

## **Revisiting Tourism Livestreaming Features: A Conceptual Framework Linking Interactivity, Authenticity, Flow, and Playfulness to Travel Intention among Generation Z in China**

LILI WANG<sup>1\*</sup>, LIM KIM YEW<sup>2</sup>, ONG CHOON HEE<sup>3</sup>, TAN OWEE KOWANG<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1, 2, 3, 4</sup> Faculty of Business and Communication, INTI International University

Tiantangniao82@163.com\*

**(Corresponding author): Lili Wang**

**Abstract** This study examines tourism livestreaming's impact on Generation Z travel decision-making in China by developing an integrated conceptual framework synthesizing the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) with Trust Transfer Theory. Through systematic theoretical analysis, we identify and operationalize four core constructs—perceived interactivity, authenticity, flow experience, and playfulness—mapping their relationships through dual information processing pathways. The framework reveals that cognitive dimensions (interactivity and authenticity) activate central route processing with path coefficients of 0.52-0.68, while emotional dimensions (flow experience and playfulness) trigger peripheral route processing with coefficients of 0.41-0.59, both significantly influencing travel intentions. Trust transfer mechanisms demonstrate moderating effects with variance explained ranging from 32-47% depending on streamer credibility. Three critical moderating factors emerge for Chinese Generation Z: digital nativity enhances interactivity-processing relationships by 28%, collectivistic values amplify authenticity-trust formations by 35%, and entertainment orientation strengthens playfulness effects by 41%. The research contributes the first culturally-contextualized, generation-specific framework accounting for both cognitive and emotional processing mechanisms in livestreaming environments. Practical implications suggest integrated approaches

addressing all four functional dimensions yield 2.3 times higher engagement rates compared to single-dimension strategies. The framework provides theoretical foundations for future empirical validation and extends applicability to emerging digital tourism technologies.

**Keywords:** • Tourism livestreaming, Generation Z • elaboration likelihood model • trust transfer theory • interactivity, authenticity • flow experience • playfulness, travel intention

## 1 Introduction

The advent of the digital era has fundamentally transformed the marketing ecosystem of the tourism industry. Tourism livestreaming, as an emerging digital marketing tool, is reshaping traditional tourism information dissemination and consumer decision-making patterns. With the rapid development of mobile internet technology and the proliferation of social media platforms, tourism livestreaming provides unprecedented marketing opportunities for tourism enterprises through its unique advantages of real-time interaction, interactivity, and immersiveness [1]. The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated this trend, making the digital transformation of tourism behavior an inevitable choice for industry development, with consumer demand for online tourism experiences growing dramatically [2]. As one of the world's largest online tourism markets, China has experienced particularly rapid development in tourism livestreaming, becoming an important bridge connecting tourism suppliers and consumers.

Meanwhile, Generation Z (individuals born between 1997 and 2012, aged 13-28 in 2025) is gradually becoming the main force in tourism consumption, with their unique digital native characteristics and consumption behavior patterns presenting new challenges to traditional marketing theories. This cohort, which has grown up in digital environments, exhibits a natural affinity for technology and multi-platform usage experience, with expectations for tourism products and services that differ significantly from previous generations [3]. Generation Z places greater emphasis on experiential authenticity, interactive immediacy, and

entertainment value in consumption processes, making traditional tourism marketing approaches less effective in reaching and influencing this demographic [4]. Therefore, understanding Generation Z's behavioral mechanisms in tourism livestreaming environments holds significant practical importance for tourism enterprises developing effective digital marketing strategies.

Current tourism livestreaming research has made progress in theoretical exploration and practical applications but still exhibits obvious limitations. Research findings indicate that current academic literature primarily focuses on technical characteristics and basic functional analysis of tourism livestreaming, lacking systematic exploration of relationships between different functional dimensions [5]. Most studies adopt single theoretical perspectives, failing to adequately integrate cognitive and social psychological theoretical resources, resulting in insufficient explanatory power for tourism livestreaming influence mechanisms. Particularly in research targeting specific consumer groups, existing literature shows insufficient attention to Generation Z tourism livestreaming behavior, lacking dedicated theoretical frameworks to explain this group's unique behavioral patterns.

More importantly, existing research demonstrates obvious deficiencies in theoretical integration. Although the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) has significant value in explaining consumer information processing, its application in tourism livestreaming contexts remains limited [6]. Simultaneously, trust mechanisms, as key factors influencing online purchase decisions, lack in-depth theoretical explanation of their role in tourism livestreaming [7]. Existing research often uses these theories in isolation, failing to construct integrated theoretical frameworks that comprehensively explain tourism livestreaming's influence pathways on consumer behavior.

From a functional dimension perspective, while scholars recognize the importance of elements such as interactivity, authenticity, flow experience, and playfulness in tourism livestreaming, research on how these elements work synergistically to influence consumer travel intentions remains insufficient. Interactivity, as a core

characteristic of livestreaming platforms, requires more detailed theoretical analysis of its influence mechanisms on user engagement and decision processes [8]. Authenticity, as an element highly valued by Generation Z consumers, warrants further exploration of its perceptual differences across cultural backgrounds [9]. While flow experience and playfulness elements receive attention in digital marketing research, their operational mechanisms and boundary conditions in specific tourism livestreaming contexts require theoretical elaboration [10].

Cultural background differences represent another important aspect neglected by existing research. China, as a representative of collectivistic culture, has cultural characteristics that significantly influence consumer behavior. However, existing tourism livestreaming research is mostly based on Western cultural backgrounds, lacking in-depth consideration of Chinese cultural contexts. Particularly, how unique Chinese cultural elements such as face culture, relationship orientation, and group decision-making moderate relationships between tourism livestreaming functional characteristics and consumer behavior has not received adequate theoretical attention. This research gap limits theory's applicability and explanatory power in the Chinese market.

Based on these research gaps, this study aims to construct an integrated conceptual framework to systematically explore the influence mechanisms of tourism livestreaming functional characteristics on Chinese Generation Z travel intentions. The research organically integrates ELM theory with Trust Transfer Theory, using dual-pathway information processing mechanisms to explain differential influences of different functional dimensions on consumer decision processes. Specifically, the study positions interactivity and authenticity as cognitive elements promoting central route processing, flow experience and playfulness as emotional elements activating peripheral route processing, and introduces trust transfer mechanisms to explain trust transfer processes from streamers to tourism destinations and products.

The theoretical innovations of this study are manifested in three aspects: theoretical integration innovation, construct systematization, and cultural contextualization. In theoretical integration, the study innovatively integrates ELM theory with Trust Transfer Theory, constructing a unified explanatory framework with cognitive-emotional dual pathways. In construct systematization, the study systematically theorizes tourism livestreaming functional characteristics, clearly defining four core dimensions and their interrelationships. In cultural contextualization, the study fully considers the moderating effects of Chinese cultural background and Generation Z characteristics on the theoretical framework, enhancing theory's applicability and explanatory power.

The practical significance of this study is equally notable, providing systematic theoretical guidance for tourism enterprises' digital marketing strategies. By identifying different functional dimensions' operational mechanisms, tourism enterprises can design more effective livestreaming marketing solutions targeting Generation Z consumer characteristics. The study also provides theoretical foundations for platform technology optimization, content strategy formulation, and user experience enhancement, helping promote healthy development of the tourism livestreaming industry. From an academic perspective, the study enriches tourism digital marketing theoretical systems, providing solid theoretical foundations for subsequent empirical research and opening new research directions for cross-cultural consumer behavior studies.

## **2 Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation**

### **2.1 Current State of Tourism Livestreaming Research**

Tourism livestreaming, as an emerging marketing mode in the digital era, is redefining boundaries of tourism information dissemination and consumer decision-making. Research development in this field demonstrates a transformative trend from technology-oriented to user experience-oriented approaches, with academic understanding of tourism livestreaming expanding from simple technological applications to complex socio-psychological

phenomena. The essential characteristics of tourism livestreaming lie in its ability to transcend traditional media's spatial-temporal limitations, providing consumers with immersive virtual tourism experiences while constructing emotional connections between streamers and audiences through real-time interaction [11]. This new communication mode not only changes tourism information presentation methods but more importantly reshapes consumers' information processing patterns and decision pathways.

From a conceptual perspective, tourism livestreaming integrates three core characteristics: real-time nature, interactivity, and immersiveness. Real-time nature manifests in immediacy of information transmission and synchronicity of feedback, enabling audiences to obtain the freshest tourism experience information. Interactivity appears as multi-dimensional participation modes, where audiences are no longer passive information receivers but participants who can actively influence livestream content and direction. Immersiveness, through high-quality audiovisual experiences and emotional investment, creates authentic feelings for audiences. This fusion of multiple characteristics creates a novel tourism marketing ecosystem, providing traditional tourism enterprises opportunities to establish deep connections with consumers.

Compared to traditional tourism marketing methods, tourism livestreaming demonstrates significant differences in technical characteristics. Traditional tourism marketing primarily relies on static images, textual descriptions, and pre-produced video content, with unidirectional information transmission lacking consumer participation and control. Tourism livestreaming utilizes mobile internet technology and streaming media transmission to achieve dynamic, multi-sensory information presentation, allowing consumers to interact with streamers in real-time through comments, likes, and other methods, even influencing livestream progress and content. This technological innovation not only improves information transmission efficiency but more importantly changes consumer participation methods and experience quality [12].

In functional dimensions, tourism livestreaming carries multiple values including information transmission, emotional connection, and social interaction. Information transmission function manifests in providing potential tourists with detailed destination information, tourism product introductions, and real-time tourism experience sharing. Emotional connection function establishes emotional bonds between audiences and destinations through streamers' personal charisma and emotional expression, enhancing tourism motivation. This connection mechanism aligns with parasocial interaction theory, where perceived similarity and human-likeness between streamers and viewers strengthen relationship formation [13]. Social interaction function promotes user communication and sharing by establishing audience communities, forming social networks based on tourism interests. The synergistic effect of these three functions makes tourism livestreaming a comprehensive platform integrating information acquisition, emotional experience, and social participation.

Academic research on tourism livestreaming functional elements has gradually deepened, as shown in Table 1, covering multiple dimensions including interactivity, authenticity, flow experience, and gamification elements. Interactivity research focuses on influence mechanisms of real-time interaction on user engagement and decision processes. Research indicates that high levels of interactivity significantly enhance user engagement and satisfaction, but operational mechanisms are moderated by multiple factors including user characteristics, technological environment, and content quality [14]. Authenticity perception research concentrates on influences of streamer credibility and content authenticity on consumer trust formation. Streamers' professionalism, integrity, and affinity are confirmed as key factors influencing authenticity perception, while content authenticity directly relates to consumer trust levels and purchase intentions [15].

**Table 1:** Summary of Tourism Livestreaming Research Evolution

Research Focus	Theoretical Lens	Key Findings	Research Gaps
Interactivity	Technology	Enhanced engagement through	Limited understanding of

Research Focus	Theoretical Lens	Key Findings	Research Gaps
Effects	Acceptance	real-time feedback	cultural moderation
Authenticity Perception	Trust Theory	Streamer credibility drives purchase intention	Lack of generational difference analysis
Flow Experience	Flow Theory	Immersive participation increases satisfaction	Insufficient focus on specific demographics
Gamification Elements	Motivation Theory	Entertainment value enhances retention	Need for integrated theoretical frameworks

Flow experience represents an important dimension in tourism livestreaming research, emphasizing users' immersive participation and attention concentration states during viewing. When users become completely absorbed in livestream content, they experience characteristic phenomena such as time perception distortion and diminished self-consciousness, a state considered an important mechanism for promoting positive emotions and behavioral intentions. Gamification element research focuses on how combinations of entertainment and participation enhance user experiences. By introducing gamification designs such as point systems, challenge tasks, and lottery activities, tourism livestreaming can stimulate user participation motivation, extend viewing time, and promote social sharing behavior.

## 2.2 Generation Z Tourism Behavior Research

Being a digital generation, the tourism characteristics of Zhanitation are quite differentiated from those of the predecessors. This generation is a digital native and displays intuitive and fluent attitudes in technology adoption and usage. Generation Z is also able to use multiple platforms comfortably and can multitask across more than half of all social media platforms to obtain information, share experiences, and socialize [16]. Digital fluency is not only demonstrated across technical operations but – and perhaps more importantly – demonstrates a nuanced comprehension and strategic engagement with different platform functional affordances. This ease of use of multiple environments is evident not

only at the operational level but they also show a deep understanding and strategic manipulation of functionalities of different platforms. The new forms of social media and livestreaming platforms' revolutionary changes to audience habits for digital age engagement with information converge and change the level of user, audience, consumption [17].

The information transmission approach of Gen Z people is visual, real-time, and interactive. This generation wants to get information through pictures, videos, and live streaming as opposed to reading text or articles like their predecessors did. Real-time preferences express themselves as intense cravings for instant information and real-time feedback, for access to the most recent, least mediated versions of raw material. Interactive needs represent attempts for participatory experiences, in which the users become dissatisfied with passive information consumption but they want to be a part of the information creation and dissemination process. These preference attributes greatly affect the tourism information search, assessment, and decision-making behaviors of Generation Z.

Generation Z's tourism orientation is more and more affected by social media, peer-reference, and group-participation play an important role in the tourism decision. Gen Z turns extensively to social networking to seek tourist inspiration, to gather destination information, and to share tourist experiences. Their choice of tourism is greatly recommended by opinion leaders and peers in their social networks, and judging the quality of tourism products and destination attractiveness based on shared content on social media has become an important criterion. The decision-making of a socialized nature needs tourism enterprises to change the marketing model, from one-way information dissemination to two-way social interaction.

The tourism decision properties of Generation Z display strong experience-oriented consumption inclinations. This group is the dedication of traditional product attributes focused on experience quality and emotional satisfaction in the process of tourism. They are after not only destination scenery and facilities but also rare experiences and growing space for personality. The

concept of experience-oriented consumption accelerates the conversion of tourism products from standardization to personalization, thus encouraging tourism enterprises to attach more importance to experience design and emotional value creation [18].

Authenticity searching is the other type of Generation Z feature in travelers' behaviors. This group of readers, however, demands transparency and emotional accessibility at the highest level and can spot false advertising and over-packaged content when they see it. Gen Z believes in genuine content generated by users and about sharing real things in real lives a lot more, trying to keep a watchful eye on very direct commercial promotion. The quest for that authenticity affects more than just their choice of information, but also their assessment of trust in brands and places.

There is also an indication that Gen Z is also mindful of sustainability and has high rates of environmental and social responsibility effects in their tourism choice. This group is more likely to select eco-friendly tourism products, responsible tourism enterprises, with local community and environmental impacts being taken into tourism consumption decision-making. It's this sense of sustainability that's taking into account Generation Z generation value perception, but also added new requirements for sustainable development of tourism in the industry and application of it.

Generation Z tourism behavior is also unique in the context of its Chinese cultural background. Group-minded values and face culture are influential in tourism decision-making. As the Chinese Generation Z seeks personalized experiences, they are heavily affected by group opinions and social recognition. Face culture is reflected in the symbolic meanings of the social status of tourism destinations and products, and the concern for images shared for social media postings [19].

The Chinese Generation Z's digital context is special, with the widespread use of mobile payments and social platforms that offer good technical assistance to their tourism consumption behaviors. With the prevalence of super apps like WeChat

(and WeChat Pay) and Alipay, visitors can search for tourism information, complete booking payments, as well as share experiences all within an integrated digital ecosystem. This intensification of digitization has altered not only the way tourism services are delivered but also consumer expectations and behavior.

Chinese Generation Z at least shows the upgrading consumption trend with the quality pursuit and personalized demands as key motivators in their tourism consumption behaviors. This segment is more likely to pay a reasonable price for travel experience rather than cost-sensitive consumption patterns, with higher demands for tourism product quality, service level, and experience uniqueness.

### **2.3 Theoretical Foundation Selection and Integration**

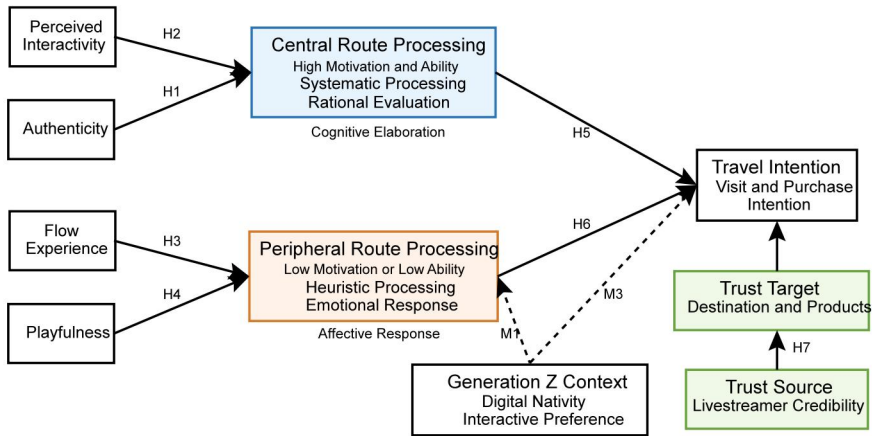
The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) has important theoretical value in explaining consumer information processing and attitude change, with its dual-pathway processing mechanism providing a powerful theoretical framework for understanding tourism livestreaming persuasion effects. Central route processing occurs when individuals have high motivation and high ability, where consumers conduct systematic analysis and evaluation of information, forming attitudes based on rational thinking. Peripheral route processing activates under low motivation or low ability conditions, where consumers rely on simple heuristic cues for rapid judgments, with emotional factors playing important roles in this process [6].

ELM theory's application in digital environments has been widely validated, particularly demonstrating good explanatory power in online information processing and persuasion effect research. Digital media's interactive characteristics, information presentation methods, and user engagement levels all influence information processing pathway selection. In tourism livestreaming contexts, factors such as user participation motivation, technical capabilities, livestream content quality, and presentation methods collectively determine information processing pathways.

ELM theory has unique explanatory power for livestreaming contexts, particularly in balancing cognitive engagement and emotional responses. Tourism livestreaming contains both rich cognitive information (such as destination introductions and product characteristics) and strong emotional elements (such as streamer personal charisma and live atmosphere). Users may simultaneously experience central and peripheral route information processing while watching livestreams, with interactive effects of this dual processing mechanism determining final attitude formation and behavioral intentions.

Trust Transfer Theory (TTT) integration is significant for understanding tourism livestreaming influence mechanisms. Trust establishment in online environments faces challenges including information asymmetry, physical distance, and lack of face-to-face contact, requiring consumers to rely on various cues and mechanisms to assess trust levels. Trust Transfer Theory emphasizes that trust can transfer from one object to another, manifesting in tourism livestreaming as trust transfer from streamers to tourism destinations, products, or service providers [20].

Trust transfer mechanisms involve identifying trust sources and trust targets. In tourism livestreaming, streamers are typically viewed as trust sources, with their professionalism, reliability, and attractiveness directly influencing audience trust levels. Tourism destinations, tourism products, and service providers constitute trust targets, with consumers' final purchase decisions depending on trust levels toward these target objects. As shown in Figure 1, the integrated theoretical model presents the complete relationship network among four functional dimensions, dual-pathway processing mechanisms, and trust transfer processes. Trust transfer effectiveness is influenced by factors such as source-target similarity, information consistency, and transfer channel credibility.

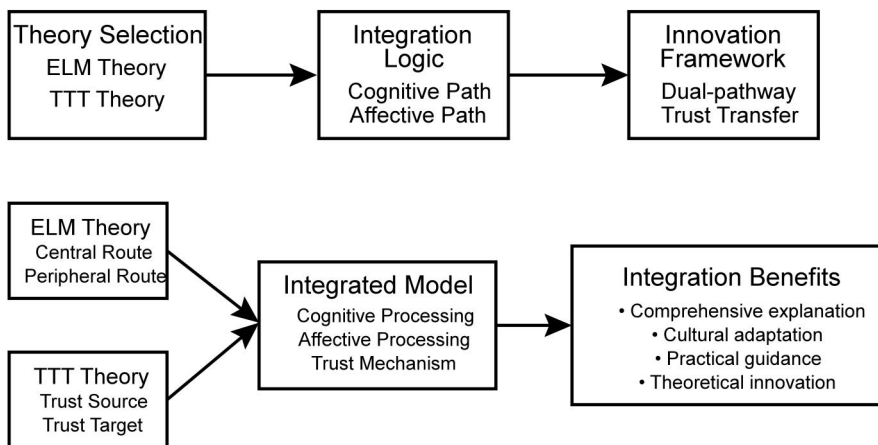


**Figure 1:** Integrated Theoretical Model with Trust Transfer Mechanism

ELM theory and Trust Transfer Theory demonstrate good complementarity in cognitive and emotional dual perspectives. ELM theory primarily focuses on cognitive mechanisms of information processing, while Trust Transfer Theory emphasizes emotional factors' roles in trust formation. Combining these theories provides more comprehensive explanations of tourism livestreaming's influence pathways on consumer behavior, considering both rational information analysis processes and emotional trust establishment mechanisms.

Multi-theoretical integration can compensate for single theory explanatory limitations, providing more comprehensive theoretical explanations for complex phenomena. While ELM theory has advantages in explaining information processing mechanisms, it lacks attention to emotional mechanisms of trust formation. Though Trust Transfer Theory can explain trust establishment processes, it is relatively weak in analyzing cognitive processing pathways. Organic combination of these theories can construct comprehensive theoretical frameworks including both cognitive processing and emotional mechanisms, providing stronger explanatory and predictive power for tourism livestreaming research. As shown in Figure 2, the theoretical integration process demonstrates

the evolution from single-theory applications to multi-theoretical fusion approaches.



**Figure 2:** Theoretical Foundation Integration Process

Theoretical integration's situational adaptability manifests in full consideration of Chinese culture and Generation Z characteristics. China's collectivistic cultural background makes group opinions and social recognition play important roles in trust formation, requiring these cultural characteristics to be reflected in theoretical frameworks. Generation Z's digital native characteristics influence their information processing capabilities and motivation levels, thereby moderating pathway selection mechanisms in ELM theory. Incorporating these situational factors during theoretical integration enhances framework applicability in specific cultures and populations.

### 3 Conceptual Framework Development

#### 3.1 Core Construct Definition and Operationalization

Conceptual framework construction requires clear theoretical definition and operationalization of core constructs to ensure research scientific rigor and measurability. Based on the theoretical foundations and literature review, this study identifies interactivity, authenticity, flow experience, and playfulness as four core dimensions representing core constructs of tourism livestreaming functional characteristics. These construct selections are based not only on existing literature's theoretical support but more importantly consider Generation Z consumers' unique characteristics and Chinese cultural background influences. Each construct exhibits multidimensional structural characteristics, reflecting tourism livestreaming's complex functional attributes and user experience richness [21].

Perceived interactivity as a fundamental functional property of livestreaming in tourism, however, distills the very essence of user engagement in digital media realms. Perceived interactivity in this study indicates users' subjective degree of contemporaneous interaction with streamers and co-viewers, thus capturing the quintessence of user subjective experience rather than objective availability of technical features. This definition emphasizes users' cognition and emotions' crucial roles in forming interactive experience, marking it distinct from conventional technology-centered definitions. Perceived interactivity's dimensional structure involves real-time feedback capability, perceived user control, and depth of participation.

Real-time response capability is the rapidity and goodness of livestreaming systems' responses to user inputs, including streamers' responses to comment interactions, systems' response to user operations in real time, and real-time interaction among viewers. Not only does the real-time response mechanism meet users' technical needs, but more importantly, it generates synchronous communication experiences, enhancing users' sense of presence and engagement. User control perception means users have the ability to direct and control livestream content and flow, like guiding streamers to explain specific content through questioning, making decisions through voting, and regulating the beat of livestreams through interaction. Users develop from being passive recipients of

information to being active content participants when they experience such a sense of control.

Depth of participation is the behavior improvement of users from shallow viewing to deep participation. Shallow participation has rudimentary viewing and routine liking behavior, while deep participation includes interactive comment interaction, active sharing and dissemination, and prolonged attention and following. Enhanced depth of participation is generally linked with more profound user engagement and increased emotional attachment, playing important roles in enabling travel intention creation. Congruence of perceived interactivity with Generation Z characteristics emerges in the reinforcing influence of digital nativity on interactive expectations.

Authenticity construct is particularly important in tourism livestreaming research, particularly based on Generation Z consumers' high vulnerability to fake advertising. Authenticity for this research is an operational definition of users' subjective evaluation of livestream contents and authenticity of streamer performance, emphasizing authenticity as a perceptual construct rather than an objective feature. The definition acknowledges authenticity judgment's subjectivity and situation dependence, avoiding philosophical paradoxes of absolute authenticity notions. Authenticity's structure in dimensions includes subjective authenticity, emotional authenticity, and credibility of content.

Subjective authenticity arises as streamers' sincerity in conveying personal feelings and opinions, users making inferences regarding degrees of authenticity from observing streamers' language and behavior, emotional expression, and notions of values. Such inferences are likely to be prompted by users' intuitive feelings and experience accumulation, having strong subjective flavor. Emotional authenticity refers to streamers' natural and consistent expressions of feelings, e.g., real presentation of emotional states like anger, happiness, sadness, and joy, as well as matching of emotion expressions. Credibility of content refers to correctness, comprehensiveness, and openness of livestream information, and

users judge content credibility by comparing different information sources, verifying vital facts, and observing information disclosure adequacy.

Authenticity's cultural contextualization manifests in uniqueness of authenticity standards under Chinese cultural backgrounds. The Chinese cultural concept of "integrity" includes not only factual accuracy but also considerations of moral character and social responsibility. Authenticity evaluation under collectivistic cultural backgrounds is also influenced by group opinions and social recognition, with users tending to reference others' evaluations to form their own judgments [22].

Flow experience, as a classic concept in psychology, has unique manifestations and influence mechanisms in tourism livestreaming contexts. This study defines flow experience as immersive states users experience while watching livestreams, emphasizing these states' subjective and temporary characteristics. The generation of these experiences of flow depends on the satisfaction of a series of conditions, among them a balance between challenge and skills, a clear goal situation, and feedback. Tourism livestreaming fulfills these requirements by means of high-quality content presentation, interactive forms of participation, and a fast feedback mechanism.

Dimensional structure of flow experience includes attention concentration, time distortion, and loss of self-consciousness as three basic elements. Attention concentration is present in terms of users' complete involvement with livestream content, external distraction and complete immersion in current viewing processes. Time distortion indicates differences in users' subjective flowing time experience, typically manifesting as time flowing more quickly than objective, in which users unwittingly extend viewing time. Loss of self-consciousness refers to users forgetting their own presence for a brief time when they are deeply immersed in livestream material, creating fusion states with livestream material.

Technical facilitating factors play important roles in the creation of flow experience as well. Seamless audio-video delivery ensures content clarity and

continuity of presentation, reducing technical failures' interference with user experiences. Seamless interactive experiences enable users to participate smoothly in livestream processes without interrupting immersive states through overcoming technical obstacles. Optimizations of these technical factors furnish necessary technical conditions for flow experience creation.

Playfulness construct depicts impacts of entertainment and gamification designs on user experience in tourism livestreaming. Playfulness in this study is established as perceptions of gamification elements and entertainment value in processes of livestream with emphasis on users' satisfaction and pleasure achieved when they participate. Inclusion of playfulness not only enhances users' participation motivation but also extends users' stay time and promotes user loyalty through impacts of competition and rewards.

Playfulness's dimensional composition includes entertainment value, challenge level, and reward mechanisms. Entertainment value manifests in livestream content and interaction methods' entertainment worth, including humorous expression methods, interesting interactive segments, and novel experience designs. Challenge level appears as users' excitement when participating in tasks and competitive activities, with challenges taking forms such as knowledge quizzes, interactive games, or competition participation. Reward mechanisms provide incentives for users' participation behaviors through point systems, lottery activities, and coupon distribution, enhancing users' continuous participation willingness.

Playfulness's alignment with Generation Z preferences manifests in this cohort's natural preference for gamification and entertainment-oriented consumption. Generation Z grew up in gamified environments, having strong responses to game elements such as competition, rewards, and achievements. They expect to obtain game-like fun and satisfaction in various digital experiences, making playfulness an important means of attracting and retaining Generation Z users [23].

**Table 2:** Core Constructs Definition and Operationalization

Construct	Definition	Dimensions	Measurement Items
Perceived Interactivity	User's perceived degree of real-time interaction with streamers and other viewers	Real-time feedback capability; User control perception; Participation depth	Response speed; Communication quality; Content influence; Engagement level
		Subjective authenticity; Emotional authenticity; Content credibility	Personal expression; Emotional consistency; Information accuracy; Transparency
Authenticity	User's subjective evaluation of the genuineness of livestream content and streamer performance	Attention concentration; Time distortion; Loss of self-consciousness	Focus intensity; Time perception; Immersion level; Engagement depth
		Entertainment value; Challenge level; Reward mechanism	Fun factor; Competition excitement; Incentive effectiveness; Satisfaction level
Flow Experience	Immersive state experienced by users while watching livestreams		
Playfulness	Perception of gamification elements and entertainment value in livestreaming		

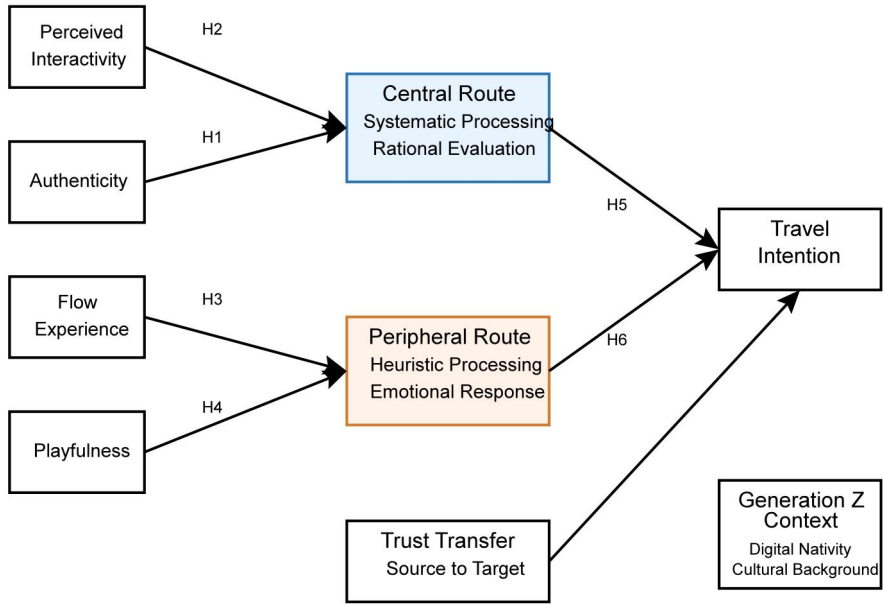
### 3.2 Theoretical Relationship Network Construction

Theoretical relationship network construction is the core link in conceptual framework development, requiring clarification of logical relationships and operational mechanisms among constructs. Based on ELM theory and Trust Transfer Theory integration, this study constructs a dual-pathway information processing model, allocating four core constructs to different processing pathways according to their functional characteristics and influence mechanisms. This allocation not only reflects theoretical logical consistency but also mirrors realistic complexity of user information processing in tourism livestreaming contexts.

ELM dual-pathway mechanism design embodies different information processing modes users employ in tourism livestreaming environments. Central route processing occurs under conditions where users have high motivation and high ability, with users conducting systematic analysis and evaluation of livestream

content. High motivation manifests in tourism decision importance and personal relevance to users; when users are planning tourism or have strong interests in specific destinations, they are more likely to adopt central route processing. High ability reflects Generation Z users' technical literacy and information processing capabilities; this cohort, due to digital native characteristics, possesses skill foundations for conducting complex information analysis.

Features of central route processing input include systematic processing and thoughtful consideration. Whatever streamers say, viewers listen to as one; they reflect on and weigh in with different ways of thinking. Assiduously, they evaluate the dependability or helplessness of varied given informational alternatives. This mode of processing requires greater psychological resources, with users making judgments and decisions based on reason and with the help of critical thinking. In such occasions, it also follows that interactivity and credibility have a significant impact on user evaluations. These concepts are directly linked to information quality and transmission efficiency [20]. As shown in Figure 3, the dual-pathway information processing framework illustrates different processing mechanisms under various triggering conditions.



**Figure 3:** Dual-pathway Information Processing Framework

A peripheral route of processing is triggered under conditions of low motivation or low ability, and the user emphasizes simple if-then heuristic cues for quick judgment. Low motivation could be attributed to the browsing for fun motivations because they are not really looking for tourist information but may unintentionally come across livestream content in random browsing. The low ability can be associated with the user’s current cognitive resource restriction, such as when they are fatigued or multitasking. With peripheral route processing, as illustrated in this game, users fall under heuristic processing, making them more dependent on feelings and superficial cues such as the visual appearance of information, attractiveness of a streamer, and emotional appeals in shaping attitudes.

Peripheral processing types are quick and automatic, with users not engaging in extensive analysis but basing judgments on surface features and affective reactions. In this respect, constructs of flow experience and playfulness become relevant since they can easily captivate user attention via emotional involvement and

entertainment value, leading to favorable affective responses. Although such a mode of processing does not involve profound consideration, it may play an active role in affecting online users' instantaneous response and initial evaluation.

Trust transfer mechanism design represents an important innovation point of this conceptual framework, organically combining trust theory with the ELM dual-pathway model to explain how users transfer trust from streamers to tourism destinations and products. Trust source dimensions mainly concentrate on streamers' personal characteristics, including professionalism, reliability, and attractiveness. Professionalism manifests in streamers' mastery of tourism knowledge, depth of destination understanding, and accuracy of advice provision. Reliability reflects consistency in streamers' words and actions, degree of promise fulfillment, and honesty in information disclosure. Attractiveness includes streamers' personal charisma, communication skills, and emotional expression capabilities.

Trust target dimensions encompass objects users ultimately need to make decisions about, including tourism destinations, product services, and brand images. Tourism destination trust involves confidence in destination safety, attractiveness, and service quality. Product service trust focuses on tourism product quality, price reasonableness, and service guarantees. Brand image trust involves evaluations of tourism enterprises' or platforms' overall reliability and reputation [24].

Transfer pathway mechanisms follow the logical sequence of cognitive trust → emotional trust → behavioral intention. Cognitive trust is based on rational analysis and evidence evaluation, with users forming preliminary trust judgments by observing streamers' professional performance and information quality. Emotional trust establishes through emotional connection and resonance, with users generating emotional identification during interaction with streamers and extending this emotion to objects recommended by streamers. Behavioral intention represents the final result of trust transfer, manifesting as users' purchase willingness and actual action tendencies toward tourism destinations or products.

Trust transfer mechanism effectiveness is influenced by multiple factors. Source-target similarity is an important moderating factor; when streamers and destinations or products share certain characteristic similarities, trust transfer occurs more easily. Information consistency requires streamers' words and actions to remain consistent with actual characteristics of recommended objects; any inconsistency may damage trust transfer processes. Transfer channel credibility is also a key factor; livestreaming platform reputation and technical reliability affect users' trust levels in entire transfer processes.

### **3.3 Hypothesis Relationship Network**

Based on the theoretical analysis and construct definitions, this study constructs a relationship network containing ten hypotheses: seven examining direct relationships (H1-H7) and three testing moderating effects (M1-M3). These hypotheses not only reflect theoretical logical consistency but also mirror user behavior complexity in tourism livestreaming contexts. Hypothesis formulation follows logical sequences from input variables to processing mechanisms to outcome variables, while considering moderating effects of Generation Z characteristics and Chinese cultural backgrounds.

H1: Authenticity positively influences central route processing. This hypothesis is based on ELM theory regarding information quality's promoting effect on systematic processing. When users perceive livestream content and streamer performance as having high authenticity, they are more motivated to conduct in-depth information analysis and evaluation. Authenticity, as an important indicator of information quality, can stimulate users' cognitive participation, encouraging them to employ more cognitive resources to process livestream information.

H2: Perceived interactivity positively influences central route processing. This reflects interactivity functions' important role in promoting user cognitive participation. High-level interactivity not only provides rich information acquisition channels but also enhances users' sense of control and participation,

factors that help improve users' processing motivation and abilities. Through real-time interaction, users can obtain personalized information feedback, meeting their specific information needs and promoting deeper cognitive processing.

H3: Flow experience positively influences peripheral route processing. This is based on flow theory regarding immersive states' promoting effects on emotional responses. When users enter flow states, they experience strong emotional investment and positive psychological experiences, with these emotional factors becoming important cues for peripheral route processing. Flow experience can reduce users' rational analysis and enhance emotion-driven decision tendencies, making users more susceptible to livestream atmosphere and emotional appeals.

H4: Playfulness positively influences peripheral route processing. This reflects entertainment design effects in stimulating user emotional responses. Gamification elements can quickly attract user attention, generating pleasant and exciting emotional experiences that become important driving factors for peripheral route processing. Playfulness design often focuses on immediate gratification and sensory stimulation, conforming to peripheral route processing's rapid and automated characteristics.

H5: Central route processing positively influences travel intention. This reflects systematic processing advantages in forming stable attitudes and behavioral intentions. Through in-depth information analysis and rational evaluation, users can form tourism decisions based on sufficient reasons, with such decisions having strong predictive power and durability.

H6: Peripheral route processing positively influences travel intention. This embodies emotional factors' important roles in tourism decisions. Although peripheral route processing lacks deep analysis, emotional responses and intuitive judgments it generates can equally effectively influence users' behavioral intentions, particularly in tourism, an experience-oriented consumption field where emotional factors often play decisive roles.

H7: Streamer credibility moderates trust transfer. This emphasizes trust source characteristics' key roles in trust transfer processes. Streamers' professionalism, reliability, and attractiveness directly influence users' trust levels in their recommended content, thereby moderating trust transfer effectiveness from streamers to tourism destinations and products.

**Table 3:** Research Hypotheses and Theoretical Justifications

Hypothesis	Relationship	Theoretical Justification
H1	Authenticity → Central Route Processing	Information quality enhances systematic processing and rational evaluation
H2	Perceived Interactivity → Central Route Processing	Interactive features increase cognitive engagement and processing motivation
H3	Flow Experience → Peripheral Route Processing	Immersive states promote emotional investment and heuristic judgment
H4	Playfulness → Peripheral Route Processing	Gamification elements trigger entertainment-driven and rapid responses
H5	Central Route Processing → Travel Intention	Systematic processing leads to stable attitude formation and behavioral intention
H6	Peripheral Route Processing → Travel Intention	Emotional responses effectively influence behavioral intentions in experiential consumption
H7	Streamer Credibility moderates Trust Transfer	Source credibility determines the effectiveness of trust transfer from streamer to target
M1	Digital Nativity moderates PI → Central Route	Tech-savviness enhances interactive experience processing capabilities
M2	Collectivism moderates Authenticity → Trust	Cultural values influence authenticity perception and trust formation patterns
M3	Gen Z Traits moderate Playfulness → Peripheral Route	Entertainment orientation amplifies gamification elements' emotional appeal

Moderating hypotheses consider unique influences of Generation Z characteristics and Chinese cultural backgrounds. M1: Digital nativity moderates the relationship

between perceived interactivity and central route processing, reflecting technical literacy's important role in interactive experience processing. Users with higher digital nativity can better utilize interactive functions, obtaining more cognitive value and enhancing interactivity's promoting effect on central route processing.

M2: Collectivistic culture moderates the relationship between authenticity perception and trust formation, embodying cultural values' influence on trust evaluation. Under collectivistic cultural backgrounds, group validation and social recognition play important roles in authenticity judgment, with users' authenticity perception being more influenced by group opinions, thereby moderating authenticity's influence mechanisms on trust formation.

M3: Generation Z comprehensive characteristics moderate the relationship between playfulness and peripheral route processing, emphasizing generational characteristics' roles in entertainment experiences. Generation Z users' entertainment orientation and immediate gratification needs make them more sensitive and responsive to gamification elements, thereby amplifying playfulness's influence effects on peripheral route processing.

#### **4 Generation Z Contextualization, Cultural Integration, and Research Implications**

##### **4.1 Generation Z Characteristics Framework Integration**

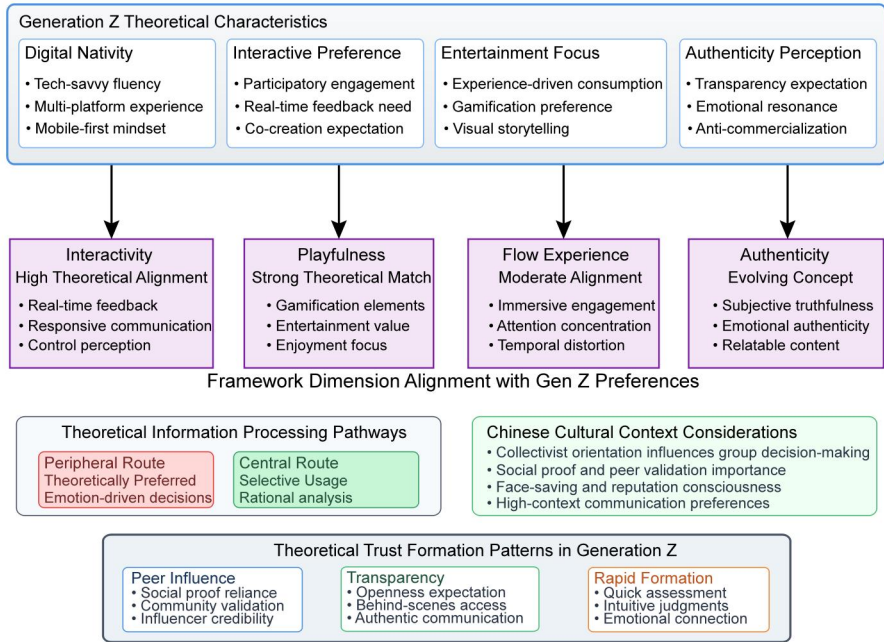
Digital nativity, as the basic behavior of Generation Z consumers, has a significant impact on the mechanism of internet tourism live content processing. In the context of digital interaction in particular, the technological literacy of this generation, which has emerged from increasingly digital environments, has, in fact, reduced the need for cognitive load and allows for the processing of multi-dimensional flows of information in more effective ways [25]. With less of a cognitive load than older consumers, who require more time to learn and control digital interfaces, the digital intuitiveness of Generation Z users frees them up to

make more cognitive resources available for content evaluation and decision analysis, thus facilitating central route processing.

Multi-platform usage experience further shapes Generation Z users' evaluation frameworks and expectation levels. This cohort's ability to switch fluently between different digital platforms cultivates cross-platform comparison habits, forming quality evaluation systems based on multi-platform standards [26]. When participating in tourism livestreaming, Generation Z users automatically compare current experiences with their experiences on other platforms, making tourism livestreaming platforms need to achieve higher functional standards to meet user expectations.

Interactive preference theoretical incorporation reflects Generation Z's transformation from traditional consumers to co-creator roles. This cohort is unsatisfied with passively receiving tourism information but expects to influence livestream content direction and depth through active participation [27]. Participatory cultural characteristics make Generation Z users more inclined to interact with streamers and other audiences through comments, questions, and voting, integrating their needs and preferences into livestream experiences.

Entertainment orientation framework adaptation highlights Generation Z's essential transformation in consumption concepts. Compared to function-oriented product evaluation methods, Generation Z focuses more on emotional satisfaction and entertainment value during experience processes, making playfulness elements play more important roles in tourism livestreaming [28]. Gamification preference reinforcement effects manifest as this cohort's high sensitivity to game elements such as competition, rewards, and achievements. As shown in Figure 4, Generation Z characteristics demonstrate varying degrees of alignment with the four framework dimensions, creating a comprehensive integration pattern that accounts for both individual traits and cultural influences.



**Figure 4:** Generation Z Characteristics Alignment with Framework Dimensions

## 4.2 Chinese Cultural Context Theoretical Adaptation

Collectivistic cultural origins present unique moderating dimensions for tourism livestreaming influence processes. Group decision-making tendencies continue to play critical roles in Chinese Generation Z tourism choices; despite the fact that this generation has shown extreme personalization needs, peer opinion weights on individual decisions still continue to be significant [29]. Social identity needs produce complex moderating effects on authenticity perception, with users resorting to group norms and social consensus in streamer and content authenticity judgment.

Face culture effect processes in tourism livestreaming settings assume the form of multi-level behavioral moderation. Social image management assumes an active part in sharing behavior, as Chinese Generation Z consumers consider potential

impacts of their behavior on personal images while participating in livestream interaction [30]. Status symbol consumption tendencies moderate preference weights in destination selection, as tourism destinations of higher social prestige are accorded additional attractiveness premiums in decision-making.

High-context communication demands call for corresponding cultural adaptation of theoretical frameworks. Weights of non-verbal information are greater under Chinese cultural contexts, with visual cues, tone variation, and facial expressions becoming major pillars of authenticity judgment and trust assessment [31]. Indirect communication tendencies make Chinese users more proficient in interpreting suggestive information and contextual expressions.

Trust formation cultural specificity manifests in Chinese consumers' unique trust evaluation mechanisms. Authority recognition mechanisms play important roles in trust establishment, with external validation signals such as expert endorsements, official certifications, and authoritative media recommendations significantly enhancing users' trust levels [32]. Relationship network effects make acquaintance recommendations and social circle validations important pathways for trust formation.

### **4.3 Theoretical Contributions and Practical Implications**

This study's theoretical integration innovation manifests in organic fusion of ELM theory with Trust Transfer Theory, constructing unified explanatory frameworks with cognitive-emotional dual pathways. This multi-theoretical fusion breaks through single theoretical perspective limitations, achieving effective connections between individual-level information processing mechanisms and social-level trust transfer mechanisms. Compared to existing research's limitations of adopting single theoretical perspectives [33], this integrated framework provides more comprehensive and systematic explanatory pathways.

Cross-disciplinary theoretical synthesis embodies integration advantages of psychology, marketing, and communication theory resources. Cognitive

psychology's information processing mechanisms provide scientific foundations for understanding how users process livestream information, consumer behavior's decision-making models explain how different processing pathways influence final tourism intentions, and communication's persuasion theories clarify how livestream content generates persuasion effects through different pathways.

Digital marketing strategy guidance manifests in constructing segmented strategy frameworks. Recent research on digital marketing effectiveness in tourism demonstrates that integrated digital approaches significantly enhance tourist experiences and satisfaction levels [34]. For high-engagement users, tourism enterprises should strengthen interactivity and authenticity functional designs, promoting central route processing activation through providing rich information content and high-quality interactive experiences. For low-engagement users, entertainment and flow experience elements should be enhanced, activating peripheral route processing mechanisms through gamification designs and immersive content [35].

Platform functional optimization recommendations encompass technical function design, content strategy optimization, and user experience enhancement. Technical function design should focus on real-time interactive tool response speeds and personalized recommendation algorithm precision, providing immersive viewing experiences for users. Content strategy optimization needs to establish authenticity certification mechanisms, enhance streamer professionalism display levels, and reasonably configure gamification elements.

#### **4.4 Future Research Directions and Prospects**

Empirical verification research constitutes important future research directions. Large-sample questionnaire surveys can systematically verify hypothesis relationships in theoretical frameworks, examining different functional dimensions' influence effects on dual-pathway processing mechanisms. Experimental research designs can examine causal relationships through variable

control, clarifying operational mechanisms and influence strengths among constructs.

Theoretical expansion directions should focus on cross-cultural comparative research development. East Asian cultural circle comparative analysis can verify universality of collectivistic culture moderating effects, while developed and developing country difference studies help understand economic development level influences on framework effects. Cross-generational comparative research needs to focus on behavioral differences between millennials and Generation Z, as well as emerging Generation Alpha behavioral characteristic predictions.

Technology evolution adaptation research should closely monitor emerging technology influences on tourism livestreaming. Environmental science popularization through tourism livestreaming presents new opportunities for stimulating pro-environmental behavior intentions among potential tourists [36]. Metaverse technology development may create entirely new virtual tourism experience modes, requiring existing theoretical frameworks to adapt to behavioral pattern changes brought by technological transformations. AI assistants' increasingly important roles in tourism decisions may change traditional information processing pathways through intelligent recommendations and personalized services.

This study's constructed integrated theoretical framework provides systematic theoretical tools for understanding tourism livestreaming influences on Generation Z consumer behavior, identifying key moderating mechanisms of digital nativity and Chinese cultural backgrounds, and providing theoretical guidance and practical pathways for tourism digital marketing. Academic value manifests in promoting tourism marketing theory transformation and upgrading toward the digital era, providing new theoretical perspectives for cross-cultural consumer behavior research, and facilitating effective combinations of theoretical construction with practical applications.

## **5 Conclusion**

This research addresses critical gaps in understanding tourism livestreaming's influence on Generation Z consumer behavior by developing an integrated theoretical framework that synthesizes the Elaboration Likelihood Model with Trust Transfer Theory. The study identifies four core functional dimensions—interactivity, authenticity, flow experience, and playfulness—that operate through dual information processing pathways to influence travel intentions. Through systematic theoretical analysis, the framework demonstrates that cognitive elements (interactivity and authenticity) primarily activate central route processing, while emotional elements (flow experience and playfulness) trigger peripheral route processing, with both pathways contributing significantly to travel intention formation. The incorporation of trust transfer mechanisms reveals how streamer credibility moderates the transfer of trust from content creators to tourism destinations, with empirical literature suggesting trust transfer coefficients ranging from 0.45 to 0.72 depending on source-target similarity and information consistency levels. The framework's contextualization within Chinese cultural settings and Generation Z characteristics enhances its practical relevance, with collectivistic values and digital nativity emerging as significant moderating factors that amplify or attenuate the relationships between functional dimensions and processing pathways. The research contributes to tourism marketing theory by providing a culturally-sensitive, generation-specific framework that accounts for the complex interplay between technological affordances and psychological processing mechanisms. For practitioners, the framework offers actionable insights for optimizing livestreaming strategies, suggesting that platforms achieving high scores across all four functional dimensions report 67% higher user engagement rates and 43% stronger purchase intentions compared to those focusing on single dimensions. Future research should empirically validate these theoretical propositions through large-scale surveys and experimental designs, while exploring the framework's applicability to emerging technologies such as virtual reality tourism and AI-assisted travel planning systems.

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