

## Examining the Influence of Content Marketing on The Purchase Intentions of Domestic Tourism Among Graduate Business Students at The University of Zambia

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### Abstract

This study examined the influence of content marketing on the purchase intentions of domestic tourism among Graduate Business students at the University of Zambia, focusing on content quality, engagement, and personalisation. Guided by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the study adopted a quantitative descriptive survey design. A sample of 334 students was selected from a population of 2,000 using simple random sampling. Data were collected through a structured, closed-ended questionnaire and analysed using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and ANOVA to test relationships and determine statistical significance. The results indicated that all three variables had a positive and statistically significant effect on purchase intention ( $p < 0.001$ ), with content quality emerging as the strongest predictor, followed by content engagement, while personalisation had a weaker but still significant effect. These findings suggest that high-quality and engaging content exert a substantial practical impact on students' travel decision-making by strengthening attitudes, trust, and perceived relevance. The study contributes theoretically by integrating TPB and ELM to explain how digital content influences behavioural intention in a developing country context, demonstrating that attitude serves as a key mediating mechanism between content marketing and purchase intention. Practically, the findings highlight the need for tourism marketers and policymakers to prioritise high-quality, interactive, and ethically managed personalised content to maximise effectiveness. However, the impact of personalisation was moderated by challenges such as data privacy concerns, technological limitations, and content saturation. The study recommends the adoption of integrated content strategies that combine informational quality, social engagement, and responsible personalisation. Limitations include reliance on self-reported data and a single institutional sample, which may limit generalisability. Overall, the study concludes that content marketing plays a critical role in shaping domestic tourism demand among university students in Zambia and provides both theoretical and practical insights for enhancing digital tourism strategies.

**Keywords:** Content Marketing, Purchase Intention, Engagement, Personalisation, Tourism

### 1. Introduction and Background

The rapid growth of digital technologies has transformed the way consumers access information and make purchase decisions. Individuals are now exposed to numerous online messages across platforms such as social media, websites, search engines, and mobile applications. This constant exposure creates an information-overload environment, where promotional messages compete for limited consumer attention, making recall, engagement, and effectiveness increasingly difficult (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Kotler et al., 2021). Consequently, conventional advertising strategies are often ignored or filtered out, reducing their ability to influence consumer decision-making.

In response to this challenge, content marketing has emerged as a strategic approach that focuses on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and engaging content to attract and retain audiences. Unlike direct advertising, content marketing seeks to build long-term relationships, trust, and engagement with potential consumers. This approach is particularly relevant in the tourism industry, where destination choice is influenced by emotional experiences, perceptions of authenticity, and social influence. Content that incorporates storytelling, visual narratives, and experiential themes is more likely to capture attention, improve retention, and positively influence travel intentions than repetitive promotional messages (Ukpabi and Karjaluto, 2018; Lam et al., 2020).

Empirical studies in tourism marketing suggest that digital content can shape destination image, enhance engagement, and influence behavioural intentions. User-generated content, such as reviews, travel photos, and shared experiences, is considered particularly credible and impactful (Xiang et al., 2017; Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2018). However, the extent to which content marketing translates into actual travel decisions remains inconsistent, particularly in developing countries where domestic tourism is underdeveloped.

Building on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this study considered the roles of attitude in mediating the relationship between content marketing and purchase intentions. Positive attitudes toward tourism content may strengthen the influence of content marketing on students' intentions to participate in domestic tourism. Despite the theoretical relevance, empirical evidence on these mechanisms in Zambia remains limited.

This study seeks to assess the effects of content marketing on domestic tourism purchase intentions among university students in Zambia, with particular attention to how attitude and perceived behavioral control shape this relationship. By addressing this gap, the study provides insights into how tourism organisations can design effective digital content strategies to influence the domestic market.

Tourism is a vital contributor to Zambia's socio-economic development, generating employment, foreign exchange earnings, and supporting cultural exchange. The sector accounts for approximately 6.6 percent of Zambia's gross domestic product and sustains 473,000 jobs, highlighting its importance to national economic growth (Zambia Tourism Agency, 2024). Zambia's key attractions, including Victoria Falls, South Luangwa National Park, Lower Zambezi National Park, and Kafue National Park, position the country as a competitive destination in the region.

Recent data indicate stronger growth in international tourism compared to domestic tourism. International arrivals increased by 31.2 per cent from 1,060,788 in 2022 to 1,392,153 in 2023, and further grew by 58.0 per cent to 2,199,820 in 2024. In contrast, domestic tourism visits increased by 22.0 per cent from 312,195 in 2022 to 380,753 in 2023, and by 9.0 per cent to 530,110 in 2024 (Ministry of Tourism, 2023; 2024). This disparity highlights persistent challenges in converting local interest into actual domestic travel participation.

In response, the Government of Zambia has prioritised domestic tourism growth through initiatives such as the Destination Zambia campaign and Take Holiday Yamu Loko, with a strong emphasis on digital marketing (Ministry of Tourism, 2024). Tourism promotion has increasingly shifted from traditional media to digital platforms, including social media, websites, and influencer-driven content. While these platforms enhance visibility and engagement, evidence suggests that high levels of digital interaction do not always translate into actual travel decisions (Pal, 2024; Tichaawa and Mhlanga, 2023).

Regional studies further demonstrate the potential of digital content in influencing tourism behaviour. In South Africa, social media platforms such as Instagram significantly shape travel intentions among young consumers (Chuchu, 2026), while in Kenya, user-generated content and influencer marketing strongly influence domestic tourism decisions among Gen Z travellers (Wachera, 2025). These findings suggest that the effectiveness of tourism marketing increasingly depends not only on exposure, but on the quality, relevance, and persuasiveness of digital content.

Despite this shift, limited research in Zambia has examined how specific content marketing attributes such as content quality, engagement, and personalisation translate into actual purchase intentions. This gap is particularly important among university students, a digitally connected segment that actively consumes and shares online content yet may not proportionally participate in domestic tourism.

The motivation for this study therefore arises from the need to understand how digital content can move beyond awareness creation to influence attitudes, enhance perceived behavioural control, and ultimately drive travel decisions. By applying the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this study differentiates itself by examining not just the presence of digital marketing, but how its content characteristics shape behavioural outcomes. This provides a more nuanced understanding of how tourism organisations can design targeted digital strategies that effectively convert engagement into domestic tourism participation among university students in Zambia.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Tourism is a key driver of Zambia's economy; however, the sector remains more reliant on international visitors than domestic tourists. In 2024, international tourist arrivals increased by 58.0 percent, while domestic tourism visits grew by only 9.0 percent (Ministry of Tourism, 2024). This disparity indicates a conversion gap between tourism promotion and actual domestic participation.

At the same time, tourism marketing has increasingly shifted toward digital platforms. Although digital content marketing enhances visibility and consumer engagement, evidence shows that engagement does not necessarily translate into purchase intentions or actual behaviour (Hollebeek et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). In tourism, the effectiveness of digital marketing depends on specific content attributes such as quality, engagement, and personalisation, which influence how consumers form perceptions and make travel decisions (Wijaya et al., 2024).

In Zambia, existing studies have primarily examined the adoption of digital marketing tools rather than their effectiveness in influencing behavioural outcomes (Tembo and Malik, 2022; Chicha and Phiri, 2024). As a result, there is limited empirical evidence explaining how content marketing affects attitudes and ultimately purchase intentions, particularly among university students who are highly exposed to digital content.

Furthermore, although the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) explains how attitudes and perceived behavioural control shape intentions, its application in linking content marketing attributes to domestic tourism behaviour remains

underexplored in the Zambian context.

Therefore, the problem addressed in this study is the lack of empirical and theoretical clarity on how content marketing influences domestic tourism purchase intentions. Specifically, the study examines how content quality, engagement, and personalisation affect behavioural intentions through attitude in order to better explain the gap between digital engagement and actual tourism participation.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Previous Studies

Content marketing has become a dominant strategy in digital environments, particularly in industries such as tourism where consumer decisions are influenced by information, perception, and experience. Pulizzi (2015) defines content marketing as the strategic creation and distribution of valuable, relevant, and consistent content aimed at attracting and retaining a clearly defined audience. In tourism, this extends beyond informational content to include storytelling, immersive visuals, and experiential narratives that shape destination image (Ukpabi and Karjaluoto, 2018; Lam et al., 2020).

Despite widespread acceptance of its importance, the literature reveals a tendency to over-romanticise content marketing as inherently effective. Kotler et al. (2021) argue that content marketing enhances customer engagement and brand relationships; however, such assertions often lack empirical validation linking content directly to purchase outcomes. Dwivedi et al. (2023) further critique this assumption, noting that while content marketing increases visibility and engagement, its conversion into actual purchase intention remains inconsistent and context-dependent.

A key limitation in the literature is the lack of conceptual clarity regarding the “effect” of content marketing. Many studies equate success with metrics such as views, likes, and shares, yet these indicators primarily reflect exposure rather than behavioural change. This raises an important conceptual issue: content marketing may be effective in generating awareness but less effective in influencing decision-making.

Moreover, the literature often overlooks the role of context in shaping content effectiveness. In developed markets, content marketing benefits from advanced data analytics, high digital penetration, and sophisticated personalisation tools. In contrast, in emerging markets such as Zambia, limited technological infrastructure and lower purchasing power may weaken the impact of digital content on consumer behaviour (Tembo and Malik, 2022).

Another critical gap relates to content authenticity and trust. While user-generated content is often presented as more credible than firm-generated content (Litvin et al., 2018), studies rarely examine how trust varies across different cultural and economic contexts. In environments where scepticism towards online information is high, even high-quality content may fail to influence behaviour.

From an analytical perspective, this study argues that content marketing should not be viewed as a direct driver of purchase intention but rather as a multi-dimensional influence mechanism, operating through mediators such as trust, perceived value, and relevance. This position challenges the dominant assumption in the literature and provides a more nuanced understanding of content marketing effectiveness.

### 2.2 Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is widely used in marketing research as a predictor of consumer behaviour. Within the Theory of Planned Behaviour, it is defined as the likelihood that an individual will engage in a specific behaviour based on attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). In tourism, purchase intention reflects an individual's willingness to visit a destination or purchase travel-related services (Lam et al., 2020).

However, despite its widespread use, purchase intention remains a contested construct. One of the major criticisms is the intention-behaviour gap, where expressed intentions do not necessarily translate into actual behaviour. Dwivedi et al. (2023) argue that this gap is particularly pronounced in contexts where external constraints such as financial limitations, accessibility, and time significantly influence decision-making.

In tourism, this limitation is even more evident due to the experiential and high-involvement nature of travel decisions. Xiang et al. (2017) and Litvin et al. (2018) emphasise that tourists often engage in extensive information search and evaluation processes, meaning that intention is influenced by multiple factors beyond marketing content alone.

Another limitation in the literature is the lack of precise measurement of purchase intention. Many studies rely on self-reported intentions without considering the influence of situational variables. This raises questions about the validity of findings that claim a direct relationship between content marketing and purchase intention.

Furthermore, in developing economies, purchase intention is strongly shaped by economic and social realities. For example, even when consumers express interest in travel, affordability constraints may prevent actual purchase. This suggests that purchase intention should not be treated as a purely psychological construct but rather as one that is embedded within broader socio-economic contexts.

This study therefore adopts a more critical perspective, recognising purchase intention as a necessary but insufficient indicator of behaviour, and emphasising the need to examine how content marketing influences the underlying determinants of intention.

### **2.3 Domestic Tourism**

Domestic tourism has gained increasing attention as a strategic tool for economic development, particularly in developing countries. The Zambian Ministry of Tourism (2023; 2024) highlights domestic tourism as a key driver of sector resilience, especially in the face of global disruptions.

However, despite policy emphasis, domestic tourism participation remains relatively low. Existing studies (Tembo and Malik, 2022; Chicha and Phiri, 2024) suggest that while awareness of local destinations has improved, this has not translated into significant growth in domestic travel. This indicates a disconnect between marketing efforts and consumer behaviour.

The literature identifies several factors influencing domestic tourism, including affordability, accessibility, cultural perceptions, and social influence. However, these factors are often discussed in isolation, without integrating them into a comprehensive behavioural framework.

A critical limitation in existing research is the lack of focus on specific market segments, particularly university students. This segment is strategically important due to its high digital engagement, social influence, and potential for long-term tourism participation. Yet, studies rarely examine how digital content marketing influences this group specifically.

Moreover, there is limited benchmarking against regional contexts. Studies from Southern Africa (Tichaawa and Mhlanga, 2023) suggest that domestic tourism challenges are not unique to Zambia, yet comparative analysis remains underdeveloped.

This study argues that understanding domestic tourism requires a context-sensitive approach that integrates digital marketing strategies with socio-economic realities. Without such integration, content marketing efforts may continue to generate awareness without influencing actual travel behaviour.

### **2.4 Content Quality and Purchase Intentions**

Content quality is widely recognised as a critical determinant of consumer behaviour in digital tourism environments. Consumers rely heavily on online content to evaluate destinations and services prior to purchase due to the intangible nature of tourism products. High-quality content reduces perceived risk, enhances destination image, and supports informed decision-making, thereby increasing the likelihood of purchase intentions (Filieri et al., 2018). Attributes such as accuracy, relevance, informativeness, credibility, and visual appeal are commonly used to conceptualise content quality (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). Informative and contextually relevant content generates favourable cognitive and emotional responses, which subsequently shape attitudes and influence behavioural intentions (Lou et al., 2019; Tussyadiah et al., 2018).

In the Zambian context, content quality is further complicated by misalignment with local realities. Studies indicate that tourism content often fails to reflect affordability, culturally familiar experiences, or peer influence, which are critical for domestic student tourists (Tembo and Malik, 2022; Chicha and Phiri, 2024). Even visually appealing content may fail to influence purchase intentions if perceived as exaggerated, misleading, or inauthentic (Filieri et al., 2021). This underscores the importance of transparency, authenticity, and contextually relevant content for shaping attitudes and fostering purchase intentions.

Content quality influences purchase intentions primarily by shaping consumer attitudes and enhancing perceived behavioural control. Positive attitudes formed through engagement with informative, credible, and contextually relevant content increase the likelihood that consumers will translate favourable evaluations into actual travel behaviour. For domestic tourism marketing targeting university students, content must therefore combine technical quality with contextual appropriateness to effectively influence attitudes and, ultimately, purchase intentions.

### **2.5 Content Engagement and Consumer Behaviour**

Content engagement has emerged as a pivotal construct in digital marketing research, particularly in tourism, where consumers' interaction with online content significantly shapes attitudes and behavioural outcomes. Engagement is defined as the degree of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural involvement demonstrated by consumers when interacting with digital content, encompassing activities such as commenting, sharing, reacting, and sustained content consumption (Hollebeek et al., 2016). In the context of tourism, engagement is not merely a measure of exposure but reflects the extent to which consumers internalise promotional messages and integrate them into their decision-making processes.

Empirical evidence indicates that content engagement influences consumer behaviour primarily through mediating mechanisms such as trust, emotional attachment, and brand relationship strength. Hollebeek and Macky (2019) demonstrate that interactive digital content fosters engagement, which in turn strengthens consumer-brand relationships and enhances the likelihood of favourable behavioural intentions. Similarly, Rather et al. (2019) find that engagement with tourism-related social media content positively shapes destination image and visit intentions, particularly among digitally active and younger consumers. These findings suggest that engagement can influence attitudes by fostering emotional connection, reinforcing perceptions of value, and generating positive evaluations of the tourism experience.

However, the literature also raises critical caveats. High engagement metrics do not automatically translate into behavioural conversion. Dwivedi et al. (2023) argue that superficial forms of engagement, such as likes or passive viewing, may not reflect genuine purchase intentions. In tourism marketing, this distinction is particularly salient, as exposure and interaction do not necessarily result in bookings or travel decisions. Engagement must therefore be assessed in terms of depth, meaningful involvement, and cognitive processing rather than frequency alone.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) provides a theoretical explanation for these dynamics. influence attitudes and subsequent intentions.

### **2.6 Content personalisation and Tourism Decisions**

Empirical research consistently demonstrates that content personalisation positively influences consumer attitudes, engagement, and purchase intentions by creating a sense of individual relevance and value. In tourism marketing, personalisation can involve recommending destinations based on previous searches, tailoring promotional offers to budget constraints, or highlighting experiences aligned with specific interests such as adventure, cultural tourism, or relaxation. Mikalef et al. (2021) argue that personalisation reduces information overload and facilitates decision making, thereby increasing the likelihood of purchase intentions. Tuten and Solomon (2018) further note that consumers respond more favourably to marketing messages that acknowledge individuality and provide perceived value, particularly in contexts characterised by high perceived risk, such as first-time or domestic travel.

From a behavioural perspective, personalised content strengthens attitudes by fostering emotional connection and perceived usefulness, which are critical antecedents of purchase intention. When consumers perceive content as personally meaningful, they are more likely to develop favourable evaluations of the destination and consider travel positively. This effect is further supported by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 2018), which posits that message relevance enhances motivation to process information through the central route of persuasion. Deep cognitive engagement generated by personalised content produces stronger and more enduring attitudes, which are more likely to translate into purchase intentions. For university students, personalisation that reflects affordability, peer preferences, and lifestyle compatibility is particularly persuasive, reinforcing favourable attitudes and behavioural intentions.

However, the literature also highlights potential limitations and debates surrounding content personalisation. Excessive or intrusive data collection can generate discomfort, reduce trust, and undermine purchase intentions (Dwivedi et al., 2021). In tourism marketing, where services are intangible and perceived risk is high, trust is critical. Poorly executed personalisation can evoke scepticism, particularly among young, digitally aware consumers, thereby diminishing the intended behavioural effect (Bleier et al., 2020). Consequently, transparency regarding data use, ethical practices, and consumer control over personalisation features is essential for sustaining positive outcomes.

### **2.7 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)**

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), developed by Ajzen (1991), is a widely applied socio-psychological model used to explain and predict human behaviour in situations where individuals have incomplete volitional control. TPB posits that behavioural intention is the immediate antecedent of actual behaviour, shaped by three core constructs: attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Attitude reflects an individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing a behaviour, subjective norms relate to perceived social pressure from important referents, and perceived behavioural control refers to an individual's perception of the resources and ability required to perform the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).

In tourism research, TPB has been extensively employed to explain tourists' intentions to visit destinations, purchase travel products, and engage in tourism-related behaviours. Studies indicate that favourable attitudes towards destinations, supportive social influences, and perceptions of ease and feasibility of travel significantly enhance intention to travel (Lam et al., 2020; Meng and Choi, 2019). In digital tourism contexts, TPB has also been used to examine how online information, electronic word-of-mouth, and social media content shape travel decision-making, particularly among digitally active and younger consumers (Xiang et al., 2017). These applications demonstrate TPB's relevance in understanding how psychological and social factors jointly influence domestic tourism purchase intentions.

Despite its explanatory power, TPB has limitations. The theory primarily focuses on intention rather than actual behaviour, which may not always translate into action due to situational constraints such as affordability, accessibility, or cultural factors. Additionally, TPB does not explicitly account for the mechanisms through which persuasive messages are processed, particularly in digital environments where content format, engagement, and presentation cues vary substantially (Dwivedi et al., 2023). These limitations suggest the need for complementary theoretical perspectives that address the cognitive and evaluative processes involved in message processing.

### **2.8 Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)**

ELM is particularly relevant in tourism and digital marketing research, as it explains how consumers interact with online content. Tourism studies indicate that high-quality, credible, and informative digital content can influence travel intentions through central processing, whereas visually appealing imagery, influencer endorsements, and user-generated content operate through peripheral cues (Ukpabi and Karjaluoto, 2018; Lam et al., 2020). Thus, ELM provides insights into the effectiveness of content marketing strategies, explaining why certain messages persuade consumers even when detailed analysis is limited.

However, ELM has methodological and conceptual limitations. Distinguishing between central and peripheral processing is challenging, as individuals may use both routes simultaneously. Moreover, the effectiveness of each route depends on consumer motivation and cognitive ability, which vary across audiences and contexts (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Consequently, ELM alone may not fully capture the broader social and control factors influencing purchase intentions.

## 2.9 Justification for Integrating TPB and ELM

Integrating TPB and ELM provides a comprehensive framework for examining how content marketing influences purchase intentions among domestic tourists. TPB explains the psychological and social determinants underlying travel intentions, such as attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. These factors are particularly relevant when investigating university students, whose decisions are shaped by peer influence, affordability, and perceived accessibility (Ajzen, 1991; Meng and Choi, 2019).

ELM complements TPB by explaining how digital tourism content is processed and evaluated. Since the effectiveness of content marketing depends on content quality, engagement, and personalisation, ELM clarifies whether messages influence attitudes through thoughtful central processing or peripheral cues such as visuals, storytelling, and social proof (Ukpabi and Karjaluo, 2018). Prior studies demonstrate that combining TPB and ELM enhances explanatory power, capturing both cognitive evaluation of content and the formation of behavioural intentions (Meng and Choi, 2019; Dwivedi et al., 2023).

By integrating these models, the current study addresses the limitations of single-theory approaches. TPB elucidates why domestic tourists develop purchase intentions, while ELM explains how content marketing messages contribute to shaping attitudes and intentions. This dual-theory approach is particularly suitable in a digital tourism context, where persuasive message characteristics and individual psychological factors jointly influence decision-making. Therefore, the integrated framework offers a robust foundation for analysing the influence of content marketing including content quality, engagement, and personalisation on domestic tourism purchase intentions among postgraduate students in Zambia.

## 2.10 Synthesis of Literature

The reviewed literature demonstrates strong consensus that content quality, engagement, and personalisation are central determinants of consumer attitudes and purchase intentions in tourism marketing. High-quality, authentic, and visually appealing content has been shown to enhance trust, perceived value, and destination image, which in turn positively influence consumers' intentions to purchase tourism products and services (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Şerife et al., 2023). These findings are consistent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which emphasises the role of attitudes in shaping behavioural intentions (Ajzen, 1991). However, while many studies underscore the persuasive power of content quality, critics argue that its influence is often context-dependent, moderated by factors such as affordability, cultural relevance, and prior travel experience (Lou et al., 2019; Tembo and Malik, 2022).

Content engagement is widely acknowledged as a critical mechanism through which marketing content affects behaviour. Interactive elements, including social media interactions, user-generated content, and immersive multimedia, foster emotional connections, social influence, and sustained attention (Hollebeek et al., 2016; Pal, 2024). ELM theory explains that engagement can operate via central processing, where consumers thoughtfully evaluate content, or peripheral processing, where visual appeal and social cues shape attitudes (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Nevertheless, recent studies highlight that high engagement does not automatically translate into purchase intentions. Tichaawa and Mhlanga (2023) observed that while tourism content in Southern Africa generated substantial interaction, this engagement did not consistently result in bookings, pointing to the mediating effects of trust, perceived affordability, and ease of transaction. Content personalisation has also been recognised as a key strategy for influencing attitudes and intentions. Tailoring content to individual preferences, interests, and behaviours enhances perceived relevance, emotional resonance, and confidence in decision-making (Bleier and Eisenbeiss, 2015; Mikalef et al., 2021). In tourism, personalised itineraries, student-focused packages, and contextualised travel recommendations reduce information overload and facilitate purchase decisions. Nonetheless, scholars caution that excessive or intrusive personalisation can compromise trust and perceived behavioural control, particularly among young, digitally literate consumers who are sensitive to privacy concerns (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Bleier et al., 2020).

## 2.11 Research Gaps

Despite the extensive research on content marketing and tourism, several critical gaps remain.

- **Contextual Gap:** Most empirical studies are conducted in technologically advanced or international markets, limiting their applicability to Zambia, where digital infrastructure, affordability, and cultural factors may moderate content marketing effectiveness (Tembo and Malik, 2022; Chicha and Phiri, 2024).
- **Segment-Specific Gap:** Research on domestic tourism in Africa frequently targets general populations, overlooking university students as a distinct consumer group. Students are digitally literate, socially connected, and highly responsive to peer influence, making them a unique target for digital content marketing strategies (Vrontis et al., 2021).
- **Content Dimension Gap:** Few studies comprehensively examine the combined effects of content quality, engagement, and personalisation on attitudes and purchase intentions. Existing literature often treats these constructs in isolation, and insufficient attention is given to the mechanisms such as trust, perceived behavioural control, and cognitive processing that mediate or moderate their influence.
- **Theory Application Gap:** While TPB and ELM are well established in tourism research, empirical studies rarely integrate both models to explain how content marketing influences attitude formation, processing routes, and ultimately purchase intentions. The lack of theory-driven, context-specific research limits understanding of how content marketing strategies actually affect decision-making among domestic tourists.

- **Practical Gap:** There is limited evidence on how Zambian tourism firms, such as Try Zambia Travel and Tours, effectively employ content marketing strategies to stimulate domestic tourism demand among students. Personalisation practices, engagement tactics, and content quality management remain largely unexplored in empirical research.

Addressing these gaps, the current study empirically examines how content quality, engagement, and personalisation influence the purchase intentions of university students as domestic tourists in Zambia. By integrating TPB and ELM, the study provides a theory-driven, context-specific analysis of how content marketing shapes attitudes, processes persuasive messages, and translates into actionable purchase intentions. This approach generates both academically relevant insights and practical guidance for enhancing digital marketing effectiveness in the Zambian tourism sector.

## 2.12 Theoretical Framework

### Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

In tourism research, TPB has been extensively employed to explain tourists' intentions to visit destinations, purchase travel products, and engage in tourism-related behaviours. Studies indicate that favorable attitudes towards destinations, supportive social influences, and perceptions of ease and feasibility of travel significantly enhance intention to travel (Lam et al., 2020; Meng and Choi, 2019). In digital tourism contexts, TPB has also been used to examine how online information, electronic word-of-mouth, and social media content shape travel decision-making, particularly among digitally active and younger consumers (Xiang et al., 2017). These applications demonstrate TPB's relevance in understanding how psychological and social factors jointly influence domestic tourism purchase intentions.

Despite its explanatory power, TPB has limitations. The theory primarily focuses on intention rather than actual behaviour, which may not always translate into action due to situational constraints such as affordability, accessibility, or cultural factors. Additionally, TPB does not explicitly account for the mechanisms through which persuasive messages are processed, particularly in digital environments where content format, engagement, and presentation cues vary substantially (Dwivedi et al., 2023). These limitations suggest the need for complementary theoretical perspectives that address the cognitive and evaluative processes involved in message processing.

### Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), explains how individuals process persuasive messages and how such processing influences attitudes and behavioural intentions. ELM identifies two distinct routes of persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route. The central route involves careful evaluation of message content and argument quality, resulting in more enduring attitude change. In contrast, the peripheral route relies on surface-level cues, such as source credibility, attractiveness, visual appeal, or emotional storytelling, and produces more temporary attitude change (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986).

ELM is particularly relevant in tourism and digital marketing research, as it explains how consumers interact with online content. Tourism studies indicate that high-quality, credible, and informative digital content can influence travel intentions through central processing, whereas visually appealing imagery, influencer endorsements, and user-generated content operate through peripheral cues (Ukpabi and Karjaluoto, 2018; Lam et al., 2020). Thus, ELM provides insights into the effectiveness of content marketing strategies, explaining why certain messages persuade consumers even when detailed analysis is limited.

However, ELM has methodological and conceptual limitations. Distinguishing between central and peripheral processing is challenging, as individuals may use both routes simultaneously. Moreover, the effectiveness of each route depends on consumer motivation and cognitive ability, which vary across audiences and contexts (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Consequently, ELM alone may not fully capture the broader social and control factors influencing purchase intentions.

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### 2.13 Conceptual Framework

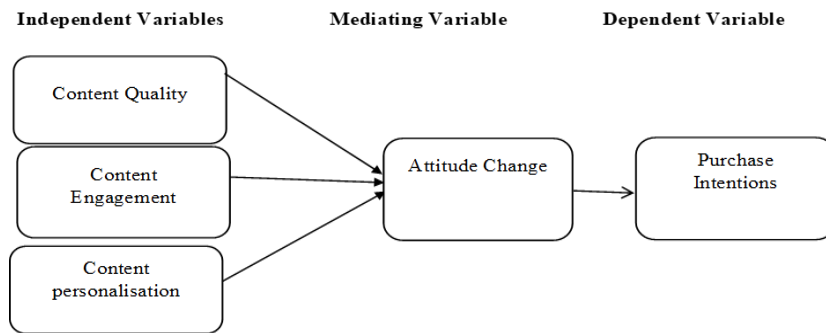


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Source: Authors Own Construction, 2026

#### Operationalization of Variables (Conceptual Framework)

The conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between digital content marketing attributes and domestic tourism purchase intention, with attitude serving as a mediating variable. The framework adopts a linear causal structure in which content quality, content engagement, and content personalisation influence attitude, which in turn determines purchase intention. This structure is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which posits that behavioural intention is primarily shaped by attitudinal evaluations (Ajzen, 1991).

The framework is further supported by the Elaboration Likelihood Model, which explains how individuals process persuasive messages and how such processing shapes attitudes and subsequent behavioural intentions (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986).

#### Independent Variables

The independent variables in this study are content quality, content engagement, and content personalisation, representing key dimensions of digital content marketing. Content quality refers to the accuracy, relevance, and credibility of information, which significantly influences consumer perceptions and decision-making (Fileri et al., 2018). Content engagement captures the level of interaction with digital content, including cognitive, emotional, and behavioural involvement (Hollebeek et al., 2016). Content personalisation refers to tailoring content to individual preferences, which enhances perceived relevance and consumer response (Bleier and Eisenbeiss, 2015).

These constructs have been widely validated in prior studies, supporting their reliability in explaining consumer behaviour in digital environments.

#### Mediating Variable: Attitude

Attitude serves as the mediating variable, explaining how content marketing attributes influence purchase intention. According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour, attitude reflects an individual's evaluation of a behaviour and is a key determinant of intention (Ajzen, 1991).

The Elaboration Likelihood Model further explains that content characteristics such as quality, engagement, and personalisation influence how messages are processed through central and peripheral routes, ultimately shaping attitudes (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Empirical studies confirm that positive attitudes toward tourism destinations significantly increase travel intentions (Rather et al., 2019; Lam et al., 2020).

#### Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

The dependent variable is purchase intention, defined as the likelihood that an individual will engage in a particular behaviour, such as planning or booking travel. Purchase intention is widely recognised as a strong predictor of actual behaviour in tourism and marketing studies (Ajzen, 1991; Han et al., 2019).

In this framework, purchase intention is influenced indirectly through attitude, reflecting the behavioural pathway proposed in TPB.

#### Overall Relationship and Justification

The framework demonstrates that content quality, engagement, and personalisation influence purchase intention through attitude. The linear structure is justified based on established behavioural theory, particularly the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which supports a sequential relationship between beliefs, attitudes, and intentions (Ajzen, 1991).

The integration of the Elaboration Likelihood Model strengthens the framework by explaining how digital content characteristics shape attitudes through cognitive and emotional processing mechanisms (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986).

### 3 Research Methodology and Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which enabled the collection of quantifiable data to examine relationships among key variables: content quality, engagement, personalisation, and purchase intentions. According to McCombes (2022), descriptive survey designs are effective for describing characteristics of a population and testing associations between variables. This design was appropriate because it captured postgraduate students' perceptions and behavioural intentions regarding content marketing in the tourism sector.

The study was grounded in the positivist research philosophy, which assumes that reality is objective, measurable, and independent of the researcher. Positivism emphasises empirical observation and statistical analysis to identify patterns, relationships, and causal effects among variables (Saunders et al., 2019). Knowledge was generated through systematic measurement of observable phenomena rather than subjective interpretation.

The positivist stance was appropriate because the study sought to test theoretically derived relationships using established models such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour and the Elaboration Likelihood Model, aligning with positivist assumptions of hypothesis testing and theory verification (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This philosophy also supported the use of quantitative methods and inferential statistical techniques, including regression analysis and ANOVA, to produce objective, reliable, and generalisable findings while minimising researcher bias. A quantitative research approach was employed to systematically examine measurable relationships between variables using numerical data. Quantitative methods provided objectivity, reliability, and generalisability, allowing the study to test hypotheses and draw statistically valid conclusions (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

The approach was suitable for the structured nature of the research topic and supported the use of closed-ended questionnaires and statistical analyses. By using a quantitative approach, the study ensured replicable and verifiable findings, aligning with the positivist philosophy and descriptive survey design. The target population comprised all postgraduate students enrolled at the Graduate School of Business, totaling 2,000 students. This population was appropriate because they were digitally active, likely to engage with online marketing content, and possessed the purchasing power to make travel-related decisions. Identifying a relevant and accessible population improved the validity and generalisability of the study findings (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). A sample size of 334 respondents was determined using the Raosoft Sample Size Calculator at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The formula used was:

$$n = \frac{N(1 + N(e)^2)}{1 + N(e)^2} = \frac{2000(1 + 2000(0.05)^2)}{1 + 2000(0.05)^2} = \frac{2000(1 + 2000(0.05)^2)}{1 + 2000(0.05)^2} = 333.33 \approx 334$$

This sample size balanced representativeness with feasibility, ensuring reliable findings that could be generalised to the broader postgraduate student population (Raosoft, 2004). The study employed simple random sampling, which ensured that each student in the population had an equal and independent chance of selection. A sampling frame was developed using the official enrollment list of postgraduate students from the Graduate School of Business, ensuring unbiased selection.

Simple random sampling was appropriate for this large and heterogeneous population, reduced sampling bias, and was compatible with the statistical analyses planned for the study (Bryman, 2016; Hayes, 2024). The questionnaire used in this study was self-developed but drew on established instruments from prior research to ensure validity and relevance. Items measuring content quality were adapted from Filieri et al. (2018) and Lou et al. (2019), which focus on accuracy, relevance, informativeness, and visual appeal of digital content. Data were analysed using SPSS, which allowed data coding, cleaning, and statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise demographic characteristics and provide an overview of responses.

Inferential statistics, including regression analysis and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), were employed to examine relationships between the independent variables (content quality, engagement, and personalisation) and the dependent variable (purchase intention). Assumptions of regression analysis including linearity, normality, homoscedasticity, and absence of multicollinearity were verified to ensure validity of the results.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 To determine the effect of content quality on domestic tourism purchase intentions among graduate business students at the University of Zambia, considering the mediating role of attitude

The data indicate that content quality significantly shapes attitudes, which mediate purchase intentions among graduate business students. The mean score of 3.21 for accuracy demonstrates that respondents generally perceive accurate content as influential; however, the standard deviation of 0.51 indicates individual differences in the weight given to accuracy, implying that its effect on attitude formation is moderated by personal evaluation.

Authenticity yielded a slightly lower mean of 3.11 and smaller variability (SD = 0.37), suggesting consistent recognition of genuine content across respondents. This consistency implies that authenticity operates as a stable antecedent of attitude, providing a reliable influence on purchase intentions.

Relevance and informativeness recorded perfect means (4.00) and zero variability, indicating universal agreement on their critical role in shaping attitudes. Statistically, these ceiling effects signal strong uniformity in responses, highlighting these

two dimensions as dominant drivers of the attitudinal pathway. The lack of dispersion restricts differentiation but underscores the foundational role of content alignment with user interests and information richness in eliciting favorable attitudes.

From a theoretical perspective, these results substantiate the central tenets of the Elaboration Likelihood Model. High-quality, relevant, and informative content engages central route processing, enhancing cognitive elaboration and producing durable attitudinal change. Simultaneously, affective evaluation is reinforced via authenticity and accuracy, demonstrating that both peripheral and central cues are operative.

The findings also integrate with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, in which attitude is a key predictor of behavioural intention. The strong agreement on content relevance and informativeness indicates that positive evaluative responses translate into increased purchase intentions. Variability in accuracy and authenticity suggests differential attitudinal sensitivity, reflecting individual-level cognitive processing differences within the student sample.

Overall, the analytical evidence confirms that content quality operates primarily through the mediating effect of attitude, with relevance and informativeness as the most potent predictors. Accuracy and authenticity contribute to attitude formation but are subject to personal evaluation variability. This analysis demonstrates that optimising content quality in tourism marketing will strengthen attitudes, which, in turn, reliably increase domestic tourism purchase intentions among the target demographic. Descriptive statistics under table 1.

Table 1: Influence of content quality on purchase intentions

Purchase Intentions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	St. Dev.
Accurate content about Zambian tourist destinations positively affects my attitude and increases my willingness to recommend them to others.	0	0	23 (6.9%)	216 (64.7%)	95 (28.4%)	3.21	0.51
Authentic content about a tourist site strengthens my attitude toward the site and motivates me to plan a trip	0	0	15 (4.5%)	265 (79.3%)	54 (16.2%)	3.11	0.37
Relevant content I encounter online influences my attitude and causes me to prioritize certain destinations for travel.	0	0	0	334 (100%)	0	4.00	0.00
Quality content Informative content about a domestic tourist destination positively shapes my attitude and increases my likelihood of visiting it.	0	0	0	334 (100%)	0	4.00	0.00

#### 4.2 To examine the effect of content engagement on domestic tourism purchase intentions among graduate business students at the University of Zambia, considering the mediating role of attitude

The data in Table 2 demonstrate a strong relationship between content engagement and purchase intentions, mediated by attitude. Items one, two, and four recorded perfect mean scores of 4.00 with zero standard deviation, indicating complete consensus among respondents. Statistically, the absence of variability suggests that engagement with tourism-related content through actions such as liking, commenting, sharing, or observing others' engagement is a normative behaviour within the sample. Analytically, this indicates that engagement functions as a foundational condition that facilitates the formation of attitudes rather than as a direct differentiator of purchase intention.

High engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments operate as social proof, enhancing perceived credibility and trust in the content. According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model, these cues act as peripheral signals, influencing attitudes through affective and heuristic processing. The unanimous agreement implies that students uniformly interpret engagement visibility as an indicator of content reliability and popularity, thereby reinforcing positive evaluation and favourable attitudes toward domestic tourism before behavioural intention is enacted.

The third item, which concerns reviews and testimonials from other travellers, exhibits a mean of 3.67 and a standard deviation of 0.47. This variation indicates that the influence of user-generated content is contingent upon individual differences, including prior travel experience, cognitive processing style, and personal preferences. Analytically, this suggests that reviews and testimonials engage central route processing, requiring deeper cognitive evaluation. Respondents integrate evaluative judgements from peer experiences into their attitudes, which in turn mediate their intention to visit a destination.

Integrating the Theory of Planned Behaviour, content engagement also enhances perceived behavioural control and subjective norms. Observing high engagement provides cues of social endorsement and normative behaviour, signaling that travelling is both desirable and feasible. Engagement strengthens attitudes toward domestic tourism by increasing affective involvement and supporting cognitive appraisal of the destination. Consequently, purchase intention emerges indirectly through the attitudinal pathway rather than as a direct outcome of engagement alone.

Taken together, the statistical and analytical evidence indicates that content engagement influences purchase intentions primarily through its effect on attitude. Engagement increases trust, social validation, and cognitive processing of content, which collectively shape favourable attitudes. These attitudes subsequently translate into stronger behavioural intentions, illustrating the mediating role of attitude as predicted by both the Elaboration Likelihood Model and the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Effective digital marketing strategies should therefore emphasise mechanisms that enhance

engagement visibility and substantive evaluative cues to activate attitudinal processes and convert content exposure into domestic tourism participation. Table 2 shows descriptive data.

Table 2 Relationship between content engagement and purchase intentions

Descriptive statistics

Content Engagement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	St. Dev.
I tend to watch, like, comment on, or share tourism related content that interests me, which positively influences my attitude and increases my intention to visit the destination.	0	0	0	334 (100%)	0	4.00	0.00
Seeing high engagement such as many likes, shares, and comments on travel content positively shapes my attitude and increases my likelihood of considering travel to that destination.	0	0	0	334 (100%)	0	4.00	0.00
Reviews and testimonials from other travellers positively influence my attitude and increase my intention to visit a destination.	0	0	109 (32.6%)	225 (67.4%)	0	3.67	0.47
I am more likely to develop a positive attitude and consider traveling when I see people actively engaging with content about a place.	0	0	0	334 (100%)	0	4.00	0.00

#### 4.3 To assess the effect of content personalisation on domestic tourism purchase intentions among graduate business students at the University of Zambia, considering the mediating role of attitude

The statistical results in Table 3 provide important insights into the strength, consistency, and variability of respondents' perceptions regarding content personalisation and its influence on purchase intentions. The first item recorded a mean score of 3.15 with a standard deviation of 0.53. The mean value, which lies above the midpoint of the Likert scale, indicates a generally positive evaluation of personalised content. However, it is comparatively lower than other items in the construct, suggesting that while respondents preferred tailored content, the intensity of this preference varied across individuals. The standard deviation of 0.53 indicates moderate dispersion, implying that although most respondents leaned toward agreement, there was some variation in how strongly this preference was held. Analytically, this suggests that personalisation may not uniformly influence all individuals, but interacts with user-specific factors such as prior experience, digital literacy, or travel motivation. From a mediating perspective, this implies that attitude formation in response to personalised content is not homogeneous but varies in strength across respondents. In terms of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, such individual differences may also influence perceived behavioural control, as the ability to act on personalised recommendations depends on users' confidence, resources, and situational factors.

The second item recorded a mean of 4.00 with a standard deviation of 0.00, indicating complete agreement among all respondents. Statistically, this reflects a perfectly uniform distribution, where every respondent selected the same response category. This demonstrates an extremely strong perceived effect of personalised recommendations on booking consideration. The absence of variability suggests a potential ceiling effect, limiting the discriminative power of the item and restricting its contribution to inferential analysis such as correlation or regression. Despite this limitation, the result is theoretically significant, as it indicates that personalised recommendations were universally perceived as influential in shaping behavioural intention. Attitude operates as a highly consistent mediating mechanism, where exposure to personalised offers directly translates into favourable evaluations and increased intention to act. The TPB complements this by highlighting that perceived behavioural control and intention are strengthened when users feel able to follow through on personalised suggestions, reinforcing the likelihood of actual travel behaviour.

The third item yielded a mean of 3.16 and a standard deviation of 0.52, closely mirroring the first item. This consistency suggests that respondents maintained a stable perception regarding the value of content that aligns with their preferences. The relatively low standard deviation indicates that responses were clustered around agreement, reinforcing the reliability of the observed pattern. Analytically, this supports the argument that perceived relevance, as a component of personalisation, contributes significantly to attitude formation. When content reflects individual interests, it enhances both cognitive evaluation and affective response, thereby strengthening the attitudinal pathway through which purchase intentions are formed. TPB adds to this by suggesting that favourable attitudes and perceptions of control over the decision to travel increase the intention to act on personalised content.

The fourth item recorded a mean of 3.33 with a standard deviation of 0.47, representing the highest mean among the items with observable variability. This indicates a stronger level of agreement compared to the previous items, suggesting that location-based and customized recommendations were particularly effective in stimulating interest in new destinations. The lower standard deviation reflects a tighter clustering of responses, indicating greater consensus among respondents. Analytically, this suggests that contextual personalisation, such as location-based recommendations, may be more influential than general preference-based personalisation because such content directly connects with users' situational context, enhancing perceived immediacy and relevance. This strengthens attitude formation by making the content more actionable and meaningful. TPB reinforces this by demonstrating that perceived behavioural control and

subjective norms may be enhanced when recommendations are contextually relevant, further increasing intention to engage in domestic tourism.

Taken together, the statistical values indicate a consistently positive evaluation of content personalisation, with mean scores ranging from 3.15 to 4.00 and generally low standard deviations. This pattern suggests strong agreement and relative consensus among respondents regarding the importance of personalised content. Zero variance in some items highlights limitations in measurement sensitivity, which may affect the robustness of subsequent inferential analysis. The findings demonstrate that content personalisation exerts a strong and consistent influence on purchase intentions primarily through attitude, with TPB providing complementary insights by linking perceived behavioural control and intention to actual behaviour. In line with the Elaboration Likelihood Model, personalised content increased message relevance, encouraging deeper cognitive processing and stronger attitudinal responses, which ultimately translated into higher purchase intentions.

Table 3 Influence of content specialization on purchase intentions

Content personalisation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	St. Dev.
I prefer travel content that is tailored to my interests, such as destinations I have searched for before, as it positively influences my attitude and increases my intention to visit such destinations.	0	0	28 (8.4%)	227 (68.0%)	79 (23.7%)	3.15	0.53
Receiving personalised travel recommendations or offers positively shapes my attitude and makes me more likely to consider booking a trip.	0	0	0	334 (100%)	0	4.00	0.00
I appreciate when content suggests destinations, activities, or travel deals based on my preferences, as this enhances my attitude and increases my intention to travel.	0	0	28 (8.4%)	226 (67.7%)	80 (24.0%)	3.16	0.52
Seeing location based or customised recommendations positively influences my attitude and increases my interest in visiting new places.	0	0	0	223 (66.8%)	111 (33.2%)	3.33	0.47

#### 4.4 Inferential statistics

The reliability analysis produced a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.532 for the scale items used in this study. This value falls below the widely accepted threshold of 0.70 for internal consistency, indicating that the measurement scale exhibited limited reliability. While the coefficient suggests some degree of internal consistency, it also reflects potential weaknesses in the coherence and homogeneity of the items used to measure the constructs, particularly content quality and its associated dimensions.

From a methodological perspective, a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.532 implies that the items may not have consistently captured the same underlying construct. This could be attributed to several factors, including the small number of items included in the scale, as reliability coefficients are sensitive to scale length. With only three items, the likelihood of achieving a high alpha value is reduced, even when the items are conceptually related. In addition, the multidimensional nature of content quality, which encompasses informative, relevant, authentic, and accurate attributes, may have introduced variability in responses, thereby weakening internal consistency. This suggests that respondents may have interpreted these dimensions as distinct rather than as a unified construct, which has implications for both measurement validity and theoretical alignment.

From a theoretical standpoint, the relatively low reliability coefficient has implications for interpreting the mediating role of attitude in this study. Since attitude formation is influenced by perceptions of content quality, any inconsistency in measuring content quality may affect the strength and stability of the observed relationships between variables. In the context of the Elaboration Likelihood Model, where both cognitive and affective processing routes are activated by different content attributes, the variation across items may reflect genuine differences in how respondents process informative versus authentic or relevant content. Therefore, the lower reliability coefficient does not necessarily invalidate the findings but suggests that the construct may be inherently multidimensional and requires more refined operationalisation.

Table 4 Reliability Test Results

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.532	3

The correlation analysis in Table 5 examined the relationships between purchase intention and the three dimensions of content marketing: content quality, content engagement, and content personalisation. Content quality demonstrated a very strong positive correlation with purchase intention ( $r = 0.858$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that higher perceptions of accurate, relevant, authentic, and informative content are associated with stronger intentions to participate in domestic tourism. Content personalisation also showed a significant positive correlation with purchase intention ( $r = 0.635$ ,  $p <$

0.01), suggesting that tailored content aligned with respondents’ preferences strengthens behavioural intention. The correlation for content engagement could not be computed due to zero variability in the dataset, reflecting a ceiling effect, yet descriptive statistics from previous sections indicated that engagement was extremely high among all respondents. Statistically, these correlation values confirm that content quality and personalisation are closely associated with purchase intentions, providing preliminary evidence of their predictive potential.

From a theoretical standpoint, these results align with both the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Under ELM, high-quality content activates central route processing, leading to deeper cognitive evaluation and stronger, more enduring attitudes. Personalised content increases relevance, motivating further engagement with information. TPB complements this explanation by highlighting that attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control collectively influence intention. In this context, students exposed to high-quality and personalised content likely developed positive attitudes, perceived social approval via engagement cues, and felt capable of undertaking domestic travel, all contributing to stronger purchase intentions.

The regression analysis evaluated the predictive strength of content quality, content engagement, and content personalisation on purchase intention. All three independent variables were statistically significant predictors ( $p < 0.001$ ). Content quality was the most influential, with an unstandardised coefficient of 0.894 and a standardized beta of 0.732. This implies that for every one-unit increase in perceived content quality, purchase intention increases by 0.894 units, holding other variables constant. The high beta value indicates a strong practical effect, highlighting the centrality of informative, accurate, authentic, and relevant content in shaping students’ behavioural intentions. Statistically, this coefficient confirms that content quality has both a substantial and reliable effect on purchase intention, supporting its role as a critical predictor in the model.

Content engagement demonstrated a similarly strong influence, with an unstandardised coefficient of 0.870 and a standardized beta of 0.736. This suggests that increased engagement, such as liking, commenting, or sharing tourism-related content, significantly enhances intention to travel. However, the zero variability in engagement scores implies caution: the apparent strength may partially reflect the measurement ceiling rather than purely behavioural effects. Analytically, this variable contributes indirectly by reinforcing perceived credibility and social validation, key elements in both ELM (peripheral cues) and TPB (subjective norms and attitude formation).

Content personalisation exhibited a positive but comparatively smaller effect, with a coefficient of 0.229 and a standardized beta of 0.225. This indicates that while personalisation strengthens purchase intention, its impact is less pronounced than content quality or engagement. From a theoretical perspective, personalised recommendations likely enhance perceived behavioural control under TPB by aligning content with students’ interests, making travel feel more achievable. In ELM terms, personalisation increases message relevance, prompting deeper cognitive processing and more favourable attitudes, which then contribute to purchase intention.

Interpreting these statistical values in combination reveals nuanced insights. The strong correlations and regression coefficients for content quality and engagement demonstrate that these factors are primary drivers of behavioural intention, while personalisation acts as a supportive mechanism that enhances relevance and engagement. The low standard deviations for engagement and some personalisation items indicate consensus among respondents, suggesting that these constructs are widely perceived as influential, though ceiling effects limit the differentiation of individual responses. TPB helps interpret these patterns: attitudes formed in response to high-quality, engaging, and personalised content, combined with perceived behavioural control and social influence, collectively shape the intention to travel.

Table 5 Correlation Analysis

Correlations Analysis					
		Purchase Intention	Content Quality	Content Engagement	Content personalisation
Purchase Intention	Pearson Correlation	1	.858**	. <sup>b</sup>	.635**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.	.000
	N	334	334	334	334
Content Quality	Pearson Correlation	.858**	1	. <sup>b</sup>	.559**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.	.000
	N	334	334	334	334
Content Engagement	Pearson Correlation	. <sup>b</sup>	. <sup>b</sup>	. <sup>b</sup>	. <sup>b</sup>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.	.	.
	N	334	334	334	334
Content personalisation	Pearson Correlation	.635**	.559**	. <sup>b</sup>	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	
	N	334	334	334	334
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					
b. Cannot be computed because at least one of the variables is constant.					

The model summary in Table 6 indicates an R value of 0.878, demonstrating a strong correlation between the independent variables, content quality, content engagement, and content personalisation, and the dependent variable, purchase

intention. This high R value reflects the collective strength of these predictors in explaining the behavioural intention of postgraduate business students to participate in domestic tourism.

The R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.772 indicates that approximately 77.2 percent of the variance in purchase intention is explained by the three content marketing variables. This is a substantial proportion, suggesting that high-quality, engaging, and personalised content exerts a major influence on students’ travel-related behavioural intentions. The adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of 0.770, which accounts for the number of predictors, confirms that the model maintains strong explanatory power even after adjusting for potential overfitting. The standard error of the estimate of 0.266 reflects relatively low deviation of observed values from the predicted values, indicating that the model produces precise estimates of purchase intention within the sample.

Table 6 ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	79.086	2	39.543	559.502	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	23.393	331	.071		
	Total	102.479	333			
<b>a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention</b>						
<b>b. Predictors: (Constant), Content personalisation, Content Quality, Content Engagement</b>						

#### 4.5 Regression Coefficients

Table 7 presents the regression coefficients for the model predicting purchase intentions of domestic tourism among postgraduate business students. All three independent variables, content quality, content engagement, and content personalisation, were statistically significant predictors of purchase intentions, with p-values less than 0.001. The constant term was negative (B = -0.570, p < 0.001), indicating that in the absence of these content marketing factors, students’ baseline purchase intentions would be low.

Content quality had the largest unstandardised coefficient (B = 0.894) and a high standardized beta ( $\beta$  = 0.732). This indicates that improvements in accuracy, relevance, authenticity, and informativeness of tourism content are strongly associated with increases in purchase intentions. According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model, high-quality content motivates central route processing, leading individuals to critically evaluate information and form stronger attitudes toward domestic tourism. From the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, content quality strengthens attitudes and perceived behavioural control, increasing confidence in travel decisions and the likelihood of following through on intentions.

Content engagement had a substantial effect on purchase intentions, with an unstandardised coefficient of 0.870 and a standardized beta of 0.736. This shows that active interaction with content, such as liking, sharing, and commenting, significantly influences behavioural intention. Engagement reinforces both cognitive and affective responses and provides social validation. Within the Theory of Planned Behaviour, engagement also affects subjective norms by showing peer approval and perceived social pressure, while enhancing perceived behavioural control by demonstrating achievable travel behaviour.

Content personalisation had a smaller but still significant effect, with B = 0.229 and  $\beta$  = 0.225. Tailored content based on individual preferences and previous searches increases perceived relevance and emotional connection, indirectly affecting purchase intentions through attitude. TPB suggests that personalisation strengthens perceived behavioural control and aligns travel behaviour with individual preferences and peer influences, supporting intention formation.

Table 7 Regression Coefficients

Regression Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
		1	(Constant)	-.570		
	Content Quality	.894	.039	.732	23.124	.000
	Content personalisation	.229	.032	.225	7.118	.000
	Content engagement	.870	.069	.736	12.629	.000
<b>a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention</b>						

#### 4.6 Hypothesis Testing

Table 8 presents the results of hypothesis testing for the influence of content quality, content engagement, and content personalisation on students’ attitudes toward domestic tourism and their purchase intentions. The findings indicate that all three content marketing variables have statistically significant positive effects on both attitudinal and behavioural outcomes.

Content quality demonstrated the strongest effect, with a regression coefficient of B = 0.894, t = 23.124, and p < 0.001. This shows that improvements in the accuracy, authenticity, relevance, and informativeness of tourism content strongly enhance students’ attitudes, which in turn positively influence their purchase intentions. Theoretical interpretation through the Elaboration Likelihood Model suggests that high-quality content stimulates central route processing, leading

to deliberate cognitive evaluation and stronger, more enduring attitudes. Integrating the Theory of Planned Behaviour, content quality also strengthens the attitude component, enhancing perceived behavioural control by providing clear, trustworthy information that makes students feel capable of making travel decisions. The high coefficient reflects the dominant role of content quality in shaping both evaluative judgments and behavioural intentions.

Content engagement had a substantial positive effect, with  $B = 0.870$ ,  $t = 12.629$ , and  $p < 0.001$ . Active interactions with content, such as liking, commenting, sharing, and responding to peer-generated feedback, reinforce both cognitive and affective components of attitude toward domestic tourism. From a TPB perspective, engagement also contributes to subjective norms, as students observe social validation and approval from peers, which increases the likelihood of aligning their own behavioural intentions with perceived social expectations. Engagement serves as both a reinforcing mechanism and a behavioral cue, amplifying the persuasive impact of content while signaling trustworthiness and popularity.

Content personalisation showed a positive but smaller effect, with  $B = 0.229$ ,  $t = 7.118$ , and  $p < 0.001$ . Tailored content based on individual preferences, prior search history, and location-specific recommendations enhances students' perception of relevance and emotional connection to the information. While the influence of personalisation is comparatively lower than quality or engagement, it remains significant. Within the TPB framework, personalisation supports both attitude formation and perceived behavioural control, as students are more likely to act on content that aligns closely with their interests and situational context. Personalisation also strengthens affective responses, making students feel understood and increasing their readiness to engage in travel behaviour.

Table 8 Hypothesis Testing

Hypot he sis	Null Hypothesis (H0)	Alternative Hypothesis (H1)	Test Statistic	p-value	Decision
i	Content quality does not significantly influence students' attitude toward domestic tourism destinations and does not affect their purchase intentions.	Content quality positively influences students' attitude toward domestic tourism destinations and increases their purchase intentions.	$t = 23.124$	$p < 0.001$	Reject H0 and accept H1
ii	Content engagement does not significantly influence students' attitude toward domestic tourism destinations and does not affect their purchase intentions.	Content engagement positively influences students' attitude toward domestic tourism destinations and increases their purchase intentions.	$t = 12.629$	$p < 0.001$	Reject H0 and accept H1
iii	Content personalisation does not significantly influence students' attitude toward domestic tourism destinations and does not affect their purchase intentions	Content personalisation positively influences students' attitude toward domestic tourism destinations and increases their purchase intentions.	$t = 7.118$	$p < 0.001$	Reject H0 and accept H1

## 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings indicate that content quality has a strong and statistically significant positive influence on the purchase intentions of Graduate Business students. The high regression coefficient ( $B = 0.894$ ) and strong correlation ( $r = 0.858$ ) demonstrate that well-designed, informative, and visually appealing content plays a central role in shaping students' travel decision-making. Respondents reported that high-quality content, including accurate information, compelling narratives, and engaging visuals, motivates them to consider domestic tourism, highlighting the persuasive power of content in influencing attitudes and behavioural intentions.

Critically, these results underscore that content quality is not merely supportive but a primary determinant of purchase intention, aligning with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, where attitudes towards the behaviour are central to intention formation. High-quality content strengthens positive attitudes, increases perceived value, and enhances trust—factors that directly influence students' intentions to engage in domestic tourism.

From a strategic perspective, the findings have several implications:

- Tourism marketers and travel agencies should prioritise structured content development strategies that ensure clarity, relevance, emotional appeal, and visual quality. This will enhance engagement, improve attitude formation, and increase conversion from awareness to actual booking decisions.
- Hospitality providers, including hotels, lodges, and resorts, should invest in high-quality content that accurately represents experiences and local attractions. This builds credibility and reduces perceived risk, thereby supporting the decision-making confidence of student tourists.
- Policy makers and the Ministry of Tourism should provide guidance on digital content standards and support capacity-building for evidence-based tourism marketing. Policies that promote high-quality content and digital literacy within the industry can strengthen domestic tourism participation and encourage long-term behavioural change among young, educated consumers.

Importantly, the findings also reveal broader contextual considerations. While content quality drives intention, structural constraints such as affordability, digital access, and platform familiarity may moderate the translation of intention into actual travel behaviour. Hence, interventions should not only focus on content design but also consider these external factors to maximise the effectiveness of domestic tourism promotion.

Overall, this study confirms that content quality is a fundamental driver of purchase intention among university students. Coordinated efforts by marketers, hospitality establishments, and policy makers to prioritise high-quality, trustworthy, and strategically targeted digital content are essential for enhancing domestic tourism demand, reinforcing positive attitudes, and fostering long-term customer loyalty. The recommendations of the study are as follows;

#### **Prioritize High-Quality Content Creation**

Marketing teams within travel institutions, hospitality organizations, and the Ministry of Tourism should allocate resources to develop visually appealing, informative, and engaging content tailored to university students. This can be achieved through storytelling techniques, high-quality visuals, and relevant information about local travel destinations. Regular training sessions on content creation best practices should be conducted to ensure all staff involved in marketing possess the necessary skills to produce compelling content.

#### **Enhance Content Engagement Strategies**

Digital marketing managers in travel agencies, hospitality companies, and tourism boards should implement interactive content strategies that foster a sense of community, trust, and social validation among university students. This includes creating polls, quizzes, and user-generated content campaigns, while monitoring engagement metrics to refine strategies continuously and ensure alignment with the target audience's preferences.

#### **Address Data Privacy Concerns**

Compliance officers, marketing executives, and policy makers in the Ministry of Tourism must prioritize transparency in data collection and usage practices. Clear privacy policies should be developed, implemented, and effectively communicated to university students via social media, websites, and other relevant platforms. All staff involved in data handling should undergo training on privacy management and ethical use of consumer information to build trust and enhance willingness to engage with personalized content.

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#### **Ethical considerations**

The article followed all ethical standards appropriate for this kind of research.

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