



The Engagement-Trust Paradox: A Qualitative Analysis of Baho Gamira's TikTok Content Among University Students

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates students' perceptions of promotional content for Baho Gamira Recreational Tourism on TikTok, focusing on the integration of animated storytelling in tourism marketing. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and online surveys involving 30 students to analyze the influence of visual narrativity and perceived authenticity on travel intentions. The findings identify a significant "Engagement-Trust Paradox," where creative animation achieved a 100% engagement rate in capturing attention but simultaneously triggered a profound "Trust Gap." Approximately 70% to 90% of participants expressed skepticism regarding the site's physical reality, perceiving animation as a tool that potentially masks logistical deficiencies or exaggerates natural beauty. Furthermore, 75% of respondents felt hindered from visiting due to a critical "Informational Gap" regarding precise location tags, road accessibility, and facility costs. This research concludes that for emerging destinations, creative digital narration must be harmonized with "aesthetic transparency" and factual documentation to convert online engagement into physical visits. Practically, the study recommends adopting a hybrid content strategy that integrates User-Generated Content (UGC) and real-life footage to bridge the gap between digital inspiration and logistical reality, ensuring that the visual "vibe" is supported by verifiable facts to reduce the perceived risk for potential visitors.

Keywords: paradox, qualitative analysis, TikTok content, university students

Paradoks Keterlibatan-Kepercayaan: Analisis Kualitatif Konten TikTok Baho Gamira di Kalangan Mahasiswa

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji persepsi mahasiswa terhadap konten promosi Wisata Rekreasi Baho Gamira di aplikasi TikTok, dengan fokus pada integrasi penceritaan animasi (*animated storytelling*) dalam pemasaran pariwisata. Menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan survei daring yang melibatkan 30 mahasiswa untuk menganalisis pengaruh narativitas visual dan persepsi autentisitas terhadap niat berkunjung. Temuan penelitian mengidentifikasi adanya "Paradoks Keterlibatan-Kepercayaan" (*Engagement-Trust Paradox*), di mana animasi kreatif berhasil mencapai tingkat keterlibatan sebesar 100% dalam menarik perhatian, namun secara bersamaan memicu "Celah Kepercayaan" (*Trust Gap*) yang mendalam. Sekitar 70% hingga 90% partisipan menyatakan skeptisisme terhadap realitas fisik lokasi, dan menganggap animasi sebagai alat yang berpotensi menutupi kekurangan logistik atau melebih-lebihkan keindahan alam. Selain itu, 75% responden merasa terhambat untuk berkunjung karena adanya "Celah Informasi" (*Informational Gap*) yang kritis terkait label lokasi yang presisi, aksesibilitas jalan, dan biaya fasilitas. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa bagi destinasi baru, narasi digital kreatif harus diselaraskan dengan "transparansi estetika" dan dokumentasi faktual untuk mengubah keterlibatan daring menjadi kunjungan fisik secara nyata. Secara praktis, studi ini merekomendasikan penerapan strategi konten hibrida yang mengintegrasikan Konten Buat Pengguna (*User-Generated Content/UGC*) dan cuplikan video nyata guna menjembatani kesenjangan antara inspirasi digital dan realitas logistik, memastikan bahwa kesan visual yang ditampilkan didukung oleh fakta yang dapat diverifikasi untuk mengurangi persepsi risiko bagi calon pengunjung.

Kata Kunci: paradoks, analisis kualitatif, konten TikTok, kalangan mahasiswa

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INTRODUCTION

The global tourism industry has witnessed a paradigm shift in how destinations are discovered and consumed, largely driven by the exponential growth of short-form video platforms. Li et al. (2021) state that TikTok has revolutionized travel inspiration for younger demographics by offering high sensory stimulation through immersive, rapid-fire visual storytelling. In this digital era, the perceived value of a destination like Baho Gamira is no longer determined solely by its physical attributes but by its “digital viral potential.” For Gen Z, who prioritize visual aesthetics, a destination must first succeed as a digital product on their “For You Page” (FYP) before it can be considered a viable travel option.

However, the transition from digital discovery to physical visitation is fraught with psychological barriers, primarily concerning the authenticity of the content. While creative marketing is essential for capturing attention, Dwivedi et al. (2021) emphasize that social media users are increasingly sophisticated in their evaluation of information credibility. There is a growing “Trust Gap” in digital marketing where overly polished or artificial content is often met with skepticism. In the context of Baho Gamira, the use of highly stylized animation serves as a “visual hook,” yet it simultaneously creates a barrier of doubt, as users struggle to distinguish between artistic imagination and the actual geographical reality of the site. Modern consumers are highly sensitive to “manufactured” authenticity, as noted by Gannon in Prothero (2018). Theoretically, the success of digital tourism promotion depends on what Kutukcuoglu et al. (2023) describe as “Informational Utility,” where travel inspiration only translates into actual behavior when the content is “actionable.” Without transparency, curiosity remains stagnant, failing to convert digital engagement into physical foot traffic.

Based on this phenomenon, the research addresses the primary question: how do university students perceive the use of animated TikTok content in influencing their travel decisions to

Baho Gamira, and to what extent does the lack of logistical information hinder the conversion from digital engagement to physical visitation?

In alignment with this problem, this study aims to explore the complex interplay between creative digital narration and consumer decision-making among university students to understand how digital content drives actual visitation intent.

Furthermore, this research offers significant benefits from a managerial perspective by providing strategic recommendations for site managers to harmonize creative storytelling with logistical transparency. To strengthen the analytical framework, this study builds upon relevant research conducted by Du et al. (2020) regarding the influence of short-video marketing, Buhalis et al. (2022) on the role of social media in destination image, and Su et al. (2021) concerning the effectiveness of visual storytelling in capturing Gen Z’s attention.

METHOD

This study utilizes a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the subjective perceptions of university students regarding TikTok promotional content. According to Doyle, Brady, and Byrne (2020), a qualitative descriptive approach is particularly effective when the researcher seeks to provide a comprehensive and straightforward summary of a specific phenomenon in everyday language, allowing for a rich description of the “Engagement-Trust Paradox.” The research procedure was conducted systematically, starting from the identification of the digital phenomenon at Baho Gamira, followed by participant selection, data collection through digital platforms, and concluding with a multi-stage thematic interpretation.

The participants of this study consisted of 30 students (\$N=30\$) who are active users of the TikTok application, selected through a purposive sampling technique. As suggested by Campbell et al. (2020), purposive sampling is essential in qualitative research to ensure that the informants, as digital natives, possess the necessary experience



to provide in-depth information. The study was centered at a major university campus to capture the specific demographic of potential student travelers. The data collection process was conducted over a period of one month, in December 2025.

To ensure data triangulation and depth, the researcher employed semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires. Following the guidelines by Kallio et al. (2016), the semi-structured interviews provided a balance between a standardized set of questions and the flexibility to explore spontaneous themes such as “visual skepticism.” These instruments were validated to ensure they could accurately capture the nuances of “Informational Utility” and the “Trust Gap” perceived by the respondents.

The qualitative data analysis was conducted using Reflexive Thematic Analysis, following the framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2019). This process involved data familiarization, initial coding, and the systematic development of overarching themes such as the “Authenticity Gap.” Since this is a qualitative study, the analysis focused on identifying patterns of meaning rather than statistical inference. Trustworthiness was maintained through a clear audit trail as outlined by Nowell et al. (2017).

Throughout the study, ethical standards were strictly maintained. All 30 students provided informed consent before participating. Their identities remained strictly anonymous, and the data was treated with the utmost confidentiality to protect the participants’ integrity.

RESULT

The primary data obtained from the 30 participants (N=30) highlights a significant “Engagement-Trust Paradox” regarding the TikTok promotional content of Baho Gamira. The findings indicate that while visual innovation is highly effective for initial attraction, it creates significant secondary barriers related to authenticity and logistical clarity.

Table 1
 Summary of Student Perception Categories
 Regarding Baho Gamira TikTok Content (N=30)

Category	Key Findings	Percentage/ Frequency
First Impression	High curiosity and interest in the animation/storytelling concept.	90% - 100%
Visual Attraction	Focus on bright colors, smooth animation, and natural scenery.	100%
Trust & Authenticity	Skepticism due to the perceived "manipulative" nature of animation.	70% - 90%
Major Barriers	Informational gap regarding precise location, access, and costs.	75% - 100%

1. Visual Narrativity and Immediate Engagement Patterns

a. Pattern Interrupt and Scroll Stopping.

The data analysis reveals that 100% of the participants identified the animated storytelling as the primary “pattern interrupt” that effectively stopped their scrolling behavior on the TikTok “For You Page” (FYP). Within the first three seconds of exposure, approximately 90% to 100% of students reported a high level of curiosity.

b. Technical Execution and Aesthetic Appeal.

Specifically, 70% of the respondents praised the technical execution of the content, citing the vibrant color grading and the fluid transitions of the animation as “visually refreshing.” Participants noted that the storytelling approach felt unique compared to standard travel vlogs, creating a “digital oasis” effect that triggered an immediate emotional response.

2. Perceived Authenticity and the Trust Gap Analysis

a. Skepticism Toward Visual Reality.

Despite the high attraction metrics, the results uncover a profound “Trust Gap” emerging from the use of stylized visuals. Quantitative and qualitative data indicate that 90% of interviewees and 70% of survey respondents expressed deep skepticism regarding the destination’s actual physical condition.

b. Perception of Artistic Fiction

The participants viewed the animation as a “double-edged sword” that led to a perception that the content might be masking environmental flaws. As a result, the overall trust level regarding the destination’s reality remained low, with more than 60% of students stating they felt unsure if the place looked anything like the video in real life.

3. Logistical Hurdles and Informational Gaps

a. Lack of Navigational Proof

A consensus of 100% of participants identified the lack of logistical transparency as a primary deterrent. Although 80% of the students expressed a desire to visit based on the “vibe” of the video, 75% of them felt completely hindered by the absence of precise Google Maps location tags and information on entrance fees.

b. Uncertainty in Vehicle Accessibility

Participants specifically mentioned uncertainty regarding vehicle accessibility as a critical barrier. They questioned whether the road conditions were suitable for cars or strictly for motorcycles, a detail they deemed essential before committing to a trip. This informational gap creates a point where the initial 100% engagement fails to convert into physical foot traffic.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the “Engagement-Trust Paradox” observed in Baho Gamira’s TikTok content reveals a critical tension between digital aesthetics and consumer reliability. The 100% curiosity and engagement rate among the participants underscores the effectiveness of animated storytelling as a “pattern interrupt” in the saturated TikTok environment (Point 1a). This finding strongly aligns with the Short-video Engagement Theory by Li et al. (2021), which argues that high sensory stimulation and visual appeal are the most potent predictors of initial user interaction. From a psychological perspective, the “vibrant colors” and “fluid transitions” identified in Point 1b create an immediate emotional “hook.” However, this study finds that such attraction remains a form of “shallow engagement.” While the animation triggers a sense of escapism for digital natives, it fails to progress to a deeper commitment because it lacks the “Social Proof” (Cialdini, 2001) found in traditional, raw travel vlogs. Without seeing real people interacting with the actual environment, the engagement stays at the level of digital consumption rather than physical intention.

The profound 90% skepticism rate regarding the site’s authenticity (Point 2a) points toward a critical crisis of trust in modern digital tourism. This finding confirms the propositions of Dwivedi et al. (2021), who suggest that as social media becomes flooded with “over-filtered” content, Gen Z consumers have developed a heightened sensitivity to information credibility. Viewed through the lens of Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953), the participants perceived the animation as a “manufactured” narrative—an artistic fiction—rather than a reliable representation of a geographical site. This skepticism (Point 2b) suggests that for Gen Z, a high aesthetic value can ironically become a “red flag” if it is not balanced by raw evidence. To mitigate this, site managers must adopt what Du



et al. (2020) describe as a “Hybrid Content Strategy.” By integrating User-Generated Content (UGC) or “behind-the-scenes” footage alongside professional animations, destinations can bridge the “Authenticity Gap,” grounding the artistic vision in a verifiable physical reality.

Furthermore, the transition from “inspiration” to “visitation” is fundamentally blocked by what this study identifies as a “Logistical Disconnect” (Point 3a). The 100% consensus on the lack of practical information reflects a failure to provide “Informational Utility.” According to the Information Success Model by DeLone & McLean (2003), the quality and usability of information are the primary drivers of user behavior. For the participants, the “vibe” of the video was not enough to outweigh the perceived “risk of the unknown” regarding vehicle accessibility and facility costs (Point 3b). As argued by Xiang et al. (2015), the usability of information on social media is the core bridge to actual travel behavior. For Baho Gamira, the animation currently functions only at the “dreaming” stage. To convert “likes” into “foot traffic,” it is essential to include “Actionable Overlays”—such as integrated Google Maps links and transparent pricing—as suggested by Buhalis et al. (2022). This approach reduces the cognitive effort required for the traveler to move from the digital “For You Page” to the physical destination, thereby closing the gap between digital engagement and physical visitation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that while animated storytelling on TikTok is a revolutionary tool for capturing attention, it creates a significant “Engagement-Trust Paradox” for emerging tourism destinations like Baho Gamira. The findings demonstrate that creative digital narration effectively answers the research problem by achieving a 100% engagement rate in terms of visual attraction (Point 1a); however, it

simultaneously triggers a profound 90% skepticism rate concerning the site’s physical authenticity (Point 2a). For the university student demographic, animation alone is perceived as artistic fiction rather than a reliable travel guide. This perception, coupled with the identified 75% informational gap regarding logistics (Point 3a), effectively halts the consumer decision-making process, preventing digital curiosity from converting into physical visitation.

To resolve this paradox and bridge the gap between “dreaming” and “visiting,” the management of Baho Gamira must adopt a “Hybrid Content Strategy.” It is imperative to anchor creative animations with factual evidence by integrating User-Generated Content (UGC), visitor testimonials, and raw footage that validates the destination’s real-world conditions. Furthermore, addressing the “logistical disconnect” (Point 3b) by providing precise coordinates, transparent pricing, and clear road accessibility data is essential to reduce the perceived risk of travel. By balancing creative visual inspiration with “Informational Utility” and “Social Proof,” Baho Gamira can successfully build the trust necessary to convert its viral digital potential into tangible and sustainable tourism growth.

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