

Narrative-Driven Short Video Marketing and Hotel Consumers' Reservation Intention in the Chinese Market: A Conceptual Framework

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ABSTRACT

The rapid rise of short video platforms has reshaped hospitality marketing, especially in the Chinese market, where Douyin, Xiaohongshu, and WeChat Video Channel influence consumer engagement and booking-related decisions. This conceptual paper synthesizes the study into a Stimulus-Organism-Response framework in which narrative structure operates as the stimulus, narrative transportation, flow experience, and sense of presence operate as organism states, perceived value and reservation intention operate as responses. The paper argues that the effectiveness of hotel short-video marketing depends on narrative coherence, emotional appeal, and immersive capacity rather than on mere promotional exposure. It develops six conceptual relationships: narrative structure enhances narrative transportation; transportation strengthens flow experience and sense of presence; flow experience and sense of presence elevate perceived value; and perceived value shapes reservation intention. The paper also positions these mechanisms within the Chinese digital ecosystem, where emotional engagement, cultural proximity, and relational meanings influence how hospitality content is interpreted. Its conceptual contribution lies in reframing short video marketing as experiential value creation rather than routine digital promotion. Its practical contribution lies in demonstrating why hotel marketers should prioritize coherent storytelling, culturally adaptive platform strategies, and collaborative narrative ecosystems that involve hotels, travel agencies, key opinion leaders, and users.

Keywords: Short-video marketing, narrative structure, narrative transportation, flow experience, sense of presence, reservation intention.

INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry has undergone a marked digital transformation, shifting from competition based mainly on physical amenities toward competition for visibility and persuasion in algorithm-driven online environments. In this changing landscape, short video platforms have become central to how hotels communicate with prospective customers. The study situates this shift in the Chinese market, where platforms such as Douyin, Xiaohongshu, and WeChat Video Channel play a major role in shaping travel-related attention, aspiration, and decision making (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Xiang, Magnini, & Fesenmaier, 2015; Chen, H. et al., 2023).

Within this context, the study presents an important conceptual insight. The persuasive strength of short video marketing does not rest primarily on whether the content is produced by a hotel or by a third party. Rather, it depends on whether the content can create narrative coherence and psychological engagement. This shifts the analytical focus from channel ownership to narrative and experiential design (Wang, X. et al., 2023; Polat et al., 2023).

The study, therefore, frames short video marketing as more than a promotional device. It treats it as a psychologically active medium capable of translating narrative cues into affective, cognitive, and behavioural outcomes. This conceptual paper condenses that argument into a journal-style framework centred on narrative structure, narrative transportation, flow experience, sense of presence, perceived value, and reservation intention (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Green & Brock, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Steuer, 1992; Zeithaml, 1988).

Problem Statement or Research Gap

Although short video marketing has become increasingly visible in hospitality practice, the study identifies a clear theoretical gap. Existing digital marketing studies have paid limited attention to the distinct qualities of short video content, particularly its narrative structure, visual storytelling, and immersive qualities, which may influence consumer engagement and reservation decisions. The study argues that the fast-paced, algorithm-driven nature of short video platforms requires a distinct conceptual approach from broader social media marketing (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Chen, H. et al., 2023).

The study further identifies several specific gaps. First, the mechanisms through which narrative transportation shapes behavioural outcomes in hotel short videos remain insufficiently understood. Second, the roles of flow experience and sense of presence in short video hospitality marketing remain underexplored, despite their relevance in adjacent fields such as gaming, virtual reality, and digital media. Third, the function of perceived value within short video-induced reservation behaviour has not been sufficiently clarified (Green & Brock, 2000; Van Laer et al., 2014; Ding & Hung, 2021; Kim & Biocca, 1997; Tussyadiah et al., 2018; Zeithaml, 1988).

The literature review within the study also points to unresolved contextual issues. Much of the existing evidence is cross-sectional, platform-specific, or drawn from single contexts. It often neglects cumulative exposure effects, algorithmic recommendation systems, and cultural differences in how digital travel content is interpreted. These unresolved issues justify the effort to organise the field through a clearer conceptual model (Tang et al., 2023; Pang et al., 2022; Ying et al., 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study positions short-video marketing as an emerging yet increasingly important domain in hospitality research. Short videos are particularly effective in this sector because they can present hotel experiences through dynamic, emotionally rich, and visually immersive narratives. Unlike static promotional materials, they can simulate real-time experience, increase authenticity, and strengthen emotional connection. The literature reviewed in the study suggests that such content can influence brand awareness, trust, and purchase-related intentions, especially among digital consumers (Kim & Kim, 2020; Chen, H. et al., 2023; Bouteraa et al., 2023a; Chekima et al., 2023; Febrilia et al., 2024; Yamagishi et al., 2024).

A central construct in the reviewed literature is narrative structure. The study defines narrative structure as the coherent arrangement of events within a storyline. It argues that structured narratives reduce cognitive overload, improve comprehension, and create emotional resonance. In short-form content, where attention is limited and exposure is brief, coherence becomes especially important because it supports rapid engagement and facilitates subsequent psychological immersion (Green & Appel, 2024; Wang, X. et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2023).

Narrative transportation is presented as a second major construct. The study treats it as a state in which viewers become cognitively and emotionally absorbed into the story world. In hospitality contexts, this matters because viewers who mentally simulate a guest journey may become more receptive to persuasive cues and more favourably disposed toward the featured hotel. The literature also suggests that transportation remains central to understanding how narrative content influences attitudinal and behavioural outcomes (Green & Brock, 2000; Van Laer et al., 2014; Zhao et al., 2021).

The literature review then develops flow experience and sense of presence as complementary immersive states. Flow is associated with focused attention, enjoyment, and temporal dissociation during media consumption. Presence refers to the feeling of being there in the mediated environment. The study shows that both states are relevant to digital hospitality content because short videos can combine pacing, sound, visuals, narrative framing, and interface features in ways that intensify experiential engagement (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Chong et al., 2024; Steuer, 1992; Tussyadiah et al., 2018; Ying et al., 2022).

Perceived value and reservation intention complete the reviewed sequence. The study conceptualizes perceived value as a broad assessment of benefits relative to costs, while also recognizing that, in hospitality, it extends beyond simple price and quality calculations to include emotional, symbolic, experiential, and social meanings.

Reservation intention is treated as a key behavioural outcome shaped by affective and experiential inputs, rather than by rational evaluation alone (Zeithaml, 1988; Chen & Peng, 2021; He, 2024).

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation of the study is the Stimulus-Organism-Response model. Within this framework, stimulus refers to the external features of short video content, organism refers to viewers' internal psychological states, and response refers to evaluative and behavioural outcomes. The study adapts this model to hospitality short video marketing by treating narrative structure as the key stimulus, narrative transportation, flow experience, and sense of presence as organism states, and perceived value and reservation intention as responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Jiang et al., 2024).

The study strengthens this foundation by integrating three supporting theoretical streams. Narrative transportation theory explains how viewers become absorbed in story worlds and how this absorption increases receptiveness to persuasive communication. Flow theory explains how focused enjoyment and immersive attention can emerge during short video consumption. Presence theory explains how mediated content can create a compelling feeling of experiential immediacy. By combining these perspectives, the study develops a more integrated account of how short video storytelling affects consumer judgment and intention (Green & Brock, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Steuer, 1992).

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

The conceptual framework organises the focal constructs into a sequential pathway. Narrative structure is positioned as the external trigger that initiates consumer immersion. Once viewers encounter a coherent and emotionally resonant short video narrative, they are more likely to experience narrative transportation. That immersive state then deepens into a flow experience and sense of presence. These organism states shape perceived value, which, in turn, informs reservation intention (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Green & Brock, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Steuer, 1992; Zeithaml, 1988).

This framework is conceptually important because it reframes hospitality short video marketing as a progression from storytelling to immersion, from immersion to valuation, and from valuation to booking-related intention. It also positions short video marketing as a relational and experiential process rather than a purely informational one. Within the study, this sequence becomes the basis for a broader interpretation of digital persuasion in the hospitality sector (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Jiang et al., 2024).

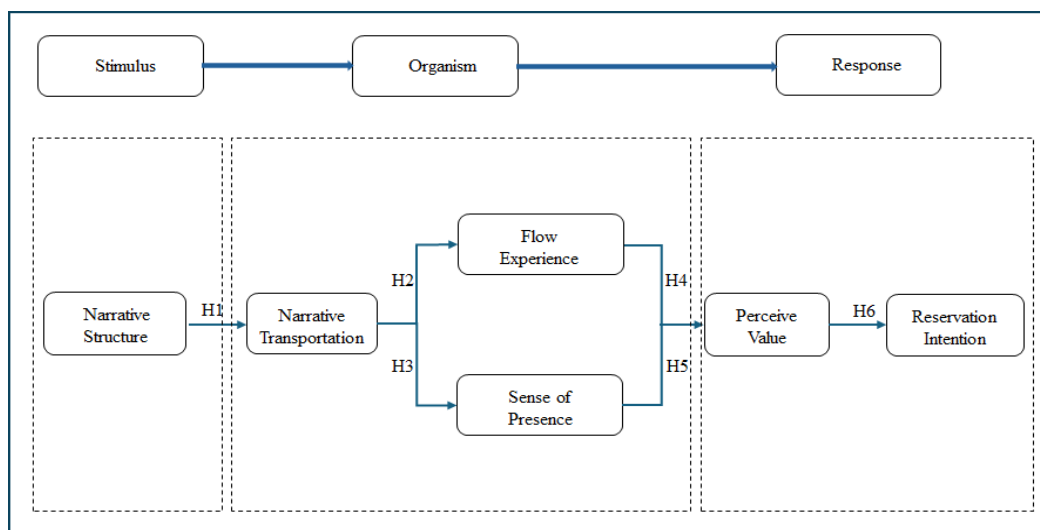


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Developed by the researcher through the integration of key concepts from Narrative Transportation Theory (Green & Brock, 2000), Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), and Presence Theory (Kim & Biocca, 1997).

Narrative structure positively influences narrative transportation

The study argues that coherent narrative structure is a critical antecedent of narrative transportation. When a short video presents a clear storyline with temporal and causal logic, viewers can more easily follow the sequence of events, reduce cognitive friction, and become emotionally involved in the depicted experience. In hospitality content, such structure helps viewers imagine themselves moving through a hotel environment and emotionally entering the narrative world (Green & Appel, 2024; Van Laer et al., 2014; Wang, X. et al., 2023).

Narrative Transportation Positively Influences Flow Experience

The study presents transportation and flow as closely connected immersive states. Once viewers are drawn into the narrative world, they become more likely to experience focused attention, intrinsic enjoyment, and reduced awareness of time. In this way, transportation serves as a narrative gateway that intensifies experiential absorption during short-video consumption (Green & Appel, 2024; Cao et al., 2021; Gan et al., 2023).

Narrative Transportation Positively Influences Sense Of Presence

The study further suggests that transportation facilitates the perceptual feeling of being there. Once viewers are emotionally and cognitively absorbed in a story, they may begin to feel psychologically present in the depicted hotel environment. In hospitality short videos, this simulated presence strengthens realism, authenticity, and affective connection (Green & Appel, 2024; Cao et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2025).

Flow Experience Positively Influences Perceived Value

The study argues that flow enhances perceived value by amplifying positive engagement and reducing perceived costs of attention. When viewers become deeply absorbed in short video content, they rate the featured hotel experience as more enjoyable, compelling, and worthwhile. Flow, therefore, operates not only as a pleasurable viewing state but also as a mechanism for value enhancement (Chen & Peng, 2021; Yong et al., 2021; He et al., 2023; Chong et al., 2024).

Sense of Presence Positively Influences Perceived Value

The study also links presence to value formation. When a short video creates a strong sense of realism and immediacy, viewers perceive the content and the hotel it depicts as more authentic, more trustworthy, and more emotionally meaningful. Sense of presence, therefore, contributes to perceived value by strengthening psychological realism and emotional engagement (Tussyadiah et al., 2018; Tsai, 2022; Ying et al., 2022).

Perceived Value Positively Influences Reservation Intention

The final relationship in the study links perceived value to reservation intention. Once viewers perceive that the featured hotel offers compelling functional, emotional, social, or symbolic worth, they are more likely to judge the experience as worth booking. The study consistently treats perceived value as the immediate evaluative condition through which immersive short video experiences are translated into booking-related intention (Zeithaml, 1988; Chen & Peng, 2021; He, 2024).

DISCUSSION

Taken together, the study supports a broader conceptualization of short-video marketing in hospitality. Consumers do not respond to hotel short videos merely as compressed bundles of information. They respond through a narrative-experiential chain in which structured storytelling activates immersion, immersion shapes experiential evaluation, and experiential evaluation informs intention. This sequence shifts the logic of hospitality promotion away from static demonstration and toward psychological orchestration (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Green & Brock, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Zeithaml, 1988).

A key implication of this synthesis is that the effectiveness of short videos depends on how well narrative and sensory cues are integrated. Coherent plot development, emotional pacing, visual framing, and immersive

atmosphere are not isolated design features. Within the study, they operate as coordinated mechanisms that move viewers from passive observation toward active mental simulation and emotional involvement. This is why generic or trend-following content may attract attention but still fail to generate meaningful conversion (Wang, X. et al., 2023; Gan et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2023).

The study also offers a culturally situated interpretation. In the Chinese digital ecosystem, emotional responses may be shaped by relational warmth, social aspiration, and collectivist meanings rather than by purely individualistic frames of luxury consumption. This does not reject the broader psychological architecture of the model. Instead, it suggests that the emotional grammar through which transportation, flow, presence, and value are expressed is culturally contingent (Pang et al., 2022; Jiang, Y. et al., 2023).

Theoretical Implications

The study makes several theoretical contributions that remain suitable for conceptual article development. First, it extends the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework to the underexplored context of hospitality short-video marketing by showing how narrative structure can serve as a stimulus that activates multiple immersive organism states before shaping response outcomes. This extends SOR beyond generic digital cues and grounds it in narrative and experiential media design (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Jiang et al., 2024).

Second, the study bridges narrative transportation theory, flow theory, and presence theory within a single explanatory sequence. Rather than treating these perspectives separately, it integrates them into a unified account of how short video storytelling works psychologically. The result is a more holistic model linking affective, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions of digital consumer response (Green & Brock, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Steuer, 1992; Bouteraa et al., 2023b).

Additionally, the study conceptually repositions key constructs. It frames narrative transportation and flow as interconnected rather than isolated processes. It treats the sense of presence as an embodied emotional antecedent rather than a purely technical effect. It also interprets perceived value as emerging from immersion and emotional experience rather than from rational comparison. In this sense, the study challenges more traditional rationalist readings of consumer behaviour in digital hospitality contexts (Green & Appel, 2024; Tussyadiah et al., 2018; Zeithaml, 1988).

Besides, the study contributes a culturally sensitive reading of digital persuasion. Locating the framework within the Chinese market suggests that cross-cultural interpretation matters to how narrative immersion and value perception unfold. This extends the model's conceptual relevance beyond a single media setting and underscores the importance of contextual sensitivity in hospitality marketing research (Pang et al., 2022; Ying et al., 2022).

Practical Implications

The study offers clear practical implications for hospitality marketers. The first is strategic. Hotels should move from functional communication toward emotion-driven storytelling. Rather than focusing solely on room size, amenities, or service claims, short videos should present coherent narratives that allow viewers to imagine an experience rather than merely inspect a facility. In the study, social media is reframed as an experiential stage rather than a simple promotional outlet (Wang, X. et al., 2023; Gan et al., 2023).

Regarding concerns about content design, hotels should produce emotionally consistent short video narratives that strengthen narrative coherence, sensory presence, and sustained engagement over time. The study suggests that narrative arcs, audiovisual consistency, and emotionally resonant storytelling can help consumers visualise an experiential journey rather than a transactional purchase (Chong et al., 2024; Tussyadiah et al., 2018).

The study also emphasizes that hotels should actively work with travel agencies and key opinion leaders to create a layered storytelling ecosystem. Such partnerships broaden reach while also combining authenticity, logistical credibility, creativity, and audience influence. The same logic extends to user-generated content, which the study treats as a source of authenticity and social validation when effectively integrated into a broader narrative strategy (Polat et al., 2023; Wu & Lai, 2024; Yamagishi et al., 2024).

Additionally, because the study is situated in the Chinese digital environment, it highlights the need for culturally adaptive content strategies aligned with platform-specific features and user expectations. Hotels entering this market cannot assume that conventional international promotion will translate effectively. They must adapt storytelling techniques, emotional cues, and platform use to local digital behaviour (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Pang et al., 2022; Jiang, Y. et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023b).

The study also argues that marketers should be concerned with resource allocation, concentrating time, budget, and creative effort on the content features most likely to strengthen perceived value and reservation intention. This reduces waste on superficial trends and shifts strategic focus toward psychologically meaningful narrative design (Tang et al., 2023; Guo et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper, derived strictly from the study, frames short video marketing in hospitality as a narrative and experiential process rather than a narrow promotional tool. Its central claim is that coherent narrative structure can activate immersive psychological states, namely narrative transportation, flow experience, and sense of presence, which shape perceived value and ultimately influence reservation intention. In this framework, storytelling is not peripheral. It is the mechanism through which digital hospitality content becomes persuasive (Lada et al., 2024; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Green & Brock, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Steuer, 1992; Zeithaml, 1988).

The study further shows that this process is particularly relevant in the Chinese digital market, where platform ecosystems, emotional cues, and relational meanings shape consumers' engagement with short-form video content. The resulting conceptual model offers a coherent basis for understanding why some short videos convert attention into booking-related intention while others do not. It also positions short video marketing as a long-term brand relationship tool grounded in immersion, authenticity, and value creation (Chekima & Chekima, 2019; Pang et al., 2022; Jiang, Y. et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024a).

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