Content or Crowd? Travel Vlog Content Value, Vlogger Popularity and Intention to Visit a Tourism Destination

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ABSTRACT

Travel vlogs have become a prominent source of pre-trip destination information, yet it remains unclear whether viewers are persuaded mainly by what a vlog contains or by how popular it appears. Drawing on the elaboration likelihood model, this study examines how the perceived content value of travel vlogs (a central-route cue) and the popularity of travel vloggers (a peripheral, heuristic cue) influence intention to visit a tourism destination. A cross-sectional online survey was distributed through WhatsApp and social media to Malaysian adults who had watched a travel vlog in the preceding 12 months, using convenience sampling. After screening, 109 complete responses were analysed using multiple linear regression. Together, the two predictors explained 13.6% of the variance in visit intention, $F(2, 106) = 8.31$, $p < .001$. Content value ($B = 0.373$, $p = .013$) and vlogger popularity ($B = 0.196$, $p = .003$) each had a significant positive effect, and the two predictors were virtually unrelated to each other. The findings indicate that viewers draw on both the substance of a vlog and visible popularity metrics such as views, ratings and subscriber counts when forming visit intentions. The modest explained variance, a convenience sample dominated by young Malay respondents, and self-reported measures limit generalisation. The study adds Malaysian evidence to a literature that draws largely on samples from China and South Asia, positions popularity metrics as a heuristic cue distinct from content quality, and offers destination marketers practical guidance on selecting and briefing travel vloggers. Future studies should test these routes with larger, more diverse samples and structural models that capture viewer involvement.

Keywords: travel vlogs, content value, vlogger popularity, elaboration likelihood model, visit intention

INTRODUCTION

Social media has changed how travellers search for, evaluate and share destination information. Among the formats that now shape pre-trip decision making, the travel vlog (a video blog in which a creator documents a journey, usually on YouTube and increasingly on short-video platforms) has become one of the most influential. Unlike written travel blogs, vlogs combine moving images, sound, narration and the visible presence of the creator, giving viewers a vicarious, first-person preview of a destination's attractions, food, accommodation and atmosphere (Pan et al., 2007; Peralta, 2019). A rapidly growing body of research shows that watching travel vlogs can stimulate travel intention, whether through audience involvement and the happiness viewers derive from the content (Hu et al., 2024), the perceived quality of the information presented (Islam et al., 2024), parasocial bonds with the vlogger (Roy & Attri, 2024) or comparison with official destination marketing videos (Zhou et al., 2024). A systematic review by Saini et al. (2023) concluded that social media influencers have become a key determinant of travel decisions.

Less settled is the question of *what* in a travel vlog persuades the viewer. One possibility is the substance of the content itself: an interesting storyline, clear and attractive footage, simple language and a well-organised flow that help viewers evaluate a destination. Another is the social proof that surrounds the content: the number of

subscribers, views, likes, comments and ratings that platforms display beside every video. Research on influencer marketing shows that follower counts shape perceptions of an influencer's likeability and opinion leadership (De Veirman et al., 2017) and that a vlogger's popularity carries through to viewers' purchase decisions (Ladhari et al., 2020). Communication research describes such metrics as bandwagon cues that signal collective endorsement and can be used as mental shortcuts (Sundar, 2008; Waddell & Sundar, 2020). The elaboration likelihood model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) offers a useful lens for these two possibilities, distinguishing persuasion through careful evaluation of message content (the central route) from persuasion through simple cues that require little thought (the peripheral route). Recent tourism studies have begun to apply the ELM to short videos and travel vlogs (Li & Rui, 2025; Wang et al., 2026), but most empirical work on travel vlogs focuses on vlogger credibility, parasocial interaction and engagement rather than on the visible popularity metrics that frame every video.

Two gaps follow. First, relatively few studies have tested content value and popularity metrics side by side as predictors of destination visit intention. Second, much of the evidence on travel vlogs draws on samples from China and South Asia (Hu et al., 2024; Islam et al., 2024; Roy & Attri, 2024), and evidence from Malaysia, where domestic tourism and creator-led promotion are both well established, remains limited. This study addresses these gaps by examining the influence of travel vlog content value and travel vlogger popularity on Malaysian viewers' intention to visit a tourism destination. Specifically, it aims (a) to investigate the influence of content value on intention to visit a tourism destination, and (b) to determine whether the popularity of travel vloggers affects intention to visit a tourism destination.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. The next section reviews the literature on travel vlogs, visit intention and the ELM, and develops the hypotheses. The methodology section describes the research design, sample, instrument and analysis. The results are then presented and discussed, and the paper concludes with the study's contributions, limitations and directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Travel Vlogs as a Source of Destination Information

Because tourism products are intangible and cannot be tried before purchase, travellers rely heavily on information from others who have already experienced a destination. Early research on travel blogs showed that traveller-generated narratives offer richer, more experiential and more trusted information than conventional promotional material, and are therefore valuable to destination marketers (Pan et al., 2007). Travel vlogs extend this function into video. They record a creator's itinerary, activities, accommodation, food and encounters, frequently presenting both the attractions and the drawbacks of a place, and in doing so they shape the destination image formed by viewers (Peralta, 2019). Compared with official promotional videos, travel vlogs are perceived as more authentic and realistic, which helps explain why they can rival or complement destination marketing organisation (DMO) content in stimulating travel intention (Zhou et al., 2024).

Viewers also differ in what they look for. Cheng et al. (2024) found that travel vlog audiences value practical information such as routes, costs and accommodation, alongside experiential and visual content, and that these preferences vary by gender. Gan et al. (2023) showed experimentally that the visual perspective, visual content and narration appeal of short travel videos jointly affect travel intention. This literature suggests that the craft of the vlog (how it is shot, narrated and organised) matters, but also that viewers encounter each vlog within a platform environment that displays how many others have watched, liked and subscribed. Influencer research consistently finds that such signals of popularity affect audience responses (De Veirman et al., 2017; Ladhari et al., 2020; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Schouten et al., 2020).

Intention to Visit a Tourism Destination

Behavioural intention refers to an individual's readiness to perform a given behaviour and is regarded as the most immediate antecedent of that behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). In tourism, intention to visit captures a prospective traveller's plan or willingness to travel to a destination and is widely used as the outcome of

destination marketing communication because actual visitation is difficult to observe at the point of exposure. Travel vlog studies routinely use visit or travel intention as the dependent variable, treating it as the point at which online viewing is converted into offline travel (Hu et al., 2024; Islam et al., 2024; Roy & Attri, 2024). In the present study, intention to visit refers to the extent to which travel vlogs lead viewers to consider, plan and recommend a visit to the destinations portrayed.

Theoretical Lens: The Elaboration Likelihood Model

The ELM proposes that attitudes and intentions can be changed through two routes (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Through the central route, individuals who are motivated and able to process a message scrutinise its arguments and substance; through the peripheral route, individuals rely on simple cues, such as the attractiveness or perceived popularity of the source, that allow a judgement without detailed evaluation. The ELM has been widely applied to online consumer behaviour (Shahab et al., 2021) and, more recently, to tourism video content. Li and Rui (2025) found that both central-route variables (argument quality) and peripheral-route variables (source credibility, comments and network effects) shaped attitudes toward a city promoted through short videos, with peripheral variables exerting the stronger influence. Wang et al. (2026) similarly used the ELM to show that travel vlog information attributes and viewer-vlogger similarity combine to drive check-in intention at Instagrammable destinations.

The MAIN model (Sundar, 2008) further explains why popularity metrics act as peripheral cues. Interface features that show how many others have viewed, liked or rated content trigger a *bandwagon heuristic*: if many people endorse something, it is presumed to be good. Such cues have been shown to increase viewing (Fu & Sim, 2011) and to shape enjoyment of media content (Waddell & Sundar, 2020). In the context of travel vlogs, the content value of the vlog therefore maps onto the central route, whereas the popularity of the vlogger maps onto the peripheral route. The present study uses the ELM as an organising framework for these two predictors; it does not measure elaboration likelihood itself, a point revisited in the limitations.

Content Value and Intention to Visit

Content marketing seeks to attract and retain audiences by creating and distributing relevant, useful and engaging content, and the value audiences perceive in that content underpins their engagement and trust (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). In this study, content value refers to the importance viewers attach to the quality attributes of travel vlog content: simple language, interesting material, attractive and clear footage, a good narrative, an organised flow and straightforward navigation (adapted from Choi & Lee, 2019). These attributes correspond to the argument or information quality that the ELM places on the central route.

Evidence consistently links such content attributes to travel intention. Islam et al. (2024) found that the information quality of travel vlogs made the information more useful and trustworthy to Bangladeshi viewers, which in turn increased their intention to visit. Hu et al. (2024) showed that narrative involvement with travel vlogs enhanced the hedonic and eudaimonic happiness of viewers and, through these, their travel intention. Gan et al. (2023) demonstrated that visual content and narration appeal in short travel videos influence travel intention, while Li and Rui (2025) reported that argument quality shapes attitudes and city image. Well-crafted content therefore gives viewers the material they need to evaluate a destination and to imagine themselves there. Accordingly:

H1: Content value positively influences intention to visit a tourism destination.

Popularity of Travel Vloggers and Intention to Visit

Popularity on video-sharing platforms is expressed through quantitative metrics, namely subscriber counts, views, likes, comments and ratings, which both reflect and reinforce audience attention (Chatzopoulou et al., 2010). From an ELM perspective these metrics are peripheral cues: they say little about the destination itself but signal that many others have found the vlogger worth watching. Following the bandwagon heuristic (Sundar, 2008), viewers may infer that a popular vlogger is credible and that the destinations featured are

worth visiting. Fu and Sim (2011) found that videos with higher view counts subsequently attracted disproportionately more views, which is consistent with popularity cues guiding what audiences choose to watch.

Influencer research supports the persuasive role of popularity. De Veirman et al. (2017) found that Instagram influencers with more followers were perceived as more likeable, partly because they were seen as more popular and as opinion leaders. Ladhari et al. (2020) found that the popularity of YouTube vloggers significantly influenced viewers' purchase of recommended products. In tourism, Li and Rui (2025) showed that peripheral cues such as comments and the size of the user base had a pronounced influence on attitudes toward a destination promoted through short videos. Because popular vloggers attract larger audiences and are more readily trusted, their portrayals of a destination are more likely to translate into visit intention. Hence:

H2: The popularity of travel vloggers positively influences intention to visit a tourism destination.

Figure 1 presents the research framework. Content value (central route) and the popularity of travel vloggers (peripheral route) are modelled as independent predictors of intention to visit a tourism destination.

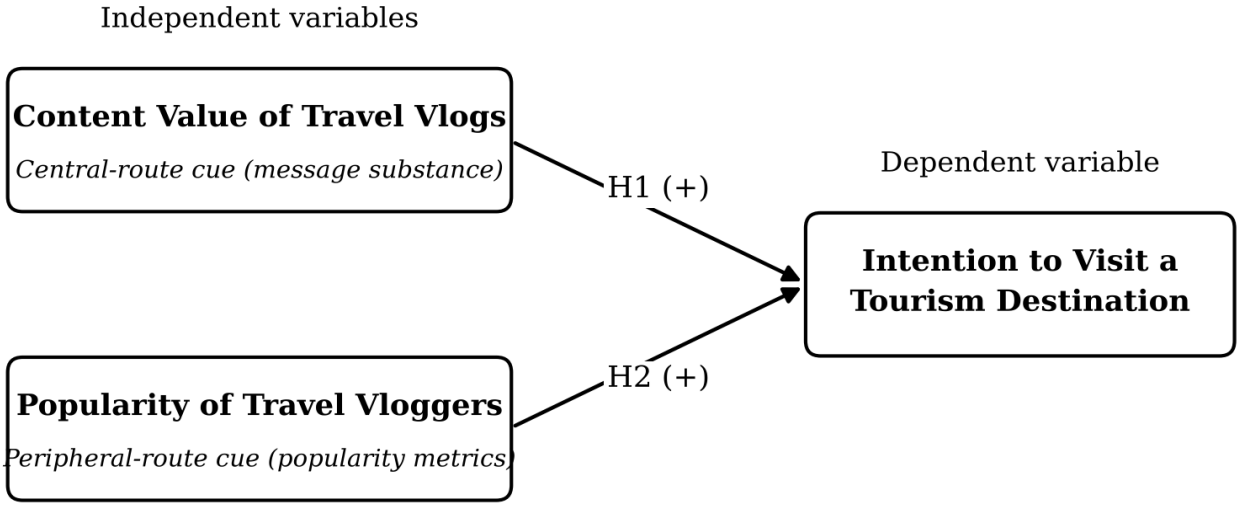

Figure 1: Research Framework

Source: Developed by the authors based on Petty and Cacioppo (1986) and Sundar (2008).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to test the hypothesised relationships among content value, the popularity of travel vloggers and intention to visit a tourism destination. Data were collected at a single point in time in a non-contrived setting, with respondents completing the questionnaire on their own without researcher intervention. The unit of analysis was the individual, because all three constructs concern personal perceptions and intentions.

Population, Sampling and Sample Size

The target population comprised Malaysian adults aged 18 years and above who had watched travel-related vlog content in the preceding 12 months. A screening question at the start of the questionnaire confirmed that respondents met this criterion. As no sampling frame of travel vlog viewers exists, a non-probability convenience sampling technique was used, which is common in exploratory consumer research where the population cannot be enumerated.

The minimum sample size was estimated using G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2007) for an *F* test of linear multiple regression with two predictors, a medium effect size (f^2 = .15), α = .05 and statistical power of .95. The required minimum was 107 respondents.

Instrument

The self-administered questionnaire contained four sections: (A) content value, (B) popularity of travel vloggers, (C) intention to visit a tourism destination and (D) respondent demographics. Items were adapted from prior studies (Table 1). Content value was measured with seven items adapted from Choi and Lee (2019), popularity of travel vloggers with five items based on the YouTube popularity metrics identified by Chatzopoulou et al. (2010), and intention to visit with four items adapted from Jannat (2018). All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Respondents were asked to reflect on their own experience of watching travel vlogs when answering.

Table 1: Measurement Items

Construct	Items	Source
Content value (7 items)	CV1 I think it is important for travel vlogs to use simple language. CV2 … to showcase interesting content. CV3 … to have beautiful video quality. CV4 … to have a clear video. CV5 … to have a good narrative. CV6 … to have an organised flow. CV7 … to have a straightforward navigation.	Choi and Lee (2019)
Popularity of travel vloggers (5 items)	PP1 The number of subscribers that a vlogger has influences my decision to watch travel vlogs. PP2 The number of views that a vlog has influences my decision to watch travel vlogs. PP3 The number of likes that a vlogger has influences my decision to watch travel vlogs. PP4 The number of comments that a vlogger receives influences my decision to watch travel vlogs. PP5 The amount of ratings that a vlogger has influences my decision to watch travel vlogs.	Chatzopoulou et al. (2010)
Intention to visit (4 items)	VI1 I refer to travel vlogs before visiting a tourist destination. VI2 Travel vlogs make me want to visit the destination depicted in the vlogs. VI3 Travel vlogs positively affect my intention to visit a tourism destination. VI4 I always recommend people to watch travel vlogs before visiting a tourism destination.	Jannat (2018)

Note: CV2–CV7 begin with "I think it is important for travel vlogs …". All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was hosted on Google Forms and distributed online through WhatsApp and other social media platforms. Mobile instant messaging was chosen because it allows a survey link to reach many potential respondents quickly and lets them respond at their convenience. The cover page explained the purpose of the study, stated that participation was voluntary, and assured respondents that their answers would be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes. No personally identifying information was collected. A total of 207 responses were received; 98 incomplete responses were removed, leaving 109 usable responses, which exceeded the minimum of 107 required by the power analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 22. Descriptive statistics were used to profile the respondents, and internal consistency reliability was assessed with Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951), using .70 as the minimum acceptable value (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Composite scores for each construct were calculated as the mean of their items. The hypotheses were tested with multiple linear regression, with content value and popularity of travel vloggers entered simultaneously as predictors of intention to visit. Before interpreting the model, the assumptions of normality of residuals, homoscedasticity and absence of multicollinearity were examined (Hair et al., 2019).

RESULTS

Respondent Profile

Table 2 summarises the profile of the 109 respondents. Female respondents made up 57.8% of the sample.

Most respondents were aged 18–29 (61.5%) and held a bachelor's degree (54.1%). Students (40.4%) and government servants (39.4%) were the largest occupational groups, and almost two-thirds were single (64.2%). The sample was predominantly Malay (92.7%).

Table 2: Respondent Profile (N = 109)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	46	42.2
	Female	63	57.8
Age (years)	18–29	67	61.5
	30–39	31	28.4
	40–49	8	7.3
	50–59	3	2.8
Highest education	Secondary school (SPM)	10	9.2
	Pre-university	3	2.8
	Certificate/diploma/vocational	27	24.8
	Bachelor's degree	59	54.1
	Postgraduate degree	10	9.2
Occupation	Student	44	40.4
	Government servant	43	39.4
	Private sector	15	13.8
	Self-employed	4	3.7
	Unemployed	3	2.8
Marital status	Single	70	64.2
	Married	34	31.2
	Divorced/separated	4	3.7
	Widowed	1	0.9
Ethnicity	Malay	101	92.7
	Chinese	4	3.7
	Indian	3	2.8
	Others	1	0.9

Source: Survey data.

Reliability

As shown in Table 3, Cronbach's alpha exceeded the .70 threshold for all three constructs: content value (α = .776), popularity of travel vloggers (α = .878) and intention to visit (α = .765). Following DeVellis and Thorpe (2022), these values indicate respectable to very good internal consistency, and no item was removed.

Table 3: Reliability of the Constructs

Construct	No. of items	Cronbach's α
Content value	7	0.776
Popularity of travel vloggers	5	0.878
Intention to visit a tourism destination	4	0.765

Source: Survey data (N = 109).

Regression Assumptions

The normal P-P plot of the regression standardised residuals showed points lying close to the diagonal, indicating approximately normally distributed residuals, and the scatterplot of standardised residuals against standardised predicted values showed no systematic pattern, supporting homoscedasticity. Multicollinearity was not a concern: both predictors had a tolerance of .994 and a variance inflation factor (VIF) of 1.006, well within the recommended limits of tolerance above .10 and VIF below 10 (Hair et al., 2019). A tolerance of .994 also means that content value and vlogger popularity shared less than 1% of their variance, indicating that respondents treated the two as largely independent considerations.

Hypothesis Testing

The regression model was significant, $F(2, 106) = 8.31$, $p < .001$, and explained 13.6% of the variance in intention to visit ($R^2 = .136$; adjusted $R^2 = .120$). The corresponding effect size ($f^2 = .16$) approximates a medium effect by Cohen's (1988) conventions. As shown in Table 4, content value had a significant positive effect on intention to visit ($B = 0.373$, $p = .013$), supporting H1. Popularity of travel vloggers also had a significant positive effect ($B = 0.196$, $p = .003$), supporting H2. The estimated regression equation was: Intention to visit = 1.837 + 0.373 (content value) + 0.196 (popularity of travel vloggers).

Table 4: Multiple Regression Results for Intention to Visit a Tourism Destination

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	VIF	Decision
(Constant)	1.837		–			–	–
H1: Content value	0.373				0.013	1.006	Supported
H2: Popularity of travel vloggers	0.196				0.003	1.006	Supported

Note: $R^2 = .136$; adjusted $R^2 = .120$; $F(2, 106) = 8.31$, $p < .001$. Dependent variable: intention to visit a tourism destination. B = unstandardised coefficient; β = standardised coefficient.

DISCUSSION

This study examined whether travel vlog viewers form visit intentions on the basis of what a vlog contains, how popular its creator appears, or both. The results support both hypotheses, indicating that the two routes described by the ELM operate side by side when viewers watch travel vlogs.

The support for H1 shows that viewers who place greater importance on simple language, interesting material, attractive and clear footage, a good narrative and an organised flow report stronger intention to visit the destinations they see. This is consistent with evidence that information quality makes travel vlog content more

useful and trustworthy (Islam et al., 2024), that narrative involvement converts viewing into travel intention (Hu et al., 2024) and that the visual and narrative qualities of short travel videos shape travel intention (Gan et al., 2023). Item-level means for content value were uniformly high, ranging from 4.45 for straightforward navigation to 4.72 for interesting content on a five-point scale. Content quality thus appears to be a near-universal expectation among Malaysian viewers. One consequence is a restricted range on this predictor, which tends to reduce its estimated precision; this may explain why the content value coefficient was larger but less precisely estimated than that of popularity.

The support for H2 indicates that visible popularity metrics also contribute to visit intention. This aligns with influencer research showing that follower counts and vlogger popularity shape audience evaluations and purchase behaviour (De Veirman et al., 2017; Ladhari et al., 2020) and with the bandwagon heuristic, in which metrics signalling collective endorsement serve as shortcuts to judgement (Sundar, 2008; Waddell & Sundar, 2020). It also echoes Li and Rui's (2025) finding that peripheral-route cues have a pronounced influence on tourism attitudes formed through short videos. Notably, the popularity items asked whether metrics influence respondents' decision to *watch* a vlog. The results therefore suggest a gatekeeping role for popularity: subscriber counts, views and ratings help determine which vlogs are watched in the first place, and the vlogs that are watched then shape visit intention. Among the popularity cues, ratings were reported as the most influential and the number of comments as the least (M = 3.20), suggesting that viewers attend more to summary signals of endorsement than to the content of audience discussion.

The near-zero overlap between the two predictors is itself informative. Viewers who value content quality are not necessarily those who are swayed by popularity, which is consistent with the ELM's proposition that central and peripheral processing represent distinct routes to persuasion. At the same time, popularity should not be read as the *stronger* predictor simply because its p-value is smaller: a p-value reflects the precision of an estimate, not the size of an effect, and the relative importance of the two predictors should be judged from their standardised coefficients. Finally, the model explained a modest 13.6% of the variance in visit intention. Travel intention also depends on factors not modelled here, including vlogger credibility, parasocial relationships and engagement (Roy & Attri, 2024; Saini et al., 2023), destination image, and practical travel constraints, which were particularly severe when the data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the influence of travel vlog content value and travel vlogger popularity on intention to visit a tourism destination among Malaysian viewers. Both factors had significant positive effects, and they were almost entirely unrelated to each other, indicating that viewers draw on both the substance of a vlog and the popularity signals that surround it.

The study makes three contributions. First, it applies the ELM to travel vlogs by modelling content value as a central-route cue and popularity metrics as a peripheral-route cue within a single framework, and shows that both contribute to visit intention. Second, it treats the platform metrics that accompany every video (subscribers, views, likes, comments and ratings) as a construct distinct from vlogger credibility or parasocial attachment, which have received more attention in tourism research. Third, it adds evidence from Malaysia to a literature that draws largely on samples from China and South Asia.

For practice, destination marketing organisations and tourism businesses that partner with travel vloggers should assess both the craft of a creator's content (storytelling, video quality, clarity and organisation) and the creator's audience metrics, rather than selecting on follower counts alone. Briefs for sponsored content should emphasise simple language, a clear narrative and well-organised footage, as viewers regard these as essential. Because popularity cues appear to influence which vlogs are watched, destinations may benefit from working with creators who have established audiences while encouraging the ratings and endorsements that signal quality to new viewers. Vloggers, for their part, should treat production quality and audience growth as complementary rather than competing goals. Popularity metrics should be built genuinely, as purchased or inflated engagement may mislead viewers and damage trust in both the creator and the destination.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations should be noted. First, the convenience sample of 109 respondents was predominantly young and Malay, which limits generalisation to the wider Malaysian population and to international tourists. Second, the data are cross-sectional and self-reported from a single source, so common method bias cannot be ruled out (Podsakoff et al., 2024). Third, the measures have conceptual limitations. The content value items capture the importance respondents attach to content attributes rather than their evaluation of a specific vlog; the popularity items refer to the decision to watch rather than to visit; and one intention item concerns recommending vlogs to others. Construct validity was assessed only through internal consistency, without confirmatory factor analysis. Fourth, data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, when travel was restricted, and before the current dominance of short-form video platforms, which may affect how the findings apply today. Fifth, the study used the ELM as an organising lens but did not measure viewers' involvement or elaboration, so the routes through which the predictors operate were inferred rather than tested.

Future research could address these limitations by using larger and more diverse samples, including international and non-Malay viewers; by validating the measures with confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling; and by testing whether viewer involvement moderates the relative influence of content and popularity cues, as the ELM predicts. Experimental designs that manipulate view counts and ratin-

gs while holding content constant would allow stronger causal claims about popularity cues. Studies of short-form platforms such as TikTok and YouTube Shorts, and studies linking visit intention to actual visitation, would further extend the findings.

Ethics Statement

Participation was voluntary, respondents were informed of the purpose of the study before taking part, and responses were collected anonymously and used solely for academic purposes.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available because respondents were assured that their answers would be used solely for academic purposes. Anonymised data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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