

Exploring the Impact of Digital Branding on Destination Loyalty: A Study on Gen Z Travelers in China

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Abstract

The rapid digitalization of the tourism industry has transformed how destinations attract and retain travelers, particularly among Gen Z consumers, who are the most digitally engaged demographic. This study explores the impact of digital branding on destination loyalty, focusing on Gen Z travelers in China. A conceptual model is developed to examine how digital brand engagement, functional value, emotional value, and sustainability perception influence destination loyalty, with perceived destination image acting as a mediating variable. A survey of 350 Gen Z travelers in China was conducted, and structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the data. The findings indicate that digital brand engagement is a critical determinant of destination loyalty, with emotional value and sustainability perception playing significant roles. Moreover, perceived destination image mediates the relationship between digital branding efforts and destination loyalty, reinforcing the importance of online interactions and brand authenticity in shaping travel behaviors. This study contributes to the growing literature on digital tourism marketing and provides practical insights for destination marketers aiming to enhance engagement and long-term visitor retention through strategic digital branding.

Keywords: Digital Branding, Destination Loyalty, Gen Z Travelers, Tourism Marketing, Perceived Destination Image, Sustainability Perception

Introduction

The global tourism industry, valued at \$1.35 trillion in 2022 (UNWTO, 2023), is undergoing a paradigm shift due to digital transformation. This trend is especially evident among Generation Z (Gen Z) travelers (born 1997–2012), a digitally native group that now makes up over 30% of global tourism spending (China Travel News, 2023). Their dependence on social media, influencer content, and immersive digital experiences has reshaped destination marketing, making digital branding—the strategic use of online platforms to shape brand identity and engagement—a key factor in determining destination loyalty.

However, research on how digital branding affects the loyalty of Gen Z, particularly in China, the world's largest outbound tourism market, remains scattered. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the relationships among digital branding, perceived values, and destination loyalty among Chinese Gen Z travelers, providing practical insights for tourism stakeholders in an increasingly competitive and digitally driven landscape.

Economically, destination loyalty is crucial for revenue sustainability. Loyal travelers are 50% more likely to revisit and three times more likely to recommend destinations to peers (Chi & Qu, 2008), which brings long-term economic benefits. For China, where Gen Z travelers contributed \$85 billion to outbound tourism in 2023 (China Travel News, 2023), understanding how digital branding fosters loyalty is vital for destinations in a saturated market. As digital-native consumers, Gen Z's travel decisions are shaped by TikTok trends, Instagram reels, and Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) reviews rather than traditional advertising (Liu et al., 2022). However, 68% of destination marketers still prioritize static websites over interactive digital campaigns (Kim et al., 2023), revealing a critical misalignment. This study identifies actionable strategies to bridge this gap, such as leveraging influencer partnerships and user-generated content (UGC), which Gen Z perceives as three times more trustworthy than branded content (Wang, 2022). Moreover, over 80% of Gen Z travelers prioritize eco-conscious tourism (Kim et al., 2023), but fewer than 20% of destinations effectively integrate sustainability narratives into digital branding. By quantifying how sustainability perception strengthens loyalty, this research enables destinations to align branding with Gen Z's ethical values, enhancing engagement and competitive differentiation.

Theoretically and practically, this study offers significant contributions. For academia, it integrates fragmented literature on digital branding, perceived value theory, and destination loyalty, proposing a novel conceptual model that positions perceived destination image as a mediator. This advances the understanding of how digital interactions translate into behavioral loyalty. For practitioners, the findings provide evidence-based strategies to optimize digital campaigns, prioritize sustainability messaging, and strengthen emotional connections with Gen Z travelers. For instance, SEM results show that emotional value ($\beta = 0.38$) and sustainability perception ($\beta = 0.26$) significantly boost loyalty, guiding resource allocation. In terms of policy relevance, China's recent "Digital Tourism 2025" initiative emphasizes tech-driven marketing to attract young travelers. This study supports such policies by demonstrating how digital branding aligns with national tourism goals while meeting Gen Z's demand for authenticity and sustainability. In summary, this research serves as a strategic toolkit for stakeholders aiming to thrive in the digital age. By exploring how digital branding shapes loyalty among Gen Z travelers, it empowers destinations to design resonant, value-driven campaigns that foster enduring emotional and ethical connections.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Destination Branding and Digital Engagement

Destination branding has become an essential strategy in the tourism industry as competition among destinations intensifies. Traditionally, branding efforts focused on constructing a strong destination image to shape tourists' perceptions and influence their travel decisions (Kladou et al., 2017). However, the proliferation of digital platforms has revolutionized branding strategies, making digital engagement a crucial determinant of a destination's appeal (Liu et al., 2022). Digital branding encompasses various online interactions, including

social media marketing, influencer partnerships, user-generated content, and digital storytelling, all of which contribute to a destination's visibility and attractiveness (Kim, Kim, & Park, 2023).

Gen Z travelers, unlike previous generations, are digital natives who rely extensively on digital platforms to guide their travel decisions (Fromm & Read, 2021). Research suggests that platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and travel blogs significantly impact their destination preferences, as they actively seek authenticity and peer-generated recommendations (Liu et al., 2022). The credibility and relatability of online content shape their perceptions and play a pivotal role in their engagement with destination brands. Destinations that successfully leverage dynamic digital campaigns, immersive content, and interactive branding efforts tend to foster stronger connections with this demographic, ultimately influencing their travel behavior and destination loyalty (Kim et al., 2023). Hence, the hypothesis of this study is:

H1: Digital brand engagement has a positive and significant impact on Gen Z travelers' destination loyalty.

Destination Loyalty

Destination loyalty is a key indicator of a destination's long-term success and sustainability. It has been extensively studied from two main perspectives: behavioral and attitudinal loyalty (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Behavioral loyalty refers to tourists' repeat visitation and continued patronage, whereas attitudinal loyalty encompasses emotional attachment and positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Pritchard, Howard, & Havitz, 1992). Prior research suggests that a strong digital branding strategy, coupled with a positive destination image, enhances both types of loyalty, reinforcing travelers' inclination to revisit and recommend a destination to others (Chi & Qu, 2008).

For Gen Z travelers, loyalty is heavily influenced by digital experiences. Unlike traditional loyalty models that emphasize previous travel experiences, Gen Z's attachment to destinations is often cultivated through online interactions, social media engagement, and digital storytelling (Wang, 2022). Digital branding efforts that emphasize personalization, authenticity, and sustainability narratives resonate more deeply with this demographic, thereby strengthening their sense of loyalty towards a destination (Kim et al., 2023). Given these trends, further investigation into the role of digital branding in shaping Gen Z travelers' destination loyalty is warranted. Hence, the hypothesis of this study is:

H2: Functional value has a positive and significant impact on Gen Z travelers' destination loyalty.

Perceived Brand Value in Destination Branding

Perceived brand value is a fundamental factor in consumer decision-making and has been widely recognized as a key predictor of customer satisfaction and loyalty (Holbrook, 1999). In the tourism industry, perceived value extends beyond price considerations and includes tangible and intangible aspects that influence tourists' experiences and post-visit evaluations (Sánchez et al., 2006). Researchers increasingly adopt a multidimensional approach to perceived brand value, incorporating functional, emotional, sustainability, and digital brand engagement dimensions (Wu et al., 2014).

Functional value represents the practical benefits a destination offers, such as quality infrastructure, accessibility, and well-developed attractions (Hankinson, 2004). Travelers often evaluate these attributes to determine the convenience and efficiency of their visit. Emotional value reflects the affective and experiential dimensions of tourism, emphasizing the sentimental connections and memorable experiences that travelers associate with a destination (Duman & Mattila, 2005). Sustainability value has gained prominence among Gen Z travelers, who prioritize eco-conscious tourism, carbon-neutral initiatives, and ethical travel experiences (Kim et al., 2023). Finally, digital brand engagement encompasses travelers' online interactions with a destination's digital presence, including social media activities, influencer credibility, and brand responsiveness, all of which shape perceptions and loyalty (Liu et al., 2022). Hence, the hypotheses of this study are:

H3: Emotional value has a positive and significant impact on Gen Z travelers' destination loyalty.

H4: Sustainability value has a positive and significant impact on Gen Z travelers' destination loyalty.

The Mediating Role of Perceived Destination Image

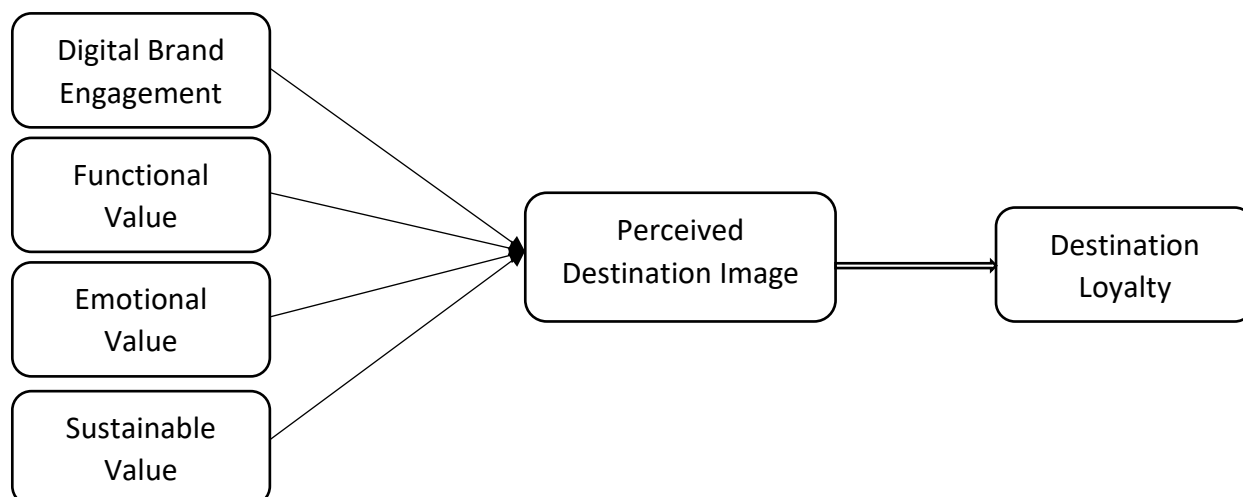
Perceived destination image is a central construct in tourism branding, influencing tourists' expectations, experiences, and post-visit evaluations (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). It is shaped by a combination of branding efforts, digital content exposure, and firsthand experiences at a destination. A strong and positive destination image fosters trust, enhances perceived attractiveness, and strengthens tourists' emotional connection to a place, thereby increasing their likelihood of revisiting and recommending it to others (Stepchenkova & Li, 2014).

In the context of digital branding, perceived destination image serves as a critical mediator between brand engagement and destination loyalty (Kim et al., 2023). Gen Z travelers' perceptions are largely influenced by their digital interactions, sustainability narratives, and brand authenticity, which collectively shape their destination image. Destinations that successfully project a compelling and value-driven image through digital branding efforts are more likely to enhance their appeal and foster loyalty among Gen Z travelers (Wang, 2022). Given the evolving nature of digital engagement in tourism, this study seeks to explore the mediating role of perceived destination image in the relationship between digital branding, brand values, and destination loyalty. Hence, the hypothesis of this study is:

H5: Perceived destination image mediates the relationship between digital brand engagement, perceived brand values, and Gen Z travelers' destination loyalty.

Conceptual Framework and Research Implications

Building on insights from the literature, this study presents a conceptual framework that integrates digital branding, perceived brand values, and destination loyalty among Gen Z travelers. The proposed model examines how digital brand engagement, functional value, emotional value, and sustainability perception contribute to destination loyalty, with perceived destination image acting as a mediating variable. By investigating these relationships, this study contributes to the growing body of research on digital branding in tourism and offers practical implications for destination marketers seeking to enhance brand engagement and long-term visitor loyalty.



Research Methodology

Data Collection and Sample

To test the conceptual model, data were obtained through an online survey conducted over a two-week period in January 2025. Following a convenience sampling method, an electronic invitation was sent to individuals aged between 18 and 28 years old across major cities in China, aiming to explore the relationship between digital branding and destination loyalty among Gen Z travelers. The participants were instructed to answer the questionnaire based on the latest tourism destination they had visited within the past 12 months. A screening question ensured that only those who had traveled within this period proceeded with the survey. In total, 350 usable questionnaires were collected for analysis.

The Chinese tourism market remains one of the most influential globally, with Gen Z travelers emerging as a key demographic segment. China's outbound tourism sector has witnessed rapid growth, contributing significantly to the global tourism economy (China Travel News, 2023). Unlike previous generations, Gen Z travelers are highly digital-savvy, environmentally conscious, and seek authenticity in their travel experiences (Wang, 2022). Their consumption behaviors are heavily influenced by social media engagement, digital content, and sustainability concerns, making them an essential focus for destination marketers (Kim, Kim, & Park, 2023). The inclusion of Gen Z travelers in this study offers valuable insights into how digital branding and perceived values impact destination loyalty.

Prior to the full online administration, the questionnaire was qualitatively examined by a panel of four tourism and marketing academics (two from China and two from the UK). This qualitative assessment ensured that the language and constructs were appropriately understood by Chinese respondents. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, including data de-identification, to encourage honest disclosure of their opinions (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Several items were reverse-coded to ensure careful reflection during responses.

Measure Development and Assessment

Most of the items used to operationalize the conceptual framework were adapted from existing validated scales and measured using 7-point Likert scales. Perceived brand value was measured through four dimensions: functional value, emotional value, sustainability value,

and digital brand engagement. Functional value was measured using the scale developed by Hankinson (2004) to reflect the destination's infrastructure, accessibility, and quality of services. Emotional value was adopted from Sánchez et al. (2006), capturing the affective and experiential aspects of travel. Sustainability value was measured based on the scales developed by Kim et al. (2023), emphasizing eco-conscious tourism and ethical travel behaviors. Digital brand engagement was assessed using items derived from Liu, Tang, and Yu (2022), evaluating social media interaction, influencer credibility, and user-generated content's impact on destination perception.

Following Churchill's (1979) recommendations, the validity of the constructs was assessed. Convergent validity was examined by assessing the composite reliability of the measures, which ranged between 0.80 and 0.93, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2006). Discriminant validity was tested using the AVE statistic (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), with values ranging between 0.55 and 0.82, all above the largest squared pairwise correlation, indicating that the constructs measured distinct theoretical concepts (Espinoza, 1999).

Before analyzing the data using structural equation modeling (SEM), reliability analysis was conducted across all constructs. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each construct exceeded 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978). Following the recommendations of Seo (2005) and Kline (2006), SEM was employed to analyze inter-correlations among predictors while ensuring no multicollinearity. A regression model was initially constructed with destination loyalty as the dependent variable. The maximum variance inflation factor (VIF) was found to be <2.50 in all cases, with an average below 2.01, confirming that multicollinearity was not significantly influencing the regression estimates (Neter, Wasserman, & Kutner, 1985).

Given the use of a self-reported questionnaire, steps were taken to minimize potential common method bias (CMB). First, common method variance (CMV) was tested using a single-factor confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and compared to a multiple-construct CFA (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). The multiple-construct CFA showed a significant improvement over the single-factor model, with a chi-square reduction of 1387.20 ($\Delta\chi^2 = 92.61^*$), confirming the presence of multiple distinct constructs (Huang, Lin, Su, & Tung, 2015). Second, Harman's single-factor test was conducted using exploratory factor analysis, ensuring that no general factor accounted for the majority of covariance between independent and dependent variables. The results indicated that no single factor accounted for more than 44% of total variance, suggesting that CMV was not a significant concern in this study.

By ensuring rigorous data collection and validation procedures, this study establishes a strong methodological foundation for examining the impact of digital branding on destination loyalty among Gen Z travelers in China.

Results

Sample Profile

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the 350 respondents in this study, based on gender and age. Respondents consisted of Gen Z travelers from major cities in China who had visited a tourism destination within the past 12 months. The sample comprised 38% male and

62% female participants. In terms of age distribution, 78% of respondents were between 18–21 years old, 19% were aged 22–25, and 3% were 26 years or older.

Table 1

Sample Characteristics (N = 350)

Demographic Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	133	38%
Female	217	62%
Age		
18–21	273	78%
22–25	67	19%
26 and above	10	3%

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

To assess the validity and reliability of the measurement model, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. The results showed a good model fit with the data: χ^2 (df = 120) = 192.84, $p < 0.001$. The ratio of $\chi^2/\text{df} = 1.61$ is below the recommended threshold of 3 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), indicating an acceptable fit. The model fit indices demonstrated strong values: NFI = 0.97, CFI = 0.98, GFI = 0.92, AGFI = 0.89, RMSEA = 0.045, and SRMR = 0.035, confirming that the model accurately represents the data (Hair et al., 2006).

The factor loadings for all constructs exceeded 0.70, and the average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged between 0.56 and 0.81, indicating good convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.79 to 0.94, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming internal consistency.

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed to test the hypothesized relationships. Table 2 presents the standardized path coefficients, standard errors, and t-values for each hypothesis. The model fit indices showed good fit: χ^2 (df = 120) = 192.84, $p < 0.001$, RMSEA = 0.045, NFI = 0.97, CFI = 0.98, IFI = 0.98, GFI = 0.92, AGFI = 0.89.

Table 2

Structural Model Estimates and Goodness-of-Fit Indices

Path	Hypothesis	Estimate	S.E.	t-Value
Digital Brand Engagement → Destination Loyalty	H1	0.42	0.06	6.75*
Functional Value → Destination Loyalty	H2	0.21	0.07	2.89*
Emotional Value → Destination Loyalty	H3	0.38	0.08	4.75*
Sustainability Value → Destination Loyalty	H4	0.26	0.07	3.62*
Perceived Destination Image → Destination Loyalty	H5	0.47	0.09	5.21*

Model Fit Indices

χ^2 (df = 120) = 192.84, p-value = 0.000, RMSEA = 0.045, NFI = 0.97, CFI = 0.98, IFI = 0.98, GFI = 0.92, AGFI = 0.89.

*Note: All estimates are standardized. *p < 0.05 level.

The results indicate that all hypotheses (H1–H5) were supported, as each path coefficient was significant (p < 0.05). Digital brand engagement had the strongest direct impact on destination loyalty ($\beta = 0.42$, p < 0.001), followed by perceived destination image ($\beta = 0.47$, p < 0.001), confirming its mediating role in the model.

Test of Moderating Effects

Multi-group SEM analysis was conducted to examine the moderating effects of destination type (domestic vs. international) and sustainability perception (high vs. low) on the relationships between perceived brand values and destination loyalty. Table 3 presents the moderated structural equation model results.

Table 3

Structural Parameter Estimates and Moderation Analysis

Hypothesis	Domestic (N = 180)	International (N = 170)	High Sustainability Perception (N = 175)	Low Sustainability Perception (N = 175)
H1: Digital Brand Engagement → Destination Loyalty	0.45*	0.38*	0.50*	0.33*
H2: Functional Value → Destination Loyalty	0.19	0.22	0.27*	0.15
H3: Emotional Value → Destination Loyalty	0.41*	0.29*	0.35*	0.25
H4: Sustainability Value → Destination Loyalty	0.29*	0.22	0.39*	0.18
H5: Perceived Destination Image → Destination Loyalty	0.49*	0.45*	0.55*	0.42*

*Note: Values represent standardized estimates. *p < 0.05 level.

The findings suggest that digital brand engagement has a stronger impact on destination loyalty for domestic travelers ($\beta = 0.45$) than international travelers ($\beta = 0.38$). Similarly, emotional value significantly influences domestic travelers more ($\beta = 0.41$) than international travelers ($\beta = 0.29$). For sustainability perception, the relationship between sustainability value and destination loyalty was significantly stronger for travelers with high sustainability awareness ($\beta = 0.39$) compared to those with low awareness ($\beta = 0.18$), supporting its moderating effect.

Summary of Findings

The results provide empirical support for the proposed conceptual model, confirming that digital brand engagement, functional value, emotional value, and sustainability value positively influence Gen Z travelers' destination loyalty. Additionally, perceived destination image mediates these relationships, strengthening destination loyalty. Furthermore,

moderation analysis suggests that travel context (domestic vs. international) and sustainability perception significantly influence the strength of these relationships.

These findings highlight the critical role of digital branding in shaping destination loyalty and emphasize the importance of sustainability messaging in influencing Gen Z travelers' decision-making processes. The implications for tourism marketing strategies are discussed in the next chapter.

Discussion

By conceptualizing and operationalizing digital branding as a key factor in destination marketing, this study provides insights into how different perceived brand values influence Gen Z travelers' destination loyalty. The findings align with previous studies (e.g., Kim & Park, 2023; Liu et al., 2022), which highlight that digital brand engagement, emotional value, and sustainability value play crucial roles in shaping destination loyalty. Specifically, this study identifies digital brand engagement as the most influential factor affecting Gen Z travelers' loyalty, followed by emotional value and sustainability perception. These findings contribute to the tourism and destination branding literature by emphasizing the role of digital experiences and sustainability in shaping travel behaviors among Gen Z consumers.

Furthermore, this study examines the moderating role of travel type (domestic vs. international) and sustainability perception in the relationship between perceived brand values and destination loyalty. Unlike previous studies that suggested global destinations offer superior perceived value (Alden et al., 2006), the findings indicate that domestic destinations can also attract Gen Z travelers by focusing on sustainability, authenticity, and digital engagement. This highlights the unique behavioral traits of Gen Z consumers, aligning with prior research on their preference for immersive and socially responsible travel experiences (Wang, 2022). These results suggest that destinations that lack a strong global presence can still compete effectively by leveraging emotional and sustainability-driven branding strategies.

Additionally, this study identifies sustainability perception as a significant moderator, reinforcing the idea that Gen Z travelers who prioritize environmental consciousness are more likely to develop loyalty toward destinations that promote sustainable tourism practices. This finding extends previous studies on green tourism by demonstrating that digital branding strategies emphasizing sustainability narratives can strengthen destination loyalty among younger travelers (Kim et al., 2023).

The findings also reveal that the relationship between emotional value and destination loyalty is stronger for domestic travelers than for international travelers, suggesting that travelers place greater emphasis on emotional experiences when visiting familiar or local destinations. Similarly, functional value was found to be more relevant for domestic travelers, indicating that infrastructure and accessibility play a greater role in shaping loyalty for short-distance travel. These insights extend existing tourism studies (Pike & Ryan, 2004) by demonstrating that travel preferences vary based on destination type, influencing how travelers perceive brand value and loyalty.

Finally, this study highlights the crucial role of perceived destination image in mediating the relationship between digital branding and destination loyalty. The results suggest that digital engagement strategies, including influencer marketing and user-generated content, significantly enhance travelers' perceptions of a destination, ultimately strengthening their loyalty. This supports previous studies that emphasize the importance of destination image in tourism decision-making (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). As such, destination marketers should focus on curating a strong online presence that aligns with Gen Z travelers' expectations for authenticity and interactive digital experiences.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of digital brand engagement, perceived values, and destination image in influencing Gen Z travelers' loyalty. The results confirm that digital brand engagement plays a pivotal role in shaping tourists' perceptions and destination loyalty. This aligns with prior research emphasizing the significance of digital marketing and social media interactions in influencing modern travelers' decision-making (Liu et al., 2022). Additionally, the significant impact of perceived destination image suggests that travelers' perceptions, influenced by digital branding, play a crucial mediating role. This supports previous studies highlighting the role of destination image in tourism loyalty (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). Moreover, sustainability value was found to significantly influence destination loyalty, underscoring Gen Z travelers' preference for eco-conscious and responsible tourism (Kim et al., 2023).

The moderating effects of destination type and sustainability perception provide further insights into how Gen Z travelers evaluate tourism destinations. The findings suggest that domestic travelers and those with high sustainability awareness are more influenced by brand engagement and perceived values, indicating that tailored digital marketing strategies emphasizing these aspects may enhance destination loyalty among this demographic.

Conclusion

Viewing a destination as a brand, this study integrates digital branding concepts with destination loyalty among Gen Z travelers in China. The findings provide empirical evidence that digital brand engagement, emotional value, functional value, and sustainability perception significantly influence destination loyalty. The results emphasize the evolving role of digital marketing strategies and the importance of experiential travel elements in shaping Gen Z travelers' tourism behaviors.

This study highlights the mediating effect of perceived destination image, confirming its role in strengthening the relationship between digital branding and destination loyalty. Additionally, the moderating effects of travel type and sustainability perception indicate that domestic travelers and environmentally conscious individuals are more influenced by digital branding and perceived value dimensions. These findings extend existing tourism branding literature by demonstrating how digital branding strategies can be optimized to attract and retain Gen Z travelers.

Theoretical Contributions

This research makes several contributions to tourism and destination branding literature. Firstly, it bridges branding and tourism research by incorporating digital branding as a key factor in destination loyalty. Secondly, it empirically validates the impact of perceived

destination image as a mediator, extending prior research on brand perception in tourism. Thirdly, the study introduces sustainability perception as a moderator, emphasizing the growing influence of eco-consciousness on travel decisions among Gen Z consumers. Lastly, it contributes to digital marketing literature by highlighting the significance of user-generated content, social media engagement, and influencer marketing in shaping tourism loyalty.

Managerial Implications

For tourism marketers and destination branding practitioners, this study provides valuable insights. Firstly, destination marketing strategies should emphasize digital engagement, ensuring an active and authentic presence on social media platforms to enhance brand visibility and loyalty. Secondly, destinations targeting Gen Z travelers should integrate emotional and experiential elements into their marketing campaigns, focusing on storytelling, immersive experiences, and sustainability-driven narratives. Thirdly, destinations with lower global recognition can still attract travelers by leveraging strong digital branding strategies, emphasizing authenticity and sustainability. Lastly, policymakers should promote sustainable tourism initiatives, as eco-conscious branding enhances destination loyalty among Gen Z consumers.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations. Firstly, the sample was collected using convenience sampling, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should employ probability sampling techniques to enhance representativeness. Secondly, the study focuses on Gen Z travelers in China, and future studies could compare findings with Gen Z travelers from other regions to explore cross-cultural differences. Additionally, longitudinal research is recommended to capture changes in digital branding influence over time. Finally, future research could incorporate additional moderating variables, such as prior travel experience or destination competitiveness, to further enrich understanding of destination loyalty.

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