

Determinants of travel intention on TikTok: A SEM-ANN approach.

Abstract

Purpose: This study explores how eWOM, user-generated content trust (UGCT), economic perspective, and social perspective influence travel intention in TikTok users. Unlike previous research, we conceptually differentiate eWOM from UGCT and analyze their effect on travel decisions, providing empirical evidence from an emerging digital context.

Design/methodology/approach We applied structural equation modeling (SEM) and artificial neural network (ANN) analysis to a sample of 470 Chilean TikTok users interested in travel. We validated the relationships using SPSS AMOS and used ANN to identify the relative importance of the predictors.

Findings: The results show that eWOM directly influences destination trust, economic perspective, and UGCT. In turn, user-generated content trust significantly impacts travel intention, being the most important predictor according to ANN. Economic and social perspectives strengthened trust in content, while the direct relationship between destination trust and travel intention was not significant, highlighting the mediating role of UGCT in tourism decisions.

Originality/Value The study contributes by differentiating eWOM from UGCT and demonstrating their specific influence on travel intention. Furthermore, it proposes an innovative approach by integrating SEM and ANN, offering theoretical and practical contributions to the design of digital tourism marketing strategies based on trust and pre-purchase interaction.

Keywords: TikTok, travel intention, eWOM, UGCT, digital tourism marketing, SEM, ANN.

1. Introduction:

Social media has reshaped how people access information, interact, and make consumption decisions. In travel, TikTok has become a key channel of influence, becoming a primary source of inspiration for travel planning (Ramos and Ramos, 2025). Its short and dynamic format and highly personalized recommendations attract global audiences; the ephemeral, engaging videos can strengthen brand ties and encourage engagement or purchase intentions (Wang, 2024).

In tourism, short TikTok videos shape destination image and travel intention. Platform content significantly influences perceptions of destinations and visit decisions (Chenchen *et al.*, 2020; Zhou *et al.*, 2023), with particularly strong effects among younger users (Liu *et al.*, 2024).

In Chile, 69.8% of the population is familiar with TikTok and 26.1% uses it regularly (Subsecretaría de Telecomunicaciones and Cadem, 2023). Chilean youth, especially Generation Z, prefer brief, fast-playing visual content on TikTok and Instagram, transforming how they discover and evaluate travel experiences (Martínez-Estrella *et al.*, 2023). This shift is pressuring travel agencies toward stronger digital presence, omnichannel strategies, and personalized experiences (Rodríguez Pallas, 2024). Understanding the drivers of travel intention is therefore essential, as satisfaction and information trust increasingly depend on the quality of shared visual content (Li, 2021).

Despite substantial progress in research on TikTok's role in tourism, important gaps remain regarding users' underlying motivations for consuming tourism content on this platform. Much of the recent literature has emphasized perceptual, technological, or affective pathways. For example, Liu *et al.* (2024) show that perceived ease of use and entertainment foster flow experiences that, in turn, drive travel intention, Zhu *et al.* (2022) highlight the mediating role of authenticity, both existential and object-based, between user-generated content and travel intention, and Gozali and Tunjung Sari (2024) examine TikTok celebrity involvement, with destination authenticity mediating its effect on travel intention. While valuable, these strands have tended to overlook functional dimensions, specifically, the economic and social benefits users expect from such content, and have seldom integrated them with established relational constructs such as eWOM and destination trust.

This study addresses these gaps with a model of six latent variables. User-generated content trust (UGCT), together with the economic perspective (EP) and the social perspective (SP), represent essential concepts for analyzing the perception of value in the use of social networks when planning trips (Khoa *et al.*, 2021). These are integrated with eWOM and destination trust (DT), consistent with evidence that eWOM raises DT and, in turn, travel intention (Abubakar, 2016). All converge on travel intention (TI) as the behavioral response to digital exposure (Zhu *et al.*, 2023).

To validate the model, we apply structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the hypothesized relationships and complement the analysis with artificial neural networks (ANN) to assess predictive capacity. This mixed approach provides empirical evidence on tourism consumer behavior on digital platforms and practical guidance for tourism marketing in emerging short-video environments such as TikTok.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Electronic Word of Mouth

eWOM refers to any positive or negative statement made by consumers about a product or company that is made available to many people via the Internet (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004). In tourism, eWOM is a key input to trip planning and an especially influential information source given the pre-consumption intangibility of hospitality services (Litvin *et al.*, 2008). Empirical evidence shows that eWOM shapes travel decisions both directly and indirectly through destination trust (Abubakar, 2016).

2.2. Destination Trust

Destination trust is a multidimensional construct that reflects tourists' belief that a destination's inhabitants and institutions are honest, benevolent, and competent (Marinao *et al.*, 2017). Recent research distinguishes self-interest, altruistic, and mutual-benefit forms of trust and develops a validated measurement scale (Li and Yang, 2022). In the context of medical tourism, destination trust has also been framed as travelers' willingness to rely on a destination's ability to perform reliably and deliver on its promises (Abubakar, 2016).

2.3. Economic Perspective

The economic perspective concerns tourists' cost-benefit evaluations and perceived price value during trip planning. In the hotel context, perceived price value is a salient antecedent of online hotel booking intention and selection behavior (Le and Bui, 2022). Digitalization strengthens this calculus by enabling more informed decisions and delivering economic benefits to tourism development (Jiang and Phoong, 2023). In social media settings, advertising activities can enhance user engagement and downstream outcomes; together with the positive effect of value-for-money on satisfaction, these mechanisms are consistent with greater post-consumption advocacy and eWOM (Chu *et al.*, 2020; Frías-Jamilena *et al.*, 2012).

2.4. Social Perspective

Social perspective denotes perceived relational benefits, social value, and affective outcomes from engaging with travel UGC on platforms such as TikTok (Chavez *et al.*, 2020; Ukpabi and Karjaluoto, 2018). Social influence and ties shape UGC adoption and travel choices via user-, source-, and content-level attributes (Ukpabi and Karjaluoto, 2018). In line with uses and gratifications, travelers value content fulfilling social bonding and social enhancement needs, reinforcing stickiness and intentions to create UGC (Chavez *et al.*, 2020). Social media are central to online travel information search, amplifying UGC's reach and impact (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Among Gen Z, a stronger social perspective increases trust in UGC, which relates to travel intention (Khoa *et al.*, 2021).

2.5. User-Generated Content trust

UGCT refers to the perceived credibility and information quality of consumer generated tourism content (Yoo *et al.*, 2009; Dedeoğlu, 2019). Photos, videos, and narratives are often seen as more relatable and credible than institutional messages because they reflect consumer experiences (Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Cox *et al.*, 2009). In tourism, UGCT is associated with reduced uncertainty and shapes both destination image and visit/selection intentions; these effects are strengthened by self-congruence with endorsers and affective mechanisms (Yoo *et al.*, 2009; Abubakar and Ilkan, 2016; Nguyen and Tong, 2023; Xu and Pratt, 2018).

2.6. Travel Intention

Travel intention denotes an individual's readiness to perform the behavior of visiting a destination, consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In tourism, it is

typically operationalized as destination choice intention (Lam and Hsu, 2006) and is shaped by online word of mouth via destination trust and by UGC mechanisms (Abubakar and Ilkan, 2016; Nguyen and Tong, 2023). Within the TPB, intention is the most proximal antecedent of behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

3. Conceptual framework and hypothesis

3.1. eWOM and Destination Trust

Numerous studies have shown that electronic word of mouth strengthens trust in the destination by providing information perceived as more authentic, reliable and useful than traditional channels (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012). In medical tourism, Abubakar *et al.* (2017) showed that eWOM directly influences trust in the destination, with differences according to gender. Similarly, Abubakar and Ilkan (2016) confirmed that the perceived credibility and informational usefulness of eWOM reduce tourist uncertainty and amplify trust. Doosti *et al.* (2016) reported that eWOM also improves destination image, reinforcing associated trust levels. Furthermore, Su *et al.* (2021) found that online reviews, a specific form of eWOM, directly increase destination trust, especially when their reliability is high. Mohammadian and Soltani, (2019) corroborated a significant effect of eWOM on the perceived trust of foreign tourists towards Iran. Likewise, Paramita *et al.* (2024) showed that trust acts as a mediator between eWOM and the intention to visit, confirming its central role in this relationship. Taken together, this evidence strongly supports eWOM as a positive and consistent predictor of destination trust, supporting the following hypothesis:

H1. Electronic word of mouth positively influences destination trust.

3.2. eWOM and Travel Intention

Electronic word of mouth generally shows a positive, significant effect on travel intention by supplying credible and valuable information (Abubakar, 2016; Hanandeh *et al.*, 2019). In Islamic destination contexts, Jalilvand *et al.* (2013) find that eWOM improves destination attitude and strengthens intention. Akhi *et al.* (2023) show significant effects of source credibility and review valence among tourists in Bangladesh. A more nuanced pattern appears in halal tourism in Indonesia: Wibawa *et al.* (2025) show that eWOM elevates destination image and trust, yet neither yields a direct increase in visit intention. On Instagram, eWOM influences both attitude and intention in urban destinations (Gosal *et al.*, 2020). In Vietnam, Thao *et al.* (2023) demonstrate that attitude and information acceptance mechanisms account for eWOM's positive impact on intention. Taken together, this evidence supports the following hypothesis:

H2. Electronic word of mouth positively influences travel intention.

3.3. eWOM and Economic Perspective

The literature indicates that eWOM shapes tourists' economic perspective by informing price value evaluations, revealing savings opportunities, and reducing pre-purchase risk (Nieto-García *et al.*, 2017; Liang and Corkindale, 2019; Álvarez Álvarez and Vázquez Casielles,

2005; Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012). eWOM influences willingness to pay and the perceived acceptability of prices through shifts in perceived value and risk (Nieto-García *et al.*, 2017; Liang and Corkindale, 2019). Online reputation built via reviews is associated with price premiums, indicating valuation adjustments consistent with value over price judgments (Yacouel and Fleischer, 2012; Noone and McGuire, 2013). In tourism's inherently intangible context, eWOM functions as a risk mitigation mechanism that facilitates value-oriented decision processes (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012). Evidence on sales promotions further shows that promotional cues strengthen value for money assessments, aligning with eWOM's informational role in identifying advantageous offers (Álvarez Álvarez and Vázquez Casielles, 2005). Taken together, these findings provide strong support for the following hypothesis:

H3. Electronic word of mouth positively influences economic perspective.

3.4. eWOM and User-Generated Content Trust.

Several studies have shown that electronic word of mouth directly influences trust in user-generated content (UGC), acting as a social signal on digital platforms. Muchnik *et al.* (2013) found that an initial positive vote (eWOM) generates a herding effect, increasing the perception of trustworthiness of subsequent content. Likewise, Moe and Trusov (2011) showed that the dynamics of valuation on online platforms determines user trust when consuming new content. Liu and Ooi (2024) demonstrated that eWOM and UGC significantly influence consumer trust, which mediates their purchasing behavior. This trust acts as a bridge between content exposure and decision-making. Finally, Gretzel and Yoo (2008) point out that information provided by other users serves as a social validation mechanism, reinforcing the perceived credibility of UGC. Collectively, this evidence clearly supports that eWOM builds trust in content on platforms like TikTok, which supports the following hypothesis:

H4. Electronic word of mouth positively influences user-generated content trust on TikTok.

3.5. Destination Trust and Travel Intention.

Academic literature consistently supports that destination trust is a strong antecedent of travel intention, by mitigating uncertainty and reinforcing tourists' psychological safety. In the context of medical tourism, Abubakar (2016) showed that greater trust in a destination's capabilities significantly increases visiting intention by offering guarantees in environments perceived as risky. Likewise, Yang *et al.* (2021) confirmed through surveys in Macau that destination trust has a significant direct effect on post-pandemic travel intention. From a digital perspective, Su *et al.* (2021) found that trust built through online reviews strengthens travel intention, especially when the opinions are perceived as trustworthy. Complementarily, Shen *et al.* (2022) showed that, even during health crises, trust in the safety conditions of a destination acts as a key predictor of travel intention, reinforced by a positive country image. Furthermore, Torres-Moraga and Barra (2023) showed that destination brand experience builds trust, which translates into a greater willingness to visit or recommend the location.

Finally, Yang *et al.* (2021) also emphasized that strengthening destination trust after a health crisis contributes to a significant increase in travel intention.

Taken together, this evidence empirically supports the following hypothesis:

H5. Destination trust positively influences travel intention.

3.6. Economic Perspective and User-Generated Content Trust.

Several studies have indicated that perceived economic benefits, such as discounts or promotions, can incentivize not only the generation of tourism content by users, but also their trust in such content as a valuable source of information. Along these lines, Le and Bui (2022) provide direct evidence that the economic perspective significantly influences the trust placed in user-generated content, which reinforces its usefulness when making travel decisions.

While other studies do not directly address trust in UGC, they do highlight that economic factors act as drivers of content use and generation. For example, Amersdorffer *et al.* (2012) argue that economic incentives derived from the use of the social web transform consumer behavior, promoting active participation in content creation. Complementarily, Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Walsh (2004) argue that consumers participate in digital platforms motivated by a rational evaluation of benefits, including economic incentives, which can reinforce the credibility attributed to the generated content. Finally, Chu *et al.* (2020) suggest that economic stimuli increase the perception of the value of the content, which can implicitly strengthen trust in it as a tourism planning resource.

Based on this evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6. Economic perspective positively influences user-generated content trust.

3.7. Social Perspective and User-Generated Content Trust.

Social factors are central to how tourists engage with content on social media. Evidence shows that sharing travel experiences is driven by social benefits such as connection and belonging, which enhances the value ascribed to content within collaborative communities (Kang and Schuett, 2013). Relationship building with tourism providers on social platforms is linked to perceived relational benefits that increase engagement and loyalty; by extension, familiarity and social connection can foster acceptance of information shared online, including user generated content (Senders *et al.*, 2013). From a theoretical standpoint, social drivers including relational benefits, social value, and emotional value increase information seeking and shape responses to hospitality and tourism content (Chu *et al.*, 2020). Empirical work with Generation Z further shows that perceived social value strengthens interaction with user generated content, supporting the view that social benefits encourage reliance on such content during tourism planning and, ultimately, reinforce trust in it (Khoa *et al.*, 2021).

H7. Social perspective positively influences user-generated content trust.

3.8. User-Generated Content Trust and Destination Trust.

Kim and Kim (2017) argue that the quality of tourist information on social media, understood as useful, relevant and well-presented content, not only contributes to shaping the image of the destination, but also reinforces user trust in the promoted place. This argument is consistent with Chung and Koo (2015), who contend that trust in tourist information published on social media significantly influences the intention to use these platforms, especially when the content is perceived as reliable and reduces consumer uncertainty.

Similarly, Narangajavana *et al.* (2017) demonstrated that user-generated content (UGC) enables the construction of cognitive and affective expectations about the destination, by relying on authentic experiences that reinforce the credibility of the place. Furthermore, Burgess *et al.* (2009) highlight that UGC can influence online trust by providing shared experiences between users that reduce perceived uncertainty in digital contexts.

Taken together, this evidence supports the idea that user-generated content trust, when perceived as authentic, useful, and aligned with real-life experiences, drives trust in the tourism destination, empirically validating:

H8. User-generated content trust positively influences destination trust.

3.9. User-Generated Content trust and Travel Intention.

User generated content trust (UGCT) relates to travel intention through credibility, authenticity and risk reduction. UGC such as photos, videos and personal posts is often perceived as more credible and less self-serving than institutional messages, fostering favorable destination attitudes (Burgess *et al.*, 2009; Gretzel and Yoo, 2008). Perceived authenticity reduces uncertainty during trip planning and strengthens confidence in the information (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008; Su *et al.*, 2021). Exposure to UGC also shapes informed and realistic expectations about visits, aligning anticipated and experienced attributes, in part by trusting the received content (Narangajavana *et al.*, 2017). Empirical models frequently indicate that UGCT influences intention indirectly through destination attitude, image or trust, and in some contexts the direct path is not significant (Abubakar, 2016; Su *et al.*, 2021; Nguyen and Tong, 2022; Wijaya *et al.*, 2025). Beyond tourism, research in electronic commerce reports a positive association between trust in UGC and purchase intention through informational usefulness and perceived fairness (Demba *et al.*, 2019). Young consumers intensively use the internet to plan trips and value authentic and experiential content, which heightens the practical relevance of UGCT in travel decisions (Le and Bui, 2022; Leung *et al.*, 2013; Gretzel and Yoo, 2008). Based on this background, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H9. User-generated content trust positively influences travel intention.

Based on this theoretical review, a conceptual model is proposed, which will be validated using structural equation modeling (SEM) and complemented with artificial neural networks (ANN), as detailed in the methodology section.

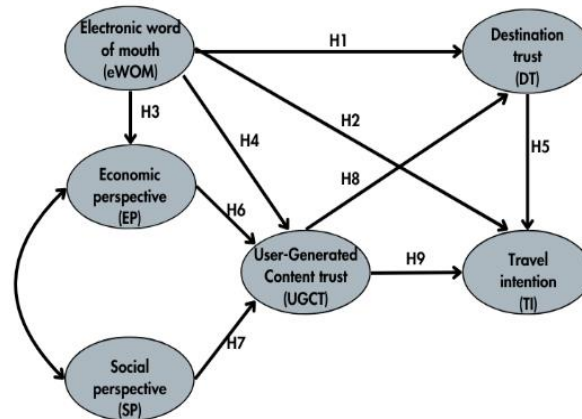


Figure I. Proposed model (Created by authors).

4. Methodology

4. 1. Sample and procedure

The study comprised two complementary stages. First, a systematic review of established models in tourism and digital marketing (Stimulus–organism–response, Trust Transfer Theory and Digital Authenticity) guided the selection of factors linked to trust, perceived value and travel intention in TikTok settings. From this review we proposed the conceptual model in Figure I, which integrates electronic word of mouth, user generated content trust, destination trust and travel intention, and treats economic perspective and social perspective as exogenous variables. The model reflects value formation in digital environments and is grounded in prior empirical research on consumer behavior in social platforms. To improve model fit, we introduced a covariance between the EP and SP error terms following AMOS modification indices and evidence that economic and social motives co occur in collaborative contexts (Hamari *et al.*, 2016; Oliveira *et al.*, 2021).

Six latent variables were measured with 24 observable items (Table I) using a 7-point Likert-type scale, where 1 equal “strongly disagree” and 7 equals “strongly agree.” The questionnaire was implemented in SurveyMonkey and disseminated through three channels: Instagram posts, university mass emails and in person administration at three Chilean universities. A non-probability purposive sampling strategy targeted active TikTok users interested in travel.

We collected 556 responses; after screening for eligibility and data quality, 86 cases were removed, yielding a final valid sample of $N = 470$. TikTok use was intensive: 70.0% connected several times per day and 9.8% once per day. The sample comprised 51.5% women and 47.2% men. By age, 64.3% were 18–24, 24.3% were 25–30 and 5.7% were 31–43. Regarding occupation, 58.1% identified as students and 20.2% as employed. Geographically, participation concentrated in the Metropolitan Region (46.8%) and the Valparaíso Region (24.5%).

In sum, the sample is predominantly Generation Z with high affinity for digital content, composed mainly of women, students and early career workers residing in central Chile. A substantial share reported planning trips autonomously, consistent with a proactive and self-directed digital consumer profile aligned with the study's objectives.

4.2. SEM-ANN data analysis

To strengthen explanatory and predictive robustness, we used a multi analytical design that combines Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and Artificial Neural Networks (ANN), following recent recommendations in digital tourism research (Mehedintu and Soava, 2022; Sharma *et al.*, 2020; Vărzaru and Bocean, 2021). SEM validates relationships among latent variables, while ANN captures nonlinear predictive patterns that conventional linear regression may miss (Cicha *et al.*, 2021). The analysis proceeded in two phases. First, data were cleaned, constructs were validated with Confirmatory Factor Analysis, and the structural model was estimated with SEM in IBM SPSS Statistics and AMOS v26 (IBM, 2022), enabling empirical tests of the proposed hypotheses using model fit indices, standardized paths and significance levels. Second, we trained an ANN and examined synaptic weights to obtain the relative importance of predictors for travel intention, offering complementary insight into the factors that shape tourism behavior on TikTok.

4.3. Analysis using Artificial Neural Networks (ANN)

To complement the SEM analysis and strengthen the predictive validation of the proposed model, an Artificial Neural Network (ANN) analysis was conducted, using a Multilayer Perceptron (MLP) approach, a method widely used in digital marketing and consumer behavior for modeling complex nonlinear relationships (Kalinić *et al.*, 2021; Sharma *et al.*, 2020). Inputs were eWOM, DT, UGCT, EP and SP, previously validated through SEM, and the output was TI. For both layers, the sigmoid activation function was used, as it is appropriate for transforming values into probabilities between 0 and 1 and facilitates interpretation of each predictor's relative impact (Vărzaru and Bocean, 2021). The network was trained in IBM SPSS Statistics v26 with multiple iterations to ensure stability. Findings are presented and interpreted in the complementary results section.

Table I. *Survey Applied.*

Construct	Observable Variable
eWOM (Abubakar, 2016)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. I often read other users' comments on travel videos on TikTok to see which destinations make a good impression on others.2. To make sure I choose the right travel destination, I often read other users' comments on travel videos on TikTok.3. I often check out other users' comments on TikTok travel videos to help me choose a good destination.4. I often gather feedback from other users' comments on TikTok travel videos before traveling to a certain destination.5. When I travel to a destination, other users' comments on travel videos on TikTok give me confidence to travel to that destination.
DT (Abubakar, 2016)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">6. The destinations that TikTok recommends meet my expectations.7. I trust the destinations that TikTok recommends to me.8. I won't be disappointed by the cleanliness of the destinations TikTok recommends to me.9. The destinations that TikTok recommends to me guarantee my satisfaction.10. The destinations that TikTok recommends to me would be honest and sincere in addressing my concerns.11. I could trust the vacation destinations TikTok recommends.12. In the destinations that TikTok recommends to me, they would make every effort to satisfy me.
EP (Khoa <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">13. I could have derived the functional values (Have a nice trip) from TikTok user-generated content.14. You could have obtained monetary benefits (e.g., saving money by booking a cheaper hotel) thanks to the content generated by TikTok users.15. You could have obtained sales promotions (e.g., getting a discount on the room) from TikTok's online user-generated content.

SP (Khoa <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	<p>16. I could have gained relational benefits (having a new travel companion) from TikTok user-generated content.</p> <p>17. I could have obtained the social values (Sharing useful information with others) from TikTok user-generated content.</p> <p>18. I could have derived the emotional values (Enjoying watching travel TikTok) from TikTok user-generated content.</p>
UGCT (Khoa <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	<p>19. I rely on user-generated content online on TikTok when traveling.</p> <p>20. I am attracted (enjoyed/enjoyed) by TikTok's online user-generated content when it comes to traveling.</p> <p>21. I am willing to rely on user-generated content online on TikTok when traveling.</p> <p>22. In the next few years, if I plan a trip, I will visit the destination TikTok recommends.</p>
TI (Zhu <i>et al.</i> , 2023)	<p>23. If I have the opportunity to travel, I will consider a trip to the destination recommended by TikTok.</p> <p>24. In short, I think the destination TikTok recommends is a good place worth visiting.</p>

5. Results

5.1. Reliability Analysis

To evaluate the internal consistency of the scales used, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for each latent variable in the model. All constructs exceeded the minimum recommended threshold of 0.6 (Loewenthal and Lewis, 2001) for constructs with fewer than ten items, thus supporting the reliability of the measurements, as shown in Table II.

The results revealed high levels of internal consistency for the constructs Electronic Word of Mouth ($\alpha = 0.917$), Destination Trust ($\alpha = 0.902$), and Travel Intention ($\alpha = 0.907$). Likewise, Trust in User-Generated Content ($\alpha = 0.855$) and Economic Perspective ($\alpha = 0.790$) also satisfactorily exceeded acceptable levels. Finally, although Social Perspective obtained a lower value ($\alpha = 0.708$), it remains within the acceptable range for exploratory studies (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

These results support the internal validity of the instrument applied, enabling progression to the structural analysis phase.

Table II. Cronbach's Alpha.

Construct	Items	Cronbach's alpha
Electronic Word of Mouth	5	0,917
Destination trust	7	0,902
Economic perspective	3	0,790
Social perspective	3	0,708
User generated content trust	3	0,855
Travel intention	3	0,907

5.2. Model Fit

To assess the quality of the proposed structural equation model, absolute, incremental, and parsimony fit indices were analyzed, following methodological recommendations (Byrne, 2010; Talwar *et al.*, 2020). The results are summarized in Table III.

First, the absolute fit of the model is examined using the following indicators:

CMIN/DF: The value obtained was 3.364, below the maximum recommended threshold of 4, indicating a reasonable fit of the model (Talwar *et al.*, 2020).

Probability level associated with CMIN: The value was 0.000, meeting the criterion of statistical significance ($p < 0.05$), which suggests that the model adequately reproduces the observed covariance matrix.

GFI: Obtained a value of 0.877, close to the desired threshold of 0.9, considered a good fit (Byrne, 2010).

RMSEA: The value was 0.071, meeting the acceptability criterion by being below 0.08 (Talwar *et al.*, 2020).

The incremental fit was then evaluated:

NFI: The result was 0.901, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.9, reflecting a good incremental fit.

CFI: The model reached a value of 0.928, confirming an excellent fit compared to the null model (Byrne, 2010).

Finally, the parsimony adjustment was analyzed:

PNFI: The value obtained was 0.790, higher than the recommended minimum of 0.5, indicating that the model achieves a good balance between fit and complexity.

Taken together, these results show that the model presents a solid absolute, incremental and parsimonious fit, which empirically validates its explanatory capacity for the relationships proposed between the latent variables.

Table III. *Model Adjustment.*

Indicator	Value	Criterion
CMIN	814,169	-
CMIN/DF	3,364	<4
Probability level CMIN	0,000	< 0,05
GFI	0,877	Close to 1 ($\geq 0,9$)
NFI	0,901	Close to 1 ($\geq 0,9$)
CFI	0,928	Close to 1 ($\geq 0,9$)
RMSEA	0,071	< 0,08
PNFI	0,790	>0,5

5.3. Hypothesis validation and standardized regression Coefficients

The model has 242 degrees of freedom, as shown in Table IV. This indicates that the model is overestimated ($DF > 0$). Therefore, this model can be empirically evaluated, its hypotheses tested, and the findings generalized beyond the sample used.

Table IV. *Degrees of Freedom SEM Model.*

Number of distinct sample moments	300
Number of distinct parameters to be estimated	58
Degrees of freedom	242

Table V. *Standardized Regression Estimators, and Significance of Each Relationship Between Latent Variables.*

Hypothesis	Relation	Standardized estimated	p-value	Result	β
H1	eWOM \rightarrow DT	0,161	***	Accepted	0,25
H2	eWOM \rightarrow TI	0,167	***	Accepted	0,18
H3	eWOM \rightarrow EP	0,353	***	Accepted	0,48

H4	eWOM →UGCT	0,145	0,006	Accepted	0,17
H5	DT → TI	0,196	0,172	Rejected	0,13
H6	EP→ UGCT	0,659	***	Accepted	0,57
H7	SP→ UGCT	0,199	0,007	Accepted	0,22
H8	UGCT → DT	0,541	***	Accepted	0,73
H9	UGCT → TI	0,642	***	Accepted	0,58

*** p<.000

Using the proposed structural equation model (SEM), the validity of the hypotheses posed in the theoretical phase is evaluated. Table V shows the estimated values and significance levels (p), which are used to accept or reject each proposed relationship (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Eight significant relationships are obtained by considering a significance threshold of 0.05.

The results show that eWOM has a positive and significant effect on economic outlook, destination trust, travel intention, and trust in user-generated content, confirming hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4, respectively.

On the other hand, the destination trust variable did not show a significant effect on travel intention, thus rejecting hypothesis H5. In contrast, the economic perspective strongly influences UGCT, validating hypothesis H6. Similarly, the social perspective also shows a positive effect on UGCT, confirming hypothesis H7.

Finally, the relationship between UGCT and both destination trust and travel intention was significant, thus supporting hypotheses H8 and H9. This can be seen in Figure II.

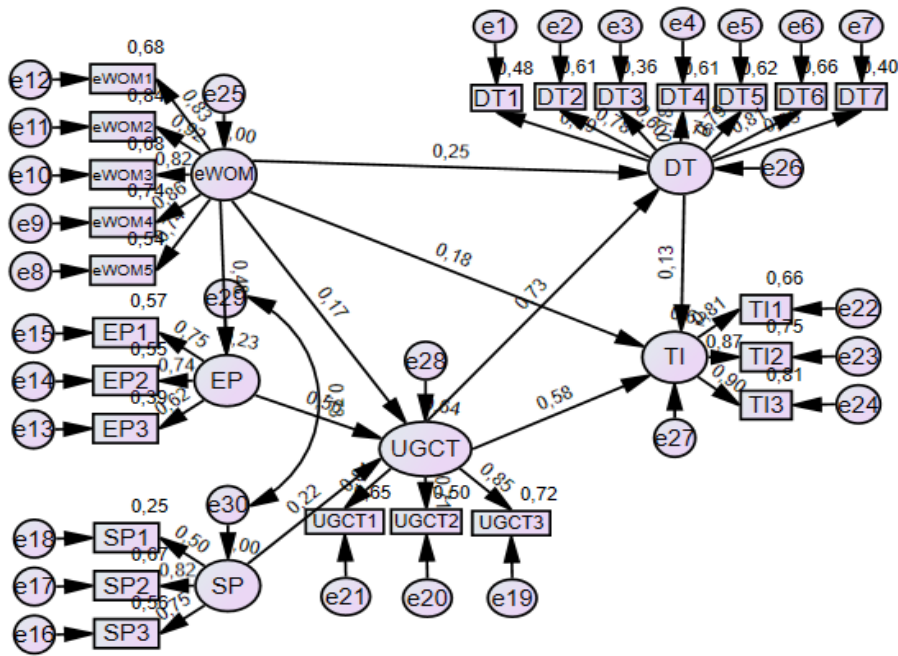


Figure II. Model in SPSS AMOS (Created by the authors)

Table VI. R² of Endogenous Latent Variables.

Variable	R ²
Destination trust (DT)	0,76
Travel intention (TI)	0,62
User generated content trust (UGCT)	0,64
Economic perspective (EP)	0,23

Table VII. Covariance estimators and calculation between EP and SP errors.

Relation	Estimate	Covariance	S.E.	C.R.	P Label	Estimate Correlation
E29<->e30	0,827		0,1	8,254	***	0,735

Based on the coefficients of determination (R²) obtained for the model's endogenous latent variables, an adequate level of variance explanation by their antecedents is observed. Specifically:

Trust in the destination has an R^2 of 0.76, which indicates that 76% of its variance is explained by the exogenous variables that precede it (eWOM and UGCT).

The intention to travel reaches an R^2 of 0.62, reflecting that 62% of its variance is explained by DT and UGCT.

Trust in user-generated content has an R^2 of 0.64, meaning that 64% of its behavior can be attributed to the variables eWOM , EP, and SP.

Finally, the economic perspective presents an R^2 of 0.23, that is, 23% of its variance is explained by eWOM , which, although lower than the rest, is still significant enough to consider its inclusion as an explained variable.

The proposed model incorporates a covariance between errors e_{29} and e_{30} , corresponding to the economic and social perspective variables. This methodological decision is justified based on the conceptual and empirical interdependence between both dimensions of perceived value. As noted by (Fiore *et al.*, 2005), in digital contexts, consumers often experience functional and symbolic benefits simultaneously, which generates a natural overlap between both dimensions when evaluating content generated by other users. This interaction can give rise to correlations not directly explained by causal relationships in the model, but which should be considered to improve its fit.

The estimated covariance between errors e_{29} and e_{30} was 0.827 (see Table VII), with high statistical significance, while the correlation between these errors reached 0.735. These results reflect a strong association not explained by direct structural paths, which reinforces the decision to allow their covariance.

This practice is methodologically supported when justified by theory and improves the parsimony of the model without compromising discriminant validity (Byrne, 2010). Studies such as that by Kim *et al.* (2017) have shown that digital environments can generate both cognitive and affective responses in users, which significantly influence the formation of destination imagery. This also applies to the evaluation of social and economic value in travel planning through TikTok.

Regarding the possible presence of multicollinearity, the results do not indicate a significant threat. The correlation between errors, although high, does not exceed the critical threshold of 0.85 suggested by (Kline, 2016) for considering severe multicollinearity in structural equation models.

5.4. Analysis of artificial neural networks

As detailed in the methodology section, this study complements SEM analysis with the use of artificial neural networks (ANNs), with the aim of strengthening the predictive validity of the proposed model. Unlike SEM, which evaluates causal relationships between latent constructs, ANNs allow modeling nonlinear and complex relationships between multiple variables, standing out for their accuracy in environments where the structure of relationships

may not be fully known (Kalinić *et al.*, 2021; Sharma *et al.*, 2020; Vărzaru and Bocean, 2021).

The network architecture used was a multilayer perceptron (MLP) with a hidden layer composed of three neurons. The network had five input neurons corresponding to the predictor variables: eWOM, Destination Trust, Economic Perspective, Social Perspective, and User-Generated Content Trust. The dependent variable used as the output neuron was Travel Intention. Both the hidden layer and the output layer used the sigmoid function as the activation function, following the methodological recommendations of previous studies (Sharma *et al.*, 2020; Vărzaru and Bocean, 2021). As shown in Figure III.

To avoid overfitting, 10-fold cross-validation is used, dividing the database into 80% for training and 20% for testing. The model accuracy is evaluated using the root mean square error (RMSE) for both phases. As shown in Table VIII, the average RMSE values obtained are 0.113 for training and 0.110 for testing, which indicates a good level of predictive accuracy (Sternad Zabukovšek *et al.*, 2019).

Regarding the relative importance of the predictors on travel intention, this is assessed through a sensitivity analysis, the results of which are shown in Table IX and Figure IV. In a normalized way, the most influential predictor was UGCT (100%), followed by Destination Trust (78.5%), eWOM (48.6%), Economic Perspective (45.5%) and, lastly, Social Perspective (24.6%). These results suggest that trust in user-generated content is the most decisive factor in shaping travel intentions among active TikTok users.

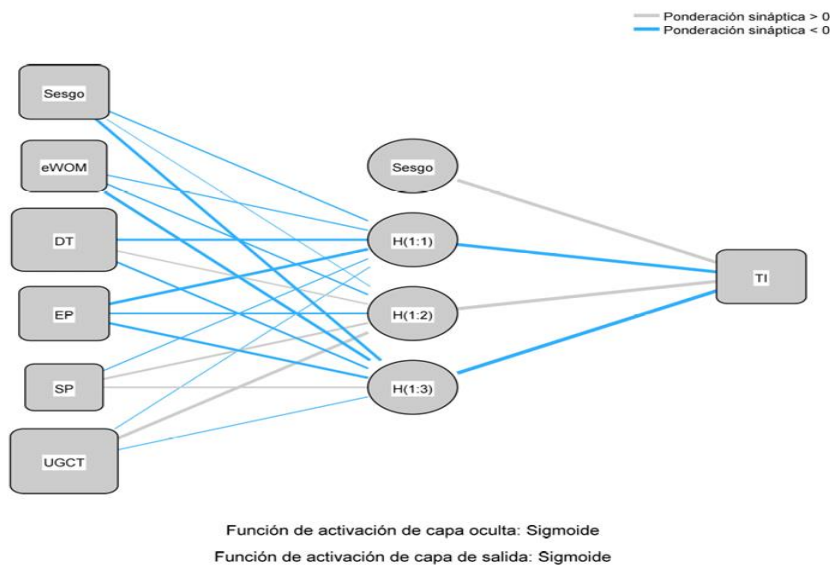


Figure III. Neural network model. Source: Developed by the authors based on data calculated with SPSS Statistics.

Table VIII. *RMSE values for the ANN model.*

	Training Dataset		Testing Dataset		Relative importance				
	RMSE	SSE	RMSE	SSE	eWOM	DT	EP	SP	UGCT
ANN1	0,113	4,762	0,115	1,265	0,58	0,337	0,143	0,114	0,348
ANN2	0,109	4,497	0,125	1,41	0,111	0,336	0,112	0,081	0,36
ANN3	0,117	5,085	0,097	0,898	0,092	0,253	0,142	0,103	0,41
ANN4	0,112	4,506	0,113	1,332	0,116	0,271	0,18	0,039	0,395
ANN5	0,11	4,421	0,12	1,567	0,143	0,269	0,215	0,108	0,265
ANN6	0,116	4,979	0,092	0,857	0,103	0,315	0,146	0,068	0,368
ANN7	0,113	4,769	0,105	1,061	0,159	0,253	0,15	0,074	0,363
ANN8	0,114	4,84	0,1	0,986	0,116	0,29	0,157	0,046	0,391
ANN9	0,111	4,494	0,116	1,382	0,104	0,261	0,214	0,045	0,377
ANN10	0,113	4,867	0,116	1,233	0,198	0,199	0,149	0,195	0,258
MEAN	0,113	4,722	0,11	1,199	0,172	0,278	0,161	0,087	0,354

Table IX *Relative importance of the normalized variable.*

Predictors	Average Relative Importance	Normalized Importance (%)	Ranking
eWOM	0,172	48.59%	4
DT	0,278	78.53%	2
EP	0,161	45.48%	5
SP	0,087	24.58%	6
UGCT	0,354	100.00%	1

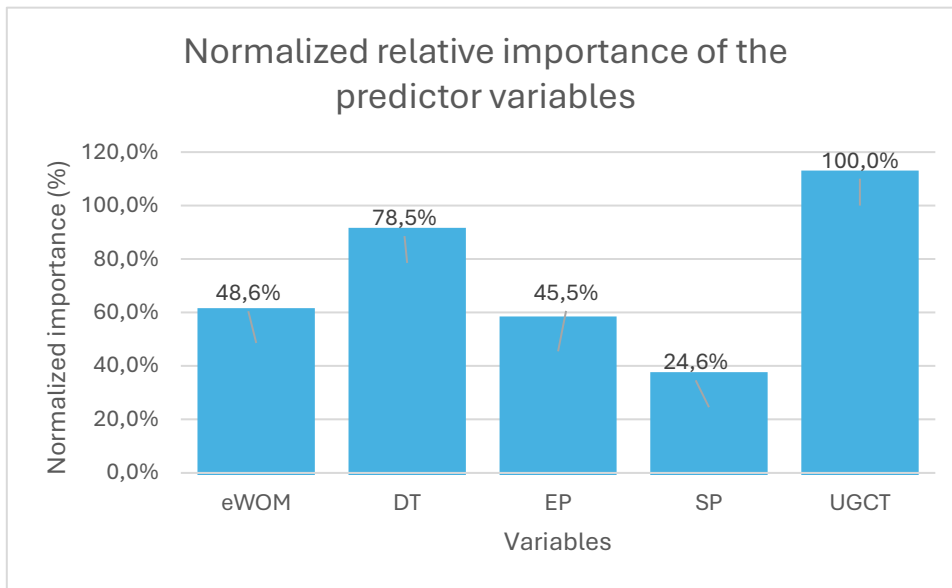


Figure IV. Normalized importance. Source: Prepared by the authors based on data calculated with SPSS Statistics.

6. Discussion

Theoretical Contributions

The present study examined how trust in user-generated content (UGCT), economic perspective (EP), social perspective (SP), electronic word of mouth (eWOM), and destination trust (DT), influence travel intention (TI) in the context of TikTok. The combined use of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and Artificial Neural Networks (ANN) enabled the assessment of both linear and non-linear relationships, thereby strengthening the validity of the findings. Results position UGCT as the most influential factor on TI, followed by eWOM and, to a lesser extent, DT.

UGCT showed the strongest direct influence on TI, corroborated by its relative importance in the ANN analysis. This result aligns with Khoa *et al.* (2021) and Zhu *et al.* (2022), who identify trust in social media content as a key predictor of tourism consumption behavior. Unlike studies that have treated eWOM and UGCT as a single construct without distinguishing their specific functions (Ukpabi and Karjaluoto, 2018), the findings demonstrate that although both affect TI, UGCT has a greater impact, underscoring the importance of analyzing it independently.

eWOM had significant effects on DT, TI, EP, and UGCT. Its influence on TI, while positive, was smaller than that of UGCT, contrasting with studies reporting equivalent impacts between the two (Abubakar, 2016; Ukpabi and Karjaluoto, 2018). The relationship between eWOM and EP confirms that digital recommendations convey not only experiential elements but also tangible benefits such as offers or savings strategies (Amersdorffer *et al.*, 2012;

Christodoulides *et al.*, 2012). Likewise, the effect of eWOM on UGCT demonstrates that volume, coherence, and quality of comments enhance content credibility, thereby increasing its capacity to influence TI.

Both EP and SP exerted positive effects on UGCT. EP reinforced content trust by providing functional value, such as discounts and promotions, consistent with Khoa *et al.* (2021) and Amersdorffer *et al.* (2012). SP, meanwhile, strengthened credibility by offering relational and emotional benefits, consistent with evidence showing that social interaction and a sense of belonging enhance the perceived value of tourism information (Khoa *et al.*, 2021). These results confirm that functional and social stimuli act as catalysts of trust in user-generated content.

The relationship between DT and TI produced divergent results: ANN analysis indicated a positive effect, whereas SEM did not confirm it statistically. This contrast suggests that although DT may influence intention in non-linear scenarios, its impact is not robust enough to hold in a linear model. This finding differs from Abubakar (2016), where DT was identified as a direct determinant of TI, and highlights the usefulness of employing complementary methodologies to identify complex patterns.

Overall, the findings expand the understanding of tourist behavior on short-form video platforms such as TikTok by demonstrating that trust in user-generated content—reinforced by economic and social benefits and positive digital interactions—is the primary driver of travel intention. The conceptual distinction between UGCT and eWOM adds clarity to a field where both variables have traditionally been treated as equivalent, enabling greater precision in their specific roles in intention generation. Methodologically, the integration of SEM and ANN provides a robust framework for identifying both consistent linear relationships and non-linear patterns, offering a solid basis for the design of tourism marketing strategies that integrate authentic content, tangible incentives, and social elements, thereby maximizing the potential of social media to stimulate travel.

Practical Contributions

The findings of this research provide concrete guidelines for managing tourism marketing on short-form video platforms such as TikTok, particularly regarding the factors that strengthen trust in user-generated content. Since the model confirmed that eWOM interaction directly influences trust in UGCT, as well as indirectly through the economic perspective, it is essential to implement strategies that enhance these links. A key action is to develop campaigns that encourage users to comment on videos about their travel experiences or explain how they have benefited from information obtained on TikTok. These interactions act as social validators that reinforce the perceived authenticity of the content, increasing the trust other users place in it and, consequently, their travel intention.

Finding that the perception of economic benefits acts as a mediator between eWOM and trust in UGCT opens the door to initiatives aimed at highlighting these benefits in a verifiable way. In this respect, a functional improvement of the platform could be to allow direct links in video descriptions so that users can immediately verify the promotions, discounts, or

advantages mentioned. This would not only reinforce content credibility but also facilitate the conversion of travel intention into an effective purchase decision.

Strengthening the social dimension that supports trust in UGCT requires fostering interaction among users with shared travel interests and creating opportunities to connect beyond the virtual environment. This can be achieved through content that invites the community to meet, with the aim of finding travel companions, or through brand-driven dynamics, such as contests where several users win a joint trip with the content creator or have the option to purchase a trip in which the creator participates. Likewise, the platform could enable links to broadcast channels or thematic forums associated with videos, where users can exchange useful information, share travel anecdotes, and strengthen community cohesion. These actions foster closeness, belonging, and social validation, which increase both content credibility and travel intention.

These practical implications are particularly relevant for content creators, tourism brands, and TikTok itself, as they provide a clear roadmap for designing strategies that maximize the impact of travel videos. Creators can focus on generating authentic and verifiable interactions, brands on highlighting tangible and emotional benefits associated with their services, and TikTok on adapting its functionalities to facilitate validation and access to reliable information.

Taken together, these practical implications indicate that strategically stimulating eWOM, demonstrating verifiable economic benefits, and fostering meaningful social interactions constitute an effective pathway to strengthening the factors that sustain trust in UGCT and, consequently, increasing travel intention.

Limitations

This study focused on TikTok users residing in Chile. The sample was composed mainly of university students and self-organized travelers, concentrated in the country's two most populated cities. These characteristics may limit the generalization of the findings to profiles with lower economic capacity or different travel organization habits; moreover, the results may reflect cultural particularities and features of the local tourism market. Consequently, we propose employing probabilistic sampling and balancing geographical composition to reach more general conclusions; expanding the analysis to other macro-regions; and replicating it in other Latin American countries. Likewise, future research should apply multi-group analysis according to packaging level, differentiating self-organized and package travelers, and incorporate control variables such as income level and time availability.

SEM analysis did not find a significant effect between DT and TI, in contrast with Abubakar (2016), whereas the neural network model supported this relationship. Future studies should re-examine this link with longitudinal or experimental designs, incorporate external variables such as destination familiarity and emotional involvement, and explore mediation through economic perspective and trust in user-generated content. It would also be pertinent to evaluate moderating effects of perceived risk and destination type.

Finally, although the focus was on TikTok, the model can be contrasted with analogous short-form video formats such as Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts. Comparing platforms with different recommendation algorithms and degrees of technological maturity would allow for a clearer understanding of which features of the format most strongly explain travel intention and would strengthen the external validity of the results.

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