

Destination information search in social media and travel intention of Generation Z university students

Z世代大学生在社交媒体的目的地信息搜索与旅游意向

Abstract

In an age of ubiquitous internet, social media has become a key source of travel information searches and channels of digital marketing. People everywhere are continually exposed to travel information content through social media, whether intended or not. By employing the concept of accidental discovery of information, this study identified the ability of accidental discovery versus purposeful search to affect tourists' intentions to travel and recommend. Since the younger generations both in China and globally play the role of creating and interpreting trends, this study aimed to investigate the impact of social media usage behaviors in Chinese university students on domestic travel intention. The impact of information structure in social media, including content types and content creators, was further investigated. We found that accidental discovery had a greater impact on behavioral intention than purposeful search, and photo and video content provided a greater impact than text content. Significant influences from DMOs and user comments were also identified. The findings contribute to the knowledge on information searching behavior and digital marketing strategies in destination information dissemination.

在互联网时代下，社交媒体已成为搜索旅游信息的主要来源以及数字营销的渠道。无论是否刻意搜索，人们也能不断地透过社交媒体接触到旅游相关的信息。本研究以“信息的意外发现”(accidental discovery of information)的概念为基础，分析意外性发现和有目的性搜索对游客旅游和推荐意向的影响。中国和全球年轻一代都在创造并演绎着趋势，本研究针对中国大学生的社交媒体使用行为及其对国内旅游意向的影响进行调查。本文进一步探讨了社交媒体中不同信息结构的影响，包括信息内容类型和

内容创作者。研究结果显示，与有目的性搜索相比，意外性发现的信息对行为意向的影响更大，而在内容类型来看，照片和视频内容比文字内容更有影响力。此外，本研究还发现了目的地管理组织和用户评论的显著影响。该研究结果丰富了信息搜索有关的知识，还为目的地信息传播等数字营销策略提供启示。

Keywords: Social media, Information search, Accidental discovery of information, Content type, Creator type, Behavioral intention

1. Introduction

In the tourism and hospitality industry, social media is perceived as the megatrend that has significantly affected travelers' searching and sharing behavior and changed the distribution channels of marketing information for the operation and management of tourism suppliers (Leung et al., 2013). With the increase in social media usage and interactivity among social media users, social media fosters the accidental discovery of information introduced by Erdelez (Erdelez, 1995; Panahi et al., 2015). People are not only encountering unexpected information through browsing social media platforms but also actively seeking information to fill a knowledge gap or to meet unknown needs in the future (McKenzie, 2002). People are constantly seeking new information in their daily lives, and the accidentally discovered (or unintentionally collected) information could be retrieved later for use (De Bruijn & Spence, 2001).

Especially for younger tourists, who are characterized by their intense interest and ubiquitous connectivity in social media, purchase decisions tend to be more easily influenced by social media (Giachino et al., 2020). Social media has become an inseparable part of daily life, and university students heavily rely on it for communication and interaction, as well as for entertainment. Selwyn (2007) claimed that social media has played an important role in students' lives, as it provides informal learning platforms to learn how to interact, understand values, and

shape identities in the online environment. Similarly, Sharma et al. (2016) indicated that the main reason university students use social media is for resource sharing, followed by enjoyment, collaboration, and social influence. Moreover, social media enhances their network connections, especially through knowledge transfer (Lacka et al., 2021). Therefore, social media could be seen as a means of virtual communication that plays a significant role in forming and changing the behavioral patterns of university students' everyday lives.

Given university students' strong association with social media, using social media in the tourism industry could be essential to understand the factors influencing their travel decision making and to effectively promote tourism products and services to them (Denizci Guillet et al, 2016). According to Xu et al. (2008), university students are a segment that has been overlooked in the tourism industry, even though they often have more time for traveling than working adults because of school vacations and extended holidays. Recently, more studies have paid attention to Generation Z students, who may influence the future of the tourism industry (Giachino et al., 2020). The market power of Generation Z students has been acknowledged, especially in fast-growing tourist countries. It is forecasted that the number of students enrolled in higher education will reach 262 million by 2025, and more than half of them will be in China and India (Malsen, 2012). Regarding the younger generation in general, more than 23% of international tourists are between the ages of 15 and 29 years (World Tourism Organization, 2016), there were 336 million youth travelers with a spending of over USD 333 billion in 2018 (WYSE Travel Confederation, 2020). Chinese younger generation especially become the major force of consumption and is recognized as both current and future contributor to the tourism industry (Shi et al., 2020). Considering Generation Z university students' potential leading role in tourism development, they will likely become an important segment and source of revenue for the tourism and related industries.

Especially, this study proposes that scholars and practitioners should pay more attention to Chinese domestic tourism, especially within the Generation Z university student market, to fill the current knowledge gap and predict the future direction of the tourism industry in the post-pandemic era. As we discussed earlier, the popularity of and heavy reliance on social media platforms among Chinese university students (Wang & Kuntz, 2021) are grounds for this study to define social media as an indicator of their information search behaviors and an influencing factor in this group's decision-making about domestic tourism.

In terms of information searches of tourists, two key dimensions have been underlined by Fodness and Murraray (1997), which are the use of information sources and the amount of effort that was spent in doing the information search. This study attempts to address these two dimensions of information search behaviors in social media by estimating the effect of accidental discovery which involves less cognitive load than purposeful searches (Heinstrom, 2006), as well as heterogeneous effects of information sources (i.e., content types and creator types). Accordingly, this study set the following three research objectives. First, applying the concept of accidental discovery of information, which is widely used in social media studies (Erdelez, 1995), this study will divide social media searching behavior into discovery and purposeful seeking and identify their heterogeneous impacts on Chinese university students' domestic travel intention. Second, this study will identify different content types of social media and their impact on travel intention. Lastly, considering the unique feature of social media—user-generated content by various social media creators (Sabate et al., 2014)—this study will explore the information provider effect on university students' domestic travel intention.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Accidental Discovery of Destination Information on Social Media

In tourism research and practice, great efforts have been made to understand tourists' information search behavior as it can form, influence, and predict their future behaviors. Information not only reduce perceived risks and uncertainty but also positively influence the quality of destination experiences (Fodness & Murray, 1997). Tourists' online information search behaviors need more attention as tourists could access a much greater wealth of information, and the dynamics of destination information via various online channels have become more sophisticated (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Although purposeful (or intentional) searches have a great impact on decision-making as in previous findings, unintentional searches also play a significant role in influencing people's perceptions of brands or, in this case, destinations. Erdelez (1995, 1999) explained the importance of this unintentional or unexpected discovery of information (information encountering) using the terms *accidental discovery of information* and *incidental information acquisition*. Information encountering is regarded as a type of opportunistic acquisition of information and is defined as "an instance of accidental discovery of information during an active search for some other information" (Erdelez, 2005, p. 180). More specifically, Makri and Blandford (2012) explained information encountering as making unexpected mental connections with different information. The process of information encountering starts when unexpected information was encountered and captures users' attention (Jiang et al., 2022). Information encountering as a process described a set of stages when people finds interesting and useful information accidentally from pre-encountering (e.g., browsing and searching), encountering to post-encountering (e.g., capturing), and emphasized serendipity in the context of information acquisition can occur during both active and passive searching activities (Erdelez & Makri, 2020). Although information encountering is an event or

incident of information acquisition, it can have a long-term impact on information acquisition patterns, as individuals are more likely to pursue the same browsing patterns when they come across useful or interesting information while browsing (Erdelez, 1999).

Accidental discoveries are more effective if the content is spread positively a sufficient number of times through the right media (Chan, 2016). In an information-rich environment, people are exposed to a great amount of social media content, although much content is not designed to influence individuals (Kaiser et al., 2021). However, encountered information can form cognitive images in the receivers' minds and create a certain influence over their potential actions (Chen et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2015). The information regarding tourism destinations that people encounter while browsing social media may form destination images and lead people to take future actions (Blazevic et al., 2013). Through this unintentional influence, individuals, also known as information receivers, get to know more about a product, service, or brand they had not noticed or were unaware of (Sicilia et al., 2020). Erdelez (2018) further emphasized that social networking is the base of the accidental discovery of information because social media users often unintentionally encounter various user-generated content that was created and shared by other users (Erdelez, 2018).

Incidental information acquisition is the outcome of the accidental discovery of information; it involves less cognitive load than purposeful searches for information and requires the ability to recognize information that is potentially useful (Heinstrom, 2006). Even when people are looking for particular information, they are still monitoring their world by acquiring other information they are unaware of (Williamson, 1998). The more emotional the experience triggered by the content, the more likely it is to be noticed (Heinstrom, 2006). Unexpected or new content automatically creates awareness in the information receiver, and this explains why information

such as news headlines can be remembered for a long time (Lang et al., 2002). People are used to passive learning due to the large amount of passive information available that is ready for individuals to absorb without purposely seeking information acquisition (Bates, 2002). It was found that passive information acquisition usually occurs on smartphone devices because this type of information acquisition is unplanned and accidental, typically happening when people are spending leisure time scrolling through social media (Liu, 2020). The passive attention triggered by the environment that results in incidental information acquisition is also an important method of information assimilation (Niedźwiedzka, 2003). Hence, it could be inferred that when tourists are experiencing incidental information acquisition or accidental discoveries of information regarding a particular destination, their travel intention is still affected, even when they are not searching for information about the destination. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: *Accidental discovery of destination information on social media will generate a significant impact on university students' behavioral intention.*

2.2 Influence of Social Media Content

Social media is the term for the web-based and mobile technologies that make communication interactive, allowing people to build networks and foster information sharing (Baruah, 2012; Li et al., 2020). Social media serve as important information sources not only for tourists but also for destination marketers, as it contains abundant and timely travel-related information as well as vivid and realistic viewpoints from other tourists' narratives (Park et al., 2018; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Positive outcomes of social media use consist of a feeling of mastery, interacting with peers, and identity exploration (Morgan et al., 2010). Interactivity is important in social media; users share and exchange information with one another while sellers or

organizations connect and interact with their customers (Huertas & Marine-Roig, 2016). Social media in tourism continues to play an essential role in different aspects (Alghizzawi et al., 2018), since social media is considered as a more efficient platform for gathering information (Yu et al., 2017). Tourists are able to share their views and contribute to developing, extending, rating, and commenting on their destination experiences and those of others (Sotiriadis, 2017). In doing so, tourists in a Web 2.0 environment become “co-designers, co-producers, co-marketers, and co-consumers of tourism experiences” (Sigala et al., 2012; Sotiriadis, 2017, p. 180). What makes social media different from the traditional form of marketing is that it has user-generated content, meaning some of the information posted is created by users rather than marketers (Manap & Adzharudin, 2013). Social media has changed the way individuals plan, consume, and share their travel experiences, as people often rely on others’ experiences in supporting their decision-making process to reduce their uncertainty about the destination (Ketter, 2016).

Social media content is user-generated and usually in the form of text, pictures, or videos (Hausmann et al., 2017). Sabate et al. (2014) found that posts with images or videos can be more impactful by getting more likes than other types of content, including texts and links. Similarly, it has been indicated that “images receive 22% more engagement than video posts and 54% more than text posts, but videos receive 27% more engagement than text posts” (Sabate et al., 2014, p. 1003). Moreover, the richness of a post increases the likelihood of people reading the post. Those with animations or videos, pictures with a rich mixture of colors, or links to other sites are more attractive to people than a post with only text information (Sabate et al., 2014). Researchers have found that different content types have the power in influencing customer purchase intentions. Textual information was found to influence customer emotions with the length of the text, which could further affect customer booking and purchase intention (Bufquin et al., 2020). Pachucki and

Scholl-Grissemann (2022) also emphasized the role of textual social media content that can reflect consumers' responses and emotions in response to contextual factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic. While Xu (2017) found that images posted by hotels can easily influence the booking intention of customers. With videos, Chen et al., (2021) claimed that videos especially vlogs by other tourists can create an impact on users' travel intention. User-generated content from tourists and residents conveys important information that forms an overall image of a destination and also influences tourists' behavioral preferences (Zhang et al., 2020). Among the different types of content in social media, Sabate et al. (2014) underlined visual content (such as images and videos) as having a stronger impact than text, and images have the most persuasive and powerful impact on users.

Given the large consumption of social media in China, a more comprehensive understanding of local tourists' social media usage is expected (Cheng & Edwards, 2015). In 2020, China was the world's largest social network market with its own developed social media platforms, including WeChat, Sina Weibo, TikTok (Douyin), RED (Xiaohongshu), and Zhihu (Lai, 2020). China has the world's most active social media environment—Chinese online users spend more than 40% of their day on social media, and this number continues to increase (Chiu et al., 2012). Chinese social media is dominated by younger consumers and social media has become the main platform for searching for information (Yu et al., 2011). With the development of mobile technology, various social media platforms have grown rapidly, with the main content being sharing short videos and photos about lifestyle, including consumption in tourism and everyday life. For Chinese consumers, social media has become an important pre-purchase step (Chen, 2019), and social media in China has greatly influenced behaviors when consumers make choices regarding products and services. Therefore, based on existing findings of various media elements

(e.g., text, images, video) in social media (e.g., Hausmann et al., 2017; Sabate et al., 2014; Scholl-Grissemann, 2022), this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Various types of social media content will generate different impacts on Chinese university students' behavioral intention (regarding travel and recommendations)

- H2_a-Photo will generate a significant impact on Chinese university students' behavioral intention.
- H2_b- Text will generate a significant impact on Chinese university students' behavioral intention.
- H2_c- Video will generate a significant impact on Chinese university students' behavioral intention.

2.3 Influence of Social Media Content Creators

With the convenience that widespread social media use has brought to society, people are gradually shifting their trust to other consumers for recommendations, and it has been confirmed that user-generated content can influence individuals' purchase intention for services and products (Sabate et al., 2014). The spread of positive word-of-mouth can develop prominent destination image in which further creates positive influence on individual's evaluation towards the destination and travel decision making (Bu et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2016). Especially for Chinese younger tourists, their perceptions towards a travel service can easily be influenced by those electronic word-of-mouths, and finally result in their attitude and intention (Wang et al., 2021). However, this influence can differ as consumers evaluate whether the information and the source are credible (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012). Tourists' evaluations of a destination on the internet could

be influenced by the perceived level of usefulness and credibility of the tourists toward the information source. For instance, Huertas and Marine-Roig (2016) found that social media users perceived recommendations and experience sharing from non-commercialized information sources to be more trustworthy and credible. In Chinese culture, credible information sources are typically smaller social groups, such as family and friends, and interestingly, Chinese consumers tend to view e-word of mouth from key opinion leaders (KOLs) as reliable (Chiu et al., 2012). With the increase in social media use, KOLs have emerged as new information sources and are gaining more attention and trust from social media users. They are generally perceived as competent, engaged, and trustworthy in providing information (Turcotte et al., 2015). Westerman et al. (2014) emphasized the importance of information sources and found that familiarity with a particular information source could build the credibility of the information on social media.

In the tourism field, different information sources allow individuals to form images of a destination, ranging from traditional print publications, such as brochures, guidebooks, magazines, and newspapers, to formal or professional organizations, such as local tourist offices, travel guides, and travel agents, to friends and relatives (Sarma, 2007). Among these sources, destination management organizations (DMOs) and travel agencies can be regarded as the most professional. By applying social media in their digital marketing, DMOs have been pushed to reengineer and implement their networking and marketing operations (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Online travel agencies influence tourists' destination preferences through the quality of the information provided (Huang & Lan, 2021). In the online social media environment, the role of these professional information sources (DMOs and travel agencies) could be enhanced by taking advantage of their trust from tourists and their traditional status in destination marketing (Hays et al., 2013). However, increasingly personalized sources on social media platforms may decrease the power of

conventional information creators such as professional marketers and institutions (Park et al., 2021; Thevenot, 2007).

Based on the findings from existing studies and through pilot interviews on information sources and their roles, this study will identify university students' variance in trust toward different types of information sources (i.e., social media creators, including family, friends, KOLs, DMOs, travel agencies, and user comments) and their impact on travel intention. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: *Various information sources (i.e., content creators) on social media will generate different impacts on university students' behavioral intention.*

- H3_a- Social media posts created by Family will create a significant impact on university students' behavioral intention
- H3_b- Social media posts created by Friends will create a significant impact on university students' behavioral intention
- H3_c- Social media posts created by Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) will create a significant impact on university students' behavioral intention
- H3_d- Social media posts created by Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) will create a significant impact on university students' behavioral intention
- H3_e- Social media posts created by Travel agencies will create a significant impact on university students' behavioral intention
- H3_f- User comments in social media will create a significant impact on university students' behavioral intention

3. Methodology

The target population for this research was Generation Z university students from mainland China currently completing a bachelor's degree. One advantage with surveying Generation Z is that they are educated and technologically savvy, most of them are more comfortable with texts (Janssen & Carradini, 2021), are straightforward and value honesty (Isaacs et al., 2020), this helps survey design and process to be more efficient. In accordance with studies by Brookes (2010) and Sabate et al. (2014) on types of content on social networking sites, three main content types were included in the questions for the examination. From the research by Sarma (2007) and Turcotte et al. (2015) on information sources in social media, five information sources were extracted to measure different impacts on travel and recommend intentions, consisting of family members, friends, KOLs, DMOs and travel agencies. In addition, we conducted pilot interviews with Chinese university students prior to the survey, and a new content type (i.e., user comments) was added to the survey to provide a full picture of actual social media usage behavior.

Convenience sampling was adopted as the sampling method for this research, it will enable efficiency for data collection as it allows easy access to participants (Etikan et al., 2016). A screening question was set at the start of the survey to screen out participants who are not targeted for this research to ensure the validity of the result. The survey was divided into five parts. Prior to the main sections, a screening section was designed to exclude respondents who were not Generation Z university students from mainland China. Part one focused on the respondents' social media usage. Part two mainly focused on the accidental discovery of information to see to what extent the respondents' search information related to tourism destinations was based on accidental discovery or purposeful search. Single-item measurement was chosen for this part ("How frequently do you *search for* destination information using social media platforms *through typing*

keywords?” and “How frequently do you *bump into* destination information *when you’re scrolling* social media platforms?”). A 7-point scale (1 being “Seldom” and 7 being “Very Often”) was used to measure these two items. Although there is a long-lasting argument for single- versus multiple-item measurement, many researchers have supported single-item measurement by presenting its predictive validity (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007; Drolet & Morrison, 2001) and effectively used single question for measuring single facet/dimension items (Fong et al., 2021; Kim & Stepchenkova, 2015). Considering theoretical foundations of single- versus multiple-item measurement (Dolnicar, 2013), the authors agreed that using a single question was appropriate considering survey respondents and research purpose. In part three, questions were asked to examine the influence of different content types and the respondents’ trust toward different types of social media creators. Part four served as the dependent variable, which was the respondents’ behavioral intention (including travel and recommend intentions) after searching for destination information on social media. In these sections, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Part five was designed to collect the respondents’ demographic information.

To achieve the three objectives of this study, a self-administered questionnaire was conducted through an online survey. Online surveys allow researchers to access internet users across a large geographic area (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006). Because mainland Chinese students can be located in different parts of the country and given the situation of the pandemic, it was best to use an online survey to collect data. The survey was distributed from January to February 2021 on WeChat which is one of the biggest social media platforms in China and acknowledged as an effective tool for tourism experience data collection (Skavronskaya et al., 2020). The survey was designed to be not too long, as shorter completion times make fatigue less likely, therefore ensuring

minimum negative effects on data quality (Dolnicar & Grün, 2012). To avoid misunderstanding of questions that could lead to unreliable data collection, the questionnaire was distributed in both English and Chinese for ease of understanding.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Analysis: Chinese University Students' Social Media Usage Characteristics

A descriptive analysis was conducted to reveal the respondents' social media behaviors (Table 1). A total of 406 valid responses were collected from Chinese students currently completing bachelor's degrees. The gender of the respondents was nearly equally distributed, with 51% ($n = 207$) being male and 49% ($n = 199$) female. The respondents' favorite social media platforms were asked using multiple choice question, the results showed that the most-used social media platform was RED (Xiaohongshu) ($n = 255$), followed by Sina Weibo ($n = 239$). More than half of the participants ($n = 231$, 56.8%) indicated that they used social media *very often*, and only 1.47% indicated that they *seldom* used social media. One-fifth of the respondents reported that they *sometimes* or *frequently* used keywords to search for destination information, and only 8.1% of the respondents regarded themselves as using keywords *very frequently* in searching for destination information. Regarding social media posts, the domestic destinations that appeared the most on respondents' social media pages was Beijing ($n = 60$, 14.78%), followed by Shanghai ($n = 37$, 9.11%) and Suzhou ($n = 25$, 6.16%).

[Table 1 near here]

Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha (α) to examine the internal consistency of each construct in the survey. The questions were divided into four constructs (discovery versus

purposeful searches, content type, trust in social media creators, and behavioral intention). To ensure the preciseness of the text, each element was tested separately for the construct of content type (photo, video, and text). The α values for content type were as follows: photo $\alpha = .843$, text $\alpha = .842$, and video $\alpha = .875$. For behavior intention, it was $\alpha = .752$. As all of the α values exceeded .7 (see Table 2), they were found to be satisfactory (Bland & Atlman, 1997).

[Table 2 near here]

4.2 Hypotheses Testing: The Impacts of Social Media Usage on Behavioral Intention

Regression analysis was conducted to measure the impact of social media usage on behavioral intention. As Table 3 shown, the three social media dimensions (content types, creator types, and information searches) were categorized together as social media usage, and behavioral intention included the intention to travel and to recommend the destination, acting as the dependent variable of this research. The model summary indicated that the R^2 was 0.571, signifying that 57.1% of the variance was explained in the model, which is satisfactory for this research. The F value was 47.703, with a significance level of .000, rejecting the null hypothesis (H_0). The variance inflation factors for all attributes were below 3, strengthening the reliability of the regression results and eliminating the possibility of multicollinearity.

For hypothesis 1, both purposeful search ($p < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.1154$) and accidental information discovery ($p < 0.01$, $\beta = 0.0716$) had significant impacts on behavioral intention. Interestingly, the results reveal that accidental information discovery generated a stronger impact than purposeful search. This finding not only extends the application of the accidental discovery of information to tourist information searching behaviors but also provides destination marketers with insight into

taking tourists' accidental information discoveries into account when they promote destinations or tourism activities via social media.

Regarding hypothesis 2, the p -values were lower than 0.001 for photo and video content, indicating that photo and video content on social media created significant impacts on university students' behavioral intention, but text contents do not create a significant impact, supporting hypothesis 2. Between photos and videos, photo content created a stronger impact on behavioral intention, with a β of 0.3220 for photos and 0.2650 for videos. For text, the p -value was 0.6644, showing no significant impact of text on behavioral intention. Therefore, H2_a & H2_c are supported while H2_b is rejected.

Regarding the impact of social media creators (i.e. information sources, hypothesis 3), there were six creator types identified, and the ones that showed a significant impact on behavioral intention were DMOs ($p < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.1036$), travel agencies ($p < 0.05$, $\beta = -0.1009$), and user comments/reviews ($p < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.1226$), supporting H3_{d,e,f}. Surprisingly, social media content created by family, KOLs, and friends did not significantly affect respondents' behavioral intentions, rejecting H3_{a,b,c}. This result may be linked with features of tourists' information searching strategies which imply that tourists perceived information search as a tool for reducing uncertainty and perceived risks prior to the purchase decision (Buhalis et al., 2011). Hence, risk-averse tourists are more likely to collect relevant information from the most relied-upon sources such as family members and friends (Murphy et al., 2007). In this study, information from the family and friends group was marginal because: first, domestic destinations tend to be more familiar and less uncertain for Chinese tourists; second, young and well-educated tourists such as university students are generally classified as novelty seekers with low-risk perception (Promsivapallop & Kannaovakun, 2018). User comments/reviews had the strongest impact among

the other two (DMOs and travel agencies), and travel agencies had a negative impact on behavioral intention, as the information posted by travel agencies was perceived as commercial advertising.

[Table 3 near here]

5. Conclusion

5.1 Discussion and conclusion

Social media has transformed the way information is transferred and communicated in the tourism industry and the way travelers make decisions (Nezakati et al., 2015). The effects of social media usage on university students' behavioral intention were examined in this study, and the effects were found to be influential regarding different aspects. First, by employing the concept of accidental discovery of information, this research reveals the impact of accidental information discovery and purposeful search on university students' behavioral intention. Both searching behaviors had a significant impact on behavioral intention, although accidental information discovery generated a stronger impact, even greater than when individuals were intentionally searching and ready to receive new information. It is worth noting that the destination information collected from tourists' accidental discovery greatly affected their travel and recommendation behaviors. As the literature on the accidental discovery of information has explained, accidental discoveries or incidental information acquisitions involve less cognitive load from individuals but require them to be able to recognize information that could be useful (Heinstrom, 2006), meaning that individuals still need to pay attention while scrolling through information to recognize potentially useful information. Echoing existing knowledge about the accidental discovery of information that elaborates the information would be retrieved for future use (De Bruijn & Spence,

2001) and finally influence their perceptions and decision makings (Erdelez, 1995; 1999), our findings show that accidental discovery of destination information, in which respondents are not intentionally seeking destination information and are not prepared to receive destination-related information, can later remind them of a particular destination and eventually have a significant influence on behavioral intention. Second, the effect of social media content type on behavioral intention was examined. As claimed by Sabate et al. (2014), photos and videos provide more impact than text. The findings of the current study also show that photos and videos influenced students' behavioral intention, with photo content being more influential than videos. However, text content had no significant impact on behavioral intention, a finding which differs from other empirical studies showing that text has an impact to some extent (Brookes, 2010; Sabate et al., 2014). Third, the creator types identified that influence behavioral intention were DMOs, travel agencies, and user comments/reviews. Unexpectedly, our study indicates that family members, friends, and KOLs had no significant effect. According to the results about social media content type, DMOs should provide more attractive, professional photos and videos, which university students value, to increase their impact. Local DMOs in China are creating official accounts on various social media platforms to promote their destinations, and our findings imply that tourists recognize DMOs' social media marketing efforts. In earlier studies, KOLs were regarded as reliable information sources (Chiu et al., 2012), but KOL marketing has recently become too commercialized, and our finding signals that trust in KOLs has failed. Similarly, perceived commercialization of travel agencies' information was found to have a negative influence. These results imply that in successful social media marketing, commercialized information is taboo.

5.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study contributes new knowledge of the relationship between accidental discovery of destination information and tourists' intentions to travel and recommend by applying the concept of accidental discovery of information to tourist behavior studies. Past research findings have implied that information acquired from unintentional searches has some influence on individuals, especially when it is emotionally engaging. However, accidental discoveries have been neglected in the study of information searching behaviors despite their importance, especially in an information-rich environment. This study expands our knowledge by identifying the significant role of information that is incidentally or accidentally acquired in Chinese university students' behavioral intention than that of purposeful searches. In terms of influencing factors in social media contents and their heterogeneous impacts on tourists' behavioral intention regarding travel and recommendations, this study also broadened our understanding by delineating the content types and content creator effects in social media.

The findings of this study also provide practical implications for marketers in the tourism industry. By identifying the influential social media content types and creator types, this study shows that DMOs and tourism social media marketers should design more effective content types and distribute content through a more reliable creator. In addition, this study identified the destinations in China that most often created impressions among Chinese university students via social media (Beijing, Shanghai, and Suzhou), providing insight into the destinations that should have more social media marketing activities to reach the Chinese student market. Given that the powerful effect of the accidental discovery of destination information was also identified in our study, facilitating destination information encountering is likely a key to successful social media marketing. Because it is effective for content to be distributed positively a sufficient number of times, distributing more posts on social media regarding a destination could create widespread

awareness among students and further increase their behavioral intention, such as the intention to travel there and recommend it. This effect would be even more important for the DMOs during the COVID-19-induced travel lockdown, because effective application of the accidental discovery of information as a destination's marketing stimuli would keep people remembering a destination and will retrieve relevant information when they can travel again. Social media is a very useful distribution channel to raise awareness among Chinese university students and trigger their travel intention. Marketers in the tourism industry could utilize social media platforms with effective content types and information sources to stimulate destination awareness during tourists' social media searches. In particular, it is important to get potential tourists to experience more destinations virtually by exposing them to destination information through accidental discoveries.

These findings address meaningful discussions occurring about social media and travel intention, although there are several limitations to this study that should be considered. First, since the survey was conducted online through a social media platform, a more randomly distributed sample would have improved the generalizability of the research findings. Convenience sampling was used for this study, a more representative sampling method could also improve the generalizability of the findings. Second, the findings of this study are only applicable to Chinese university students. Future studies should expand to other countries and cultural contexts. Third, to answer our research questions, we focused only on domestic destinations on social media. However, it would be valuable for future studies to explore overseas destinations as Chinese travelers' search for novel destinations and their behavioral intentions may differ from that of domestic tourism.

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