trust and attitude.



Note: ⟶ direct effect; ⋯▸ mediating effect, * p < .05, ***p < 0.001.

Figure 1: Mediation Model of Travel Bloggers' Personality Characteristics, Trust, Attitude, and Travel Decision-Making Intention

Discussion of Research Results

From the result of the 1st objective, it was found that travel bloggers' personality characteristics (TBP) had a significant positive effect on tourists' trust. This finding indicates that when tourists perceive bloggers as credible and authentic, they tend to rely on their information and recommendations. The result supports the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model, showing that external stimuli such as TBP can trigger internal cognitive responses in the form of trust. This finding is consistent with previous studies by Pavlou and Gefen (2004) and Zhou et al. (2024), confirming that source credibility increases tourists' confidence in online content.

From the result of the 2nd objective, it was revealed that TBP also had a significant positive influence on tourists' attitudes. This means that when bloggers display appealing and trustworthy personalities, tourists develop favorable feelings toward the destinations promoted. The result aligns with Hsu and Huang (2012) and supports the SOR framework that external stimuli evoke affective responses. It highlights that bloggers' personalities not only convey information but also shape tourists' emotional evaluations toward travel experiences.

From the result of the 3rd objective, it was confirmed that trust significantly mediated the relationship between TBP and tourists' travel decision-making intentions. The indirect effect was statistically significant, indicating that trust serves as a bridge connecting bloggers' perceived personality to tourists' behavioral intentions. This finding corresponds with Chen et al. (2014), who found that trust reduces uncertainty and increases the likelihood of following bloggers' travel suggestions.

From the result of the 4th objective, it was shown that attitude also acted as a significant mediator between TBP and travel decision-making intentions. This suggests that favorable attitudes formed toward bloggers and their recommendations lead to higher travel intentions. The result supports Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, confirming that positive attitudes are strong predictors of behavioral intentions. Therefore, attitude functions as an emotional pathway that translates bloggers' influence into tourists' willingness to travel.

Conclusion

The study examined the influence of travel bloggers' personality characteristics (TBP) on Chinese tourists' travel decision-making intentions through the mediating roles of trust and attitude. The results showed that TBP significantly influenced both trust and attitude, indicating that credible and authentic bloggers can build tourists' confidence and create positive perceptions toward the destinations promoted. In addition, both trust and attitude were found to significantly mediate the relationship between TBP and travel decision-making intentions, confirming that tourists' psychological responses play a crucial role in transforming bloggers' influence into behavioral intention. These findings support the Stimulus–Organism–

Response (SOR) framework and provide empirical evidence that trust and attitude serve as key psychological mechanisms linking bloggers' personality to tourists' travel decisions.

Suggestions

Based on the research findings, the researcher presents the subsequent suggestions.

1. The suggestions from the research

From objective 1: Since travel bloggers' personality characteristics significantly influence tourists' trust, bloggers should emphasize credibility, honesty, and consistency in presenting travel information. Tourism marketers are encouraged to collaborate with bloggers who demonstrate a trustworthy public image to enhance reliability in digital tourism communication.

From objective 2: Given that travel bloggers' personality characteristics positively affect tourists' attitudes, bloggers should create engaging and authentic content that connects emotionally with audiences. Visual storytelling and genuine personal experiences can help foster favorable perceptions toward promoted destinations.

From objective 3: As trust mediates the relationship between bloggers' personality characteristics and travel decision-making intentions, enhancing tourists' trust is essential for translating online influence into travel intentions. Tourism authorities may consider certification or verification mechanisms to strengthen the transparency and credibility of travel bloggers.

From objective 4: Since attitude also mediates the relationship between bloggers' personality characteristics and travel decision-making intentions, bloggers and tourism stakeholders should focus on creating positive emotional experiences and persuasive messages. Marketing campaigns that integrate bloggers' personal appeal and emotional tone can effectively stimulate tourists' intention to visit recommended destinations.

2. The suggestions for future research

2.1 Future studies should expand the scope of participants to include international tourists or tourists from other regions of China to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

2.2 Further research may examine additional mediating variables, such as perceived value, satisfaction, or destination image, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of tourists' decision-making mechanisms.

2.3 Subsequent studies could adopt a mixed-methods approach by combining quantitative SEM with qualitative interviews to gain deeper insights into tourists' psychological responses to travel bloggers.

2.4 Longitudinal studies are recommended to observe changes in tourists' trust, attitude, and decision-making over time, especially in response to evolving trends in social media and influencer marketing.

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