# User Generated Content and Generation Z Tourists' Visit Intention: Evidence from the Newly Inaugurated Kebumen Geopark, Indonesia

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## Abstract

This study examines the influence of user-generated content on Generation Z tourists' visit intention toward Geopark Kebumen through the Stimulus Organism Response framework. Emotional and factual user-generated content were conceptualized as external stimuli affecting trust in user-generated content and the destination image as organismic states, which, in turn, influence visit intention as the response. A quantitative approach was applied using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling, based on 315 valid responses from active social media users aged 17–28 years. Results show that emotional content significantly enhances destination image, trust, and visit intention, while factual content affects destination image and trust but has no direct influence on intention. Trust in user-generated content emerges as the strongest predictor of both destination image and visit intention, confirming its central role as a cognitive-affective bridge in the decision process. The findings validate the Stimulus Organism Response framework for digital tourism behavior and emphasize the importance of authenticity, emotional resonance, and credibility in shaping Generation Z travel decisions. The study contributes to theory development in digital destination marketing and provides managerial insight for promoting geotourism through authentic, emotionally engaging, and trustworthy user-generated content.

**Keywords:** User Generated Content, Trust In UGC, Destination Image, Visit Intention, Generation Z, Stimulus Organism Response.

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## INTRODUCTION

Tourism communication has evolved into a digital ecosystem where information exchange is driven by participatory interaction among travelers. Social media platforms enable users to share authentic experiences, evaluate services, and influence destination perceptions. User-generated content (UGC) has become a primary source of destination knowledge because it emerges from actual tourist experiences rather than institutional marketing campaigns (Adeloye et al., 2021; Aboalganam et al., 2025). Travelers regard peer-created content as credible and relatable, forming perceptions that strongly affect their attitudes and decisions to visit destinations. The increasing accessibility of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube amplifies the persuasive potential of UGC, turning it into a central instrument in modern destination marketing and tourist decision-making (Lam et al., 2020; Cheng et al., 2020; Abbasi et al., 2022).

The Stimulus Organism Response (SOR) model provides an appropriate theoretical foundation for explaining how UGC affects tourist psychology and behavior. The model conceptualizes environmental stimuli that generate internal cognitive and affective states,

which subsequently result in observable responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). In tourism contexts, UGC serves as an external stimulus that triggers perceptions and emotions, leading to behavioral outcomes such as destination preference and visit intention (Hua et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2018; Li et al., 2020). Prior studies confirm this mechanism: credible peer narratives enhance destination imagery and strengthen behavioral intention (Aboalganam et al., 2025), while novelty, reliability, and experiential value embedded in UGC improve image and travel intention (Das et al., 2024; Correia et al., 2025). Interactive participation on digital platforms further generates co-created value, elevating emotional experience and satisfaction (Lam et al., 2020). Collectively, these findings support UGC as a multidimensional construct that stimulates cognitive, affective, and conative components of tourist behavior, reinforcing the applicability of the SOR framework in digital tourism research (Bigne et al., 2020; Baber & Baber, 2022).

Despite this theoretical progress, previous studies often treat UGC as a homogeneous construct, overlooking its dual nature as both factual and emotional communication. Factual UGC conveys descriptive information such as cost, facilities, and accessibility, which activates cognitive evaluation (Kim et al., 2017; Marine-Roig, 2017). Emotional UGC, on the other hand, transmits affective cues — joy, excitement, awe, or nostalgia — that stimulate empathy and imagination (Correia et al., 2025; Kim & Stepchenkova, 2015). Each form evokes distinct psychological pathways: factual content fosters rational assessment, while emotional narratives elicit affective engagement (Cheng et al., 2020). Limited integration of these dual dimensions restricts theoretical precision and prevents a comprehensive understanding of how tourists synthesize informational and emotional stimuli when forming perceptions and intentions. Addressing this conceptual gap enhances UGC's explanatory power within the SOR framework.

Another underexplored mechanism is trust in UGC, which functions as a key organismic variable connecting exposure to behavior. Trust represents the belief that peer content is authentic and unbiased, transforming perception into behavioral commitment (Tsiakali, 2018; Kitsios et al., 2021). It determines whether tourists accept user narratives as reliable and credible sources of information (Ayeh et al., 2013; Lo & Yao, 2019). Emotional authenticity strengthens this confidence because sincerity signals real experience rather than promotional intent (Hua et al., 2024; Ghaly, 2023). In the context of digital tourism, trust has been recognized as the psychological bridge that converts online stimuli into a favorable destination image and visit intention (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Setiawan et al., 2021). However, empirical studies that combine trust, factual-emotional UGC, and destination image within a single integrative model remain scarce, especially among younger travelers.

Generation Z represents a distinctive audience for examining these relationships. As digital natives, they are characterized by high connectivity, short attention spans, and emotional expressiveness. Their decision-making relies heavily on peer validation, visual storytelling, and perceived authenticity rather than institutional persuasion (Yamagishi et al., 2023; Ghaly, 2023; Nguyen & Tong, 2022). Emotional resonance in short-form videos and user stories plays a stronger role than traditional advertising in shaping their preferences and travel motivation. Understanding how Generation Z processes factual and emotional stimuli, and how trust mediates these perceptions, is therefore critical to explain digital decision-making patterns in contemporary tourism behavior.

From a contextual perspective, previous empirical work has focused mainly on developed destinations such as Jordan, Spain, and China (Aboalganam et al., 2025; Hua et al., 2024), leaving developing markets underrepresented. In Indonesia, most UGC-based tourism studies concentrate on leisure and cultural destinations such as Bali and Wae Rebo (Nadiastuti et al., 2025), while geotourism remains largely overlooked. Geotourism integrates education, environmental conservation, and recreation, making it a strategic component of sustainable tourism (Fahmawee & Jawabreh, 2023). However, the potential of UGC to promote and educate audiences about geological heritage is rarely explored. This lack of scholarly attention limits understanding of how digital narratives can contribute to both conservation awareness and destination competitiveness.

The case of Geopark Kebumen illustrates this research gap. The geopark possesses significant geological heritage and educational value, yet remains underrepresented within digital tourism promotion. Prior studies on Indonesian geoparks indicate that digital exposure and visitor engagement remain low due to limited use of social media–based marketing and a lack of emotional storytelling that connects audiences with the scientific and cultural values of the geoparks (Mauladi et al., 2023). Geoparks and other geotourism sites often struggle to communicate complex educational content to younger digital audiences, leading to reduced destination visibility and visit intention (Fahmawee & Jawabreh, 2023). Research has shown that authentic and emotionally engaging user-generated content increases awareness and visit motivation by transforming abstract information into a relatable experience (Lam et al., 2020; Abbasi et al., 2023). In the context of Generation Z, the absence of such narratives diminishes affective connection and reduces the likelihood of social sharing, a key mechanism in destination branding (Yamagishi et al., 2023; Correia et al., 2025). Therefore, strengthening authentic and engaging user-generated content related to Geopark Kebumen is essential to enhance its digital visibility, foster emotional connection, and align with Indonesia's sustainable and educational tourism development agenda.

This study, therefore, constructs a comprehensive model that positions factual and emotional UGC as external stimuli influencing trust in UGC and destination image as organismic states, which subsequently shape visit intention among Generation Z tourists. The study contributes theoretically by refining the SOR model to incorporate multidimensional digital stimuli and psychological mechanisms; empirically by providing evidence from an underexplored geotourism context; and practically by offering insights for developing authentic, credible, and emotionally resonant digital strategies to promote Geopark Kebumen.

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing redefines how destinations communicate and build relationships with tourists. Platforms encourage users to participate, co-create content, and share authentic experiences that shape destination narratives. Such dialogic interaction enables mutual value creation between tourists and destinations and strengthens emotional engagement (Lam et al., 2020; Cheung et al., 2021). Visual and participatory content on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube fosters peer influence and electronic word of mouth, which affect travelers' cognitive and affective evaluations of destinations (Abbasi et al., 2022; Cheng et al., 2020). These dynamics confirm that social media marketing operates as a relational and experiential process rather than a unidirectional promotional tool, making it the dominant context through which Generation Z constructs meaning and motivation to visit (Adeloye et al., 2021; Baber & Baber, 2022; Xu et al., 2021).

User-Generated Content

User-Generated Content (UGC) refers to content created and shared by individual users on social networks, including photos, short videos, stories, and reviews that convey personal travel experiences. Authentic peer communication reduces information asymmetry and increases persuasive power (Aboalganam et al., 2025; Ayeh et al., 2013). In tourism, the novelty, reliability, and experiential nature of UGC have been shown to enhance destination image and behavioral intention (Das et al., 2024; Nguyen & Tong, 2022; Xu et al., 2021). Scholars classify UGC into two primary forms. Factual UGC delivers descriptive and verifiable information routes, facilities, and costs that shape cognitive appraisal (Kim et al., 2017; Marine-Roig, 2017). Emotional UGC expresses affective impressions and symbolic meanings that evoke empathy and attachment (Correia et al., 2025; Kim & Stepchenkova, 2015). When these two forms interact, the result is immersive storytelling that engages both thought and feeling, strengthening tourist responses. However, most studies examine factual or emotional cues separately, leaving a limited understanding of their combined effect on trust and image formation (Correia et al., 2025; Das et al., 2024).

Trust in User-Generated Content

Trust represents confidence in the authenticity and reliability of online information. It is essential to transform exposure to UGC into acceptance and behavioral responses (Tsiakali, 2018). Users evaluate trustworthiness based on perceived sincerity, reviewer credibility, and message consistency across platforms (Ayeh et al., 2013; Lo & Yao, 2019; Kitsios et al., 2021). Emotional authenticity increases credibility by signaling genuine experience rather than mere promotion (Hua et al., 2024; Ghaly, 2023). Cross-cultural findings also demonstrate that trust mediates the relationship between electronic word of mouth and destination evaluation (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Setiawan et al., 2021). Within the Stimulus-Organism-Response model, trust functions as an internal affective state that links UGC stimuli to perceptual and conative outcomes.

Destination Image

Destination image refers to the totality of beliefs, impressions, and emotions associated with a place (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). It includes cognitive components, knowledge, and evaluation of tangible attributes, as well as affective components such as emotions and feelings toward the destination (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020). Continuous exposure to UGC shapes both components: factual cues refine cognitive judgments, while emotional stories strengthen affective connection (Kim et al., 2017; Lam et al., 2020; Marine-Roig, 2017). Empirical research consistently shows that a favorable destination image increases satisfaction, loyalty, and intention to visit (Kim & Perdue, 2011; Kanwel et al., 2019; Chaulagain et al., 2019). In digital contexts, the image serves as the organismic response through which UGC influences behavior.

Visit Intention

Visit intention refers to a tourist's willingness and determination to travel to a particular destination. It constitutes the response stage of the Stimulus Organism Response process, where internal evaluations transform into planned behavior (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020). Empirical evidence shows that positive emotional experiences and credible peer information

directly elevate intention (Das et al., 2024; Nguyen & Tong, 2022). Trust and image consistently appear as key antecedents that translate digital interactions into actual visit decisions (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Hua et al., 2024). For emerging geotourism sites such as Geopark Kebumen, amplifying authentic and emotionally resonant UGC is therefore vital to converting online engagement into real visitation.

Emotional UGC Affects Destination Image

Within the Stimulus Organism Response perspective, emotionally expressive user content acts as a stimulus that evokes affective appraisal and vivid imagery, which enhances destination image. Emotional UGC includes photos, videos, and narratives that convey feelings, satisfaction, and tourists' lived experiences (Marchiori & Cantoni, 2015; Xu et al., 2021). These expressions generate positive emotional tones toward destinations (Wang et al., 2016) and foster deeper psychological connections and empathy among potential visitors. The emotional appeal conveyed through visual storytelling facilitates affective bonding between tourists and destinations, particularly for hedonic and experiential products such as tourism services (Lwin et al., 2014). Emotional narratives also encourage shared experiences and enjoyment, strengthening social connection and memory-based imagery (Kim & Stepchenkova, 2015; Carlson et al., 2017; Cheung et al., 2020). Prior studies indicate that emotional content enhances perception of destination beauty, history, and uniqueness, leading to a more favorable overall image (Lam et al., 2020; Correia et al., 2025; Abbasi et al., 2022; Eman & Refaie, 2023). User-generated videos and reels stimulate imagination and sensory anticipation, thereby reinforcing destination attractiveness (Adeloye et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2021).

*H₁: Emotional UGC has a positive effect on Destination Image.*

Emotional UGC Affects Trust in UGC

Perceived sincerity and authenticity expressed through emotional cues increase confidence in user content. Emotionally rich messages are viewed as genuine reflections of real experience rather than persuasive promotion (Hua et al., 2024; Tsiakali, 2018). This authenticity fosters trust by reducing perceived manipulation and signaling transparency. Reviews, vlogs, and visual posts that reveal personal enjoyment and affective tone are judged as honest and credible (Adeloye et al., 2021; Lo & Yao, 2019). In digital communities, trust develops through repeated exposure to authentic emotional expressions that align with peer expectations (Kitsios et al., 2021). Research on Generation Z audiences demonstrates that emotional resonance enhances perceptions of credibility toward both influencers and peer content (Ghaly, 2023; Correia et al., 2025).

*H₂: Emotional UGC has a positive effect on Trust in UGC.*

Emotional UGC Affects Tourist Visit Intention

Affective arousal resulting from emotionally engaging user content generates motivational readiness to act. Positive emotional reactions derived from peers' experiences increase the desire to visit destinations to recreate similar enjoyment (Das et al., 2024; Adeloye et al., 2021). Vlogs and visual storytelling heighten engagement and mental simulation of the experience, which leads to stronger behavioral intention (Cheng et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2021). Research on digital natives confirms that emotional resonance in social media content

influences destination selection more effectively than factual information (Correia et al., 2025; Nguyen & Tong, 2022).

*H₃: Emotional UGC has a positive effect on Visit Intention.*

Factual UGC Affects Destination Image

Factual user content provides descriptive clarity and cognitive assurance regarding accessibility, price, facilities, and services. This information shapes the cognitive dimension of destination image by reducing uncertainty and facilitating accurate evaluation (Kim et al., 2017; Marine-Roig, 2017). UGC serves as an informational resource for travel decisions and contributes directly to image formation (Luo & Zhong, 2014; Li et al., 2008). Reliable and informative UGC enhances perceived usefulness and fosters a structured, favorable destination image (Das et al., 2024; Asyraff et al., 2024). Consistent factual updates on activities, cultural events, and facilities help tourists visualize destination attributes clearly (Lin et al., 2021; Kladou & Mavragani, 2015).

*H₄: Factual UGC has a positive effect on Destination Image.*

Factual UGC Affects Trust in UGC

Trust in user content strengthens when users observe consistency, verifiable information, and accuracy across multiple reviews. Credibility emerges from detail, transparency, and alignment of user experiences (Ayeh et al., 2013; Lo & Yao, 2019). Transparent factual information enhances perceived integrity of the source and increases platform reliability (Kitsios et al., 2021). Factual UGC, such as travel routes, pricing, or historical facts, signals objectivity and thus fosters user confidence (Agarwal, 2020). Prior knowledge and verifiable data enhance belief in user-provided information during the decision-making process (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004).

*H₅: Factual UGC has a positive effect on Trust in UGC.*

Factual UGC Affects Tourist Visit Intention

High-quality factual information reduces perceived risk and facilitates informed travel planning, which enhances visit intention (Das et al., 2024; Nguyen & Tong, 2022). Empirical research shows that credible and detailed user information positively influences attitudes and behavioral decisions (Jalilvand et al., 2012; Doosti et al., 2016). Factual UGC conveys essential cognitive cues that aid comparison and evaluation of destinations, thereby promoting confidence in choice and willingness to visit (Khasawneh et al., 2022; Piramanayagam et al., 2021).

*H₆: Factual UGC has a positive effect on Tourist Visit Intention.*

Destination Image Affects Tourist Visit Intention

Destination image integrates cognitive beliefs and affective impressions that guide behavioral responses. Studies consistently confirm that a favorable image increases intention to visit and revisit (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Kim & Perdue, 2011; Kanwel et al., 2019). The image includes safety, hospitality, environmental quality, and service excellence (Pratt et al., 2016). Empirical studies show that destinations with positive and distinctive images are more likely to be chosen, especially among young travelers influenced by UGC (Assaker & O'Connor, 2021; Chaulagain et al., 2019; Setiawan et al., 2021). In Indonesia, destination image

mediates the relationship between online communication and visit intention (Nadiastuti et al., 2025).

*H₇: Destination Image Has A Positive Effect On Visit Intention.*

Trust in UGC Affects Destination Image

Trust operates as a cognitive-affective amplifier, enhancing how individuals process and interpret destination cues. When travelers perceive peer content as credible, they perceive the destination more positively and form richer mental imagery (Ayeh et al., 2013; Kitsios et al., 2021). In cultural and heritage tourism, perceived authenticity and trust enhance emotional attachment and reinforce image quality (Hua et al., 2024). Trust mediates the relationship between online word-of-mouth and destination image (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Setiawan et al., 2021).

*H₈: Trust in UGC positively affects Destination Image.*

Trust in UGC Affects Tourist Visit Intention

Trust translates perception into behavioral commitment by reducing uncertainty and strengthening confidence in travel decisions. Confidence in the honesty and accuracy of peer content increases willingness to act upon recommendations (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Das et al., 2024). Empirical studies show that trust in UGC and platforms predicts stronger intention outcomes across generations, including Generation Z (Kitsios et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2021; Hua et al., 2024).

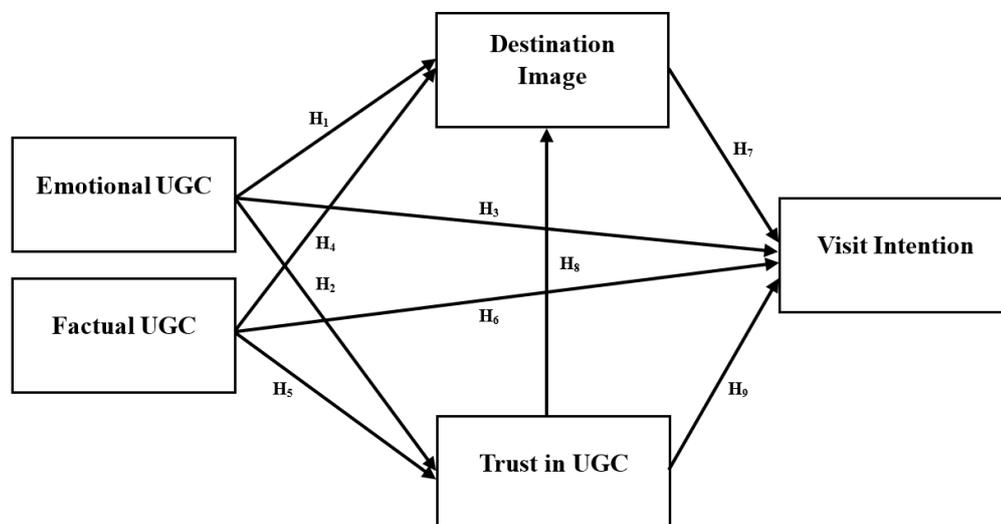*H9: Trust in UGC has a positive effect on Visit Intention.*



**Figure 1.** Research Model
Source(s): Author (2025)

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative approach to examine the influence of user-generated content on Generation Z tourists' visit intention toward Geopark Kebumen. The quantitative design enables statistical testing of causal relationships within the Stimulus Organism Response framework, in which factual and emotional User Generated Content act as external

stimuli that influence trust in User Generated Content and destination image as organismic variables, leading to visit intention as the behavioral response.

The population in this study consisted of Generation Z individuals who actively use social media and have a potential interest in visiting the geopark. Sampling employed a nonprobability purposive technique that selects participants based on specific criteria and their ability to provide relevant information (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019). The criteria for inclusion were respondents aged between thirteen and twenty-eight years who fall within Generation Z (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025), active users of Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube, and individuals who had previously searched for tourism information through User Generated Content. The sample size followed the recommendation of Hair et al. (2021), which states that the minimum number of respondents should be 10 times the most significant number of arrows pointing to a latent variable in the PLS path model. Because the model contains nine relationships, the minimum sample size required was ninety respondents, and the final data exceeded that number.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via social media and personal networks. The instrument consisted of two sections. The first section contained demographic questions, and the second section measured five primary constructs: factual User Generated Content, emotional User Generated Content, trust in User Generated Content, destination image, and visit intention. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from one (Strongly Disagree) to five (Strongly Agree). Measurement indicators were adapted from prior validated studies. Emotional and factual User Generated Content items were adapted from Xu et al. (2021), trust in User Generated Content from Kaosiri et al. (2019), destination image from Pratt et al. (2016), and visit intention from Bandinelli (2020). Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling with SmartPLS version 4. This method was selected because it is suitable for predictive and exploratory models that include multiple latent constructs and complex relationships (Hair et al., 2018; Henseler et al., 2014). The analysis consisted of two stages: assessment of the measurement model and evaluation of the structural model. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was used to assess the significance of the hypotheses.

**Table 1. Construct Measurement**

| Construct | Code | Indicator | Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| | EUGC1 | User-generated content gives the impression that Geopark Kebumen is a wonderful destination. | |
| | EUGC2 | User-generated content conveys that Geopark Kebumen has high historical value. | |
| | EUGC3 | User-generated content increases my interest in the natural beauty of Geopark Kebumen. | |
| Emotional (EUGC) UGC | EUGC4 | User-generated content makes me feel that I really like Geopark Kebumen. | Xu et al. (2021) |
| | EUGC5 | User-generated content has strengthened my desire to visit Geopark Kebumen. | |
| | EUGC6 | User-generated content has sparked my interest in visiting educational attractions in Geopark Kebumen. | |
| | EUGC7 | User-generated content convinces me that Geopark Kebumen is worth visiting. | |
| Factual (FUGC) UGC | FUGC1 | User-generated content provides information about whether Geopark Kebumen is an international-class tourism destination. | Xu et al. (2021) |
| | FUGC2 | User-generated content gives me a deeper understanding of the history of Geopark Kebumen. | |

| Construct | Code | Indicator | Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| Trust in UGC (TUGC) | FUGC3 | User-generated content provides updated information on activities and events at Geopark Kebumen, including local food and cultural experiences. | Kaosiri et al. (2019) |
| | TUGC1 | Comments about Geopark Kebumen on social media reflect real conditions. | |
| | TUGC2 | Photos or videos of Geopark Kebumen on social media represent the actual situation. | |
| | TUGC3 | Through user-generated content shared on social media, I can understand what to expect before visiting Geopark Kebumen. | |
| | TUGC4 | I believe that others' experiences of Geopark Kebumen shared on social media are reliable. | |
| | TUGC5 | After reading or viewing comments and images on social media, I feel confident that Geopark Kebumen will meet my expectations. | |
| Destination Image (DI) | DI1 | Geopark Kebumen is a safe tourist destination. | Pratt et al. (2016) |
| | DI2 | The people at Geopark Kebumen are friendly. | |
| | DI3 | Services at Geopark Kebumen are of good quality. | |
| | DI4 | Geopark Kebumen is a clean tourist destination. | |
| | DI5 | It is easy to communicate with residents at Geopark Kebumen. | |
| | DI6 | Traveling around Geopark Kebumen feels comfortable. | |
| | DI7 | It is easy to find accommodation within the Geopark Kebumen area. | |
| | DI8 | Travel information about Geopark Kebumen is easy to obtain. | |
| | DI9 | Geopark Kebumen has a pleasant climate. | |
| | DI10 | Geopark Kebumen has beautiful natural scenery. | |
| Visit Intention (VI) | VI1 | I am confident that I will visit Geopark Kebumen in the future, as shown in the content. | Bandinelli (2020) |
| | VI2 | I prefer visiting Geopark Kebumen to other destinations. | |
| | VI3 | If everything goes as planned, I will arrange a visit to Geopark Kebumen in the future. | |
| | VI4 | When I see content about Geopark Kebumen, I feel motivated to visit the destination. | |

**Source(s):** *Author (2025)*

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## Quantitative Result

The research was conducted from 3 February 2025 to 20 July 2025 through the distribution of online questionnaires to Generation Z respondents who are active social media users and potential visitors of Geopark Kebumen. A total of 315 valid responses were collected, exceeding the minimum sample size requirement recommended by Hair et al. (2021), which states that the minimum sample size in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) should be at least ten times the most significant number of arrows pointing toward a latent variable.

The respondents consisted predominantly of young adults aged 21 to 24 years (44.4%), followed by those aged 17 to 20 years (34.9%) and 25 to 28 years (20.6%), confirming that the study participants represent the productive age segment typical of Generation Z. In terms of gender distribution, female respondents accounted for 52.4% and male respondents for 47.6%, aligning with findings that women are generally more active in producing and consuming digital content across social platforms (Cheung et al., 2020; Abbasi et al., 2022). The majority of respondents were students (69.8%), followed by private employees (17.5%) and government employees (7.9%), reflecting the demographic structure of Generation Z, which is composed mainly of university students and early-career professionals. Instagram emerged as the most frequently used social media platform (41.3%), followed by TikTok (31.7%), YouTube (22.2%), and Facebook (4.8%), consistent with research showing that Generation Z favors visually oriented and short-form video platforms (Yamagishi et al., 2023; Ghaly, 2023). Regarding

usage intensity, 69.8% of respondents reported spending more than 3 hours per day on social media, confirming their high digital engagement and connectivity —a characteristic widely discussed in studies of digital-native consumers (Correia et al., 2025; Nguyen & Tong, 2022). Regarding tourism experience, 71.4% of respondents had never visited Geopark Kebumen, while 28.6% had visited the site, indicating that most participants are potential tourists whom User Generated Content may influence in forming their visit intentions. Concerning the perceived influence of User Generated Content, 50.8% stated that they were strongly influenced, 39.7% moderately influenced, and 9.5% slightly influenced, confirming that UGC plays a crucial role in shaping tourist decisions, especially among Generation Z audiences who rely heavily on peer-created digital information (Lam et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2023). The respondents were geographically diverse, with 31.7% from Kebumen Regency, 30.2% from other cities or regencies within Central Java, and 38.1% from outside the province, ensuring broad representativeness of both local and non-local perceptions. Overall, these descriptive results highlight that the sample effectively represents Generation Z's demographic and behavioral profile as digitally active, emotionally expressive, and visually oriented consumers, thereby providing a robust empirical foundation for further testing of the proposed Stimulus Organism Response model linking emotional and factual User Generated Content, trust, destination image, and visit intention. A complete breakdown of respondent characteristics is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Respondent Characteristics (n = 315)**

| Characteristic | Category | Frequency (Person) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 17–20 years | 110 | 34.9 |
| Age | 21–24 years | 140 | 44.4 |
| | 25–28 years | 65 | 20.6 |
| Gender | Male | 150 | 47.6 |
| | Female | 165 | 52.4 |
| | Student | 220 | 69.8 |
| Occupation Status | Private Employee | 55 | 17.5 |
| | Government Employee | 25 | 7.9 |
| | Others | 15 | 4.8 |
| | Instagram | 130 | 41.3 |
| Most Frequently Used Social Media | TikTok | 100 | 31.7 |
| | YouTube | 70 | 22.2 |
| | Facebook | 15 | 4.8 |
| | Every day (>3 hours) | 220 | 69.8 |
| Frequency of Accessing Social Media | Every day (<3 hours) | 70 | 22.2 |
| | 3–5 times per week | 25 | 7.9 |
| Travel Experience to Geopark Kebumen | Have visited | 90 | 28.6 |
| | Have not visited | 225 | 71.4 |
| Influence of User-Generated Content on Visit Intention | Strongly influenced | 160 | 50.8 |
| | Moderately influenced | 125 | 39.7 |
| | Slightly influenced | 30 | 9.5 |
| | Kebumen Regency | 100 | 31.7 |
| Domicile | Other cities/regencies in Central Java | 95 | 30.2 |
| | Outside Central Java Province | 120 | 38.1 |

*Source(s): Author (2025)*

Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model was assessed to determine convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability of all constructs. Convergent validity was verified through the factor loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), following the thresholds proposed by Hair et al. (2018; 2021). As shown in Table 3, all indicator loadings exceeded 0.70, confirming item adequacy. The factual user-generated content (FUGC) construct showed loadings between 0.753 and 0.847, with α = 0.787, CR =

0.732, and AVE = 0.631. The emotional user-generated content (EUGC) construct demonstrated superior reliability (α = 0.944, CR = 0.934, AVE = 0.753), while the trust in user-generated content (TUGC) construct achieved α = 0.853, CR = 0.879, and AVE = 0.711. The destination image (DIE) construct recorded α = 0.827, CR = 0.829, and AVE = 0.709, and visit intention (VI) exhibited the highest reliability with α = 0.899, CR = 0.821, and AVE = 0.858. Since all AVE values were greater than 0.50 and CR values surpassed 0.70, all variables met the criteria for convergent validity and internal consistency. Therefore, the measurement indicators for each construct were valid and reliable for further structural testing (Hair et al., 2018).

**Table 3. Measurement Model Evaluation**

| Item | Loadings | α | CR | AVE |
|------|----------|-----|-----|-----|
| FUGC1 | 0.753 | 0.787 | 0.732 | 0.631 |
| FUGC2 | 0.847 | | | |
| FUGC3 | 0.781 | | | |
| EUGC1 | 0.752 | 0.944 | 0.934 | 0.753 |
| EUGC2 | 0.731 | | | |
| EUGC3 | 0.818 | | | |
| EUGC4 | 0.785 | | | |
| EUGC5 | 0.804 | | | |
| EUGC6 | 0.844 | | | |
| EUGC7 | 0.839 | | | |
| TUGC1 | 0.710 | 0.853 | 0.879 | 0.711 |
| TUGC2 | 0.761 | | | |
| TUGC3 | 0.839 | | | |
| TUGC4 | 0.843 | | | |
| TUGC5 | 0.825 | | | |
| DIE1 | 0.781 | 0.827 | 0.829 | 0.709 |
| DIE2 | 0.698 | | | |
| DIE3 | 0.813 | | | |
| DIE4 | 0.790 | | | |
| DIE5 | 0.799 | | | |
| DIE6 | 0.743 | | | |
| DIE7 | 0.773 | | | |
| DIE8 | 0.755 | | | |
| DIE9 | 0.711 | | | |
| DIE10 | 0.786 | | | |
| VI1 | 0.888 | 0.899 | 0.821 | 0.858 |
| VI2 | 0.874 | | | |
| VI3 | 0.887 | | | |
| VI4 | 0.773 | | | |

*a: Cronbach's alpha; CR: composite reliability; AVE: average variance extracted*

*DIE : destination image*

*EUGC: emotional user-generated content;*

*FUGC: factual user-generated content;*

*TUGC: trust in user-generated content;*

*VI: visit intention*

***Source(s):*** *Authors' data generated from SmartPLS (2025)*

Discriminant validity was assessed through two approaches, the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT). The Fornell–Larcker criterion compares the square root of each construct's AVE with inter-construct correlations. Since all constructs exhibited square roots of AVE between 0.793 and 0.912, which exceeded their inter-construct correlations, discriminant validity was satisfied.

### Table 4. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) Result

|      | DI    | EUGC  | FUGC  | TUGC  | TUGC  |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| DI   | 0.901 |       |       |       |       |
| EUGC | 0.412 | 0.872 |       |       |       |
| FUGC | 0.387 | 0.521 | 0.854 |       |       |
| TUGC | 0.298 | 0.411 | 0.376 | 0.793 |       |
| VI   | 0.354 | 0.332 | 0.401 | 0.423 | 0.912 |

*Source(s): Authors' data generated from SmartPLS (2025)*

The HTMT ratio, shown in Table 4, was then applied as a more stringent measure (Henseler et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2021). All HTMT values were below the 0.85 threshold, with the highest ratio observed between EUGC and FUGC (0.521). These results confirm that each construct is empirically distinct and complementary to multicollinearity. Therefore, the model meets both convergent and discriminant validity requirements.

### Table 5. R-Square Result

|                   | $R^2$ | Adjusted $R^2$ |
|-------------------|-------|----------------|
| Destination Image | 0.517 | 0.503          |
| Trust in UGC      | 0.428 | 0.412          |
| Visit Intention   | 0.592 | 0.581          |

*Source(s): Authors' data generated from SmartPLS (2025)*

Following the validation of the measurement model, the structural model was analyzed using the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS 3 to examine the hypothesized relationships. The coefficient of determination ($R^2$) in Table 5 indicated strong explanatory power, with destination image (DI) at $R^2 = 0.517$ (adjusted $R^2 = 0.503$), trust in UGC at $R^2 = 0.428$, and visit intention (VI) at $R^2 = 0.592$. These results suggest that emotional and factual UGC, along with trust in UGC, explain 51.7% of the variance in destination image. In comparison, 59.2% of the variance in visit intention is explained by destination image, trust in UGC, and emotional UGC.

The path coefficients for the structural equation model can be seen in **Figure 2**:
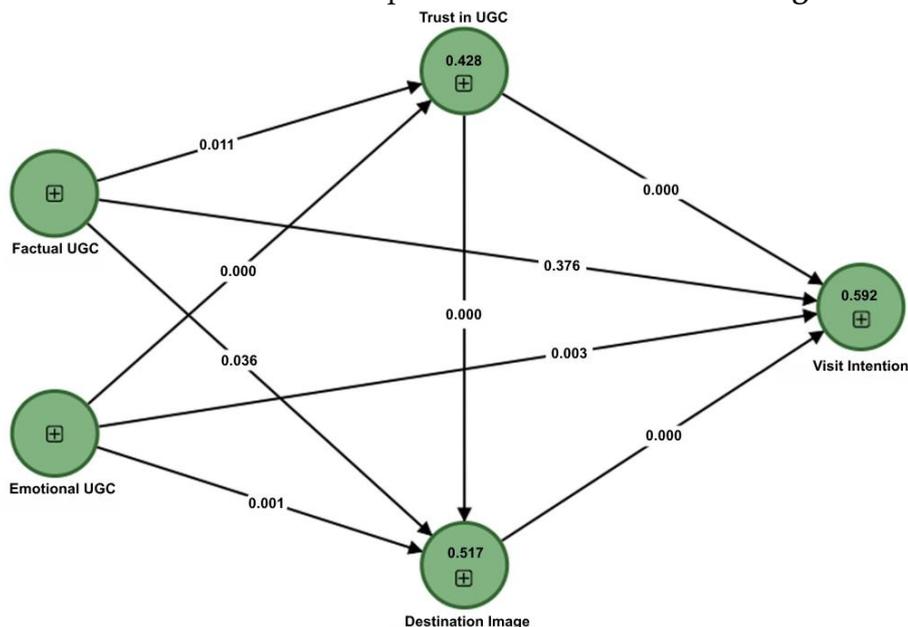


**Figure 2. Structural Equation Modeling**
*Source(s): Authors' data generated from SmartPLS (2025)*

## Table 6. Hypothesis Testing

| Hypothesis | Relationship | Path Coefficient (β) | Nilai-t | p-value | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1 | Emotional UGC → Destination Image | 0.224 | 4.112 | 0.001 | Supported |
| H2 | Emotional UGC → Trust in UGC | 0.387 | 6.245 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H3 | Emotional UGC → Visit Intention | 0.182 | 3.018 | 0.003 | Supported |
| H4 | Factual UGC → Destination Image | 0.098 | 2.101 | 0.036 | Supported |
| H5 | Factual UGC → Trust in UGC | 0.134 | 2.554 | 0.011 | Supported |
| H6 | Factual UGC → Visit Intention | 0.041 | 0.887 | 0.376 | *Not Supported* |
| H7 | Destination Image → Visit Intention | 0.203 | 3.976 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H8 | Trust in UGC → Destination Image | 0.421 | 7.892 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H9 | Trust in UGC → Visit Intention | 0.368 | 6.731 | 0.000 | Supported |

*Source(s): Authors' data generated from SmartPLS (2025)*

As shown in Table 6, eight of nine hypotheses were statistically significant. Emotional UGC had a positive and significant effect on destination image ($\beta$ = 0.224, t = 4.112, p = 0.001), trust in UGC ($\beta$ = 0.387, t = 6.245, p < 0.001), and visit intention ($\beta$ = 0.182, t = 3.018, p = 0.003), supporting H1–H3. Factual UGC positively influenced destination image ($\beta$ = 0.098, t = 2.101, p = 0.036) and trust in UGC ($\beta$ = 0.134, t = 2.554, p = 0.011), supporting H4 and H5, but its relationship with visit intention was not significant ($\beta$ = 0.041, t = 0.887, p = 0.376), indicating that H6 was rejected. Destination image had a significant impact on visit intention ($\beta$ = 0.203, t = 3.976, p < 0.001), confirming H7. Trust in UGC strongly influenced both destination image ($\beta$ = 0.421, t = 7.892, p < 0.001) and visit intention ($\beta$ = 0.368, t = 6.731, p < 0.001), supporting H8 and H9. Collectively, these findings highlight that trust in UGC serves as the most dominant predictor of visit intention, followed by emotional UGC and destination image, reinforcing the central role of authenticity and credibility in the Stimulus Organism Response framework for explaining Generation Z tourists' decision-making toward Geopark Kebumen.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis confirms the central role of user-generated content in shaping Generation Z tourists' behavior toward Geopark Kebumen. Emotionally user-generated content exerts consistent positive effects on destination image, trust in user-generated content, and visit intention. This pattern aligns with the Stimulus Organism Response view in which emotionally expressive stimuli trigger affective appraisal and vivid mental imagery that consolidate internal states into behavioral readiness. Visual narratives in photos, short videos, vlogs, and reels cultivate enjoyment, empathy, and identification that enrich the affective layer of destination image and convert attention into intention, a mechanism that prior studies documented across platforms and markets (Lam et al., 2020; Correia et al., 2025; Kim & Stepchenkova, 2015; Abbasi et al., 2022; Eman & Refaie, 2023; Adeloye et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2023). The current evidence confirms that this affective route is salient for digital natives who value authenticity and peer presence in travel decision processes.

Emotionally, user-generated content also strengthens trust in it. Respondents appear to read sincere emotion as a proxy for authenticity and low persuasive intent. Trust increases when audiences perceive that creators disclose genuine feeling that emerges from real experience rather than promotion. Prior work reached the same conclusion in settings involving cultural heritage and community interaction, where authenticity and trust go hand in hand and elevate participation (Hua et al., 2024; Tsiakali, 2018; Ayeh et al., 2013; Lo & Yao, 2019; Kitsios et al., 2021; Ghaly, 2023). In the present context, the strongest standardized path to visit intention involves trust, indicating that affect, by itself, is not the terminal driver. Emotion appears to work through trust formation and image consolidation before translating

into intention, a sequence consistent with a staged organismic process in the Stimulus-Organism-Response logic.

Factual user-generated content improves destination image and trust in user-generated content, yet shows no direct effect on visit intention. This pattern suggests a cognitive route that supports evaluation rather than immediate action. Accurate detail about access, cost, facilities, and historical value improves clarity and reduces ambiguity, which strengthens the cognitive layer of image and signals credibility of the source, as documented in research on information quality and online travel reviews (Kim et al., 2017; Marine Roig, 2019; Luo & Zhong, 2014; Li et al., 2008; Das et al., 2024; Asyraff et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2021; Kladou & Mavragani, 2015). The absence of a direct link between factual content and intention replicates a typical result in digital tourism, where cognition prepares action. At the same time, affective and trust-based mechanisms trigger the conative response. Studies on electronic word of mouth and decision formation also reported that detailed information often influences intention indirectly through attitude, trust, or image rather than through a direct path (Jalilvand et al., 2012; Doosti et al., 2016). For Generation Z audiences, this indirect pattern is plausible because planning begins with fact-checking, while the decision to go is catalyzed by emotional resonance and perceived credibility.

Destination image continues to have a positive effect on visit intention. Respondents report a stronger intention when they ascribe safety, hospitality, service quality, cleanliness, travel convenience, and attractive scenery to the geopark. These dimensions correspond to widely used image facets in tourism evaluation and match the measurement structure adopted in this study (Pratt et al., 2016). The significant image-to-intention link agrees with cumulative evidence that a favorable image elevates intention and revisit likelihood in domestic and international settings (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Kim & Perdue, 2011; Kanwel et al., 2019; Chaulagain et al., 2019). Indonesian evidence linking online communication to intention through images provides additional support for this pathway and strengthens the external validity of the present findings (Setiawan et al., 2021; Nadiastuti et al., 2025).

Trust in user-generated content emerges as a pivotal construct with strong effects on both destination image and visit intention. Confidence in the honesty and accuracy of peer narratives functions as a cognitive affective amplifier. Once trust is present, audiences process cues more positively and form richer imagery that elevates choice confidence and readiness to act. The current results mirror findings that platform and reviewer credibility predict intention. That trust mediates the influence of electronic word of mouth on image and behavior in medical and leisure tourism, as well as in Indonesian samples (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Setiawan et al., 2021). The magnitude of the trust paths in this study positions trust as the most influential antecedent of intention, followed by emotional content and destination image, which is consistent with research on Generation Z that emphasizes authenticity, peer endorsement, and creator credibility as decisive cues in digital choice processes (Yamagishi et al., 2023; Nguyen & Tong, 2022).

The unsupported path from factual user-generated content to visit intention deserves attention. Three explanations fit the current context. First, Geopark Kebumen remains relatively underexposed among respondents. Factual detail may inform, yet not trigger action, when a destination is unfamiliar and lacks widely shared cultural narratives. Second, Generation Z shows a preference for visual, short-form storytelling that elicits emotion and social identification. Factual messages that lack a story structure or a creator's presence may

fail to convert. Third, perceived risk and effort can remain salient despite good information, leaving trust and emotion to carry the final step toward intention. Prior studies indicate that factual cues create perceived usefulness and diagnosticity. At the same time, intention depends on affect, social proof, and credibility signals —a division of labor that the present model captures through the separate roles of emotional content, trust, and image (Kim et al., 2017; Jalilvand et al., 2012).

Theoretical implications follow. The findings validate the Stimulus Organism Response framework for digital tourism by demonstrating that emotional and factual content represent distinct stimuli that feed different organismic states. Emotional content feeds directly and also fosters trust. Factual content feeds cognition and credibility. Trust integrates these inputs and functions as a cross-cutting organismic state that shapes both image and intention. The model therefore extends prior work on user generated content by clarifying the dual content structure and by locating trust as a core driver rather than a peripheral moderator or control, a position that several reviews and empirical studies have encouraged but not consistently demonstrated in a single design (Ayeh et al., 2013; Lam et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2023).

Managerial implications for the geopark are direct. Content strategy should prioritize emotionally resonant storytelling that features authentic voices of visitors, volunteers, and local guides. Short videos that capture landscape beauty, learning moments, and cultural interactions should be paired with sincere captions that reveal personal feelings and offer practical tips. Trust building requires a visible creator identity, consistent cross-post information, and community engagement that responds to questions and corrects errors. The official accounts should curate and repost credible user stories, tag creators, and provide links to official booking and education pages to close the information and action loop. Factual content remains necessary. It should be embedded in story formats and creator-hosted content to avoid an informational tone that does not convert. Collaboration with student communities and campus clubs can expand the pool of credible creators for the Generation Z audience. The present evidence suggests that such a combined strategy will elevate trust and image and produce measurable gains in visit intention.

Limitations suggest future work. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference over time. Experimental or longitudinal designs would strengthen claims about the sequencing of stimuli and organismic states. The model did not formally test mediation, although the pattern of coefficients suggests indirect effects from factual content to intention through trust and image, and from emotional content to intention through trust. Future research can extend the analysis by explicitly testing for indirect effects and by conducting heterogeneity checks across prior visit experience, gender, and platform preference, which the descriptive profile indicates are relevant segments for the geopark.

## CONCLUSION

The research confirms that user-generated content plays a decisive role in shaping Generation Z tourists' behavioral intentions toward Geopark Kebumen. The analysis demonstrates that emotional and factual content exert different yet complementary influences within the Stimulus Organism Response mechanism. Emotionally user-generated content functions as an affective stimulus that enhances destination image, builds trust, and directly increases visit intention. Factual user-generated content contributes to cognitive clarity and reliability, improving trust and image formation, but lacks direct motivational power to

generate immediate behavioral intention. Trust in user-generated content emerges as the strongest determinant of both destination image and visit intention, highlighting that authenticity and perceived credibility remain the foundation of digital persuasion. Destination image also mediates perception and behavioral readiness, confirming that cognitive and affective evaluations translate into concrete travel plans. Collectively, these findings validate the Stimulus Organism Response framework for digital tourism behavior and clarify the dual nature of user-generated content as both informational and emotional stimuli that trigger cognitive affective organismic states culminating in conative responses.

The results have several theoretical implications. The study extends the existing literature on user-generated content by integrating emotional and factual dimensions within a unified behavioral model. The evidence strengthens the argument that emotional resonance and cognitive reliability represent distinct but interdependent pathways to behavioral intention. The findings also refine understanding of trust as a mediating organismic process rather than a peripheral moderator, demonstrating that belief in authenticity and credibility transforms perception into intention. Furthermore, the study provides empirical validation of the Stimulus Organism Response framework in an emerging geotourism context, confirming its applicability beyond conventional leisure destinations. The results, therefore, contribute to the growing body of research on Generation Z tourism behavior, social media marketing, and user-generated content, particularly in developing-country settings where digital engagement shapes sustainable destination growth.

From a managerial perspective, the findings offer practical guidance for destination managers, tourism authorities, and local stakeholders in developing promotional strategies for Geopark Kebumen. Managers should prioritize emotionally engaging storytelling that communicates authentic visitor experiences through visual narratives such as short videos, reels, and vlogs. Content strategies must emphasize sincerity, local identity, and educational value rather than polished marketing imagery. Collaboration with micro influencers, student creators, and local communities can increase the authenticity and credibility of user narratives while simultaneously expanding online visibility. Destination managers should also ensure that factual information about access, accommodation, safety, and educational programs is accurate, up to date, and embedded within emotional storytelling to maintain a balance between affective appeal and cognitive reliability. Enhancing trust requires transparency, active interaction with audiences, and consistent response to user feedback across social media channels. Integrating user-generated content into official promotional platforms through reposts, community features, and content co-creation initiatives can strengthen engagement and bridge online exposure with actual visitation. In addition, partnerships with universities and local tourism associations can be leveraged to train young creators to produce credible, emotionally resonant digital content that aligns with the geopark's sustainable tourism mission.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study adopts a cross-sectional quantitative design, which limits inference about causal dynamics over time. Longitudinal or experimental research would better capture temporal sequences in the Stimulus Organism Response process. Second, the study relies on self-reported perception data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias or situational mood at the time of response. Combining self-report with behavioral tracking or content analysis of actual posts could strengthen measurement validity. Third, the sample focuses exclusively on Generation Z respondents in

Indonesia, limiting generalizability to other demographic or cultural groups. Comparative studies across generations and destinations could test the model's robustness in different social media ecosystems. Fourth, the study did not include tests of mediation and moderation beyond the model's direct paths. Future research could examine whether trust and destination image mediate the relationship between emotional and factual content and visit intention or whether platform type, prior experience, or cultural values moderate these effects. Finally, although the study uses Geopark Kebumen as a representative case of geotourism, other natural and cultural heritage destinations may present different digital engagement patterns. Expanding research across multiple geoparks and ecotourism sites would enhance external validity and provide comparative insight into sustainable destination marketing practices.

Despite these limitations, the study provides an integrated empirical explanation of how user-generated content drives behavioral intention among Generation Z tourists. It offers both theoretical advances in modeling digital stimuli and practical guidance for transforming social media engagement into sustainable visitation. Strengthening authenticity, trust, and emotional storytelling in digital promotion is essential for increasing the competitiveness and visibility of Geopark Kebumen and similar emerging destinations in Indonesia's evolving digital tourism landscape.

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