

How Ai-Generated and User-Generated Content Shape Travel Intention: The Mediating Role of Tourist Attitude in Soft Adventure Tourism

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Abstract. This study investigates the impact of AI-generated content (AIGC) and user-generated content (UGC) on travel intention (TI) toward soft adventure tourism, with tourist attitude (TA) as a mediator. Using an online survey of 456 Vietnamese respondents interested in soft adventure tourism, the proposed research model was analyzed through partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4.1. The findings reveal that both AIGC and UGC significantly influence TI through TA, with UGC exerting a stronger effect. Additionally, UGC has a direct positive impact on TI, whereas the direct effect of AIGC on TI is not statistically significant. The research results confirm the partial mediating role of TA in the relationship between UGC and TI in the soft adventure tourism. The study provides empirical evidence that UGC remains a more reliable source of information than AIGC and proposes practical management implications to help businesses optimize UGC and AIGC to increase TI.

Keywords: AI-generated content; soft adventure tourism; tourist attitude; travel intention; user-generated content

1. Introduction

According to Grand View Research (2025), the global adventure tourism market is estimated at approximately US\$464.3 billion, and it is expected to exceed US\$1,700 billion by 2033. Thus, the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of this market during the 2026-2033 period is approximately 18.6%, an attractive growth rate compared to traditional tourism segments. Within this segment, the market share of hard adventure tourism is significantly lower than that of soft adventure tourism, which accounts for 65% (Grand View Research, 2025). This disparity can be explained by the fundamental differences between the two types of tourism. Specifically, hard adventure involves high risk levels, physical demands, and technical skills (Mason et al., 2016). In contrast, soft adventure refers to activities that are lower-risk and more accessible (Rantala et al., 2018), such as trekking, canoeing, camping, safaris and wildlife viewing, making them suitable for a diverse range of tourist groups (Bichler & Peters, 2021). Overall, soft adventure strikes a balance between challenge and safety and does not require specialized skills or a high level of physical fitness. Therefore, this is a preferable choice of mass-market approach, especially for family groups with young children and older people (Pomfret, 2021).

Early studies on soft adventure tourism often prioritized the appealing characteristics of this type of tourism, such as novelty (Williams & Soutar, 2009), connection with nature (Hunt & Harbor, 2019), flow experience (Tsaur et al., 2013), or challenge (Tsaur et al., 2020), in motivating tourists' intention to participate. These factors help create unique and highly personalized experiences, thereby naturally increasing the desire to participate in this type of tourism. Later, studies have expanded to examine the extent to which intrinsic factors, such as personal motivation (Sato et al., 2018), family motivation (Jamal et al., 2019), and perceived value (Ha et al., 2024) influence the behavioral intentions of tourists. However, most studies to date have not focused on the role of external factors. Especially in the growth of digital media, where online content sources can powerfully influence tourists' decisions.

Thus, user-generated content (UGC) has emerged as a necessary source in the pre-trip process, which influences tourists' perceptions and behavioral intentions both directly and indirectly. UGC shared by previous tourists in various formats, such as videos, photos, and after-trip reviews, could help reduce uncertainty when evaluating and selecting a destination (Aboalghanam et al., 2025; Khasawneh et al., 2022). This is further reinforced by empirical evidence that exposure to UGC can shape destination image, attitudes, and intentions through envy, desire, and the perceived vividness of the experience (Nguyen & Tong, 2023; Wijaya et al., 2025). However, studies on UGC in adventure tourism remain limited, especially those employing quantitative methods. In the adventure tourism literature, studies by Liu & Chong (2023) and Luong (2025) used only qualitative approaches to explore the role of social media in behavioral intentions, and both called for the use of quantitative methods in future research.

In digital marketing, recent breakthroughs in artificial intelligence have given rise to a new type of digital content: AI-generated content (AIGC), created by integrating human prompts with deep learning models (Zi-yang, 2024). Initial studies have begun to examine the role of AIGC in tourism, focusing on its ability to generate content efficiently, offer personalized information, and support tourists' decision-making processes (Li et al., 2025; Luo et al., 2025; Seo et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2026). However, these studies investigate the effects of AIGC in isolation, treating it as a single predictor of attitude or behavioral intention without considering its relationship with other digital content sources. As a result, there remains a lack of empirical evidence on both AIGC and UGC in behavioral intentions of soft adventure tourism.

Hence, two significant gaps currently exist: Firstly, there is a lack of quantitative research on the role of UGC and tourist behavior in soft adventure tourism. Secondly, existing studies on AIGC primarily treat it as an independent factor, without simultaneously examining the combined effects of both AIGC and UGC on TA and TI. Therefore, this study was conducted to address the aforementioned

research gap by focusing on answering the following research questions: (1) How do AIGC and UGC affect TI in soft adventure tourism? (2) What role does TA play in the relationship between AIGC, UGC, and TI? and (3) Do AIGC and UGC differ in their direct and indirect influence on TI? To address these questions, this study aims to examine the simultaneous effects of AIGC and UGC on TA and TI, and to compare their direct and indirect influences within a unified research model.

2. Theoretical Backgrounds and Hypotheses Development

2.1. AI-generated content

AI-generated content (AIGC) refers to digital content created by artificial intelligence systems, mainly through deep learning models that generate new content instead of simply analyzing or merely copying existing data (HU Zi-yang, 2024; Li et al., 2025). This technology can generate different forms of content such as text, images, audio and video, which is a huge breakthrough for artificial intelligence (Shin et al., 2026). Therefore, AIGC is considered a branch of generative AI, capable of creating new content by recognizing and rearranging learned data patterns (Giri et al., 2026), through a combination of algorithms and human-machine interaction (Li et al., 2025).

One of the key features of AIGC is its ability to generate highly personalized content in various formats based on user context and needs (Shin et al., 2026; Zhang et al., 2024). In addition, AIGC can create content quickly, efficiently, and cost-effectively by automating the creation process and leveraging big data (Seo et al., 2025). This technology can also mimic human creative thinking, thereby creating engaging and highly interactive content (Giri et al., 2026). It can be seen that AIGC is more standardized and objective, and allows for real-time content creation through user-system interaction (Zhang et al., 2026).

In the tourism sector, AIGC enables the creation of highly personalized, interactive content through co-creation between humans and AI, thereby enhancing the tourist experience (Yang & Liu, 2025). Moreover, AIGC plays a crucial role in supporting decision-making by quickly and concisely synthesizing tourism information in an easily understandable, accessible format (Z. Li & Bang, 2026). In addition, AIGC contributes to innovation in tourism marketing by creating flexible content that addresses limitations in real-world data and content production costs (Seo et al., 2025).

2.2. User-generated content

In early studies, user-generated content (UGC) was conceptualized as a form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), in which consumers share favorable or unfavorable information about products and services through online platforms (Bahtar & Muda, 2016). Due to its independence from direct commercial influence, UGC is often perceived as a credible and trustworthy source of information, enabling consumers to make decisions based on the real experiences of other users (Santos, 2022). Up to nowadays, UGC has evolved into a broader form of digital media, encompassing images, videos, and personal experience reviews shared across social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Al-Abdallah & Jumaa, 2022; Colicev et al., 2019).

In terms of format, short videos with rich audio-visual elements and immersive storytelling help convey experiences vividly and facilitate easy interaction with other users, making them favored for sharing in online communities (Wang et al., 2025). Especially in the tourism sector, UGC is widely available on social media platforms and plays a crucial role in providing information and shaping tourists' search behavior (Liu et al., 2023). Additionally, UGC also appears in the form of reviews, comments, and shared experiences on platforms such as TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and Booking.com, where tourists record and share their real-life experiences (Li & Bang, 2026; Nguyen & Tong, 2023).

2.3. Tourist attitude

Tourist attitude (TA) is an individual's overall evaluation of a travel activity or experience, reflecting a positive or negative orientation prior to actual behavior and influencing how individuals process information to make decisions (Ervina & Octaviany, 2022; Hsu & Huang, 2012). Accordingly, TA plays a central role in shaping tourists' behavioral intentions, as positive or negative reviews of tourism activities directly influence future participation decisions (Dhungana & Sharma, 2024; Lam & Luo, 2023). Importantly, such evaluations are not formed in isolation but are shaped through the process of information acquisition and interpretation prior to the travel experience. In this regard, the rapid development of social media platforms has made short video content increasingly prevalent and accessible, thereby playing a crucial role in shaping TA (Huimin & Albattat, 2024; Qiu et al., 2024).

In adventure tourism, TA becomes more distinct because tourists often form attitudes based on expectations about the specific experiences of this type of tourism. Specifically, factors such as excitement, exhilaration, or the ability to overcome personal limitations, which tourists envision before the trip, can contribute to shaping a positive attitude towards the activity (Amatulli et al., 2021). In particular, in soft adventure tourism, awareness of the balance between challenge level and perceived safety helps tourists perceive the experience as both appealing and accessible, thereby shaping their attitudes. (Tsaur et al., 2020).

2.4. Travel intention

Travel intention (TI), defined as the degree of an individual tourist's preparedness to make a future journey, reflects behavioral intentions before behavior occurs (Hsu & Huang, 2012). TI is considered an important predictor of travel behavior and has been proven to be influenced by perceived value and satisfaction (Williams et al., 2017), personal motivation (Mangoch et al., 2026), eWOM and social media content (Liu et al., 2023). However, the factors influencing TI become even more complex in soft adventure tourism, due to its high-level experiential nature and associated risks.

Regarding soft adventure tourism, TI not only reflects the intention to participate but also reveals how tourists form their pre-trip perceptions and expectations of the core elements of the experience and the service delivery process. Specifically, previous studies have shown that TI is influenced by natural environment (Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016), flow experience (Tsaur et al., 2013), challenge level (Tsaur et al., 2020), perceived safety (Bentley et al., 2004), and professionalism (Cousquer & Beames, 2013). Furthermore, users' information on social platforms also shapes tourist perceptions and influences TI in soft adventure tourism (Liu & Chong, 2023).

2.5. Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory explains how external stimuli influence an organism's internal psychological state, which, in turn, leads to behavioral responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Within this theoretical framework, the organism component reflects both the cognitive and emotional processes through which individuals receive, interpret, and evaluate environmental stimuli. In the context of tourism, the rapid development of digital media has changed how tourists access and process information. Content types such as destination information, marketing communications, and social media content act as stimuli that can influence tourists' perceptions and emotions. Previous studies have applied the SOR framework to explain how online information factors influence tourist behavior (Cheung et al., 2022; Hadrian & Ratnasari, 2025; Yamagishi et al., 2024). These studies show that stimuli from the digital environment affect tourists' cognitive and emotional processes, thereby shaping attitudes and leading to behavioral responses such as travel intentions.

Based on this theoretical framework, the study views UGC and AIGC as stimulus factors. These factors influence the internal psychological state of tourists, which represents the organism component, subsequently affect travel intention, which represents the response component. This approach helps to clearly explain the mechanism by which digital content sources influence tourist behavior in soft

adventure tourism.

3. Hypotheses Development and Research Model

3.1. The relationship between AIGC, tourist attitude and travel intention

The development of AIGC has changed how tourists receive and evaluate travel information, thereby influencing their attitudes towards content and destinations. Recent studies show that AIGC possesses outstanding characteristics, such as intelligence, human-like interaction capabilities, and personalization, which positively impact users' cognitive and emotional experiences (Li et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2023). In other words, when information provided by AIGC is perceived as clear, accurate, and relevant to individual needs, users tend to form more favorable opinions of the content (Zhong et al., 2025). Moreover, AIGC content can evoke emotional responses and foster empathy, thereby increasing the level of psychological connection to the information (J. J. Zhang et al., 2024), which plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' favorable attitudes towards content and destinations (Bai & Yang, 2025).

Besides shaping attitudes, AIGC directly influences tourists' behavioral intentions by supporting the decision-making process as the volume of travel information becomes increasingly diverse and complex. Zhang et al., (2026) noted that AIGC simplifies information search and processing by providing concise, clearly structured content relevant to individual needs, thereby reducing cognitive burden and improving decision-making efficiency. Beyond efficiency, AIGC also demonstrates diversity in presentation and the ability to adapt messages to different contexts, thereby increasing persuasiveness for users (Song et al., 2024). When information is both accessible and highly persuasive, users tend to trust the content and destination, thereby increasing their intention to choose and their travel behavior (Bai & Yang, 2025; Bui et al., 2024).

In summary, AIGC enhances tourists' cognitive and emotional experiences, thereby fostering favorable attitudes toward information and destinations (C. Li et al., 2025; Zhong et al., 2025). Building on this, prior studies indicate that attitude functions as a key mediating mechanism linking perceptions to behavioral intentions. Specifically, Jiang et al. (2022) and Hasan et al. (2023) demonstrate that attitude facilitates the transformation of tourists' evaluations into travel intentions. Therefore, tourist attitude can be considered a critical pathway through which AIGC influences travel intention. Based on the above arguments, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: AIGC has positive impact on tourist attitude

H2: AIGC has positive impact on travel intention

H3: Tourist attitude mediates the relationship between AIGC and travel intention

3.2. The relationship between UGC, tourist attitude and travel intention

In digital tourism, UGC is generated from tourists' real-life experiences and is therefore often considered a more reliable, authentic, and valuable source of information than direct information from businesses (S. Santos & Vasconcelos, 2025; Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2018). Chung et al., (2015) stated that this characteristic enables UGC to serve as electronic word of mouth, strongly shaping users' perceptions and evaluations of destinations. In other terms, when tourists are exposed to reviews, images, and experiences shared by other users, they not only receive information but also form emotional responses and empathy, thereby affecting their attitude towards the destination (Wang et al., 2025; Wijaya et al., 2025).

Beyond shaping tourists' perceptions and attitudes, UGC plays a crucial role in promoting behavioral intentions through decision-making support. Previous studies have shown that UGC provides rich and diverse information in various formats, helping tourists visualize destinations more clearly (Ashfaq et al., 2022; Rathore, 2020). Essentially, UGC is built upon users' real-world

experiences, resulting in high reliability and persuasiveness, which has been proven to significantly influence destination selection (Rajamma et al., 2020; S. Santos & Vasconcelos, 2025). Nguyen & Tong (2023) also indicated that exposure to UGC can directly impact destination selection intentions, and also indirectly through mediating factors such as attitudes and destination images.

The above arguments indicate that when tourists perceive UGC as reliable and authentic, they tend to form positive attitudes towards the destination (Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2018; Wang et al., 2025). This attitude acts as a "bridge," transferring tourists' assessments and feelings into behavioral intentions. It is also consistent with previous studies showing that attitudes mediate the relationship between perception/information and travel intentions (Jiang et al., 2022; Nguyen & Tong, 2023). Based on the above arguments, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: UGC has positive impact on tourist attitude

H5: UGC has positive impact on travel intention

H6: Tourist attitude mediates the relationship between UGC and travel intention

3.3. The relationship between tourist attitude and travel intention

Empirical findings in tourism research consistently demonstrate that TA influences behavioral intentions. In particular, Hasan et al. (2023) found that positive tourists evaluations of a destination are strongly correlated with the willingness to choose it. Similarly, Huimin & Albattat (2024) also indicated that changes in attitude lead to corresponding changes in travel intentions. It can be said that the positive relationship between tourist attitude and travel intention has been widely studied and supported across various tourism contexts (Hu et al., 2025; Jiang et al., 2022; Y. Li & Jiang, 2025). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Tourist attitude has positive impact on travel intention

3.4. Research model

Based on the above hypothesis, the study proposed the comprehensive research model in Figure 1.

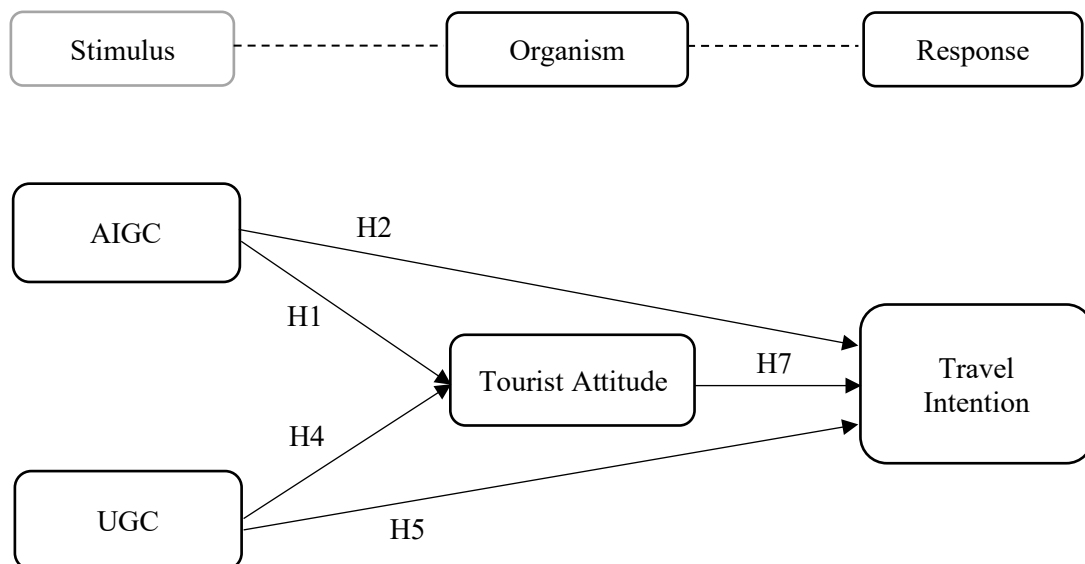


Fig 1. Research model

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Measures

All measurement scales in this study were adapted from prior studies and slightly modified to suit the

research context. First, AIGC measurement scale was adapted from C. Li et al. (2025) included 8 items. Secondly, UGC was measured using 8 items adapted and slightly modified from Wijaya et al. (2025). Finally, the tourist attitude and travel intention measurement scales were adapted from Hsu & Huang (2012), each comprising 6 items. This study used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for all measurement items.

4.2. Sampling procedure and data collection

The study was conducted using both qualitative and quantitative methods. In the qualitative stage, the study involved focus group discussions with 5 tourists to refine the semantics and assess the clarity of the scales after translation from English to Vietnamese. The results of this phase ensured that the content of the observed variables was appropriate to the research context and easily understandable to the respondents. Following, a pilot test was conducted with 30 tourists to identify potential problems in the measurement process. With 28 observed variables, the pilot sample is suitable for a preliminary assessment of the scales' reliability and comprehensibility before conducting the official survey (Johanson & Brooks, 2010)

In the formal quantitative stage, data were collected through an online survey over a four-month period, from November 2025 to February 2026. The study sample consisted of domestic tourists aged 18 and above who use social media and possess basic awareness of AI-generated content. A cross-sectional design was employed, with respondents recruited via online communities and social media platforms using convenience sampling. This approach is commonly employed in exploratory research and has been proven to be reliable and representative (Andrade, 2021; Etikan et al., 2016).

The final questionnaire for the survey was designed in three parts. The first part included 2 screening questions (Yes/No) to ensure respondents met the research criteria: (1) "Have you ever used user-generated content (UGC) for pre-trip search?" and (2) "Have you ever been exposed to artificial intelligence-generated content (AIGC)?". Only respondents who answered "Yes" to both questions were allowed to continue with the survey. The second part collected respondents' demographic information, including gender, age, education, and income. Finally, the third part included the measurement scales of AIGC, UGC, TA, and TI. In total, the study received 512 responses from the online survey. After removing responses that did not select "Yes" for both screening questions, 456 valid responses remained for further analysis. With a final sample size of $n=456$, the study met the minimum requirements for PLS-SEM analysis according to the "10-times rule" (Hair et al., 2019).

4.3. Data analysis techniques

The study initially used SPSS 29.0 to screen the data and perform descriptive statistical analyses of the respondents' demographic characteristics. Next, the study used SmartPLS 4.1 to analyze the proposed research model using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). In this phase, data analysis was conducted in two steps: measurement model assessment and structural model assessment. For measurement model assessment, outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha (α), composite reliability (CR), and mean extracted variance (AVE) were all tested to ensure the reliability and validity of the model. For structural model assessment, the study employed bootstrapping (5,000 subsamples) to examine the significance of direct and indirect relationships through t-values and p-values. Concurrently, the study assessed the model's explanatory power via the coefficient of determination (R^2) and its predictive relevance via Stone–Geisser's Q^2 index, calculated using the blindfolding technique.

In addition, because of using the convenience sampling method, the study has to test for common method bias (CMB) during analysis to ensure data reliability. According to Kock (2015), a variance inflation factor (VIF) value less than 3.3 indicates that CMB is not a serious problem in the research model. Therefore, VIF was used as an important criterion to assess the potential presence of CMB.

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive statistics

Among the valid samples, most respondents were male (53.9%), and females accounted for only 46.1%. By age, most respondents were in the 18-30 age group (53.5%), followed by the 31-40 age group (36.6%), the 41-50 age group (7.9%), and a small proportion (2.0%) aged over 50. In terms of education, most respondents held a college or university degree (69.3%), followed by postgraduate qualifications (24.6%), whereas only 6.1% had a high school education. Regarding monthly income, a small proportion (4.4%) earned under 10 million VND, over half of the respondents (53.3%) earned 10-20 million VND, followed by 29.4% earning 20-30 million VND, and 12.9% earning more than 30 million VND. The detailed results are included in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics of the sample

Variable		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	246	53.9
	Female	210	46.1
Age	18-30	244	53.5
	31-40	167	36.6
	41-50	36	7.9
	Above 50	9	2.0
Education background	High school diploma	28	6.1
	Bachelor's degree	316	69.3
	Master or above	112	24.6
Monthly income (VND)	Under 10 million	20	4.4
	From 10-20 million	243	53.3
	From 20-30 million	134	29.4
	Over 30 million	59	12.9

5.2. Measurement Model Assessment

The results of convergent validity are presented in Table 2. All indicator loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2019). In addition, the values of Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR) for all constructs are above 0.70, demonstrating adequate internal consistency. Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.50, confirming that the constructs exhibit sufficient convergent (Hair et al., 2019).

Discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) in Table 3. All HTMT values are below the conservative threshold of 0.90, indicating that the constructs are empirically distinct and have no discriminant validity issues (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 2. Convergent validity results

Constructs	Items	Outer Loadings	α	CR	AVE
AI-generated content			0.922	0.936	0.648
	AIGC1	0.845			
	AIGC2	0.796			
	AIGC3	0.788			
	AIGC4	0.841			
	AIGC5	0.845			
	AIGC6	0.742			
	AIGC7	0.768			
	AIGC8	0.807			
User-generated content			0.913	0.930	0.624

	UGC1	0.830			
	UGC2	0.803			
	UGC3	0.733			
	UGC4	0.726			
	UGC5	0.826			
	UGC6	0.803			
	UGC7	0.819			
	UGC8	0.771			
Tourist attitude			0.896	0.920	0.658
	TA1	0.858			
	TA2	0.795			
	TA3	0.811			
	TA4	0.754			
	TA5	0.795			
	TA6	0.851			
Tourist intention			0.930	0.945	0.741
	TI1	0.862			
	TI2	0.855			
	TI3	0.859			
	TI4	0.866			
	TI5	0.856			
	TI6	0.866			

Table 3. Results of Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Constructs	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
AI-generated content (1)				
Tourist attitude (2)	0.621			
Tourist intention (3)	0.415	0.568		
User-generated content (4)	0.604	0.677	0.532	

5.3. Structural Model Assessment

The results of hypothesis testing using bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples are presented in Table 4. Prior to hypothesis testing, the variance inflation factor (VIF) values were examined to assess potential common method bias (CMB). All VIF values range from 1.452 to 1.845, which are less than 3.3, indicating that CMB is not a serious concern and the issue of collinearity does not exist (Kock, 2015).

For direct effects, AIGC has a significant positive effect on tourist attitude ($\beta = 0.327$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. In contrast, its effect on travel intention is not significant ($\beta = 0.060$, $p = 0.258$), thereby not supporting H2. Meanwhile, UGC significantly influences both tourist attitude ($\beta = 0.438$, $p < 0.001$) and travel intention ($\beta = 0.259$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H4 and H5. Notably, the strongest direct effect is observed for the relationship between UGC and tourist attitude ($\beta = 0.438$). In addition, tourist attitude also has a significant positive effect on travel intention ($\beta = 0.327$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H7.

For indirect effects, both H3 and H6 are supported, which indicates the mediating role of tourist attitude. Specifically, tourist attitude significantly mediates the relationships between AIGC and travel intention ($\beta = 0.107$, $p < 0.001$) and between UGC and travel intention ($\beta = 0.143$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 4. Results of hypotheses testing

Hypothesis	Path	VIF	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
<i>Direct effects</i>						
H1	AIGC $\rightarrow$ TA	1.452	0.327	7.156	0.000	Supported
H2	AIGC $\rightarrow$ TI	1.649	0.060	1.132	0.258	Not Supported
H4	UGC $\rightarrow$ TA	1.452	0.438	10.311	0.000	Supported
H5	UGC $\rightarrow$ TI	1.806	0.259	4.746	0.000	Supported
H7	TA $\rightarrow$ TI	1.845	0.327	6.094	0.000	Supported
<i>Indirect effects</i>						
H3	AIGC $\rightarrow$ TA $\rightarrow$ TI		0.107	4.529	0.000	Supported
H6	UGC $\rightarrow$ TA $\rightarrow$ TI		0.143	5.499	0.000	Supported

The explanatory power and predictive relevance of the model are presented in Table 5. The R^2 value for tourist attitude is 0.458, indicating a moderate level of explanatory power, while the R^2 value for travel intention is 0.322, suggesting a moderate explanatory capability (Hair et al., 2019). Regarding the explanatory power, all Q^2 values are > 0 , confirming that the model has predictive relevance for the endogenous constructs. In which, tourist attitude demonstrates medium predictive relevance with $Q^2 = 0.296$, and tourist intention demonstrates small predictive relevance with $Q^2 = 0.235$ (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 5. Explanatory power (R^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2)

Constructs	R^2	Q^2
Tourist attitude	0.458	0.296
Tourist intention	0.322	0.235

6. Discussion and Conclusion

6.1. Discussion

This study clarifies two key issues: the roles of AIGC and UGC in shaping TI, and the mediating mechanism of TA. The results show that AIGC positively influences TA but does not directly affect TI, consistent with prior studies highlighting its role in enhancing personalized information and users' cognitive experiences (Li et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2023). However, this finding is not fully consistent with prior studies by Zhang et al. (2026) and Song et al. (2024), which report a significant direct effect of AIGC on travel intention, alongside mediating and moderating mechanisms. This discrepancy can be explained from two perspectives. Firstly, in terms of technology, AIGC is still a relatively new source of information and its reliability has not been firmly established in users' perception. Secondly, in terms of research context, soft adventure tourism encompasses nature-based activities, novelty seeking (Bichler & Peters, 2021), and a level of challenge (Tsaur et al., 2015, 2020). These characteristics cause tourists to hesitate and consider carefully before deciding to participate. Although AIGC can provide systematic and personalized information, it is not persuasive enough due to the lack of experiential information, such as UGC.

Regarding UGC, the research results show that this content source has a positive influence on both TA and TI, and demonstrates the strongest impact in the model. This finding is in line with studies by Santos (2022), Wijaya et al. (2025) and Wang et al. (2025), which suggest that UGC not only helps form positive reviews but also promote behavioral intentions. In fact, with its rich, diverse information presented in various formats, UGC helps tourists easily visualize their destination experience. At the same time, this content is highly reliable because it reflects users' actual experiences and is less influenced by commercial objectives. Particularly in the context of soft adventure tourism, where tourists still exercise some restraint before making decisions, "real-life" information from UGC plays a crucial role in reducing uncertainty, building favorable TA and promoting TI.

In addition, the research results confirm that TA serves as a transformational mechanism in the

relationship between AIGC, UGC, and TI. For AIGC, the effect on travel intention is fully mediated by TA, as the direct effect is not significant. This finding aligns with prior studies by Jiang et al. (2022) and Hasan et al. (2023), which demonstrated that attitude functions as a key psychological mechanism linking perceptions and behavioral intentions in tourism. In contrast, for UGC, TA serves as a partial mediator, given that both direct and indirect effects are significant. This outcome is in line with previous research highlighting the dual pathways through which tourism information can influence behavioral intention (Nguyen & Tong, 2023; Wijaya et al., 2025).

6.2. Conclusion

The study highlights the differences in the roles of AIGC and UGC in influencing travel intentions. Both types of content have a positive effect on the formation of attitude. However, only UGC has a direct effect on the behavioral intentions of travelers. AIGC impacts the behavioral intention of tourists in an indirect manner as it serves the role of providing information to travelers. The result shows that UGC is a prevalent source of information for travelers in the context of soft adventure tourism as the challenges and uncertainties of the experiences are part and parcel of soft adventure tourism. Based on the S-O-R framework, TA is significantly mediated in the process of AIGC and UGC influencing travel intentions. The effectiveness of these content sources depends on how tourists perceive and feel about the information provided to them.

7. Research Contributions

7.1. Theoretical contributions

First, by integrating AIGC and UGC into one research model to investigate their differential influences on travel intention, this study makes a contribution to the emerging literature on digital content within the field of tourism. Most existing literature has investigated each of these types of content separately. However, through this study, it was found that UGC has a direct influence on TI, but AIGC only has an indirect influence on this factor. Despite the advantages of AIGC in providing informational intelligence and personalization to travelers, the experiential knowledge and information from UGC were generally more valuable to tourists. As a result, the finding of a more powerful and direct influence of UGC on tourists' behavioral intention indicates that AIGC is inherently less influential than UGC.

Second, this study also makes contributions to the application of the S-O-R framework in the field of soft adventure tourism. The study clarifies the role of tourist attitude as a key psychological organism that mediates the relationship between informational stimuli (AIGC and UGC) and behavioral response (travel intention). This result provides empirical support for the mediating role of TA and extends the applicability of the S-O-R framework to this typical type of tourism.

7.2. Practical contributions

Firstly, this study provides valuable insights for tourism businesses to allocate marketing channels to attract tourists effectively, especially in soft adventure tourism. The finding suggests that AIGC should be positioned as a supporting tool within marketing strategies in the information search stage, as it only indirectly influences tourist intention. Tourism businesses can apply AIGC to travel consultation through AI-powered chatbots, providing structured and personalized information, generating itinerary recommendations, and dynamically creating destination descriptions for different customer segments. However, AIGC should be combined with UGC to enhance authenticity and credibility and achieve better marketing results.

Secondly, this study also confirms that the significant role of UGC in influencing both tourist attitude and travel intention. In soft adventure tourism, where uncertainty and perceived risk are most salient, experience-based content that depicts "real people and real experiences" can effectively reduce uncertainty, increase credibility and directly influence tourist decisions. Therefore, this study

recommends that tourism businesses actively facilitate and manage UGC by encouraging customers to share authentic experiences, leveraging reviews, photos, and short videos on social media platforms, and collaborating with micro-influencers to enhance perceived authenticity. Furthermore, including UGC in official communication channels, such as websites and promotional campaigns, can enhance trust and increase conversions from interest to actual travel intention.

8. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged in this study. However, these also provoke directions for future research. The first limitation is the sampling method. This study uses convenience sampling, which limits the representativeness of the sample. Therefore, future studies are encouraged to adopt probability-based sampling techniques, such as stratified or multi-stage sampling, to enhance generalizability.

The second limitation is the sample collection time. The data were collected over four months (from November 2025 to February 2026), which may not fully capture seasonal variations in tourism demand. Thus, future research could employ longitudinal designs or compare peak and off-peak seasons to examine the stability of the proposed relationships.

Finally, the third limitation is stimulus factors. This study primarily focuses on digital communication stimuli: AIGC and UGC. Hence, future research should incorporate other factors, such as destination attributes, social influences, or policy orientations, as stimuli to further extend and refine the research model.

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Appendix. Measurements items

AI-generated content	
AIGC1	The AI-generated content is competent
AIGC2	The AI-generated content is intelligent.
AIGC3	The AI-generated content is knowledgeable.
AIGC4	The AI-generated content is sensible.
AIGC5	Interacting with the AI-generated content feels like interacting with a real person.
AIGC6	The AI-generated content seems to have its own mind.
AIGC7	The AI-generated content feels considerate.
AIGC8	The AI-generated content feels lifelike.
User-generated content	
UGC1	The user-generated content is reliable
UGC2	The user-generated content is credible.
UGC3	The user-generated content is fair and balanced.
UGC4	The user-generated content is unbiased.
UGC5	The user-generated content helps me make travel decisions.
UGC6	The user-generated content changes my understanding of the destination.
UGC7	The user-generated content is informative and valuable.
UGC8	The user-generated content is comprehensive
Tourist attitude	
TA1	Taking part in this type of tourism is a good idea.
TA2	Taking part in this type of tourism would be enjoyable.
TA3	Taking part in this type of tourism would be a wise decision.
TA4	Taking part in this type of tourism would be interesting.
TA5	Taking part in this type of tourism would be beneficial to me.
TA6	Taking part in this type of tourism would be valuable for my development.
Tourist intention	
TI1	I intend to participate in this travel activity in the future.
TI2	I will consider choosing this travel activity for my next trip.
TI3	I am willing to spend time planning this travel activity.
TI4	I am likely to visit destinations offering this type of tourism.
TI5	I would recommend this travel activity to others.
TI6	I have a strong intention to engage in this travel activity.