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Exploring the Role of TikTok in Tourism Destination Choice in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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EXPLORING THE ROLE OF TIKTOK IN TOURISM DESTINATION CHOICE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

ABSTRACT

This study explores how TikTok influences destination choices among users in Bosnia and Herzegovina, (BiH) using an extended UTAUT2 model that integrates perceived trust. Through an online survey conducted in 2024 (N = 327; valid cases = 229) and analysis via PLS-SEM, the research examines cognitive, motivational, and trust-based determinants of intention and actual use. Results show that perceived trust, hedonic motivation, and habit significantly shape behavioral intention, whereas performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions do not. Overall, reliance on TikTok in travel decision-making is driven more by credibility, enjoyment, and habitual engagement than by utilitarian factors. The study validates an extended UTAUT2 framework in a Southeastern European context and offers practical guidance for destination marketing organizations, underscoring the value of trustworthy, engaging, and peer-driven short-form video content.

Keywords: TikTok, destination choice, tourism marketing, UTAUT2, perceived trust.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of social media and communication technologies has significantly transformed how tourists plan trips and share experiences, offering richer visual and emotional engagement than traditional promotion. Younger generations increasingly rely on social media when choosing destinations (Dramićanin et al., 2023, p. 136), particularly visually oriented platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok (Gabriel & Park, 2025, p. 526). Repeated viewing of short TikTok videos further amplifies inspiration and travel motivation (Karuna & Aiswarya, 2025, p. 3).

TikTok, which surpassed one billion users within four years – faster than Instagram or Facebook (West, 2024) – offers highly immersive, viral, and emotionally engaging content (Zhou et al., 2023, p. 2). It has become an important tool for destination image building, enabling rapid popularization of locations (Wengel et al., 2022). Although social media's influence on tourism decision-making has been examined, especially regarding TripAdvisor, Facebook, and Instagram (Gretzel et al., 2015, p. 184), TikTok remains comparatively underexplored (Wang et al., 2025), particularly in the context of BiH and Southeastern Europe.

The aim of this study is to identify the key factors influencing users' intention and behavior when relying on TikTok for destination-related decisions, using a quantitative PLS-SEM approach. The research applies an extended UTAUT2 model enriched with the construct of perceived trust, which is particularly relevant for

platforms like TikTok that rely heavily on entertainment, emotional engagement, and social interaction rather than functional utility alone (Wang et al., 2025, p. 244; Zhou et al., 2023, p. 9). This framework enables a deeper understanding of tourist decision-making, as TikTok integrates technological, social, and psychological dimensions central to UTAUT2. The model assumes that performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, hedonic motivation, habit, and perceived trust influence intention to use TikTok for destination selection, while intention and habit shape actual behavior. Theoretically, the study contributes by testing and adapting the extended UTAUT2 model in the context of TikTok's impact on tourism-related consumer behavior. Practically, it offers guidance for destination managers and marketers seeking to understand and leverage TikTok-driven decision-making processes. Overall, the study provides an integrated perspective on the cognitive, motivational, and trust-based drivers of TikTok use in choosing tourist destinations.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Social Media and Tourism

Social media have become a primary promotional channel (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010, p. 180; Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2019, p. 66) and exert strong positive and negative influences on the tourism industry (Usui et al., 2017, p. 2052). They shape travel-related decisions through information sharing, interaction, and preference formation (Kim et al., 2018, p. 499), and are used across all stages of trip planning (Yuan et al., 2022, p. 4). Consequently, their role in travel planning has been widely examined (Sparks & Browning, 2011; Choe et al., 2017; Ge & Gretzel, 2018). Social media serve multiple functions – from need creation to guidance and decision confirmation (Liu et al., 2020; Yuan et al., 2022, p. 5) – and are increasingly viewed as useful and reliable tools for decision-making (Pencarelli, 2020, p. 459). However, rising levels of fake content and reviews pose challenges for destination credibility (Kaszás et al., 2025, p. 1).

TikTok's short, simple, and useful video formats (Xie et al., 2019, p. 401; Li, 2021, p. 176) strongly influence user decision-making (Wang et al., 2022, pp. 3–5; Zheng et al., 2025, p. 1) and enhance perceptions of reliability (Susilo, 2020, pp. 37–38). The platform enables social connection, experience sharing, and memory preservation (Du et al., 2020, p. 9), supports destination promotion through user and celebrity content (Zhu et al., 2022, p. 2762), and can rapidly popularize lesser-known places (Wengel et al., 2022, pp. 1–6). Ryanair's use of TikTok illustrates how creative adaptation to platform trends can strengthen brand visibility and identity (Arpaia & Grace, 2022).

Given this growing influence of short-form video platforms on travel behavior, the UTAUT2 model represents an appropriate theoretical foundation for examining TikTok adoption in tourism contexts.

2.2. The UTAUT2 Model and Tourism

As tourists increasingly rely on digital platforms for information, communication, and travel decisions, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2) provides a relevant framework for explaining technology adoption in tourism contexts. Its constructs clarify how digital innovations and social networks influence behavioral intention (BI) to use TikTok for destination planning – through perceived usefulness (performance expectancy), ease of use (effort expectancy, facilitating conditions), social influence, enjoyment (hedonic motivation), and habitual behavior. Growing concerns about misinformation on social media (Kyza & Varda, 2019, p. 1) further highlight the importance of perceived trust (PT), which is often a key predictor of BI (Zhou et al., 2023, p. 3) and is particularly relevant on TikTok, where most travel information is user-generated.

BI is widely recognized as an indicator of future actual behavior (AB) (Venkatesh et al., 2012, p. 158), incorporating intentions to continue, try, or plan usage (Gupta & Dogra, 2017, pp. 150–151; Ali et al., 2024, p. 338). Performance expectancy (PE) – the belief that TikTok helps users make better travel decisions – has been consistently identified as a strong adoption factor (Oh et al., 2009; Ayeh et al., 2013; Amaro & Duarte, 2013; Ali et al., 2024). Due to its algorithmic personalization and interactive videos, TikTok is perceived as a useful source of destination information (Chenchen et al., 2020, p. 117; Fodzi et al., 2024, p. 166).

Effort expectancy (EE), or perceived ease of use (Venkatesh et al., 2003, p. 450), may be less influential for digitally skilled users (Zhou et al., 2023), yet TikTok's simplicity continues to support exploratory travel behavior (Datu et al., 2025, p. 242). Social influence (SI) – the role of peers, family, and influencers (Venkatesh et al., 2003, p. 451) – is particularly relevant for younger users (Tan et al., 2014, p. 304; Tan & Ooi, 2018, p. 1635), with TikTok's social interaction features reinforcing tourism-related opinions (Wang et al., 2022, p. 5).

Facilitating conditions (FC), such as access to devices, skills, and platform support (Venkatesh et al., 2003, p. 453; Ali et al., 2024, p. 337), enhance usage of mobile tourism applications (Cheng, 2024; Escobar-Rodríguez & Carvajal-Trujillo, 2014). TikTok's interface, navigation, and features like trending topics and auto-captions further simplify tourism-related use (Waliaula et al., 2025, pp. 797–798; Halim et al., 2022, p. 725).

Hedonic motivation (HM) – pleasure and enjoyment derived from use (Venkatesh et al., 2012, p. 161) – is a powerful adoption driver (Baptista & Oliveira, 2015; Gupta et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2023), especially given TikTok's entertaining short-video format (Amaro et al., 2016). Habit (HA), defined as automatic, repeated behavior (Limayem et al., 2007, p. 709), predicts both BI and AB (Zhou et al., 2023, p. 4) and is a particularly strong determinant of actual use of user-generated content (Assaker et al., 2019).

Collectively, these constructs form an integrated framework capturing the cognitive (PE, EE, FC), social (SI), motivational (HM, HA), and trust-related (PT) dimensions of TikTok use in tourism decision-making.

3. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

This study builds on the UTAUT2 model (Venkatesh et al., 2012), widely used to explain consumer adoption of digital technologies, and extends it by incorporating perceived trust (PT) to better capture the credibility dynamics of social media environments such as TikTok. PT reflects users' confidence in the reliability of user-generated and marketer-generated content, reducing uncertainty in tourism-related decision-making.

The framework includes several core constructs: performance expectancy (PE), or the belief that TikTok improves and speeds up destination decisions; effort expectancy (EE), the perceived ease of accessing travel information; social influence (SI), the impact of peers and influencers; and facilitating conditions (FC), the resources and support enabling effective use. Hedonic motivation (HM) captures enjoyment and entertainment, while habit (HA) reflects automatic and repeated use of TikTok for tourism purposes. Together with PT, these constructs form an integrated basis for understanding users' intention to rely on TikTok when evaluating destinations.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual research model based on the extended UTAUT2 framework.

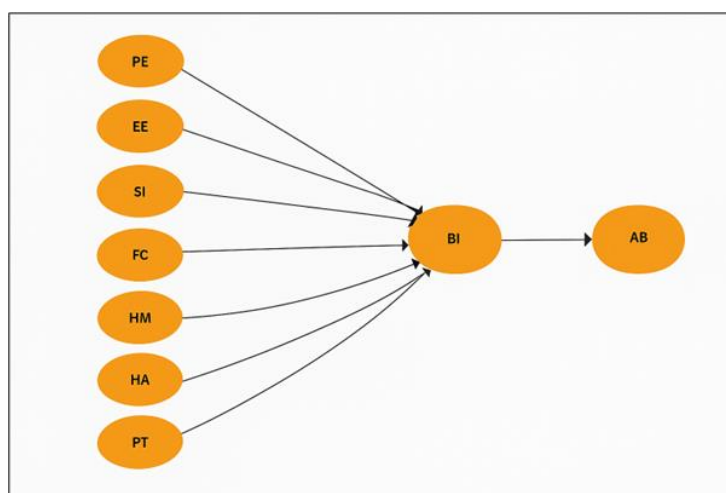


Fig. 1. Research model for the use of TikTok in choosing a destination.

(PE = Performance expectancy, EE = Effort expectancy, SI = Social influence, FC = Facilitating conditions, HM = Hedonic motivation, HA = Habit, PT = Perceived trust, BI = Behavioral intention; AB = Actual behavior)

Two outcome variables capture behavioral aspects. BI reflects the willingness of users to rely on TikTok in future destination choice, while AB denotes the concrete use of the platform in selecting and confirming destinations. Based on prior studies (e.g., Zhou et al., 2023), the hypothesized relationships posit that PE, EE, SI, FC, HM, HA, and PT positively influence BI; that both BI and HA directly predict AB; and that FC may also exert a direct effect on AB. The framework therefore assumes that BI mediates the influence of motivational, cognitive, and trust-related factors on actual behavior, while HA reinforces usage both directly and indirectly.

3.1. *Research Design and Methodology*

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional design to empirically examine the extended UTAUT2 model, which incorporated the construct of perceived trust. To test the conceptual framework, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed, as this approach is particularly suitable for predictive modeling, exploratory theory extension, and the analysis of complex models with multiple latent constructs (Hair et al., 2021).

A structured online questionnaire was developed to capture the relevant constructs. The instrument consisted of three main parts:

- Items on TikTok usage patterns, serving both as screening criteria and descriptive measures.
- Measurement scales for all latent variables (PE, EE, SI, FC, HM, HA, PT, BI, AB), adapted from validated sources (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Venkatesh et al., 2012; Zhou et al., 2023). Each construct was measured using multiple reflective items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).
- Demographic questions, including age, gender, education level, and occupation.

The target population comprised TikTok users in BiH. Respondents were recruited through snowball sampling techniques to ensure adequate reach within the relevant age cohort. The questionnaire was administered online via Google Forms in 2024, yielding a total of 327 responses, of which 254 were from TikTok users. After screening for completeness and validity, 229 responses were used in the final analysis. The analytical procedure followed established guidelines for PLS-SEM:

- Measurement model assessment, focusing on internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability), convergent validity (average variance extracted, AVE), and discriminant validity (heterotrait-monotrait ratio, HTMT).
- Structural model assessment, examining the significance and strength of path coefficients, t-statistics generated through bootstrapping (5000 resamples), explained variance (R^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2).
- Model fit evaluation, based on standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and other recommended indices for variance-based SEM.

The choice of an online survey was appropriate given the digital orientation of the target group, ensuring efficient access to TikTok users within the specified age range. PLS-SEM was selected as the analytical method due to its capacity to handle complex models, extend theoretical frameworks, and provide robust predictive insights with medium-sized samples.

3.2. *Profile of Respondents*

The sample is predominantly female (69%), with males making up 31%. Most participants are aged 18–25 (59%), followed by 26–35 (13%) and 46–55 (15%). In terms of education, 61% hold a university degree and 39% secondary education. Regarding employment, 65% are employed or self-employed, 30% are students, 5% unemployed, and 1% retired. Most respondents have over six months of TikTok experience: 33% between six months and one year, and 23% more than two years. A smaller share (16%) reported less than six months. Daily use is relatively moderate: 49% spend under 30 minutes, 32% between 30–60 minutes, and only 4% more than two hours per day.

Tourism-related use is significant: 72% engage with TikTok for travel purposes. While 62% have not traveled because of TikTok, 38% reported finding travel inspiration on the platform, highlighting its influence on destination choice. Besides TikTok, respondents also rely on Booking.com (75%) and Instagram (68%), with Airbnb (53%) and Tripadvisor (37%) also common. Pinterest (11%) and Google (1%) are used less frequently.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Measurement Model

The measurement model demonstrated strong reliability and validity. Composite reliability (Jöreskog's rho – pc) values ranged from 0.90 to 0.96, Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.88, and AVE values were all above 0.83, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was supported by the HTMT criterion, with all ratios below the conservative threshold of 0.85. Discriminant validity was further confirmed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, as the square roots of AVEs for all constructs exceeded their inter-construct correlations, supporting the distinctiveness of the latent variables.

Table 1. Construct reliability and validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	pc	AVE
BI	0.883	0.945	0.895
AB	0.945	0.965	0.901
PE	0.937	0.955	0.840
EE	0.903	0.937	0.833
SI	0.897	0.898	0.747
FC	0.896	0.898	0.747
HM	0.920	0.920	0.792
HA	0.908	0.908	0.767
PT	0.940	0.940	0.840

Source: primary data

In addition, all standardized loadings exceeded the recommended cut-off value of 0.70, providing further support for indicator reliability. This confirms that each survey item contributed meaningfully to its intended construct.

Table 2. Standardized loadings of measurement items

Construct	Items	Loading
AB – Actual Behavior	I am going to use TikTok for destination decision making	0.947
	If I already use it, I will continue to use TikTok for destination decisions in the future	0.943
	I plan to recommend using TikTok for destination decision-making to my friends and family	0.958
BI – Behavioral Intention	I would like to try/learn to use TikTok for destination decision making	0.945
	I would like to continue to use TikTok to make destination decisions in future travel	0.947
EE – Effort Expectancy	I think learning to use TikTok is easy	0.867
	The user interface of TikTok is clear and easy to understand	0.942
	I can easily search for travel information using TikTok	0.927
FC – Facilitating Conditions	I have the resources needed to use TikTok (mobile device, internet)	0.829
	I know how to use TikTok to search for short travel videos	0.931
	When I have trouble using TikTok, I can ask others or customer service for help	0.895
HA – Habit	I am used to using TikTok to watch short travel videos	0.956
	I use TikTok when I need travel information	0.970
	It is natural for me to use TikTok to help me make destination decisions when I need to	0.964
HM – Hedonic Motivation	The short tourism video content in TikTok is interesting and fun	0.885
	Watching short travel videos on TikTok makes me feel good	0.900
	I would love to use TikTok to filter travel destinations	0.921
	I find TikTok useful in searching for travel information	0.912

PE – Performance Expectancy	Travel information shared by TikTok users is useful	0.912
	Using TikTok can help me keep abreast of the travel information of the destination in real-time	0.935
	Using TikTok can help me to choose and determine the destination faster	0.907
PT – Perceived Trust	I believe TikTok can provide me with relevant travel information	0.922
	I think the travel information (videos, reviews) on TikTok is reliable	0.927
	I think it is possible to make travel decisions based on the travel information provided by TikTok	0.923
SI – Social Influence	If people around me (family, friends, peers) use TikTok to search for travel-related videos, I will be interested in using it	0.887
	If a celebrity, star, or blogger I respect or love posts a travel video on TikTok, I will be interested in using it	0.867
	The recommendations of people around me will affect my willingness to use TikTok for destination selection	0.863

Source: primary data

Variance inflation factors (VIF) were also assessed to examine potential multicollinearity issues. All values were well below the recommended thresholds (Hair et al., 2021), indicating that multicollinearity was not an issue.

4.2. Structural Model

The structural model exhibited strong explanatory power, with $R^2 = 0.815$ for BI and $R^2 = 0.865$ for AB, indicating that the proposed framework explains more than 80% of the variance in both constructs. The model demonstrated good fit, with SRMR = 0.066, below the recommended threshold of 0.08. Predictive relevance was also supported, as Q^2 values were greater than zero for all endogenous constructs.

Table 3. Path coefficients and hypothesis testing

Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
BI $\rightarrow$ AB	0.930	79.61	<0.001	Supported
PE $\rightarrow$ BI	0.079	1.38	0.169	Not supported
EE $\rightarrow$ BI	0.006	0.11	0.909	Not supported
SI $\rightarrow$ BI	0.016	0.39	0.696	Not supported
FC $\rightarrow$ BI	-0.108	-1.66	0.097	Not supported
HM $\rightarrow$ BI	0.189	2.47	0.014	Supported
HA $\rightarrow$ BI	0.369	6.48	<0.001	Supported
PT $\rightarrow$ BI	0.382	4.35	<0.001	Supported

Source: primary data

Regarding effect sizes (Cohen's f^2), BI exerted a very large effect on AB ($f^2 = 6.40$), while HA ($f^2 = 0.21$) and PT ($f^2 = 0.19$) showed medium-to-large effects on BI. HM had a small but significant effect ($f^2 = 0.04$), whereas PE, EE, SI, and FC had negligible effects.

These findings reveal that HM, HA, and PT are significant positive predictors of BI. In contrast, PE, EE, SI, and FC did not significantly affect intention.

The results provide several important insights into the use of TikTok in tourism decision-making among consumers in BiH. First, the path from BI to AB ($\beta = 0.93$, $p < 0.001$) is exceptionally strong, confirming that once users intend to rely on TikTok for travel purposes, this intention almost inevitably translates into actual use. This is consistent with the central assumptions of UTAUT2 and aligns with prior research conducted in China (Zhou et al., 2023). Second, the significance of PT highlights the centrality of credibility in social media-driven tourism contexts. Users are willing to base their travel decisions on TikTok only if they perceive the content – both user-generated and marketer-generated – as trustworthy. This finding supports the adaptation of the UTAUT2 model with PT as a critical extension, in line with arguments that reliability is decisive in environments where information quality is highly variable. Third, HM was also a significant predictor,

suggesting that enjoyment and entertainment are key drivers of intention. Users are more likely to engage with TikTok for travel decision-making when the process is perceived as fun and emotionally engaging, confirming previous findings that Gen Z prioritizes entertainment value in digital interactions. Fourth, HA emerged as a robust factor influencing BI. This suggests that repeated use of TikTok for entertainment and information gradually establishes automatic reliance on the platform when considering travel destinations. HA thus plays a dual role – strengthening BI and indirectly reinforcing actual usage. In contrast, the classical UTAUT2 predictors – PE, EE, SI, and FC – were not significant in this study. This non-significance reflects the digital fluency of the sample. For a generation accustomed to seamless digital interactions, the perceived usefulness and ease of use of TikTok are taken for granted, while peer influence is less decisive compared to intrinsic motivation and trust in the platform.

Overall, the findings indicate that trust, enjoyment, and habitual use are the true levers of intention and behavior in the context of TikTok and tourism, rather than utilitarian or social factors. This highlights the need for tourism marketers to focus on building credibility and designing engaging, emotionally appealing content that strengthens habitual engagement with their destinations on TikTok.

4.3. Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study advances understanding of social media in tourism decision-making by validating an extended UTAUT2 model that includes perceived trust in the context of TikTok usage in BiH. Incorporating trust captures a credibility dimension often overlooked in traditional adoption models. The model's high explanatory power ($R^2 > 0.80$ for BI and AB) shows that motivational and trust-based factors outweigh utilitarian predictors in explaining digital tourism behavior. These results underscore the theoretical relevance of adapting established models to the dynamics of social media platforms.

For destination marketing organizations and tourism businesses, three practical implications emerge: (1) ensuring credibility through authentic and reliable content; (2) designing emotionally engaging and entertaining material that aligns with the preferences of younger travelers; and (3) fostering repeated exposure to destination-focused videos to strengthen habitual use of TikTok early in the customer journey. Aligning strategies with these drivers can enhance TikTok's effectiveness as a tool for destination branding and consumer influence.

5. CONCLUSION

This study shows that for consumers in BiH, TikTok is not primarily evaluated through usefulness or ease of use, but through whether its content is trustworthy, enjoyable, and integrated into daily routines. This highlights a shift from utilitarian to hedonic and trust-based drivers in tourism decision-making. For destination marketers, this means that strategies should prioritize building credibility, creating emotionally engaging content, and encouraging repeated interactions, rather than emphasizing functional benefits.

This study has limitations related to its cross-sectional design, snowball sampling, and focus on BiH, which may affect generalizability. Future research should use longitudinal data to track changes over time, conduct cross-cultural comparisons, examine other short-form platforms such as Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, and extend the model with constructs such as perceived risk, authenticity, or algorithmic influence.

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