

The Effects of Social Media Tourism Information Characteristics on Gen Z's Intention to Choose Thai Nguyen as A Tourism Destination

Nguyen Thi Chinh

Faculty of Tourism, Thai Nguyen University of Sciences, Thai Nguyen, Vietnam.
Corresponding Author: Nguyen Thi Chinh

ABSTRACT: Social media has become an important information environment in which Generation Z (Gen Z) evaluates tourism destinations; however, limited research has examined how distinct information characteristics jointly shape destination choice intention. This study investigates the effects of information quality, vividness, interactivity, and reliability of social media tourism information on Gen Z's intention to choose Thai Nguyen, Vietnam, as a tourism destination. Guided by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) as an information-processing lens, data were collected through an online survey and analyzed using 380 valid responses. Scale reliability, exploratory factor analysis, and multiple regression were employed. The findings indicate that all four information characteristics positively influence destination choice intention, collectively explaining 58.6% of its variance. Reliability emerges as the most influential predictor, followed by interactivity, information quality, and vividness. These findings suggest that information capable of attracting attention is not necessarily the information most consequential for destination choice; rather, Gen Z places greater weight on information that can be trusted and used as a basis for decision-making. The study further distinguishes informational adequacy from informational trustworthiness, providing exploratory evidence that information quality and reliability represent related but empirically distinct evaluations. The findings extend understanding of social media information processing in tourism and offer implications for designing destination communication that moves beyond visibility toward decision-relevant information.

Keywords: Generation Z; social media tourism information; information quality; vividness; interactivity; reliability; destination choice intention; Thai Nguyen.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has reshaped how tourists search for, evaluate, and use information when choosing destinations [1]. Rather than serving merely as an additional communication channel, it constitutes a multimodal information environment in which organization-generated content, user-generated content, reviews, images, videos, and social interaction jointly inform destination evaluation. Evidence shows that social media information quality shapes destination image [2], while interactive affordances influence cognitive, affective, and conative responses to destinations [3]. The critical issue, therefore, is not simply whether tourists encounter destination information on social media, but how they evaluate that information before incorporating it into destination choice.

This issue is particularly salient for Generation Z (Gen Z), whose travel decisions are embedded in a digital media environment characterized by abundant and heterogeneous information sources [4], [5]. Yet exposure does not imply acceptance, and information that attracts attention does not necessarily become decision-relevant. From an Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) perspective, evidence from Vietnamese Gen Z travelers indicates that both central and peripheral cues contribute to eWOM adoption and destination choice [6]. This shifts the analytical focus from social media use per se to the cues through which users judge tourism information. Existing research, however, conceptualizes these cues unevenly. One stream treats information quality as an aggregate construct. Kim et al. (2017), for example, distinguish content and non-content quality cues and show that selected cues shape cognitive and affective destination image, which subsequently contributes to conative image [2]. Wang and Yan (2022) likewise report a positive effect of social media tourism information quality on travel intention, both directly and indirectly through self-congruity and trust [7]. Although these studies establish the behavioral relevance of information quality, aggregate measures may conceal meaningful differences among the attributes users evaluate during information processing.

A complementary stream therefore disaggregates social media information into more specific attributes. Interactive affordances, for example, provide explanatory value beyond message content alone [3], while recent work conceptualizes social media tourism information as multidimensional rather than assuming

that all characteristics generate equivalent behavioral responses [8].

Despite this progress, evidence on the simultaneous effects of distinct information characteristics on destination choice intention remains fragmented. Establishing that social media information matters does not identify which characteristics move a destination from awareness or consideration toward likely choice. This distinction is especially important because the decision value of social media information depends on more than informational content: presentation, opportunities for interaction, and perceived trustworthiness may also shape its use [8]. Moreover, information can be relevant, complete, clear, and current without being trusted; conversely, trustworthy information may still be insufficient for a decision. Separating information quality - the extent to which content satisfies informational needs - from reliability - the extent to which information is perceived as trustworthy and dependable - therefore offers a more precise account of how social media information enters destination choice.

Against this background, Thai Nguyen provides the empirical setting for examining how Gen Z evaluates social media tourism information before destination choice. The study asks: How do distinct characteristics of social media tourism information influence Gen Z's intention to choose Thai Nguyen as a tourism destination? It makes two related contributions. First, it evaluates information quality, vividness, interactivity, and reliability simultaneously, thereby distinguishing informational, experiential, interactive, and trust-related cues within a parsimonious direct-effects model. Second, it sharpens the conceptual boundary between information quality and reliability by treating informational adequacy and informational trustworthiness as related but non-equivalent evaluations. Practically, the findings can help destination managers and tourism businesses in Thai Nguyen move beyond maximizing social media visibility toward designing information that is useful, vivid, interactive, and sufficiently trustworthy to support destination decisions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Social media tourism information and destination choice

Social media is now integral to the tourism information environment, allowing tourists to receive, create, share, and evaluate destination-related content. Unlike traditional information channels, it combines organization-generated information, user-generated content (UGC), eWOM, and user-to-user interaction within the same decision environment [1], [3]. Because tourism experiences are intangible and difficult to evaluate before consumption, such information can reduce uncertainty, shape destination perceptions, and support pre-trip evaluation. Consistent with this role, social media tourism information quality cues have been shown to influence cognitive and affective destination image and, subsequently, conative image [2].

The behavioral influence of social media, however, depends on how information is evaluated rather than on exposure or volume alone. Wang and Yan (2022) show that tourists assess information quality before translating social media information into travel intention [7]. Among Vietnamese Gen Z travelers, argument quality and informativeness enhance perceived usefulness, whereas source expertise, source credibility, and information volume strengthen eWOM credibility; eWOM adoption is subsequently associated with destination choice [6]. Interactive affordances also shape cognitive and affective destination image and contribute to conative responses [3]. Together, these findings support an information-processing view in which different cues can perform distinct functions in destination evaluation.

In this study, destination choice intention (DCI) denotes an individual's willingness, consideration, and perceived likelihood of selecting a destination for a future trip. Although conceptually related to the conative component of destination image, DCI is defined more narrowly than general behavioral intention. It concerns destination selection rather than broader responses such as recommending a destination, sharing content, or engaging online. This distinction is important because behavioral intention in social media research often encompasses heterogeneous outcomes [6], [8].

Accordingly, the study examines four characteristics of tourism information encountered by Gen Z on social media: information quality, vividness, interactivity, and reliability. These constructs respectively capture informational adequacy, the capacity to evoke an imagined experience, opportunities for interactive exchange, and perceived trustworthiness. Treating them separately enables their relative contributions to DCI to be estimated within a single model.

Information processing through the Elaboration Likelihood Model

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) explains how individuals process persuasive information through two fundamental routes: the central route and the peripheral route. The central route involves relatively careful consideration of message content and quality, whereas the peripheral route relies more heavily on cues or heuristics that enable evaluation without an equivalent degree of message elaboration. Which route predominates depends on the recipient's motivation and ability to process information [7], [9].

ELM is well suited to online tourism environments, where users encounter large volumes of information that differ in source, content, and presentation. Wang and Yan (2022) use ELM to explain how

tourism information quality contributes to travel intention through information evaluation. In the Vietnamese Gen Z context, Vu Dinh and Mai Le (2026) further show that both central- and peripheral-route cues contribute to eWOM adoption and destination choice, with peripheral cues exerting comparatively stronger effects [6].

The present study therefore uses ELM as an information-processing lens rather than as a rigid classification scheme for the four predictors. The model assumes that, before social media tourism information can inform destination choice, users evaluate cues related to content quality, presentation, opportunities for interaction, and trustworthiness [9]. This use preserves ELM's core concern with cue-based information processing while accommodating the multidimensional character of social media tourism information.

Hypothesis development

Information quality and destination choice intention

Information quality (IQ) reflects the extent to which information satisfies users' needs through attributes such as relevance, completeness, clarity, and currency. Because tourism is experiential and difficult to evaluate fully before consumption, information quality can reduce uncertainty and provide a cognitive basis for assessing destination alternatives. Tourism information quality on social media comprises multiple content and non-content cues, some of which significantly influence the formation of cognitive and affective destination images [2]. Recent evidence further supports this role while suggesting that information quality may influence destination choice through multiple evaluative mechanisms. Research on fam-trip content on Instagram indicates that destination information quality positively affects destination trust as well as cognitive, affective, and unique image components; destination image and trust subsequently influence destination choice. Similarly, Shneikat et al. (2025) conceptualize tourism information quality in both UGC and firm-generated content as an important antecedent of destination trust, destination image, and behavioral intention [10]. Collectively, these findings support the argument that information quality not only improves understanding of a destination but also provides the cognitive basis required for users to move from information search to behavioral consideration.

However, because the present study simultaneously treats reliability as a separate construct, IQ is defined more narrowly in terms of relevance, completeness, clarity, and currency/timeliness. Reliability, trustworthiness, and source credibility are excluded from IQ. This distinction is necessary because information may be complete, relevant, and current without necessarily being trusted by the recipient. Consistent with ELM logic, when users are motivated to evaluate a destination, high-quality information facilitates consideration of destination attributes, reduces information gaps, and supports comparisons among alternatives [2], [7]. For Gen Z, access to large volumes of social media information does not diminish the importance of quality; rather, relevance, completeness, clarity, and currency may become important criteria for determining which information is useful in the choice process. Therefore, the study proposes:

H1. The quality of tourism information on social media positively influences Gen Z's intention to choose Thai Nguyen as a tourism destination

Vividness and destination choice intention

Vividness refers to the extent to which information is presented in a lively, visually rich manner that evokes a clear representation of the object or experience being described. In social media environments, vividness can be generated through images, videos, and experience-rich presentation. Zhang et al. (2026) operationalized vividness through the capacity to create a vivid impression of a destination, present it in an engaging manner, provide rich visual elements, and make users feel as though they were directly experiencing the destination [8].

Vividness is particularly relevant in tourism because consumers often evaluate experiences they have not yet consumed. Vivid information can reduce psychological distance between users and destinations by helping them imagine landscapes, activities, and potential experiences more clearly. Thus, unlike IQ, which concerns whether information satisfies cognitive needs, vividness captures the intensity and concreteness of the experience evoked by information presentation. This distinction also avoids conflating rich information with rich visual presentation.

The mechanism through which vividness operates can be clarified through mental imagery. Because tourists typically evaluate destinations before experiencing them directly, vivid visual information can help them construct more concrete mental representations of future experiences. Lee and Gretzel (2012) identified mental imagery as an important cognitive process in destination communication that affects persuasive outcomes such as consumer attitudes and expectations. [11] Moreover, visual characteristics of travel photographs can increase visit intention through mental imagery: photographs containing implied motion have been shown to strengthen intention to visit a destination [12]. Thus, the more effectively information activates mental representations of an experience, the more it may narrow the distance between an unexperienced destination and an anticipated experience. Vividness therefore serves not only an attention-enhancing function but also a cognitive one by enabling prospective tourists to mentally simulate the tourism experience.

This mechanism is particularly relevant to destination choice. When social media content about Thai Nguyen evokes clear representations of the destination's landscapes, activities, and experiences, Gen Z users may more readily move from observing content to imagining themselves within those experiences. Thus, whereas IQ reflects the extent to which information meets cognitive needs, vividness reflects the capacity to make a future, unexperienced tourism experience concrete and imaginable. On this basis:

H2. The vividness of tourism information on social media positively influences Gen Z's intention to choose Thai Nguyen as a tourism destination.

Interactivity and destination choice intention

Interactivity reflects the extent to which a communication environment enables two-way information exchange, interaction with others, participation in discussion, and feedback. Unlike one-way communication, interactivity allows users to participate actively in processing and clarifying information. This is relevant to destination choice because users can ask questions, receive responses, compare experiences, and verify information with other actors. In doing so, users move from being passive recipients to active participants in the construction of destination information [8]. The social media affordance perspective further supports this relationship. Liu et al. (2024) conceptualized social media affordances in terms of interaction between users and platforms and showed that these affordances are directly associated with cognitive and affective destination image [3]. Social presence and parasocial interaction also partially mediate these relationships. These findings suggest that the interactive properties of social media can alter how users perceive and evaluate destinations rather than merely functioning as passive channels of information transmission [3].

In the destination choice process, interactivity may reduce uncertainty by enabling users to ask questions, receive feedback, exchange experiences, and verify information with other users [13]. Interactivity can therefore be viewed as a social media affordance that supports information processing by allowing users to examine, supplement, and interpret destination-related cues. When tourism information about Thai Nguyen enables Gen Z users to exchange views and receive feedback from others, their understanding of and engagement with the information may increase, thereby strengthening their consideration of the destination. Therefore:

H3. The interactivity of tourism information on social media positively influences Gen Z's intention to choose Thai Nguyen as a tourism destination.

Reliability and destination choice intention

Reliability (REL) reflects the extent to which users perceive the tourism information they encounter as trustworthy and sufficiently dependable for decision-making [8]. This attribute is particularly important in social media environments, where destination information is created and shared by multiple actors with varying levels of expertise, motivations, and verifiability. In tourism, where destination experiences cannot be fully evaluated before travel, information reliability becomes a cue that can reduce uncertainty and help tourists assess whether information is sufficiently dependable to inform their choices. Information perceived as reliable may therefore reduce perceived risk and strengthen users' confidence when evaluating a destination; conversely, even complete or attractively presented information may have limited behavioral influence when its authenticity is questioned. Prior studies provide consistent support for this mechanism. Wang and Yan (2022) identified trust as an important mechanism linking tourism information quality to travel intention [7]. Among Gen Z travelers, source expertise and source credibility contribute to eWOM credibility, thereby facilitating information adoption and destination choice [6]. These findings suggest that trust in information is an important condition for its use as a basis for tourism decision-making.

Accordingly, when Gen Z perceives social media tourism information about Thai Nguyen as reliable, they have a firmer basis for considering the destination and translating information evaluation into choice intention. The study therefore proposes:

H4. The reliability of tourism information on social media positively influences Gen Z's intention to choose Thai Nguyen as a tourism destination.

Proposed research model

Drawing on ELM and research on social media tourism information, the proposed model conceptualizes destination choice intention as an outcome of evaluating four distinct information characteristics. Information quality represents the cognitive value of the content; vividness reflects the capacity of presentation to evoke imagery and experience; interactivity captures opportunities for exchange and participation within the information environment; and reliability represents the extent to which information is perceived as trustworthy. The proposed model is presented in Figure 1.

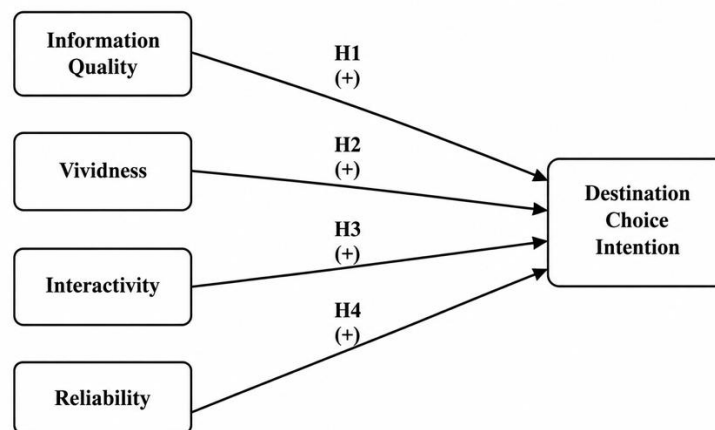


Fig. 1 Proposed research model

Source: Adapted and proposed by the author

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

A cross-sectional quantitative design was used to test the effects of four characteristics of social media tourism information - information quality (IQ), vividness (VIV), interactivity (INT), and reliability (REL) - on Gen Z's destination choice intention (DCI) toward Thai Nguyen. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed at the individual level. Eligible participants were required to (1) fall within the Gen Z age range specified for the study, (2) use social media, and (3) have encountered tourism information about Thai Nguyen on social media. Prior visitation to Thai Nguyen was not required because the outcome of interest was destination choice intention rather than revisit intention.

Measurement development

Measurement items were adapted from established scales and contextualized to tourism information about Thai Nguyen on social media. IQ, VIV, INT, and REL were each measured with four items, while DCI was measured with three items (Table 1). Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Table 1. Measurement Constructs and Items.

Construct	Code	Measurement item	Source
Information Quality (IQ)	IQ1	The tourism information I encounter on social media is relevant to my information needs regarding Thai Nguyen.	Wang & Yan (2022); Vu Dinh & Mai Le (2026)
	IQ2	Tourism information on social media provides the necessary content for me to learn about tourism in Thai Nguyen.	Wang & Yan (2022); Vu Dinh & Mai Le (2026)
	IQ3	Tourism information about Thai Nguyen on social media is presented clearly and is easy to understand.	Wang & Yan (2022); Vu Dinh & Mai Le (2026)
	IQ4	Tourism information about Thai Nguyen on social media is regularly updated.	Vu Dinh & Mai Le (2026)
Vividness (VIV)	VIV1	Tourism information on social media creates a vivid impression of Thai Nguyen for me.	Zhang et al. (2026)
	VIV2	Tourism information on social media presents Thai Nguyen in a vivid and engaging way.	Zhang et al. (2026)
	VIV3	Tourism information about Thai Nguyen on social media uses rich visual elements such as images and videos.	Zhang et al. (2026)
	VIV4	Tourism information on social media makes me feel as though I am directly experiencing Thai Nguyen as a destination.	Zhang et al. (2026)
Interactivity (INT)	INT1	Tourism information about Thai Nguyen on social media facilitates two-way information exchange among users.	Zhang et al. (2026)
	INT2	Tourism information about Thai Nguyen on social media enables me to interact with other users.	Zhang et al. (2026); Liu et al. (2024)
	INT3	Tourism information about Thai Nguyen on social media	Zhang et al. (2026)

		encourages me to participate in exchanges and discussions about the destination.	
	INT4	When discussing tourism in Thai Nguyen on social media, I can receive timely responses from other users.	Zhang et al. (2026); Liu et al. (2024)
Reliability (REL)	REL1	Overall, I consider tourism information about Thai Nguyen on social media to be reliable.	Zhang et al. (2026); Vu Dinh & Mai Le (2026)
	REL2	Tourism information about Thai Nguyen that I encounter on social media generally comes from sources that I consider trustworthy.	Zhang et al. (2026); Vu Dinh & Mai Le (2026)
	REL3	I can trust the tourism information about Thai Nguyen that I encounter on social media.	Zhang et al. (2026); Vu Dinh & Mai Le (2026)
	REL4	The tourism information about Thai Nguyen that I encounter on social media is generally trusted by many other users.	Zhang et al. (2026)
Destination Choice Intention (DCI)	DCI1	I intend to choose Thai Nguyen as a destination for a future trip.	Vu Dinh & Mai Le (2026)
	DCI2	I would consider choosing Thai Nguyen for an upcoming trip.	Vu Dinh & Mai Le (2026)
	DCI3	I am highly likely to choose Thai Nguyen as a tourism destination.	Vu Dinh & Mai Le (2026); Wang & Yan (2022)

Source: Adapted and proposed by the author, 2026

Questionnaire design and pre-test

The questionnaire comprised three sections: screening questions, construct measures, and questions on demographic characteristics and social media use. Before completing the construct measures, respondents were instructed to think about tourism information concerning Thai Nguyen that they had previously encountered on social media. This instruction established a common referent across all measurement items.

The original English-language measures were translated into Vietnamese using translation and back-translation to preserve semantic equivalence [14]. Seven experts in tourism, marketing, and research methods reviewed the preliminary questionnaire for content relevance, clarity, and conceptual consistency. After revision, the instrument was pilot-tested with 34 eligible Gen Z respondents to assess item comprehensibility and preliminary scale performance, with particular attention to discriminating IQ from REL. The questionnaire was then finalized for the main survey.

Sampling and data collection

Because no comprehensive sampling frame exists for Gen Z individuals who have encountered tourism information about Thai Nguyen on social media, purposive non-probability sampling was used. Screening questions at the beginning of the survey excluded respondents who did not meet the eligibility criteria. Data were collected online via Google Forms through social media platforms and online communities accessible to Gen Z between April and July 2026.

Gen Z is commonly defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012 [15], [16]. For this study, eligibility was restricted to respondents aged 18 years or older who used social media and had previously encountered tourism information about Thai Nguyen on social media. Of the 415 responses collected, 380 were retained after excluding ineligible, incomplete, and inattentive responses, including straight-lining. The final sample was adequate for the planned factor analysis and multiple regression given the number of observed variables and predictors [17]. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with no personally identifiable information collected. Respondents were encouraged to provide responses reflecting their actual evaluations. These procedural measures were implemented to mitigate potential common method bias associated with cross-sectional self-report data [18]. The sample characteristics are presented in Table 2.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed in SPSS 26.0. Descriptive statistics characterized the sample. Cronbach's alpha assessed internal consistency, followed by exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to examine the empirical structure of the measures. Multiple linear regression was then used to test H1-H4 and to estimate the relative effects of IQ, VIV, INT, and REL on DCI [17].

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sample profile

Table 2. Demographic profile of respondents

Measure	Items	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	154	40.5
	Female	219	57.6
	Other/Prefer not to say	7	1.9
Education	High school or below	62	16.3
	Undergraduate/College	275	72.4
	Postgraduate	43	11.3
Region of residence	Northern Vietnam	244	64.2
	Central Vietnam	52	13.7
	Southern Vietnam	84	22.1
Previous visit to Thai Nguyen	Yes	207	54.5
	No	173	45.5
Total		380	100.0

Source: Authors' data analysis, 2026

The final sample comprised 380 respondents. Women accounted for 57.6% of the sample, men for 40.5%, and respondents identifying as another gender or preferring not to disclose gender for 1.9%. Most respondents were pursuing or had completed undergraduate/college education (72.4%); 16.3% had a high-school education or below, and 11.3% had postgraduate qualifications. Geographically, 64.2% resided in Northern Vietnam, 13.7% in Central Vietnam, and 22.1% in Southern Vietnam. Slightly more than half (54.5%) had previously visited Thai Nguyen, while 45.5% had not, allowing the analysis to include respondents both with and without direct prior experience of the destination.

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Scale reliability

Table 3. Scale reliability assessment

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	Corrected item-total correlation
Information Quality (IQ)	0.866	0.690–0.747
Vividness (VIV)	0.853	0.679–0.708
Interactivity (INT)	0.867	0.682–0.757
Reliability (REL)	0.836	0.657–0.676
Destination Choice Intention (DCI)	0.783	0.603–0.648

Source: Authors' data analysis, 2026

All constructs demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.783 to 0.867, and corrected item-total correlations ranged from 0.603 to 0.757. No item was removed at this stage.

Exploratory factor analysis

EFA was conducted on the 16 items measuring the four predictors using principal component extraction with Varimax rotation. Sampling adequacy was high (KMO = 0.892), and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(120) = 2987.330$, $p < 0.001$, confirming that the correlation matrix was factorable.

Four components with eigenvalues greater than 1 were retained, corresponding to IQ, VIV, INT, and REL. Together they explained 70.440% of the total variance. The respective eigenvalues were 5.640, 2.803, 1.811, and 1.016. After rotation, loadings ranged from 0.799 to 0.861 for INT, 0.736 to 0.805 for VIV, 0.724 to 0.825 for IQ, and 0.765 to 0.819 for REL (Table 4). No cross-loading of .40 or higher was observed. Importantly, IQ and REL items loaded on separate components, providing exploratory evidence that informational adequacy and informational trustworthiness were empirically distinguishable.

A separate analysis of the three DCI items yielded KMO = 0.705 and a significant Bartlett's test, $\chi^2(3) = 334.524$, $p < 0.001$. One component (eigenvalue = 2.114) was retained, explaining 70.477% of the variance, with loadings ranging from 0.821 to 0.849. No item was removed following factor analysis.

Table 4. Rotated factor loadings

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
INT1	0.861			
INT2	0.840			
INT3	0.819			

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
INT4	0.799			
VIV4		0.805		
VIV3		0.790		
VIV2		0.779		
VIV1		0.736		
IQ2			0.825	
IQ3			0.799	
IQ4			0.783	
IQ1			0.724	
REL4				0.819
REL3				0.805
REL2				0.794
REL1				0.765
Extraction: principal component analysis; Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization. Loadings < .40 suppressed.				
a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.				

Source: Authors' data analysis, 2026

Multiple regression analysis

Multiple linear regression was used to estimate the effects of IQ, VIV, INT, and REL on DCI. The model explained 58.6% of the variance in DCI ($R = 0.766$, $R^2 = 0.586$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.582$) and was statistically significant, $F(4, 375) = 132.936$, $p < 0.001$. The Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.878.

Multicollinearity was not a concern: VIF values ranged from 1.150 to 1.768 and tolerance values from 0.566 to 0.870. All four predictors had positive and statistically significant coefficients.

Reliability showed the largest standardized effect on DCI ($\beta = 0.378$, $p < 0.001$), followed by interactivity ($\beta = 0.291$, $p < 0.001$), information quality ($\beta = 0.224$, $p < 0.001$), and vividness ($\beta = 0.194$, $p < 0.001$). H1-H4 were therefore supported (Table 5).

Table 5. Multiple linear regression results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF	Result
H1	IQ → DCI	0.224	5.082	0.000	0.566	1.768	Supported
H2	VIV → DCI	0.194	4.417	0.000	0.569	1.757	Supported
H3	INT → DCI	0.291	8.169	0.000	0.870	1.150	Supported
H4	REL → DCI	0.378	10.352	0.000	0.825	1.212	Supported

Source: Authors' data analysis, 2026.

Discussion

The results reveal a clear hierarchy among the four information characteristics. Although all predictors significantly increased DCI, reliability exerted the strongest effect, followed by interactivity, information quality, and vividness. This pattern qualifies a simple "more engaging information is better" interpretation of social media communication. For Gen Z respondents evaluating Thai Nguyen, the cues most strongly associated with destination choice were those that made information dependable and usable in decision-making, rather than those that primarily intensified presentation.

Reliability's dominant effect is theoretically consequential. Prior studies position trust and credibility as mechanisms through which online tourism information acquires behavioral relevance [6], [7]. The present findings extend this argument by showing that perceived reliability remains the strongest direct predictor even when information quality, vividness, and interactivity are considered simultaneously. Reliability may therefore be understood as a decision-enabling cue: it reduces uncertainty about whether social media information can legitimately be used as a basis for destination evaluation. For practitioners, this implies that visual reach or informational abundance cannot compensate for weak source transparency, inconsistency, or questionable credibility.

Interactivity produced the second-largest effect. This result is consistent with research showing that social media affordances shape destination perceptions [3], [8], but it also suggests a more specific decision mechanism. Interactive environments allow users to ask questions, compare experiences, obtain feedback, and verify claims with others. Interactivity can therefore reduce uncertainty through socially embedded information processing rather than merely increasing engagement. In destination communication, the capacity to interrogate and validate information may be more consequential than passive exposure to highly polished content.

The separate effects of IQ and REL further clarify an important conceptual boundary. IQ captures

whether information is relevant, complete, clear, and current; REL captures whether that information is trusted and considered dependable. Their distinct factor structure and significant regression coefficients indicate that informational adequacy and informational trustworthiness are related but non-equivalent evaluations. This distinction refines approaches that embed reliability within broader information-quality measures [7]: information can be useful without being fully trusted, while trustworthy information may still be insufficiently informative for destination choice.

Vividness, although significant, had the smallest standardized effect. This finding does not contradict the mental imagery literature, which shows that vivid visual cues can help prospective tourists simulate future experiences [11], [12]. Rather, it establishes a boundary on the relative importance of imagery when other decision-relevant information cues are considered simultaneously. What captures attention is not necessarily what carries the greatest weight at the point of choice. For destination managers and tourism businesses in Thai Nguyen, social media strategy should therefore combine vivid presentation with clear, current, verifiable information and responsive interaction. The objective is not simply to make Thai Nguyen visible, but to make destination information sufficiently credible and actionable for choice.

V. CONCLUSION

This study examined how four characteristics of social media tourism information shape Gen Z's intention to choose Thai Nguyen as a tourism destination. All four predictors were significant, but their effects were unequal: reliability was strongest, followed by interactivity, information quality, and vividness. The findings therefore shift attention from exposure and visual appeal toward the decision-enabling properties of social media information. By separating information quality from reliability, the study further shows that informational adequacy and informational trustworthiness constitute distinct evaluations that independently contribute to destination choice intention. This distinction provides a more precise information-processing account of how social media content becomes behaviorally relevant.

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. First, the cross-sectional, self-reported design identifies predictive associations rather than causal effects and does not capture the transition from intention to actual destination choice. Second, purposive non-probability sampling and the exclusive focus on Gen Z constrain generalizability to other tourist segments. Third, the analysis aggregates social media platforms even though TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube may create different information-processing conditions. Finally, the direct-effects model identifies which information characteristics matter but does not test the psychological mechanisms through which their effects arise.

Future research should therefore move beyond adding further predictors and test the mechanisms implied by the present findings. Longitudinal or experimental designs could examine whether trust, perceived uncertainty, and mental imagery mediate the effects of reliability, interactivity, and vividness on destination choice. Comparative studies across platforms and generational cohorts, ideally incorporating actual choice behavior, would also clarify the boundary conditions under which particular social media information cues become decision-relevant.

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