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Chapter: Understanding and Reshaping Socioeconomic Development to Overcome Challenges

SYNERGISTIC EFFECTS OF CONTENT STRUCTURE AND SENSORY ELEMENTS: EXPLORING THE IMPACT MECHANISM OF TOURISM SHORT VIDEOS ON TRAVEL INTENTION

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Annotation. Tourism short videos have become pivotal tools that influence tourists' decision-making amid the rapid development of digital marketing. Existing studies inadequately address the mechanisms through which short video content shapes travel intentions. To explore the relationship between content structure and sensory elements, the interaction mechanisms between content structure and sensory elements in tourism short videos and their impacts on travel intention were unravelled by employing narrative communication theory and information processing fluency theory through two scenario-based experiments. The synergistic effects of video content structures (narrative vs. non-narrative) and sensory elements (visual–content matching, background music tempo) in consumer decision-making processes were examined. Results reveal that narrative short videos significantly enhance travel intentions by evoking emotional resonance through plot development and character portrayal. The visual–content matching effect plays a critical role. Slow-tempo compositions intensify emotional immersion in narrative videos, while fast-tempo tracks amplify visual salience and instantaneous attentional capture in non-narrative formats. These conclusions elucidate the interaction mechanisms underlying content–sensory synergy in tourism short videos, thus providing theoretical foundations for video dissemination strategies and practical guidance for content creation in destination marketing.

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Keywords: tourism short videos, destination marketing, narrative communication theory, information processing fluency theory.

JEL classification: M31, L82, Z30.

Introduction

The widespread adoption of mobile smart devices and social media has led to the emergence of short-form videos as critical channels for destination marketing. As of June 2024, China's short video user base exceeded 1.05 billion (*China Short Video Development Research Report*, 2024). Destination management organizations leverage platforms such as TikTok and Instagram to showcase regional attractions through visually engaging, dynamic, and interactive formats, which effectively influence tourist decisions (Cao *et al.,* 2021; Gan *et al.,* 2023). Compared with traditional text–image content, short videos offer heightened immersion and interactivity, thus enabling precise audience targeting in targeting audiences, particularly Gen Z and millennials, who increasingly rely on user-generated content (UGC) and key opinion leader recommendations for travel planning (Li, Xie, 2020; Pop *et al.,* 2022). Authenticity and social attributes of short videos enhance tourists' trust in destinations, thereby boosting travel consumption and destination promotion (Li *et al.,* 2023). As social media dominates tourism information dissemination, short videos have evolved into core tools for destination branding. Governments and organizations are adopting creative editing, immersive storytelling, and virtual reality technologies to craft compelling short video content (An *et al.,* 2021; Mirzaei, Tabrizi, 2024). Meanwhile, academia has increasingly focused on the behavioral impacts of such content. Short videos will continue to drive digital transformation in tourism, thus serving as primary tools for information acquisition and decision-making (Li, Xing, 2024; Chen, Zeng, 2024).

Theoretical research has explored short videos' role in tourism marketing through various frameworks, such as stimulus-organism-response (SOR) theory, consumer behavior theory, and emotional response theory (Wang *et al.,* 2023; Hua, Wang, 2024). Studies indicate that short videos, which are characterized by fragmented, mass-appeal yet personalized UGC and multisensory stimulation, profoundly reshape tourists' mental imagery and behavioral intentions (Zhang, Wang, 2024; Deng, Guan, 2022). Given the intangible nature of tourism products, tourists often depend on scenario-based short videos to envision future travel experiences, thus triggering mental simulations (Yuan *et al.,* 2024; Streimikiene, 2024; Sembiyeva *et al.,* 2023; Zheng *et al.,* 2022). Visual storytelling in short videos strengthens emotional resonance, which fosters positive cognitive and affective attitudes toward destinations (Wu, Lai, 2024). This advantage positions short videos as potent marketing tools that can elicit immediate emotional reactions, shape perceptual trust, reduce risk perceptions, and enhance travel intentions (Cheng *et al.,* 2020; Gong, Tung, 2017). However, some tourists struggle to construct self-relevant mental imagery from short videos because of limited direct destination experience, thereby potentially undermining marketing efficacy (Dewantara *et al.*, 2023). Consequently, leveraging short videos to evoke destination fantasies and amplify mental simulations remains a critical research topic.

The structural design of short video content critically determines its marketing effectiveness because different structural types can shape audiences' cognitive patterns and attitudinal changes. Research demonstrates that narrative structures effectively reduce the psychological distance between audiences and destinations through storytelling and plot-driven engagement, which enhances immersive experiences and ultimately influences attitude formation (Cao *et al.,* 2021; Wang *et al.,* 2023). By

contrast, non-narrative structures facilitate comprehensive cognitive processing via multi-perspective information presentation, thus shaping distinct attitudinal preferences (McCabe, Foster, 2006). Despite progress in other fields, comparative studies on narrative versus non-narrative structures in short tourism video marketing remain limited. Tourism visuals predominantly feature entertainment activities and destination landscapes (Hur *et al.,* 2020; Zhang, Yang, 2015). However, how structural designs modulate these visual types and influence tourists' information-processing patterns remains underexplored (Byun, Jang, 2015; Hlee *et al.,* 2021). Although tourism visuals are primarily categorized as landscape-centered or activity-centered (Tussyadiah, Fesenmaier, 2009), the differential effects of structural designs on these visual types are unclear. Effective structural alignment can stimulate mental simulations of travel experiences, thereby boosting intentions (Li, Ma, 2024; Xu *et al.,* 2021). Existing literature often isolates sensory dimensions (e.g., visual or auditory stimuli), thereby neglecting a systematic investigation into multisensory–structural interactions. Within the SOR framework, although audiovisual cues are known to drive emotional responses, their interplay with narrative structures (narrative vs. non-narrative) in shaping behavioral outcomes remains unclear (Mohammed *et al.,* 2025; Wu, Peng, 2025). Similarly, the integrative applications of consumer behavior and emotional response theories in short video marketing require deep examination.

This study aims to address the research gap by systematically investigating the synergistic effects of content structure and sensory elements in tourism short videos. We use narrative communication theory and information processing fluency theory as foundations to analyze the interplay between video narrative structures (narrative vs. non-narrative) and sensory elements (visual and auditory cues) by exploring their collective impact on travel intentions. Three research questions guide this inquiry: (1) what are the differential effects of narrative versus non-narrative short videos on enhancing travel intentions, and how do sensory synergies (visual–auditory coordination) moderate these effects? (2) How do matching effects between narrative structures and visual content types amplify emotional resonance and travel intentions through sensory synergies? (3) How do visual–auditory synergies influence mental simulation processes, thus ultimately driving travel decision-making? This study resolves these questions to elucidate how to optimize the immersive appeal of short videos through sensory–structural coordination. Moreover, it identifies optimal content presentation strategies under different narrative frameworks and provides actionable recommendations for enhancing destination marketing efficacy.

This study makes three primary contributions. First, this study integrates narrative communication theory and information processing fluency theory to reveal the synergistic mechanisms between content structure and sensory elements in tourism short videos and their impacts on travel intentions. In doing so, this study fills the theoretical gap in content–sensory interaction research. Second, it provides theoretical foundations for short video content creation by demonstrating how visual–auditory coordination enhances audience immersion and travel intentions. Third, it pioneers the investigation into how background music tempo modulates visual–structural synergies, thus offering novel perspectives for multisensory integration in future video marketing.

The remainder of this study is structured as follows. Section 1 presents the theoretical framework and hypotheses. It details narrative communication theory, the matching effects between visual content and structural design, and the mediating role of mental simulation. Section 2 describes the methodology and results, including experimental designs, sampling criteria, stimulus materials, and data analysis procedures, with an empirical validation of the hypotheses. Section 3 discusses the theoretical and practical implications that have been derived from key findings. Section 4 concludes with managerial

insights, which outline applications for tourism short video marketing, while acknowledging limitations and proposing future research directions.

1. Theoretical Analysis and Hypotheses Development

1.1 Narrative Communication and Tourism Short Video Marketing

Narrative transportation theory (NTT) posits that when individuals become immersed in narrative contexts, their attention becomes highly focused, thus eliciting emotional and cognitive resonance with the storyline (Fitzgerald, Green, 2017; Lau, 2025). This process significantly enhances emotional engagement, reduces information resistance, and facilitates attitude transformation and the formation of behavioral intentions (Gnambs *et al.,* 2014; van Laer *et al.,* 2019). In destination marketing, NTT suggests that immersive storytelling strengthens destination appeal and elevates visitation intentions (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). For instance, Escalas (2004) demonstrated that narrative content outperformed informational advertisements in evoking emotional resonance, thereby increasing brand preference and purchase intent.

In tourism short video marketing, narrative short videos outperform non-narrative formats by constructing coherent storylines, character development, and emotional depth, thereby intensifying audience immersion (Qiu *et al.,* 2024). Such immersion not only directs attention to destination attributes but also fosters psychological connections, thereby deepening destination attachment. By contrast, non-narrative short videos often fail to evoke emotional resonance or stimulate mental simulations of travel experiences because of lack of narrative coherence and contextual shaping despite effectively showcasing destination attractions (Wang *et al.,* 2023). Consequently, narrative structures are effective in cultivating strong destination interests and enhancing travel intention. Based on this theoretical foundation, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Narrative structures in cultural tourism short videos positively enhance potential tourists' travel intentions.

1.2 Matching Effects between Narrative Types and Visual Content

According to NTT, when narrative structures align with audiences' cognitive schemas, viewers naturally immerse themselves in scenarios, thereby amplifying emotional resonance and facilitating deep information processing (Gan *et al.,* 2023). Empirical studies demonstrate that the alignment between narrative structures and audiences' cognitive schemas not only intensifies emotional responses but also enhances information processing efficiency (Escalas, 2004). In tourism short videos, the alignment between narrative structures and visual content types directly shapes audiences' cognitive and affective evaluations of destinations, thus ultimately driving travel intentions. Such matching effects synchronize video content with viewers' cognitive–emotional needs, further stimulating destination interest.

Tourism short videos predominantly feature activity-centric visual content (depicting tourist behaviors, interactions, and emotional engagements) and landscape-centric visual content (highlighting scenic aesthetics and cultural symbols). Research indicates that this visual typology significantly influences audiences' destination perceptions and emotional reactions (Zhang, Zhou, 2024; Guo, Xu, 2024). Activity-centric visuals convey dynamic destination attributes through plot progression, thus fostering rich mental simulations of travel experiences compared to static landscapes. Compared with static landscapes, activity-centric visuals build rich travel experiences in audiences' minds, thus enabling them to perceive destination engagement and immersion (Qian, Cui, 2024).

Emotional resonance is maximized when activity-centric visuals are paired with linear narrative structures. Lee and Gretzel (2012) noted that linear narratives enhance the comprehension of contextual backgrounds while fostering emotional alignment, thereby improving information processing efficiency. The sequential plot development in linear narratives enables audiences to engage progressively with destination-specific contexts and cultural nuances, which heightens emotional involvement and interest in destinations and stimulates travel intentions. Thus, the activity–linear narrative synergy generates cognitive–emotional synergies that amplify travel intentions.

Conversely, landscape-centric visuals showcase destination landscapes, environmental features, and culturally symbolic elements with local characteristics, thus emphasizing static aesthetics. By conveying aesthetic and cultural ambience, these visuals enhance visual appeal and stimulate audiences' imagination and emotional associations. When presented in non-narrative structures, such content adopts fragmented information delivery, thus lacking a clear plot progression that is inherent in linear structures. Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) argued that non-narrative formats stimulate higher-order cognitive processing, thus prompting audiences to engage in reasoning and associative thinking and reconstructing holistic mental imagery of destinations. Furthermore, Bilandzic and Busselle (2017) revealed that non-narrative structures enhance cognitive engagement by disrupting conventional storytelling; this process deepens destination understanding and emotional investment. Such fragmented information expands cognitive understanding and enhances information relevance, thus stimulating emotional investment and travel intentions. Consequently, landscape-centric visuals paired with non-narrative structures pairings facilitate abstract and integrative destination interpretations, significantly strengthening travel intentions.

Relevance theory provides additional theoretical grounding for these matching effects. Audiences prioritize information congruent with their cognitive–emotional states during processing. Structural–visual alignment enhances information relevance, enabling audiences to focus on plot development and visual presentation, thereby deepening destination comprehension and experience (Sperber, Wilson, 1986). Bilandzic *et al.* (2019) emphasized that information alignment with cognitive–emotional needs fosters comprehension and emotional resonance, thus strengthening destination identification. High relevance amplifies emotional immersion and cognitive engagement; this effect significantly increases cognitive engagement, thereby collectively driving travel intentions (Bilandzic *et al.,* 2019).

Thus, the narrative–visual matching effect operates through dual pathways: (1) enhancing emotional investment and cognitive participation to elevate destination appeal and (2) synergizing with other sensory elements to drive travel decision-making collectively. Optimal structural alignment not only intensifies emotional engagement but also activates proactive cognitive processing, thus catalyzing travel intentions. Based on this analysis, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: A matching effect exists between narrative types and visual content types in tourism short videos.

H2a: Activity-centric short videos elicit strong travel intentions when paired with narrative (vs. non-narrative) structures.

H2b: Landscape-centric short videos generate strong travel intentions when paired with non-narrative (vs. narrative) structures.

1.3 Mediating Role of Mental Simulation

The matching effect between narrative structures and visual content in tourism short videos significantly influences travel intentions. Beyond direct emotional and cognitive impacts, mental simulation plays a pivotal mediating role in this process.

Mental simulation refers to individuals' cognitive construction or reenactment of hypothetical future scenarios without direct experience (Li *et al.,* 2023). In tourism marketing, it is recognized as a critical factor that shapes travel decisions. Mental simulation enhances audiences' destination cognition and travel intentions by virtually pre-experiencing destination atmospheres, activities, and cultural elements (Li, Wan, 2025; Yan *et al.,* 2024). When audiences mentally rehearse travel scenarios through simulation, they develop heightened expectations about travel experiences, which critically influence final decision-making.

The narrative–visual matching effect in tourism short video communication relies on mental simulation mechanisms. Specifically, when narrative structures and visual content types are highly congruent, mental simulation is readily activated. For example, activity-centric visuals paired with linear narratives assist audiences in reconstructing travel scenarios via plot progression. This process facilitates the mental rehearsal of travel contexts, which strengthens destination identification and amplifies travel intentions (Lee, Gretzel, 2012b).

Conversely, landscape-centric visuals often combine with non-narrative structures to present static cultural or scenic elements. Despite fragmented information delivery, such content stimulates proactive mental simulation, thus enabling audiences to construct travel scenes mentally and deepen destination interest (Wu, Peng, 2025).

These findings indicate that mental simulation mediates the relationship between structural–visual congruence and travel intentions.

- Landscape–non-narrative pairings trigger self-driven mental simulation, thus fostering destination identification.
- Activity–narrative synergies enable clearer mental imagery construction, thereby enhancing decision-making proactivity.

Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Mental simulation mediates the effect of narrative–visual matching on travel intentions.

1.4 Moderating Role of Background Music Tempo

Information processing theory posits that externally sourced information that is aligned with core content is easily integrated into limited cognitive systems after entering individuals' limited cognitive systems (Atkinson, Shiffrin, 1968). Narrative transportation theory further suggests that narrative immersion transports audiences into narrative worlds, along with intensified emotional and cognitive engagement (Fitzgerald, Green, 2017). These theories provide theoretical frameworks for examining the moderating role of background music tempo in the content design of short videos.

In short video marketing, background music tempo critically moderates information processing and narrative immersion. The coordination between music and video content generates synergistic effects, thus optimizing cognitive and emotional responses. For non-narrative videos (landscape-centric), fast-

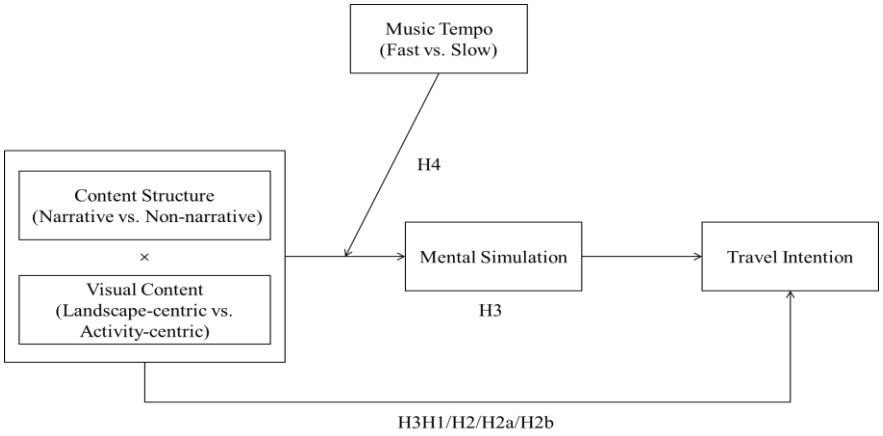
tempo music amplifies sensory stimulation, thereby enhancing visual salience and emotional arousal. The congruence between rapid rhythms and visual dynamics simplifies information processing under cognitive load by focusing attention on immediate sensory impacts. Such videos that lack plot continuity prioritize instant emotional experiences over narrative transportation.

Conversely, narrative videos (activity-centric) benefit from slow-tempo music, which reduces auditory distractions and allocates cognitive resources to plot comprehension and emotional resonance (Zhuang *et al.,* 2023). Under NTT, slow tempos deepen narrative immersion, thus enabling audiences to inhabit story roles and settings mentally and intensifying mental simulation (Min *et al.,* 2020). This synergy between pacing and plot progression enhances emotional investment and brand message internalization (Barnes, 2024). Music deepens information processing and emotional resonance by directing attention to character and plot development, thus fostering brand comprehension and identification.

Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H4a: Fast-tempo background music effectively matches visual impact demands by enhancing attention focus and simplifying information processing in non-narrative (landscape-centric) videos.

H4b: Slow-tempo background music strengthens emotional immersion and deepens narrative comprehension in narrative (activity-centric) videos.



Source: created by the authors.

Figure 1. **Research Model**

The proposed research model (*Figure 1*) was tested through two studies. Study 1 validated that narrative structures in tourism short videos significantly enhance travel intentions (*H1*). It further examined the matching effects between structural designs and visual content types, thus confirming the mediating role of mental simulation (*H2/H2a/H2b/H3*). Study 2 focused on how background music tempo moderates the effects of mental simulation across various structural–visual pairings (*H4*).

2. Methods and Results

2.1 Study 1

2.1.1 Research Design and Sample

This study adopted a 2 (content structure: narrative vs. non-narrative) × 2 (visual content: landscape-centric vs. activity-centric) between-subjects design to validate the effects of structural and visual designs in tourism short videos on travel intentions and their matching effects (Hypotheses *H1–H3*).

Participants were recruited in August 2024 via Credamo, which is a leading Chinese online research platform. Based on G*Power analysis (F-test [ANOVA: fixed effects, main effects, and interaction], f = 0.25, α = 0.05, power = 0.8, groups = 4), a minimum sample size of 133 was required. Ultimately, 160 participants (62.7% female) were enrolled. The age distributions are as follows: 18–24 (32.8%), 25–29 (31.1%), 30–39 (29.6%), and 40 and above (6.5%). Additionally, 58.1% reported taking one to two vacations annually, and 67.5% watched short videos for one to two hours daily.

2.1.2 Experimental Materials and Pretest

A pretest validated the participants' ability to distinguish between narrative/non-narrative structures and landscape/activity-centric content. Prior to the experiment, the participants received definitions of narrative (explicit plot progression with character interactions and emotional arcs) and non-narrative (no plot, focusing solely on scenery/activities) structures, as well as landscape-centric (natural landscapes, e.g., beaches) and activity-centric (dynamic water sports, e.g., diving) content.

Four video versions were filmed at Yalong Bay, Sanya, which offered rich landscapes and water activities, using identical equipment and techniques to ensure consistency in lighting, composition, and editing. Each one-minute video maintained uniform background music, aspect ratios, and typography and differed only in structure and content type.

In the pretest (N = 50, 56% female), narrative videos scored significantly higher than non-narrative ones ($M_{narrative}$ = 5.48 vs. $M_{non\text{-}narrative}$ = 2.49, t = 37.33, p < 0.001). Landscape-centric content also outperformed activity-centric content ($M_{landscape}$ = 6.37 vs. $M_{activity}$ = 1.22, t = 23.75, p < 0.001), thus confirming successful experimental manipulation.

2.1.3 Experimental Procedure

Participants were instructed to imagine planning a weekend trip to a coastal city (City A) with friends and searching for destination recommendations on short video platforms. After viewing an assigned video, they answered questions that were related to structural design and visual content presentation followed by measures of travel intention and mental simulation as well as two manipulation checks:

- "Does the video have a clear storyline?" (1 = no storyline, 7 = clear storyline).
- "Does the video primarily showcase landscapes or activities?" (1 = purely activities, 7 = purely landscapes).

2.1.4 Variable Measurement

All constructs were measured using validated seven-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree). *Table 1* summarizes the adapted scales.

Table 1. Constructs and measurement items

Construct	Measurement Items
Travel Intention (TI)	1. I would actively recommend this destination to friends after watching the video.
	2. I want to learn more about this destination after watching the video.
	3. I prioritize visiting this destination.
	(1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree)
Mental Simulation (MS)	1. To what extent could you imagine yourself traveling to this destination?
	2. How vividly could you mentally rehearse travel experiences here?
	3. How clearly could you visualize yourself engaging in activities here?
	(1 = Not at all, 7 = Extremely)

Source: authors' own results.

2.1.5 Results

Harman's single-factor test was conducted using SPSS to assess potential common method bias (CMB) (Podsakoff *et al.,* 2003). The maximum variance explained by a single factor was 23.45%, which was below the 50% threshold, thus indicating no significant CMB threat.

Table 2. Reliability and validity analysis (Study 1)

Construct/ Item	Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
Travel Intention (*TI*)		0.713	0.822	0.698
TI1	0.803			
TI2	0.727			
TI3	0.756			
Mental Simulation (*MS*)		0.946	0.953	0.631
MS1	0.708			
MS2	0.759			
MS3	0.736			

Source: authors' own results.

All item loadings exceeded 0.50 (Hulland, 1999), thereby confirming strong construct–item correlations. Cronbach's α and composite reliability (CR) surpassed the recommended 0.70 threshold. In addition, the average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, thus demonstrating robust reliability and convergent validity (*Table 2*).

Discriminant validity was confirmed by ensuring that all interconstruct correlations were below 0.85 and that the square root of each construct's AVE exceeded its highest correlation with any other construct. Additionally, the heterotrait–monotrait ratios remained within acceptable limits (<0.90). Thus, the measurements exhibited sound psychometric properties.

Independent samples t-tests revealed significant differences between narrative and non-narrative videos in content structure ($M_{narrative}$ = 4.37 vs. $M_{non\text{-}narrative}$ = 2.71; t = 13.20, p < .001). Similarly, activity-centric and landscape-centric videos differed significantly in visual content ($M_{activity}$ = 1.82 vs. $M_{landscape}$ = 4.31; t = 27.19, p < .001), thus confirming successful manipulations.

A one-way ANOVA demonstrated that video content structure significantly affected travel intentions. Narrative videos elicited higher travel intentions than non-narrative formats ($M_{narrative}$ = 5.25 vs. $M_{non\text{-}narrative}$ = 4.17; F = 7.15, p < .05), thereby supporting *H1*.

A two-way ANOVA indicated a significant interaction between content structure and visual content on travel intentions (F = 6.247, p < .05), thus supporting *H2* (*Table 3*). Variables were coded as follows: 1 = non-narrative, 2 = narrative; 1 = activity-centric, 2 = landscape-centric. Using Bonferroni-adjusted p-values (Jafari & Ansari-Pour, 2019), the post hoc analyses showed the following:

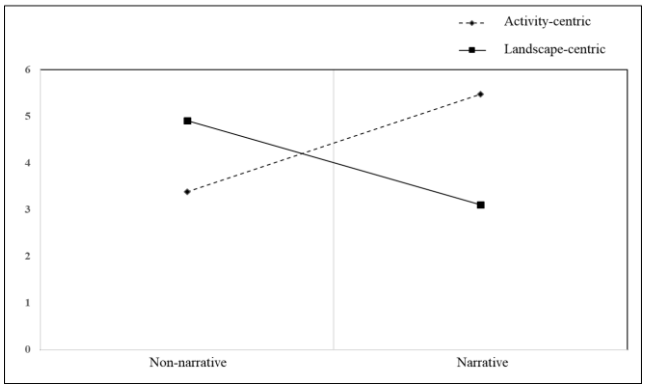
- For non-narrative videos, landscape-centric content generated higher intentions than activity-centric content (M_{11} = 3.38 vs. M_{12} = 4.91; F = 9.57, p < .05), supporting *H2a*.

- For narrative videos, activity-centric content outperformed landscape-centric content (M_{21} = 5.47 vs. M_{22} = 3.11; F = 5.73, p < .05), supporting *H2b* (*Figure 2*).

Table 3. Two-way ANOVA results (Study 1)

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	*F*	*P*
Content structure	Travel intention	9.231	0.015
Visual content	Travel intention	5.399	0.030
Content structure × Visual content	Travel intention	6.247	0.041

Source: authors' own results.



Source: authors' own results.

Figure 2. **Moderating Role of Visual Content in the Impact of Narrative Structure on Travel Intention**

Finally, the mediating role of mental simulation was tested using PROCESS Model 4 in SPSS with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. As shown in *Table 4*, the direct effect of structural–visual matching on travel intentions was significant, thus indicating that content–sensory congruence directly enhances travel intentions. The indirect effect via mental simulation was also significant. These results confirm that mental simulation plays a critical mediating role in the relationship between narrative–visual matching and travel intentions, thereby supporting *H3*.

This finding underscores the necessity of activating mental simulation in the production of tourism short videos. Beyond optimizing structural–visual alignment, content creators should strategically design elements (e.g., plot progression and sensory cues) to stimulate audiences' mental rehearsal of travel experiences, thereby maximizing the persuasive impact on travel decisions.

Table 4. Effects of structural–visual matching on travel intentions: mediation via mental simulation

Path	Effect	SE	95% CI	*p*-value
Total effect (Matching → *TI*)	0.75	0.12	[0.18, 0.33]	$p < .001$
Direct effect (Matching → *TI*)	0.25	0.08	[0.09, 0.15]	$p = .002$
Indirect effect (Matching → *MS* → *TI*)	0.50	0.09	[0.27, 0.54]	$p < .001$

Source: authors' own results.

2.2 Study 2

2.2.1 Research Design and Sample

Study 2 focused on the background music tempo as a critical sensory element in short videos. A 2 (structural–visual pairing: narrative/activity-centric vs. non-narrative/landscape-centric) × 2 (music tempo: fast vs. slow) between-subjects design was employed to examine how music–structural synergies influence mental simulation and travel intentions.

Data were collected in August 2024 via Credamo. A total of 200 participants were randomly assigned to four experimental groups. The participants watched destination short videos and completed postviewing questionnaires. The sample comprised 71.7% females aged 18–39 (18–24: 27.8%; 25–29: 32.7%; 30–39: 31.4%; 40 and above: 8.1%). Additionally, 60.3% took one to two vacations annually, and 54.9% watched short videos one to two hours daily, thus ensuring demographic representativeness.

2.2.2 Music Tempo Manipulation and Pretest

A pilot study was conducted to validate the manipulation of background music tempo. Eight instrumental tracks with clear rhythmic patterns and no lyrics were selected to eliminate confounding effects from lyrical content on emotional or cognitive responses (North *et al.,* 1999). Three music experts classified these tracks into fast-tempo (≥94 BPM) and slow-tempo (≤72 BPM) categories based on standardized tempo measurement protocols (Ding & Lin, 2012). Three fast-tempo and three slow-tempo tracks were ultimately retained as experimental stimuli.

In the pretest, 78 participants with no significant music preferences listened to one-minute excerpts of the six selected tracks at uniform volume levels. Using a seven-point scale (1 = Very slow, 7 = Very fast), the participants rated perceived tempo for each track. Results revealed significant tempo differences between fast- and slow-tempo music ($M_{Kiss\ The\ Rain}$ = 2.35 [slowest] vs. M_{Summer} = 5.91 [fastest], $p < .05$). Consequently, "Summer" (fast-tempo) and "Kiss the Rain" (slow-tempo) were selected as representative stimuli for formal experimental validation.

2.2.3 Results

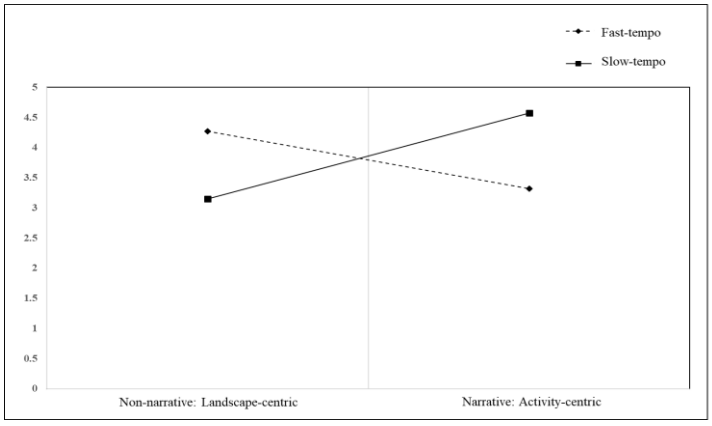
Harman's single-factor test was conducted to assess CMB. The test revealed that the maximum variance explained was 35.7% (<50% threshold), which indicated no significant CMB threat. All item loadings were significant and ≥0.50 (Hulland, 1999), thus demonstrating strong construct–item correlations. Cronbach's α, CR, and AVE exceeded recommended thresholds (α/CR >0.70; AVE >0.50), thus confirming robust reliability and convergent validity (*Table 5*).

Table 5. Reliability and validity analysis (Study 2)

Construct/ Item	Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
Travel Intention (*TI*)		0.810	0.811	0.712
TI1	0.815			
TI2	0.748			
TI3	0.736			
Mental Simulation (*MS*)		0.896	0.857	0.678
MS1	0.717			
MS2	0.773			
MS3	0.754			

Source: authors' own results.

Independent t-tests revealed significant differences between narrative versus non-narrative structures ($M_{narrative}$ = 4.57 vs. $M_{non\text{-}narrative}$ = 2.31; t = 13.03, p < .001), activity-centric versus landscape-centric content ($M_{activity}$ = 1.92 vs. $M_{landscape}$ = 4.39; t = 23.57, p < .001), and fast-tempo versus slow-tempo music (M_{fast} = 5.42 vs. M_{slow} = 3.19; t = 11.23, p < .001). These results confirm successful experimental manipulations of video structures, visual content types, and music tempos (*Figure 3*).



Source: authors' own results.

Figure 3. **Interaction Effects of Tourism Short Video Structural Design, Visual Content Matching, and Background Music Tempo on Mental Simulation**

A two-way ANOVA demonstrated a significant interaction effect between structural–visual pairing and music tempo on mental simulation (F = 26.48, p < .001). Post hoc analyses revealed the following:

- For narrative–activity-centric pairings, slow-tempo music significantly enhanced mental simulation compared with fast-tempo music ($M_{narrative\text{–}activity\text{–}slow}$ = 4.57 vs. $M_{non\text{-}narrative\text{–}activity\text{–}fast}$ = 3.32; F = 7.93, p < .05).
- For non-narrative–landscape-centric pairings, fast-tempo music outperformed slow-tempo music ($M_{non\text{-}narrative\text{-}landscape\text{-}fast}$ = 4.27 vs. $M_{non\text{-}narrative\text{–}landscape\text{–}slow}$ = 3.15; F = 14.50, p < .001), thus supporting *H4a* and *H4b*.

Finally, linear regression analysis confirmed that mental simulation exerted a significantly positive influence on travel intentions (β = 0.237, p = .003). This result aligns with Study 1's findings, thus further validating the robustness of the research outcomes.

3. Discussion

This study investigates the synergistic effects of sensory elements (visual and auditory) and content structures (narrative vs. non-narrative) in tourism short videos and reveals how such synergies shape travel intentions. The results demonstrate that tourism short videos enhance destination appeal not through isolated sensory or structural elements but via their synergistic integration. This effect amplifies emotional resonance and mental simulation, ultimately driving travel decisions.

First, our findings align with prior research on short video marketing. Studies confirm that short videos' immersive and interactive nature makes them potent tourism marketing tools (Ye, Wu, 2023; Zhang, 2024). Specifically, the impact of visual content and narrative structures on travel intentions has been well-documented (Gan et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023). This study further validates that narrative short videos outperform non-narrative formats in evoking emotional resonance and travel intentions. The matching effect between activity-centric visuals and narrative structures, where their combination maximizes travel intention, echoes previous work on narrative persuasion (Escalas, 2004; Wang et al., 2023).

Second, this study extends the literature on music–emotion interactions by clarifying the moderating role of background music tempo. The alignment between music tempo and structural–visual pairings critically regulates emotional responses and mental simulation. Slow-tempo music deepens emotional immersion in narrative videos by facilitating a mental rehearsal of travel scenarios, while fast-tempo music enhances visual salience, attentional focus, and information processing in non-narrative contexts (Min et al., 2020; Zhuang et al., 2023). This discovery advances the theoretical understanding of multisensory synergies and provides empirical guidelines for optimizing audiovisual design in short videos.

This study's significance lies not only in validating existing theories but also in proposing a groundbreaking framework for visual–auditory–structural collaboration from a synergy perspective. Prior literature often examined sensory elements (e.g., visual, auditory) in isolation, thereby overlooking their synergistic interactions in short videos (Hur et al., 2020; Wu, Peng, 2025). Hence, this research integrates narrative transportation theory and information processing fluency theory to deepen the understanding of tourism short video design. We elucidate how sensory–structural matching effects shape audiences' emotional responses and travel decisions. This theoretical advancement provides novel insights for content creation strategies and enriches multisensory interaction research in tourism marketing.

This study also opens new avenues for exploration. Despite growing attention to short videos' role in tourism marketing, optimizing alignment across cultural and audience-specific contexts and audience needs remains underexplored. Future studies should investigate cross-cultural variations in audiences' emotional and cognitive responses to sensory stimuli in short videos to provide additional information about culturally adaptive marketing strategies. For instance, how does collectivist versus individualist cultures perceive narrative–visual–music synergies differently? Such inquiries can refine global destination branding practices.

Conclusions and Managerial Implications

Main Findings

This study explores the interactive effects of content structure, visual content, and mental simulation in tourism short videos and yields three key conclusions. First, narrative short videos significantly enhance

potential tourists' travel intentions compared with non-narrative formats. Narrative structures deepen emotional resonance and immersion through plot development and character portrayal, thereby stimulating destination interest and decision-making. These results validate narrative transportation theory by emphasizing the pivotal role of storytelling in shaping travel intentions.

Second, the matching effect between content structure and visual content types critically enhances travel intentions. When narrative structures are paired with activity-centric visuals, travel intentions are significantly amplified. Conversely, non-narrative structures combined with landscape-centric visuals achieve superior communication outcomes. This result underscores the necessity of structural–visual congruence in tourism short video marketing. Proper alignment not only boosts content appeal but also fosters emotional and cognitive engagement, thus driving travel intention formation.

Finally, the synergistic role of background music tempo is revealed. Slow-tempo music strengthens emotional immersion and mental simulation in narrative-activity-centric videos, thus enhancing destination identification. By contrast, fast-tempo music paired with non-narrative-landscape-centric content elevates visual salience and immediate attention, thereby accelerating information processing. These findings demonstrate how audiovisual–structural synergies optimize emotional–cognitive responses, thus maximizing the persuasive impact of tourism short videos.

Managerial Implications

This study provides critical strategic insights for the creation and dissemination of tourism short videos particularly on enhancing travel intention formation and brand influence through precise content design and effective communication strategies. First, tourism short videos have become a vital tool for destination brand communication in the digital marketing landscape. Therefore, short video content should be strategically designed especially in leveraging narrative structures. Narrative short videos deepen emotional resonance and immersion through plot development and character portrayal, thereby stimulating travel intentions among potential tourists. A storytelling-oriented creation strategy should be adopted to achieve this goal. This approach includes embedding brand messages, destination uniqueness, and cultural features within emotionally driven narratives. It can strengthen audience cognition and emotional connections with the destination, thus ultimately driving travel decision-making.

Second, the effectiveness of short videos relies not only on content quality but also on the precise alignment between content structure and visual elements. Specifically, the pairing of video structure and visual content should be optimized based on destination characteristics and target market needs. For instance, destinations that emphasize experiential engagement should combine activity-centric visuals with narrative structures to enhance emotional immersion and participation intent. Conversely, destinations that prioritize landscape aesthetics should pair non-narrative structures with landscape-centric visuals to highlight their scenic appeal. Thus, creators must prioritize structural–visual coherence during production to maximize communication efficacy.

Third, the rhythm and atmosphere of background music play a pivotal and far-reaching role in short videos. Music tempo should align with the video's overall structure and visual content to amplify viewer immersion and information processing efficiency. In practice, creators must meticulously select and synchronize background music based on content attributes and the psychological needs of target audiences. The strategic alignment of music tempo can enhance emotional immersion and cognitive responses, thereby enhancing the video's attractiveness and dissemination impact.

Finally, tourism short video marketing transcends the mere delivery of static destination information. It is a process of building emotional connections. These videos can activate viewers' mental simulation through carefully crafted narrative structures and visual content, thus deepening their emotional investment in the destination. This strategy should enable potential tourists to rehearse travel scenarios mentally during viewing, which can foster psychological identification with the destination. This emotion-driven approach strengthens travel intentions and brand loyalty. Therefore, tourism destination marketing should prioritize long-term brand value through emotional resonance to sustain audience interest and engagement over time.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study offers valuable insights into how content structures and visual–auditory elements of tourism short videos influence travel intentions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study sample focused on young demographics aged 18–40, thus lacking adequate representation of other age groups or audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds. Future studies should incorporate broader audience segments, particularly those from varied cultural contexts, to validate the generalizability of the findings. Second, the research did not account for contextual factors, such as the temporal relevance of video releases (e.g., holidays, seasonal variations), which may shape audience responses. Future investigations should explore how these external variables interact with content structures to refine the mechanisms behind the formation of travel intentions.

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SINERGINIS TURINIO STRUKTŪROS IR JUTIMINIŲ ELEMENTŲ POVEIKIS: TRUMPŲ TURIZMO VAIZDO ĮRAŠŲ POVEIKIO KETINIMAMS KELIAUTI TYRIMAS

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Santrauka. Sparčiai vystantis skaitmeninei rinkodarai, trumpi turizmo vaizdo įrašai tapo pagrindiniais įrankiais, veikiančiais turistų sprendimų priėmimą. Esamuose tyrimuose nepakankamai nagrinėjami mechanizmai, kuriais trumpų vaizdo įrašų turinys formuoja kelionių ketinimus. Siekiant ištirti ryšį tarp turinio struktūros ir jutiminių elementų trumpuose vaizdo įrašuose bei jų poveikį ketinimui keliauti, buvo pasitelkta naratyvinės komunikacijos teorija ir informacijos apdorojimo sklandumo teorija per du scenarijais pagrįstus eksperimentus. Nagrinėtas vaizdo turinio struktūrų (naratyvinis vs. ne naratyvinis) ir jutiminių elementų (vizualinio ir turinio atitikimo, foninės muzikos tempo) sinergetinis poveikis vartotojų sprendimų priėmimo procesuose. Rezultatai atskleidžia, kad pasakojamieji trumpi vaizdo įrašai žymiai sustiprina kelionių ketinimus, kadangi jie sukelia emocinį rezonansą per siužeto kūrimą ir personažų vaizdavimą. Labai svarbus vaizdo ir turinio atitikties efektas. Lėto tempo kompozicijos sustiprina emocinį panardinimą į naratyvinius vaizdo įrašus, o greito tempo takeliai sustiprina vizualinį ryškumą ir momentinį dėmesio fiksavimą ne pasakojimo formatuose. Taigi paaiškinami sąveikos mechanizmai, kuriais grindžiama turinio ir jutimo sinergija trumpuose turizmo vaizdo įrašuose.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: trumpi turizmo vaizdo įrašai; paskirties rinkodara; naratyvinės komunikacijos teorija; informacijos apdorojimo sklandumo teorija.