



From Screen to Scene: The Role of Social Comparison in Driving Millennials' Travel Intentions via TikTok Travel Reels

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ARTICLE INFO	Abstract
Keywords: <i>TikTok Travel Reels, Travel Intentions, Social Comparison, Millennials</i> (IJTHS), O6U Vol.9, No.2, October 2025, pp. 296-315 Received:21/10/2025 Accepted:10/11/2025 Published:15/11/2025	Purpose Given the growing influence of social media on consumer behaviour, particularly in the tourism sector, it is imperative to comprehend how emerging platforms such as TikTok impact travel-related decision-making. This study examines the impact of TikTok travel reels on the travel intentions of millennials, highlighting the mediating effect of social comparison. Design/methodology/approach This study utilises a quantitative methodology, employing a structured questionnaire administered to millennial TikTok users. Data was analysed using SmartPLS4.1.0.2 software. Findings The findings display that millennials' travel intentions are significantly influenced by exposure to TikTok travel reels. Additionally, this influence is substantially mediated by social comparison. Originality/value This study makes a novel contribution by including social comparison as a mediator in the association between exposure to TikTok reels and the Millennials' Travel Intentions, a relationship that hasn't gotten much empirical attention in the existing tourism literature. Furthermore, our results present useful insights for content creators and destination marketers. Given the growing importance of Millennials as a key future market segment targeted by many destinations, the study provides timely implications for understanding and effectively engaging this generation through social media platforms.

1. Introduction

The evolution of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed the planning process of travel experiences, making digital content a key player in this evolution, particularly among millennials (Bondarenko et al., 2025). With this digital transformation, TikTok has come to involve users in dynamic forms, providing a novel medium through which travel narratives are communicated (Ajitoni, 2024). The emergence of TikTok has revolutionized digital content consumption, particularly among millennials (Sallaku et al., 2025). TikTok, boasting over 1 billion monthly active users (Sabla & Gour, 2023), has established its travel-related content as concise, visually engaging, and frequently emotive instrument for shaping visitor behaviour

(Huimin & Albattat, 2024). Unlike traditional formats, the content that is not only visually convincing but also adapts to user preferences makes travel inspiration more personalized and emotionally engaging (Chourasia, 2024).

Koç (2023) pointed out that the design of the TikTok platform inherently facilitates rapid engagement as well as algorithmic personalization, leading to greater persuasive power of travel reels in evoking travel desire. These visually appealing fragments, crafted mostly by peer travellers themselves, act as real-time windows into destinations, culture and experiences in a more digestible and understandable form, particularly for younger generations (Yawei, 2025). Social media influence on travel decisions is especially strong for millennials (Yeral, 2025). As a generation, millennials are comfortable with technology and value authentic interactions (Junipriansa & Disastra, 2025). Due to their algorithmic personalisation and rapid engagement, travel reels are more persuasive on TikTok (Thazin & Koo, 2024). These visually attractive fragments, designed mainly by peer travelers, serve as authentic windows into destinations, cultures, and activities in a format that is easily consumable and comprehensible, especially for younger generations (Yawei, 2025; Yeral, 2025). Millennials, noted for their advanced digital skills and inclination towards genuine experiences, exhibit a significant susceptibility to social media influence in their travel decision-making processes (Junipriansa & Disastra, 2025). In this context, millennials are among the most impacted by TikTok travel reels due to their digital nature and their significant reliance on online experiences (Yeral, 2025).

Liu et al. (2024) observed that TikTok short videos about travel are increasingly shaping the travel intentions of millennials. Millennials engage with the content rapidly and emotionally, thereby reshaping their perceptions of travel based on the attractive, realistic, and filtered experiences that are featured (Dramićanin et al., 2023).

The psychological mechanism that underpins this effect is the phenomenon of social comparison (Karaiskou, 2025), in which individuals compare their own experiences to those of their peers as they are presented on digital platforms (Siegel & Wang, 2019). From this perspective, reel videos serve not just as entertainment; they also play a role in stimulating the desire to travel and enhancing decision-making intentions (Kumar & Kumar, 2025).

Earlier literature has examined the influence of social media on travel decision-making; yet most of these studies have primarily concentrated on platforms such as Instagram and Facebook (Chen, 2021; Overney, 2025). Scholars have explored how these platforms influence perceptions of travel destinations and encourage engagement with visual content, including user-generated materials (Dramićanin et al., 2023; Kumar & Kumar, 2025). Several studies have investigated the impact of TikTok content on the image of tourism destinations (Chenchen et al., 2020; Wengel et al., 2022). Users' visually appealing photos and personal experiences can influence the target audience's attitudes. Other research focuses on TikTok's role in stimulating sudden and unplanned travel decisions, particularly among millennials, because of emotional engagement with reel videos (Bai et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, existing research has not thoroughly explored the influence of emerging platforms that use short, fast-paced video material, such as TikTok, which has emerged as an important factor in stimulating travel intention, particularly among younger audiences. Further,

although some studies have shown that observing others' distinctive travel experiences can evoke a desire to emulate or compete with them (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Machado et al., 2021), to the researcher's knowledge, no research has investigated the role of social comparison as a moderating variable that explains the impact of TikTok travel reels on millennials' travel intentions among millennials, revealing a research gap.

Therefore, the current study examines the influence of TikTok travel reels on millennials' travel intention. Furthermore, it examines the moderating role of social comparison as a psychological factor that may influence this relationship. By addressing an underexplored area in the existing literature, the research makes a practical and theoretical contribution to the field of digital tourism marketing. The study offers new perspectives on how short-form video content, like TikTok, affects consumer behaviour, as well as practical implications for content creators and tourism marketers. The findings are expected to foster the development of more persuasive and psychologically grounded marketing strategies that effectively engage younger audiences and stimulate their interest in travel.

2. Theoretical background

As the world of digital media is always changing, apps like TikTok are having a big effect on travel and tourism, especially for Millennials. Based on Theory of Planned Behavior developed by Ajzen (1991), visually and emotionally compelling travel videos and images will influence people's attitudes, perceived behavioural control, and subjective norms, therefore increasing the likelihood of travel. In this case, travel videos on TikTok are believed to provoke the wish to travel by portraying ideal locations and genuine participatory experiences along with user-generated content that fits the audience's identity and lifestyle wishes.

Social comparison theory is one of the fundamental theoretical foundations of this paradigm (Festinger, 1954). This theory suggests that individuals evaluate their own lives through comparisons with others, especially on social media platforms. These comparisons are facilitated by TikTok, which enables users to observe peers or influencers participating in travel activities that may appear to be more desirable or superior. This psychological process acts as a moderating determinant that could reinforce or reduce the impact of exposure to travel videos on millennials' travel intentions. By making upward comparisons, viewers might feel inspired or motivated to replicate the experiences they see, thus converting passive media consumption to active travel planning. Therefore, our conceptual framework links digital media exposure to behavioral intentions through a psychologically established route. Additionally, it reflects the growing importance of emotionally engaging, peer-generated content in shaping tourist motivations in the digital age.

3. Hypothesis development

3.1. TikTok Travel Reels and Millennials' Travel Intentions

Travel reels on TikTok represent a significant change in the way travel content is produced and viewed (Chenchen et al., 2020; Wengel et al., 2022). Unlike professionally curated travel videos that sometimes lack authenticity, these videos generated by users provide relatable information and emotional resonance, where aspiring images are juxtaposed with everyday

realities (Shamsuddin & Azman, 2025). In addition, the interactive nature of TikTok allows viewers to comment, share, and remix videos, fostering a sense of community and a shared experience that increases the persuasive impact of these travel narratives (Du et al., 2024). The democratisation of content creation allows viewers to identify with the experiences depicted, aligning with their values and personal experiences. This alignment influences travel intentions by diminishing the psychological distance between the viewer and the experience (Thazin & Koo, 2024; Karaiskou, 2025).

Millennials, born between 1981 and 1996, are among the most active users of these platforms, owing to their high digital literacy and reliance on social media as a key source of information and motivation (Huimin & Albattat, 2024). Travel TikTok videos from peers or influencers are valued by millennials for their authenticity and reliability (Junipriansa & Disastra, 2025).

Studies have shown that social media activity affects travel decisions. For example, Liu et al. (2024) identified that TikTok content related to destinations had a positive impact on users' attitudes and emotional connection to travel destinations. Chen et al. (2021) and Liu et al. (2024) confirmed the positive relationship between frequent viewing of travel short videos on TikTok and users' intention to plan vacations. The empirical findings indicate that TikTok content acts as a significant stimulus affecting users' travel intentions through its impact on cognitive and affective evaluations. Millennials, being frequent users of TikTok, are expected to have their travel behaviours significantly influenced by the content on this platform. Considering these empirical findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: TikTok Travel Reels has a positive effect on Millennials' Travel Intentions.

3.2. *The mediating role of social comparison*

3.2.1. The relationship between TikTok travel reels and social comparison:

Travel content on TikTok has become one of the most important factors influencing individuals' perceptions and behaviors toward tourism (Liu et al., 2024). Many users, especially millennials and Generation Z, rely on short videos to discover tourist destinations and new travel experiences (Du et al., 2022). However, this content is not only a source of inspiration; it also leads to social comparison, as viewers compare their lifestyles to the luxury and exclusive travel experiences they see offered by influencers or their peers (Wengel et al., 2022). Social comparison refers to the process by which individuals evaluate their lives or experiences by comparing themselves to others, especially with the proliferation of social media content such as travel videos on TikTok (Qiu, 2024).

Previous studies indicated that these comparisons could have dual outcomes (Liu et al., 2019; Du et al., 2022; Rashidin et al., 2025). On the one hand, they can motivate individuals to adopt exploratory behaviors and increase their intentions to travel. On the other hand, they can trigger negative feelings such as frustration or a sense of inadequacy if their financial capabilities or social circumstances prevent them from having the same experiences (Siegel & Wang, 2019). Thus, the impact of TikTok goes beyond mere tourism marketing to a psychological and social factor that reshapes tourists' expectations and consumption patterns (Shamsuddin & Azman, 2025).

TikTok travel reels are useful for social comparison, particularly in depicting holiday experiences and lifestyles (Du et al., 2022). Concise, visually engaging, and carefully selected content often presents idealised portrayals of travel, adventure, exploration, and enjoyment, while minimising the aspects of fatigue, discomfort, or disorientation (Qiu, 2024; Derbaix et al., 2025). As Rashidin (2025) states, these are reference points that prompt users, especially millennials, to compare their lives with their peers and influencers.

Scholars have concluded that exposure to travel content on social media intensifies comparative thinking, as we measure our opportunities and achievements against the aspirational standards presented online (Siegel & Wang, 2019; Qiu, 2024). This phenomenon is especially pertinent to millennials, who are the primary users of TikTok and are more vulnerable to social comparison (Firth et al., 2024). Given the above, the following hypothesis is formulated.

H2: TikTok Travel Reels has a positive effect on social comparison.

3.2.2. The relationship between social comparison and travel intention:

Social comparison is a crucial psychological factor that influences individuals' travel intentions. Millennials often unconsciously compare themselves to others when viewing travel experiences posted online, such as photos of destinations or short videos (Junipriansa & Disastra, 2025). This comparison can trigger a desire to emulate those experiences, either to raise their social status or to feel a sense of belonging (Dramićanin et al., 2023). Research has shown that this motivation often motivates travel decisions, particularly when destinations are portrayed as status symbols or luxury (Guan et al., 2024). Furthermore, seeing others enjoy exceptional travel experiences can trigger a sense of envy, which in turn enhances the desire to seek out similar experiences (Asdecker, 2022).

Furthermore, social comparison can reshape individuals' perceptions of themselves, highlighting gaps between their current situation and their ideal life. For many, travel becomes a way to bridge these gaps and reaffirm their identity (Machado et al., 2021; Overney, 2025). This effect is most evident in digital contexts, such as social media platforms, where travel content is easily accessible and frequently consumed. These environments foster comparisons and, in turn, enhance travel motivation (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999; Lee and Kim, 2025). Hence, our study hypothesised that:

H3: Social comparison has a positive effect on Millennials' Travel Intentions.

3.2.3. The mediating role of social comparison

Beyond its direct influence, social comparison functions as a mediating mechanism linking exposure to TikTok travel reels with travel intentions. Recent studies indicate that engaging with travel-related content on social media frequently initiates social comparison, which may influence subsequent motivational states (Asdecker, 2022; Xu et al., 2023). For example, a study conducted by Guan et al. (2024) showed that travel content on social media can increase individuals' desire to travel, as it activates social comparison and related emotions such as inspiration and admiration, which mediate travel intention.

Asdecker (2022) emphasized that exposure to visually appealing travel images not only drives travel-related goals but also elicits envy, an upward social comparison emotion that increases travel plans. According to a theoretical model of social media travel content, users frequently compare their experiences with those of others, which leads to self-driven travel intentions that align with aspirational benchmarks (Latif et al., 2020; Crusius et al., 2022). Although social comparison is associated in many studies with feelings of frustration or jealousy (Salovey & Rodin, 1986), it has another dimension that can be interpreted from a positive perspective: the motivational role it plays in guiding individuals toward improving their lives or enhancing their experiences (Crusius et al., 2022).

In this context, when individuals are exposed to visual travel content on platforms like TikTok, they may not feel deprived or inadequate (Tuominen & Sippo, 2025). On the contrary, this comparison may motivate them to adopt positive behaviors such as planning travel, searching for new destinations, or trying to have experiences like those they see (Kwie, 2023). This is in line with social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), which posits that individuals use comparison as a tool for self-improvement, not just for negative evaluation.

Thus, social comparison can be considered a positive mediating variable that explains the relationship between exposure to travel content on TikTok and travel intentions. Comparison here acts as a psychological mechanism that motivates tourists to decide to travel because of their feeling inspired or the desire to emulate the positive experiences they see. This phenomenon illustrates how social comparison transforms exposure into action (Wahba et al., 2025). Thus, social comparison seems to work not only as a psychological mechanism activated by travel content on TikTok, but also as a major avenue through which visual motivation is adapted into a genuine intention to visit. Considering that TikTok is mostly populated by millennials, the demographic group that is most active on the platform, and is influenced by peer and influencer content, this group is expected to undergo enhanced social comparison processes that modify their perception of the travel sites and fuel the urge for travel. Hence, our study hypothesized the following:

H4: Social Comparison mediates the relationship between TikTok Travel Reels and Millennials' Travel Intentions.

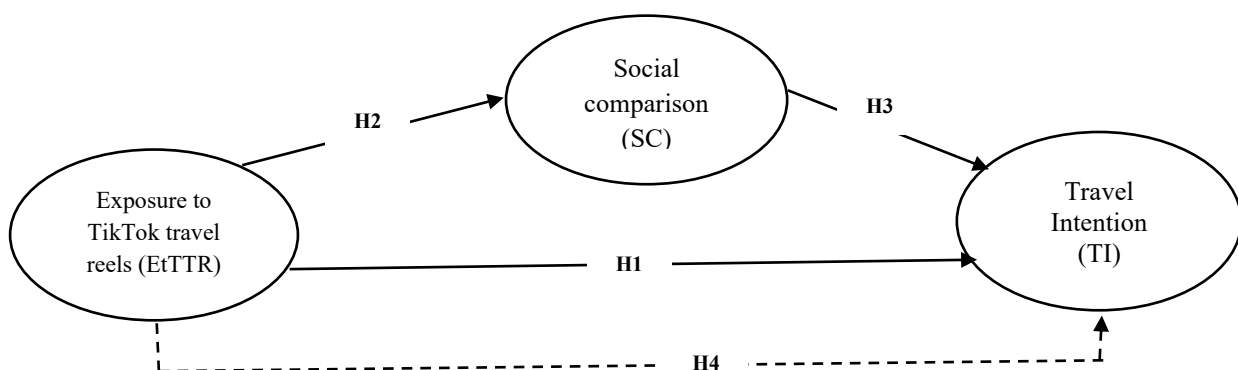


Figure 1: Study hypothesized model

4. Methodology

This study employs a quantitative, descriptive, and analytical research approach to investigate the impact of TikTok travel-related reels on Millennials' travel intentions. Additionally, it underscores the mediating role of social comparisons in this relationship. This method emphasises the collection of primary data through a structured questionnaire administered to the target population.

4.1. *Sampling*

A quantitative research approach was applied to developing a structured web-based questionnaire. The study population comprises domestic and international millennials, born between 1981 and 1995, who engage with TikTok and see travel-related short videos. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure the inclusion of participants who meet the following criteria: aged 30 to 44, have an active TikTok account, and have watched travel reels on TikTok within the past six months.

4.2. *Data collection*

The data collection period spanned from May 2025 to July 2025, utilising various online channels. The strategy involved focused engagement within TikTok communities that revolve around well-known travel hashtags (e.g., TravelEgypt, HiddenGems, BudgetTravel, VisitCairo, ExploreAswan), in addition to travel-orientated groups and pages on alternative social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram.

The survey link was also disseminated through comment sections of relevant TikTok posts, interactions with travel influencers, and niche tourism discussion forums. By highlighting communities where users share, engage with, and discuss destination-related content, the sampling approach increased the probability of capturing respondents whose travel intentions could be influenced by exposure to TikTok's curated travel imagery and peer-driven narratives.

The researcher calculated the minimum sample size using the table of Morgan (1970) to ensure relevant statistical power at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, while also considering the study and population. After data screening and coding, missing numbers, inconsistencies, and other quality issues were removed. A total of 360 valid responses were retained for final statistical analysis.

4.3. *Scale development*

The structured questionnaire was developed based on previous literature and adapted to fit the context of TikTok usage in travel decision-making. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections. Section one includes participants' demographic characteristics, gathering information about respondents' gender, age group, education level, and nationality. Section 2 contains a set of behavioural questions that assess the respondents' TikTok usage patterns and their engagement with travel-related content. These questions include daily TikTok usage, average time spent on TikTok per day, short travel video engagement, and travel content interaction. Section three consists of a set of statements that measure the study variables using five-point Likert scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The independent

variable, exposure to TikTok travel reels (EtTTR), was measured using a scale adapted from Xiang & Gretzel (2010) and Parra-López et al. (2012), with minor modifications to align with the study's objectives and context through an 11-item scale. However, ten items were used to evaluate the dependent variable, travel intention (TI), which was derived from Echtner & Ritchie (1993). These items were also slightly modified to align with the research purpose and content. The 5-item scale from Gibbons & Buunk (1999) was employed to measure social comparison (SC), with only minor modifications made to accommodate the current study.

4.4. *Pilot Study*

To evaluate the clarity, reliability, and validity of the questionnaire items, a pilot study involving 34 respondents who met the target population criteria was conducted before the main data collection. Adjustments were made in response to participants' feedback to enhance wording, remove ambiguities, and ensure understanding. All constructs exceeded Devitt et al.'s (1998) 0.70 Cronbach's Alpha criteria for reliability.

5. Results

5.1. *Demographic Profile of Respondents*

The study sample comprised 360 respondents from the millennial generation. Regarding gender, 198 participants (55%) were female, whilst 162 (45%) were male. The age distribution revealed that the predominant group was 30–34 years, comprising 144 respondents (40%), followed by the 25–29 age group with 126 respondents (35%), and the 35–39 age group with 90 respondents (25%). Educational level indicated that 216 respondents (60%) possessed a bachelor's degree, 90 (25%) had completed postgraduate studies, and 54 (15%) held a diploma or comparable qualification. This demographic profile delineates the attributes of the target generation and guarantees that the findings pertain to millennials' travel-related habits.

5.2. *Behavioural Questions*

The questionnaire included behavioural questions to assess respondents' digital engagement and travel content consumption. The findings displayed that 80% of millennials use TikTok daily, with the time ranging from one to three hours per day. Besides, 70% of participants also reported watching short travel reels on the app. Nearly 55% of participants reported that these videos have inspired them to plan a trip or add a new destination to their travel list. At end, these findings reflect that TikTok is not only used for entertainment but has also become an influential source in shaping users' travel decisions.

5.3. Measurement model Reliability and Validity Assessment

Table 1. Reliability and Convergent Validity Assessment

Constructs/Items		Loadings	Sig.	alpha	CR (rho a)	CR (rho c)	AVE
TikTok Travel Reels (EtTTR)				0.959	0.959	0.964	0.729
EtTTR1	I often watch travel-related Reels on TikTok.	0.805	***				
EtTTR2	TikTok suggests travel content that matches my interests.	0.840	***				
EtTTR3	I spend a significant amount of time viewing travel Reels.	0.841	***				
EtTTR4	Travel Reels on TikTok capture my attention more than other types of content.	0.858	***				
EtTTR5	I interact (like, comment, share) with travel Reels on TikTok.	0.873	***				
EtTTR6	I follow accounts that regularly post travel content.	0.872	***				
EtTTR7	TikTok travel videos make destinations look more attractive.	0.866	***				
EtTTR8	I feel inspired by travel Reels to explore new places.	0.881	***				
EtTTR9	I save or bookmark travel Reels for future reference.	0.858	***				
EtTTR10	I actively search for travel Reels on TikTok.	0.839	***				
Social Comparison (SC)				0.950	0.951	0.961	0.833
SC1	I often compare my travel experiences with those I see on TikTok.	0.892	***				
SC2	I feel others travel more than I do after watching TikTok Reels.	0.923	***				
SC3	Travel content on TikTok makes me reflect on my limited experiences.	0.914	***				
SC4	Seeing others travel motivates me to plan my own trips.	0.916	***				
SC5	I feel inspired to live a more exciting life when I see travel content.	0.918	***				
Travel Intention (TI)				0.965	0.965	0.969	0.760
TI1	I intend to travel in the next 12 months.	0.858	***				
TI2	I am actively searching for travel destinations.	0.852	***				
TI3	I am likely to book a trip soon.	0.868	***				
TI4	I plan to visit new places that I saw on TikTok.	0.887	***				
TI5	I feel encouraged to travel after watching TikTok travel Reels.	0.870	***				
TI6	I have added travel to my upcoming goals.	0.893	***				
TI7	I talk to others about the places I saw on TikTok and want to visit.	0.887	***				
TI8	I follow travel updates and offers online.	0.867	***				
TI9	I feel a strong desire to explore new places.	0.867	***				
TI10	I am willing to adjust my schedule to travel soon.	0.871	***				

Note: *** p<0.005

The study's measurement model was verified through performing reliability and validity tests. Table 1 demonstrates that the values of Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) for all constructs surpassed the recommended thresholds of 0.70 for reliability and 0.50 for AVE, thereby confirming robust internal consistency and convergent validity (Kamel, 2024). The factor loadings for all indicators were above 0.70, ranging between 0.839 and 0.923, indicating satisfactory convergent validity and confirming that the items effectively measured their intended constructs (Sarstedt et al., 2023; Kamel, 2025). Thus, the constructs EtTTR, SC, and TI illustrate robust reliability and internal coherence.

Discriminant validity was additionally demonstrated through the Fornell–Larcker criterion, cross-loadings, and the HTMT ratio. Table 2 demonstrates that the Fornell–Larcker test validated that the square roots of AVE for each construct exceeded their inter-construct correlations (Hair et al., 2023). Similarly, HTMT values in Table 2 ranged between 0.764 and 0.848, which is below the 0.85 threshold suggested by Henseler et al. (2023), indicating that the constructs are distinct from one another. Moreover, the results of cross-loadings were higher for their associated constructs than for others.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity Statistics for Study Constructs

<i>Constructs</i>	<i>Exposure to TikTok Reels</i>	<i>Travel Social Comparison</i>	<i>Travel Intention</i>
<i>HTMT</i>			
<i>Exposure to TikTok Reels</i>	—	0.762	0.848
<i>Social Comparison</i>	—	—	0.837
<i>Travel Intention</i>	—	—	—
<i>Fornell–Larcker Criterion</i>			
<i>Exposure to TikTok Reels</i>	0.854		
<i>Social Comparison</i>	0.730	0.913	
<i>Travel Intention</i>	0.826	0.803	0.872

5.4. Testing the Structural Relationships

Following the assessment of the measurement model, the subsequent stage is to analyse the structural model. This evaluation will utilise numerous critical metrics (Demir, 2025), including VIF, Model Fit, R^2 , F^2 , and Path Coefficients, to analyse the correlations among the research variables and the model's overall predictive efficacy.

Initially, to confirm the absence of multicollinearity, the variance inflation factor (VIF) values were evaluated and found to range from 2.604 to 4.593, which is significantly below the cut-off value of 5 (Kamel, 2024; Demir, 2025), thereby indicating that multicollinearity was not an issue. The model fit indices displayed in Table 3 ($SRMR = 0.040$, $NFI = 0.878$, $\chi^2 = 1283.451$, $d_ULS = 0.517$, $d_G = 0.677$) indicated that the structural model attained an acceptable overall fit, aligning with the criteria outlined in contemporary methodological guidelines (Hair et al., 2023; Henseler, 2022). These data collectively affirm that the measurement model satisfies all statistical criteria for reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, ensuring the robustness of the constructs for subsequent structural investigation.

Table 3. Model Fit Assessment Indicators

Fit Index	Saturated Model	Estimated Model	Recommended Threshold	Interpretation
SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual)	0.040	0.040	< 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999)	Excellent fit
d _{ULS} (Squared Euclidean Distance)	0.517	0.517	—	Acceptable
d _G (Geodesic Distance)	0.677	0.677	—	Acceptable
Chi-square	1283.451	1283.451	—	Within acceptable range
NFI (Normed Fit Index)	0.878	0.878	≥ 0.80 (Bentler & Bonett, 1980)	Good model fit

The explanatory power of the structural model is demonstrated by the R^2 coefficients, indicating the variance explained by the independent variables. Exposure to TikTok travel reels accounted for 73% of the variance in social comparison ($p=0.003$), and when combined with social comparison, the model explained 77% of the variance in travel intention ($p=0.003$). These R^2 values surpass the thresholds that are generally acknowledged and suggest a strong predictive capability (Hair et al., 2023; Demir, 2025). To assess the incremental contribution of each predictor, F^2 effect sizes were calculated. Exposure to TikTok travel reels had a large effect on travel intention ($F^2=0.531$), while social comparison had a moderate effect size ($F^2=0.370$) based on Cohen's (1988) benchmarks. These data show that both predictors make a significant contribution to explaining the endogenous constructs, supporting the structural model's robustness and explanatory validity.

Table 4. Analysis of Structural Path Relationships

Structural links	path coefficients (β)	S.E.	C.R.	P values	Bias 2.5%	Bias 97.5%	Sig.	Testing hypothesis
H1. EtTTR → TI	0.513	0.073	6.334	0.000	0.751	0.879	0.003	Supported
H2. EtTTR → SC	0.730	0.049	14.951	0.000	0.618	0.810	0.003	Supported
H3. SC → TI	0.428	0.060	7.114	0.000	0.314	0.548	0.003	Supported
H4. EtTTR → SC → TI	0.826	0.058	14.223	0.000	0.701	0.937	0.000	Supported

According to the results in Table 4, the exposure to TikTok travel reels (EtTTR) has a substantial positive impact on the travel intentions of millennials ($\beta = 0.513$, $p < 0.001$), verifying H1. This observation reflects that the frequent interaction with travel-related content on TikTok increases the motivation and desire of participants to travel. Furthermore, EtTTR significantly impacts SC ($\beta = 0.730$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that this visual information prompts users to evaluate their lives and travel ambitions against those of others. Hence, H2 is also accepted. Consequently, SC exerts a favourable influence on millennials' TI ($\beta = 0.428$, $p < 0.001$), affirming that people who engage in self-comparison with others are more inclined to cultivate heightened travel inclinations. Thus, H3 is validated. Such findings underscore the crucial influence of TikTok exposure and social comparison on millennials' travel intentions.

The bootstrapping results confirmed the mediating role of SC in the relationship between EtTTR and millennials' TI. The indirect effect ($\beta = 0.312$, S.E. = 0.041, C.R. = 7.61, $p < 0.001$) was statistically significant, as the bias-corrected confidence interval [0.238, 0.392] did not include zero. The direct effect remained significant ($\beta = 0.513$, $p < 0.001$), indicating partial

mediation. The model's strength is further evidenced by the total effect ($\beta = 0.825$, S.E. = 0.058, C.R. = 14.22, $p < 0.001$), which is supported by confidence intervals [0.701, 0.934] and verification of reliability. These results indicate that TikTok travel content not only stimulates travel intentions but also indirectly enhances them by amplifying social comparison tendencies among millennial users. Figure 2 presents the structural model results and tested hypotheses.

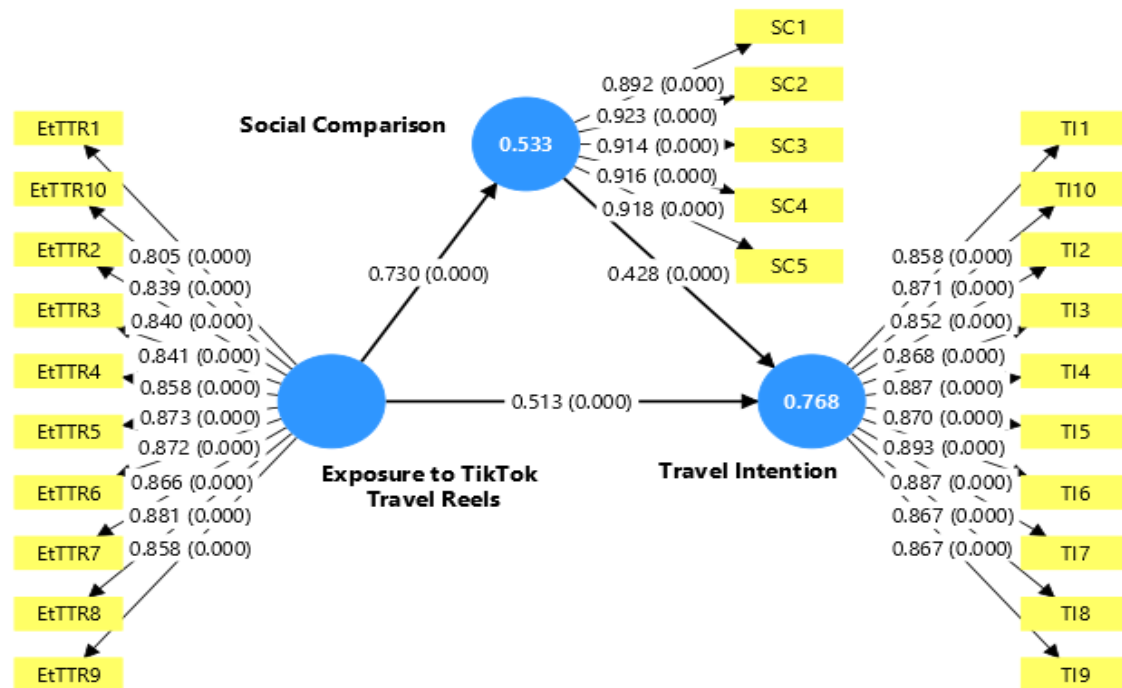


Figure 2 Empirical Results of the Research Model

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study's findings indicate that exposure to travel-related TikTok Reels positively influences travel intention among millennials, thereby supporting the first hypothesis (H1). Our finding corresponds with recent studies highlighting that short-form content, marked by strong visual elements and genuine storytelling, significantly influences travel behaviour (Sallaku et al., 2025). This indicates that millennials, being the most digitally engaged generation, are significantly influenced by visually appealing travel content that fosters emotional connections and inspiration, thus increasing their desire to undertake similar experiences. Similar evidence was presented by Lee and Kim (2025), who discovered that visually captivating TikTok travel videos evoke emotional responses and motivate millennials to visit comparable destinations, underscoring TikTok's increasing significance as a travel discovery platform for this demographic. Thus, it can be claimed that tourism-related content on TikTok goes beyond the mere dissemination of information about destinations, activating psychological mechanisms associated with inspiration and self-motivation that facilitate travel decision-making.

The findings related to the second hypothesis (H2) revealed a significant positive correlation between exposure to travel videos on TikTok and social comparison. When individuals watch reels that highlight perfect or magnificent travel experiences, they often find themselves making comparisons to these idealized portrayals. Such a result aligns with social comparison

theory (Festinger, 1954) and recent studies (Lee & Kim, 2024; Rauschnabel, 2023), which have confirmed that idealised portrayals of others' lifestyles on social media encourage individuals to reassess their own experiences. This effect seems especially noteworthy for millennials, who frequently view social comparison not merely as a source of envy but rather as a catalyst for self-improvement and aspiration.

In addition, the outcomes of the third hypothesis (H3) revealed that social comparison has a direct impact on millennials' travel intentions. This implies that participating in self-comparison via digital platforms can convert admiration into a genuine intention to travel. This study's empirical evidence indicates that modern travel motivations are increasingly shaped by peer interactions and shared personal experiences online, rather than by traditional advertising or informational campaigns. This result is consistent with recent findings of Chen et al. (2024), Hassan and Liu (2023, and Rauschnabel (2025), who signify that social comparison processes trigger feelings of ambition and a desire to seek similar experiences, which subsequently enhance travel intention, especially among younger generations who prioritize experiences over material possessions.

The results of the structural model for the fourth hypothesis (H4) validated that social comparison acts as a mediating variable between exposure to travel-related TikTok Reels and travel intention. Such evidence highlights that the impact of digital travel content on behavior is not solely direct but operates through a psychological mechanism that alters individuals' self-perceptions and ambitions. This discovery coincides with contemporary trends in digital tourism marketing research, highlighting that the influence of social media is contingent upon its capacity to elicit emotional and cognitive reactions that ultimately inform behavioral intentions (Hassan & Rahman, 2024; Wen et al., 2021; Wang & Zhang, 2023). As a result, millennials actively engage with travel content on both cognitive and emotional levels, converting inspiration into motivation and motivation into a sincere wish to travel.

Collectively, these data emphasize that TikTok Reels are an exceptionally effective marketing tool that surpasses traditional persuasive methods by leveraging implicit psychological influence. A novel travel behavior is cultivated by the combination of self-evaluation and visual delight, which is driven by the pursuit of authentic experiences and emotion. The study underscores the importance of understanding these factors for destination marketers who are seeking to establish a more authentic, emotionally impactful, and effective connection with the millennial generation.

7. Implications

7.1. Theoretical implications

This study contributes to theoretical literature by clarifying the dual mechanism through which short-form content platforms, such as TikTok, affect millennial' behavior. This highlights that these platforms function on two interrelated levels: the cognitive-perceptual dimension, in which users process and assess destination-related information, and the emotional-social dimension, where affective engagement, identification, and peer comparison influence behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, the research empirically validates the mediating role of social comparison in the relationship between exposure to tourism-related content and

travel intention, a connection that is relatively underexplored in the TikTok context. This study incorporates social comparison theory into digital tourism, enhancing its applicability to contemporary online media dynamics, where self-perception and aspiration are continuously negotiated through visual narratives. Such approach enhances the explanatory framework for understanding the influence of video-centric social media platforms on travel-related attitudes and behavioral intentions. This conceptual model provides a solid basis for future research aimed at exploring how various audience segments internalise, interpret, and respond to short-form digital content influencing their travel motivations and decision-making processes.

7.2. Practical implications

This study offers numerous actionable insights for tourism marketers, destination management organisations (DMOs), and digital content creators. The results underscore the critical role of utilising short-form content platforms like TikTok for destination marketing, especially by creating genuine, visually captivating travel videos that focus on storytelling and human-centered narratives. This type of content enhances emotional connection and motivates audiences to convert their interest into travel plans. Tourism boards and travel companies can leverage these insights by partnering with millennial influencers and content creators who share authentic and relatable travel experiences, rather than depending exclusively on conventional promotional materials.

The study reveals that social comparisons play a crucial psychological role in shaping travel behaviour. Therefore, tourism marketers should design campaigns that inspire rather than intimidate audiences. In practice, this means encouraging travel experiences that seem possible and relevant to different groups of tourists. Marketing teams within destination management organisations (DMOs), travel agencies, and national tourism boards can apply the above principle by featuring diverse travellers, including families, solo adventurers, and budget-conscious tourists, in their promotional materials. Campaigns should highlight a range of experiences and prices, from affordable local getaways to premium holidays, ensuring that potential travellers see themselves reflected in the content. By doing so, marketing messages can motivate audiences to travel while minimising their feelings of social or financial inadequacy.

Moreover, the findings can guide the creation of digital communication strategies aimed at millennials, by emphasising emotionally engaging and visually striking campaigns rather than traditional persuasive advertising methods. These approaches can improve travel intentions, cultivate deeper emotional connections with destinations, and increase online interaction. National tourism organisations should incorporate these insights into their digital marketing strategies to develop content that resonates with the expectations of digitally native generations, thus enhancing both emotional and behavioural connections with prospective travellers.

8. Limitations and future research directions

While this study offers valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The emphasis on millennial travellers in Egypt could restrict the applicability of the findings to different generational or cultural settings. Future studies should perform comparative analyses

across various age cohorts, such as Generation Z and Generation X, to uncover generational differences in digital tourism engagement. Broadening the sample to encompass a wider array of domestic and international tourists with differing educational and cultural backgrounds would significantly improve representativeness.

The suggested model could be further tested in various tourism contexts, such as cultural, heritage, and eco-tourism environments, to assess the consistency of relationships among the variables. Furthermore, subsequent investigations could enhance the model by incorporating psychological elements like emotional intelligence, digital identity, and fear of missing out (FOMO) as possible mediators or moderators, considering their increasing impact on users' reactions to digital content. Comparative studies of short-form video platforms (such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts) may reveal which channels have a more significant impact on the travel behaviours of digital generations. Ultimately, examining the relationship between user-generated content and official destination messaging may yield valuable insights into the ways informal and formal communications collaboratively influence tourists' perceptions and intentions.

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من الشاشة إلى المشهد: دور المقارنة الاجتماعية في تحفيز نوايا السفر لدى جيل الألفية من خلال مقاطع السفر على تطبيق تيك توك

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ملخص باللغة العربية

نظرًا للتأثير المتزايد لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على سلوك المستهلك، ولا سيما في قطاع السياحة، أصبح من الضروري فهم كيفية تأثير المنصات الناشئة مثل "تيك توك" على قرارات السفر. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل أثر مقاطع السفر على تطبيق تيك توك في نوايا السفر لدى جيل الألفية، مع التركيز على الدور الوسيط للمقارنة الاجتماعية. استخدمت الدراسة منهجًا كميًا، من خلال استمارة استبيان وُزعت على مستخدمي تيك توك من جيل الألفية، وتم تحليل البيانات باستخدام برنامج SmartPLS 4.1.0.2. أظهرت النتائج أن نوايا السفر لدى جيل الألفية تتأثر بشكل ملحوظ بالتعرض لمقاطع السفر على تيك توك، كما تبين أن هذا التأثير يتوسطه بشكل جوهري عامل المقارنة الاجتماعية. وتُقدم الدراسة إسهامًا علميًا جديدًا من خلال إدراج المقارنة الاجتماعية كمتغير وسيط في العلاقة بين التعرض لمقاطع السفر على تيك توك ونوايا السفر لدى جيل الألفية، وهي علاقة لم تحظَ باهتمامٍ تجريبيٍّ كبير في أدبيات السياحة الحالية. علاوةً على ذلك، تُقدم النتائج رؤى قيمة لصناع المحتوى والمسوقين للوجهات السياحية.

الكلمات الدالة

مقاطع السفر على تيك توك، نوايا السفر، المقارنة الاجتماعية، جيل الألفية