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RESEARCH ARTICLE



# The Celebrity Influencer: Delineating the Effect of Tourism-Oriented Short Video Marketing on International Tourist Conation

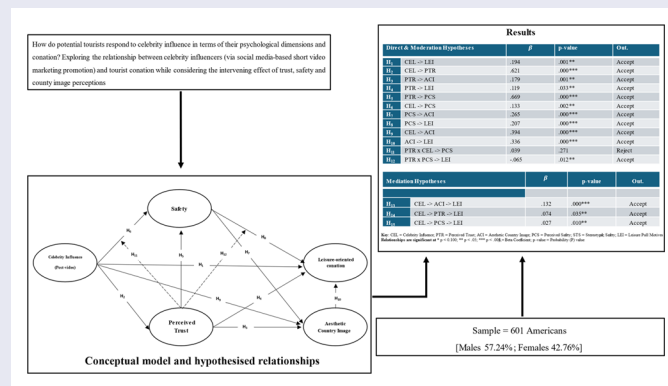
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## ABSTRACT

This quantitative deductive study explores the influence of celebrity social media influencer-based short video marketing on tourist conation. The study also explores the intervening effects of trust, safety perception, and country image as underlying psychological mechanisms in tourist decision-making. Using a sample of 601 potential American tourists, the partial least squares—structural equation model results indicate that celebrity influence *via* short video marketing positively augments tourists' leisure tourism-oriented conation—furthermore, trust, safety perception, and country image as internalized psychological mechanisms nuance this nexus. The findings enhance our understanding of the proliferation of celebrity-based social media influencing and short video marketing as conduits for destination marketing.

## GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



## KEYWORDS

Celebrity influence conation  
perceived trust safety short  
video marketing

## Introduction

The post-pandemic global tourism market has become hyper-competitive as destinations seek to recover tourism demand and re-position themselves as attractive future destinations. However, in a global tourism environment characterized by geopolitical tensions, energy and pandemic-induced financial constraints, as well as increasing behavioral pressures associated with the climate change debate (Gössling & Dolnicar, 2023; Mataković, 2023), critical underlying psychological mechanisms such as destination trust, safety, and country image perceptions also impact

tourist confidence in international tourism (Seyitoğlu & Costa, 2022). Considering these competitive challenges, tourism practitioners, particularly from the Global South, face the dual challenge of engaging in concerted destination marketing that instills tourist confidence in their destinations while stimulating demand - within an uncertain resource-constrained environment (Gabasiane & Chiguvi, 2023). One contemporary approach to meeting this challenge is high-impact celebrity influencer-based digital destination marketing that makes celebrity influencers “endorsement” of destinations a strategic imperative to

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tourism destinations' sustainable demand recovery and growth (Lee & Jeong, 2023; Roy et al., 2021). Is celebrity influence (*via* social media-based short video marketing promotion) an effective approach to addressing tourist attitude (confidence) while influencing tourist conation toward emerging Global South destinations?

Celebrity influencers are (in)famous individuals who have transcended their "star power" from their well-known roles as movie stars, sports persons or musicians to branded and unbranded content creation on primarily digital social media platforms (Moraes et al., 2019). Buoyed by the exponential growth of social media uptake and use during COVID-19, celebrity influencers' cultural relevance as content creators in contemporary society has evolved (Buhalis, 2020; Mason et al., 2021; Pop et al., 2022). Celebrity influencing (endorsement) in tourism destination promotion *via* traditional (television, movies, music videos, documentaries) and more contemporary digital social media platforms (TikTok, YouTube, X, Instagram) has risen to prominence as a successful tourism destination marketing tactic (Gan et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). Within the contemporary tourism discourse, celebrity influencing (*via* short-format video marketing content) provides tourists with a new conduit for primary information gathering and information symmetry (Song & Wareewanich, 2023). To this end, tourist destinations such as Australia (actor Chris Hemsworth), New York City in the United States of America (musician Taylor Swift) and South Korea (K-Pop group BTS) have harnessed the global appeal and celebrity "star power" of their citizens to promote inbound tourism by influencing tourist behavior such as conation (Herrera & Pérez-Tapia, 2024; Lee & Jeong, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024).

Tourist conation refers to tourists' "intention or commitment to behave toward a goal in a particular manner" (Oliver, 1997, p. 393). As part of a triad of behavioral typologies (cognitive, affective, and conative behavior), conation relates to consumers' intended responsive behavior (Han & Hwang, 2018). Travel intention is one aspect of tourism conation (Choi et al., 2015), and it is a competitive imperative for tourism marketing practitioners to attempt to

manage tourism demand by influencing tourist conation (Han & Hwang, 2018; Tran et al., 2022). Within the scope of the present study, we consider that celebrities (*via* paid online content) influence consumers' behavior (Lee & Jeong, 2023; Moraes et al., 2019; Song & Wareewanich, 2023; Zhu et al., 2024). Distinctively, our study also considers the influence of celebrities on tourists' underlying psychological mechanisms, namely safety perceptions (Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020), perceived trust (Hernández-Méndez & Baute-Díaz, 2023), destination country image (Shen et al., 2022), and their subsequent role in tourist conation. Further, as celebrities become social network-based opinion leaders and content creators who increasingly generate online audio-visual content across popular social media platforms (TikTok, Instagram and YouTube), tourists have begun to consider their paid and unpaid content as reliable information touchpoints (Buhalis, 2020; Hill & Qesja, 2023; Kim & Kim, 2021). Hence, celebrity influencers have become integral to high-impact digital destination marketing (Zhu et al., 2024).

The present study aims to establish whether celebrity influence impacts tourist conation while adjusting for the effect of underlying psychological (safety perceptions, perceived trust, and country image) mechanisms in the post-pandemic era. Using the case of South Africa and the global South African-born celebrity comedian Trevor Noah, we model the relationship between Trevor Noah's celebrity influence and international tourists' conation. The study also considers the effect of celebrity influence on tourists' trust, safety and country image perceptions of South Africa and how these psychological aspects may be intervening variables in the celebrity influence - tourist conation nexus. Further, as celebrities become social network-based opinion leaders and content creators who increasingly generate online audio-visual content across popular social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube, tourists have begun to consider their paid and unpaid content as reliable digital touchpoints (Buhalis, 2020; Hill & Qesja, 2023; Kim & Kim, 2021). Hence, celebrity influencers have become integral to high-impact digital destination marketing (Zhu et al., 2024).

Notwithstanding the widely acknowledged role of celebrity influence on consumer behavior (Bentley et al., 2021; Lee & Jeong, 2023; Zhao et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2023), Moraes et al. (2019) identify a discernible need for concerted academic inquiry into the multifaceted influence of celebrities on consumptive decision-making better to understand the role of celebrity influencers in consumer behavior. More pertinently, academic inquiry into the role of celebrity influencers in promoting tourism destinations and their effect on tourist behavior is still nascent (Hill & Qesja, 2023; Liu et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2022). As a result, there are discernible theoretical and empirical evidence gaps in research into the complex consumptive decision-making process of tourists in relation to celebrity influence (Hill & Qesja, 2023; Shen et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2024). Moreso, the interplay between celebrity influence and tourist safety perceptions (Amir et al., 2018; Molesworth et al., 2016), perceived trust (Hernández-Méndez & Baute-Díaz, 2023; Jiang et al., 2022; Lou & Yuan, 2019), image formation (Gretzel, 2018; Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020) and leisure-oriented behavioral intention (Hill & Qesja, 2023; Wan, 2018; Zhou et al., 2023) remains relatively unexplored, more-so from a Global South tourism perspective. Hence, our study contributes to the extant tourism literature by delineating the effect of celebrity influence (*via* online short video marketing) on (1) tourist conation (extrinsic travel motivation of tourists); (2) tourist's underlying psychological mechanisms, namely, safety perceptions, perceived trust of the destination, as well as the CI espoused; and (3) establish the direct, as well as intervening effects celebrity influence-induced trust, safety and CI perception on tourist conation. The findings potentially inform tourism practitioners across the tourism stakeholder spectrum (government and quasi-government entities, Destination Management Organizations, and private sector associations) on the viability of celebrity influence *via* social media content as a high-impact digital media-oriented destination marketing approach, enabling them to make data-driven marketing decisions based on tourist insights.

## Literature review

### Theoretical background

Our study refers to Mehrabian and Russell (1974) Stimuli-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model to better understand how the external environment of consumers influences. The S-O-R model posits that environmental stimuli such as marketing influence consumer cognition, which then has a follow-on effect on consumers' internal state (psychology) and their subsequent responsive behavior, such as conation (Koay et al., 2023; Liu & Geng, 2023; Mason et al., 2021). Within the scope of the present study, we consider that celebrity influence *via* short video marketing content may influence consumers' underlying psychological mechanisms and their subsequent likelihood of engaging in leisure-oriented tourism. Prior tourism studies (Jiang et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2023) have adapted the S-O-R model as an explanatory framework to model the intervening effect of value, pleasure, and trust in the short video marketing - destination decision nexus of Chinese tourists (Jiang et al., 2022); establish the mediation effect of telepresence and flow information in the influence of short video promotion on Chinese tourist's travel intentions; and the full mediation effect of destination image and place attachment in the celebrity involvement—film tourist loyalty nexus. Unlike prior contemporary studies, the present study models the moderating and mediating effect of unique multiple underlying psychological mechanisms (trust, safety, and CI) in the celebrity influencer-tourist conation within an international context.

### Celebrity influence and social media

Literature (Bentley et al., 2021; Mason et al., 2021; Osei-Frimpong et al., 2019; Qiu et al., 2024) suggests that celebrity endorsement exerts influence on consumers' consumptive behavior by stimulating favorable consumer response toward a brand or a product *via* mainstream conventional public media such as television, radio, or traditional cinema. However, with the advent of social media networks, celebrities have transcended beyond the traditional once-off paid advertising

endorsement to more long-term *influence due to the often viral and shareable* nature of well-formulated short video marketing promotional content on social media (Wahid & Gunarto, 2021; Zhu et al., 2024). Buoyed by the popularity and multi-modal (visual, aural, spatial, linguistic, and gestural) nature of contemporary social media networks, celebrities as high-profile individuals who are (in)famous in various disciplines (acting, music, sports) have transcended platforms to exploit social media networks (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Moraes et al., 2019). This inevitable convergence of conventional entertainment mediums and social media platforms has given rise to the integration of celebrity “star power” and online influence, resulting in the emergence of the celebrity-social media influencer (Moraes et al., 2019; Wan, 2018).

#### **Online short video promotion in tourism**

Defined as a media format of five minutes or less in duration, short marketing videos are an audio-visual communication format developed for expedient and convenient dissemination (predominantly on social media networks) at minimal cost while resonating with the target audience (Fu, 2019; Zhao et al., 2022). Hence, tourism-oriented short video marketing effectively communicates destination highlights and disseminates critical marketing communications to a global audience *via* social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok and Facebook (Liu et al., 2022). Prior tourism studies (Jiang et al., 2022; Xiao et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2022) have found that social media-oriented short tourism promotional marketing videos can influence many potential tourists’ destination choices and travel behavior. For instance, contemporary studies on Chinese tourism (Jiang et al., 2022; Shani et al., 2010) have affirmed that tourism-oriented short videos stimulate the perceptions and sentiments of potential tourists, resulting in positive, responsive behavior. Xiao et al. (2020) empirically found that promotional short video content *via* TikTok’s social media platform affected tourists’ cognition. After proving the short video marketing - destination decision nexus in Chinese tourism, Jiang et al. (2022) suggest that the effectiveness of short

videos could be enhanced by “strengthening” the creativity of the video content. To this end, one such creative approach is the integration of celebrities as influencers and endorsers of tourist destinations.

#### **Celebrity influence, short video marketing and tourist conation**

Celebrity influence may be implicit (subjective reference such as liking), explicit (direct endorsement), co-representational (appearance to generate association) or imperative (specific recommendation) in communicating with the target audience (Wan, 2018). Therefore, human behavior such as conation is susceptible to the influence of parasocial interactions on many levels, whereby celebrities, based on their perceived higher social standing, may exert discernible informational influence *via* bespoke short video marketing content formulated to provide information symmetry (Li, 2013; Moraes et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2024). In tourism, online short video marketing provides the heuristic cues necessary to aid the decision-making process, with celebrity influencers as part of this promotional format positively influencing the travel intentions of followers and the likelihood of visiting the destination being promoted (Pop et al., 2022). Prior studies (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020; Han & Chen, 2022) have recognized the importance of influencers in the marketing promotion of tourism destinations by linking their inclusion to the stimulation of tourists’ travel desire (Pop et al., 2022). Therefore, it follows that significant airline brands like Emirates (collaboration with Jennifer Aniston – 2015) have incorporated celebrity “endorsement” into their short video marketing communications (Wan, 2018).

The present study measures conation based on the likelihood that potential tourists would engage in specific tourism-oriented activity based on celebrity influence rather than their intention. Further, self-congruity in consumptive decision-making implies that conation is susceptible to cognitive and affective antecedents (Tran et al., 2022). Hence, as the literature (Choi et al., 2015; Tran et al., 2022) also argues, this likelihood as a form of travel intention (including revisit

intention) may be viewed as conation since it relates to broader responsive behavior (Choi et al., 2015; Han & Hwang, 2018; Tran et al., 2022). Studies have found that short promotional videos (Fu, 2019; Khaki & Khan, 2023; Xiao et al., 2020) and celebrity influence/endorsement (Jiang et al., 2022; Pop et al., 2022) *stimulate* tourist behavior. From a conation perspective, this study is concerned with the extrinsic attributes (leisure activities) that motivate tourism to a specific destination and, thus, influence the *likelihood* of potential tourists selecting the destination for tourism. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H<sub>1</sub>: Celebrity influence via short video destination marketing content significantly impacts tourists' leisure tourism-oriented conation.

### **Celebrity influence and perceived trust in tourism**

Perceived trust in marketing and promotion refers to "a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence" (Moorman et al., 1993:82). Hence, perceived trust refers to the likelihood of the value proposition being endorsed by the "branded" communication being delivered based on the perceived honesty, believability and integrity associated with the celebrity influencer (Hernández-Méndez & Baute-Díaz, 2023; Jiang et al., 2022). According to some of the literature (Hernández-Méndez & Baute-Díaz, 2023; Kim & Kim, 2021; Moraes et al., 2019), source credibility is a critical antecedent of influencer-induced trust perceptions which are predicated on the extent to which the influencer is viewed as being, an expert (influencer as a source of valid and verifiable information), trustworthy (trust and honesty associated with the influencer), attractive (the inherent appeal of the influencer), or being similar to the target audience (based on shared characteristics). Notwithstanding the positive correlation between "follower" numbers and the perceived credibility (trustworthiness) of influencers (Hill & Qesja, 2023), it is the parasocial connection between the influencer (celebrity influencer or otherwise) and the consumer that underpins the psychological state of the consumer (Shen et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2022). Therefore, the research hypothesis is proposed as follows.

H<sub>2</sub>: Celebrity influence via short video destination marketing content has a significant positive impact on tourists' perceived trust.

The extent of influence that celebrities have on perceived trust is detrimental to tourists' subsequent decision-making (Lou & Yuan, 2019). It extends to the credibility of celebrities as influencers and the guarantee of positive social exchange as a critical antecedent to perceived trust in the product or brand being endorsed (Kim & Kim, 2021; Osei-Frimpong et al., 2019). Hence, within the tourism context, trust has been found to influence image perception (Shen et al., 2022), conation (Hill & Qesja, 2023), and perceived safety (Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020). Hence, the following hypotheses were formulated,

H<sub>3</sub>: Perceived trust significantly influences the aesthetic image of a country.

H<sub>4</sub>: Perceived trust significantly influences the likelihood of tourists engaging in leisure tourism.

H<sub>5</sub>: Perceived trust significantly influences tourists' perception of safety.

### **Celebrity influence and safety in tourism**

Closely related to influencer-induced trust perceptions is the issue of the perceived safety of a destination as an outcome of an influencer's effect on the potential tourist. Safety is a critical aspect in the first stages of a tourist's consumptive decision-making process and has a detrimental impact on tourist destination attractiveness and, ultimately, tourism demand (Jiang et al., 2022; Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020). While there is scant research on how influencers or short video marketing influence tourist safety perceptions, lessons can be drawn from studies that have found that traveler-generated content about safety, such as online travel reviews and e-word-of-mouth on social media platforms, influence conation (see Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020). Furthermore, the aviation industry has adopted celebrities to promote air travel safety to generate traveler interest and improve their recall of safety communications (Molesworth et al., 2016). In their analysis of 169 National Tourism Organizations' use of YouTube to communicate destination safety

and security information, Amir et al. (2018) found that advertisement-style short videos were predominantly utilized. However, using celebrity influencers or short video marketing to address safety information asymmetry has yet to be explored. Therefore, the research hypothesis is proposed as follows.

H<sub>6</sub>: Celebrity influence via short video destination marketing content has a significant positive impact on tourists' perceived safety.

In consumptive decision-making, conation is a significant and positive function of affective psychological and perception facets, including safety perception (Çolakoglu et al., 2021; Han & Hwang, 2018; Matiza, 2022). To this end, scholars (Amir et al., 2018; Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020) also acknowledge safety as necessary in tourist image evaluation. Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H<sub>7</sub>: Tourists' safety perceptions significantly influence the aesthetic country image.

H<sub>8</sub>: Tourists' safety perceptions significantly influence the likelihood of tourists' leisure tourism-oriented conation.

### **Short video marketing, celebrity influence and country image**

Tourism-oriented short video marketing is an antecedent to the formation of image perception (Xiao et al., 2020). In contemporary media, video content on social media, such as YouTube, critically influences tourists' perceptions and subjective preferences, including their perceived destination-oriented CI (Song & Wareewanich, 2023). Prior studies have recognized a correlation between influencer-created YouTube video content and the destination-oriented CI of China (Song et al., 2023). At the same time, Williams (2022) delineated the similarities and differences in the CI of Abu Dhabi and Dubai based on the destination images projected by YouTube video content. From a visual framing perspective, Motahar et al. (2021) found that YouTube video content by social media influencers, contrary to mainstream media framing, affected how individuals perceived the CI of Iran as a country to visit for tourism. While tourism destinations, including Australia (collaboration with the actor Chris

Hemsworth in 2016) and South Korea (collaboration with the musician Psy in 2013), have integrated celebrities to enhance the appeal of their destination-oriented video marketing (Wan, 2018).

Within the scope of this study, country image (CI) is the summative cognitive representation of a country in the minds of consumers. As a subjective construct, CI is "the total of all descriptive, inferential, and informational beliefs one has about a particular country" (Martin & Eroglu, 1993, p.193). Notwithstanding the susceptibility of CI to the influence of extrinsic forces, CI is an established antecedent to tourist conation (Matiza, 2022). Based on Buhmann (2016) 4D Model, CI comprises four dimensions: normative, functional, and affective and, as exclusively explored in the present study, esthetic CI - which refers to symbolic attractiveness-oriented aspects of the CI perceptions. Therefore, the following hypothesis is tested.

H<sub>9</sub>: Celebrity influence via short video destination marketing content has a significant positive impact on tourists' aesthetic country image perception.

CI has a superseding halo effect on tourist conation (Buhmann, 2016). More pertinently, studies (Han & Hwang, 2018; Matiza, 2022; Shen et al., 2022) indicate that perception dimensions such as CI significantly predict subjective tourist preference in leisure-oriented tourism. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that,

H<sub>10</sub>: Aesthetic country image significantly influences the likelihood of tourists' leisure tourism-oriented conation.

### **Moderation hypotheses**

Attribution theory (Drumwright, 1996) considers how the perceived motive of the influencer (either altruistic or self-serving) for communicating or endorsing the brand or product to the consumer is an antecedent to the level of acceptance of the influencer's endorsement of brand engagement. According to Hill and Qesja (2023), the influencer's credibility, authenticity and believability are centered around whether the consumer trusts the influencer's ulterior motives and inherent impartiality. To this end, a prior study by Rifon et al. (2004) found that the perceived motives of endorsers/influencers

moderate the cognition-conation nexus. To ascertain the effect of perceived trust on the modeled relationships, the following hypotheses were formulated,

H<sub>11</sub>: Perceived trust moderates the relationship between celebrity influence and tourists' safety perception.

H<sub>12</sub>: Perceived trust moderates the relationship between tourists' perception of safety and the likelihood of tourists' leisure tourism-oriented conation.

### Mediation hypotheses

The extant literature (Hill & Qesja, 2023; Jiang et al., 2022; Moraes et al., 2019; Zhou et al., 2023) confirms the effect of celebrity influencers on tourist's psychological state. The extant literature (Amir et al., 2018; Çolakoglu et al., 2021; Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020) also affirms the influence of tourist's psychological dimensions on conation. Hence, the mediation effects of psychological dimensions are hypothesized as follows,

H<sub>13</sub>: Aesthetic country image mediates the relationship between celebrity influence and the likelihood of tourists' leisure tourism-oriented conation.

H<sub>14</sub>: Perceived trust mediates the relationship between celebrity influence and the likelihood of tourists' leisure tourism-oriented conation.

H<sub>15</sub>: Safety perception mediates the relationship between celebrity influence and the likelihood of tourists' leisure tourism-oriented conation.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of the study.

## Methodology

### Study context

On November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the Tourism Business Council South Africa (TBCSA) launched an online destination short video marketing campaign starring the South African-cum-global comedian Trevor Noah. Found on one of the world's largest global video-sharing platforms, YouTube (Song & Wareewanich, 2023), the comic-oriented video went viral, accumulating 896 000 views on the official TBCSA YouTube channel by December 25<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Hernández-Méndez and Baute-Díaz (2023) identify three social media influencer typologies to include micro- (10 000 to 100 000 followers), macro- (between 100 000 and 1 million followers) and mega- (over 1 million followers) influencers. Therefore, with over 11.8 million followers on X (formerly Twitter), 8.6 million followers on Instagram and 3.7 million subscribers (followers) on YouTube (HypeAuditor, 2023), Trevor Noah is beyond being a global celebrity. He may also be viewed as a "mega-influencer" on all the major social media platforms (Hernández-Méndez & Baute-Díaz, 2023).

### Data collection and sample

A quantitative study was conducted in December 2023. Using the QuestionPro online survey platform, survey respondents were asked to view the short celebrity-based video (see Figure 2 screenshots)

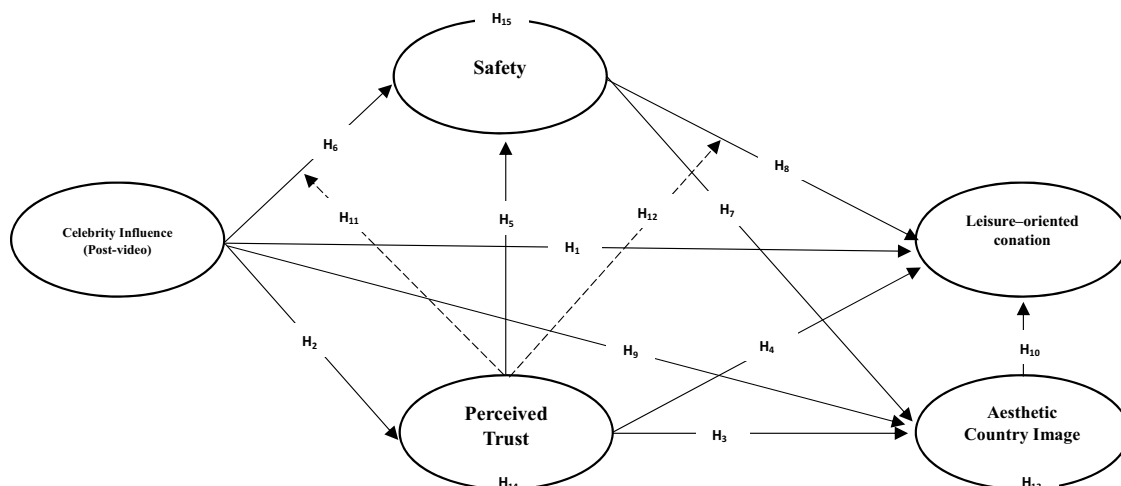
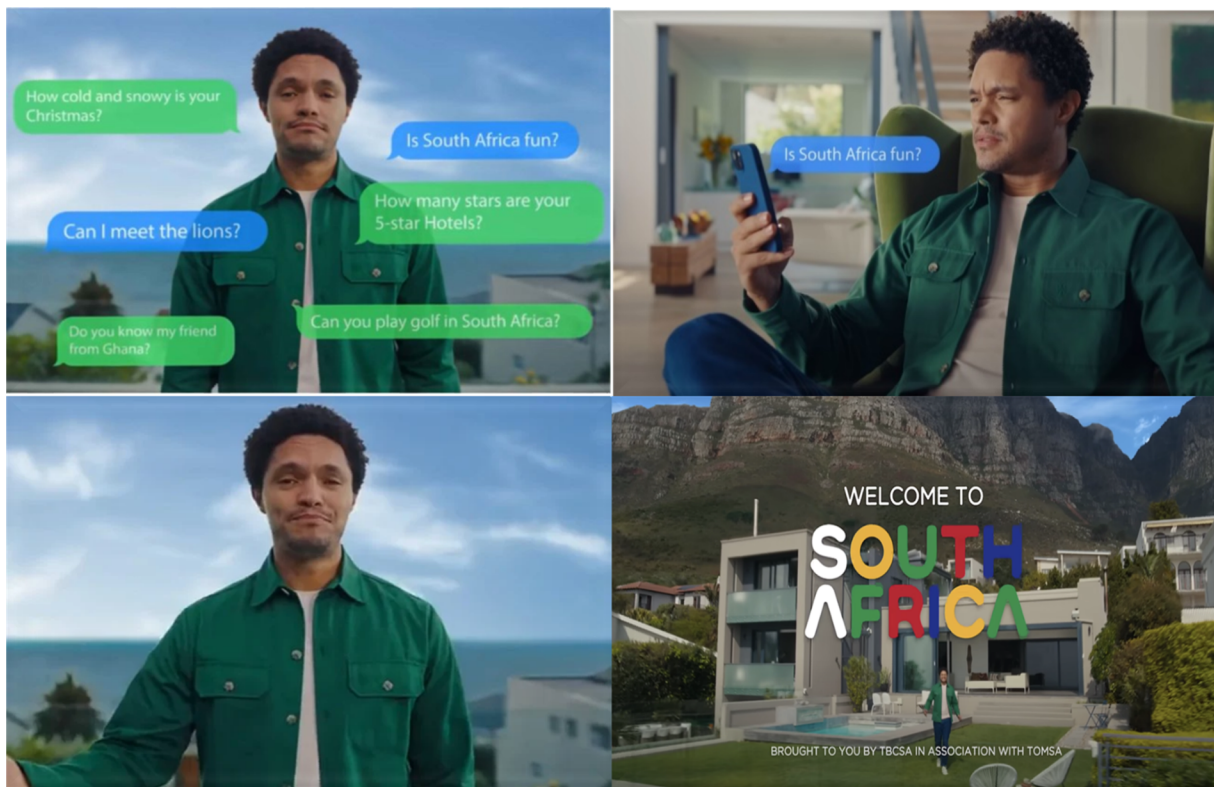


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.



**Figure 2.** Screenshots of the promotional video.  
Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=trevor+noah+tourism+video>

that promotes tourism to South Africa ([https://youtu.be/d6scLtBOC38?si=2gF9UQ9p2B4N\\_M3T](https://youtu.be/d6scLtBOC38?si=2gF9UQ9p2B4N_M3T)). In the video, Trevor Noah uses humor to address tourists' stereotypical perceptions of South Africa as a tourism destination, including South Africa's weather, infrastructure, and cross-section of nature-based and leisure-oriented attributes. Once the video was viewed, the survey questionnaire posed a series of questions to respondents about the short video, the influence of the celebrity (Trevor Noah) and tourism to South Africa.

The study sample consisted of American consumers who had traveled internationally in the past two years. The United States of America was selected as a sample since the country currently is South Africa's top international tourist source market (The Department of Tourism, 2023). A pre-recruited panel was administered by the digital insights-gathering platform Cint (<https://www.cint.com/>). A final sample of 601 respondents generated the data utilized in the present study. Quotas were applied to get a cross-sectional view based on the respondents' knowledge of South Africa as follows: (1) never heard of South Africa (14.98%), (2) know South Africa by name but

have not yet been there (31.28%), (3) know South Africa from one personal visit (28.29%), and (4) know South Africa from several personal visits (25.46%). Hence, based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling heuristics, the final sample was of statistical and practical significance.

### Measurement instrument

The study and the composite measuring instrument developed for the study were subjected to a scientific review process, and ethical clearance (Economic and Management Sciences—Research Ethics Committee) was granted by a prominent South African university panel of academics. The study was conducted under ethics number NWU-01972-23-A4. The data modeled in the present paper were generated from specific sections of a questionnaire of a study with a broader scope as follows,

- *Independent variable* – The exogenous variable in the model was *Celebrity influence*, measured based on four items adapted from the literature (see Jiang et al., 2022;

Zhu et al., 2023). Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale type of agreement where 1 was “strongly disagree”, and 5 was “strongly agree”.

- *Intervening variables* – The intervening variables in the model were based on scales from the literature as follows: *Perceived Trust* (three items - see Jiang et al., 2022); *Esthetic Country Image* (five items – see Buhmann, 2016) and *Perceived Safety* (five items – (see Xiaolong et al., 2022)). Responses were also recorded on a five-point Likert scale type of agreement where 1 was “strongly disagree”, and 5 was “strongly agree”.
- *Outcome variable* – The outcome variable was tourist conation measured in the model as *leisure-oriented attributes that* likely motivated respondents to visit South Africa. Five items were adapted from an established scale by Baloglu and Uysal (1996), with responses recorded on a five-point Likert scale type of likelihood where 1 was “extremely unlikely” and 5 was “extremely likely”.

### Data analysis

In line with some previous studies (Liu & Geng, 2023), the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v.28) and Smart-PLS4 (version 4.0.9.5) were utilized to analyze the data. A three-stage process was applied. First, data reduction *via* Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) in SPSS assessed the factorability of the data and sample adequacy, reducing the data into discernible variables that can be modeled (Hair et al., 2022). The second stage involved the assessment of the measurement model in Smart-PLS4, including Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), followed by reliability and validity testing. The final analysis stage was the Partial Least-Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the study’s hypotheses. PLS-SEM was more suitable than Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM), as it is (1) better suited for behavior prediction modeling, (2) appropriate for theory development from composite scales, and (3) adapts to complex models that comprise multiple

exogenous and endogenous variables (Hair et al., 2022; Liu & Geng, 2023). Additionally, Importance–Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) indicated the importance and performance of the latent variables as antecedents to the likelihood of tourists engaging in leisure tourism to South Africa (Buhalis et al., 2020; Fakfare & Manosuthi, 2023).

## Results

### Respondent profile

Supplementary Data Table 1 summarizes the socio-demographic profile of the respondents. The typical respondent was male (57.24%). In terms of age, most of the respondents were aged between 35 and 44 years of age (34.94%) and 25–34 (32.11%), respectively, and possessed at least a high school (32.95%) or college diploma (22.46%). The typical respondent was also married (43.26%), employed in the private sector (56.57%) and mostly traveled with a partner (32.45%). Respondents indicated earning the same average income (35.27%) in the United States, had traveled internationally more than once (55.91%) before the survey, were influenced

**Table 1.** Measurement model summary.

| *Variable                     | OL   | VIF   | ( $\alpha$ ) | CR    | AVE   |
|-------------------------------|------|-------|--------------|-------|-------|
| <b>Celebrity Influence</b>    |      |       | 0.905        | 0.934 | 0.779 |
| CEL1                          | .896 | 3.032 |              |       |       |
| CEL2                          | .902 | 3.155 |              |       |       |
| CEL3                          | .884 | 2.684 |              |       |       |
| CEL4                          | .846 | 2.117 |              |       |       |
| <b>Perceived Trust</b>        |      |       | 0.832        | 0.899 | 0.748 |
| PTR1                          | .871 | 1.817 |              |       |       |
| PTR2                          | .851 | 1.943 |              |       |       |
| PTR3                          | .872 | 2.021 |              |       |       |
| <b>Esthetic Country Image</b> |      |       | 0.867        | 0.904 | 0.653 |
| ACI1                          | .827 | 2.118 |              |       |       |
| ACI2                          | .807 | 1.979 |              |       |       |
| ACI3                          | .789 | 1.802 |              |       |       |
| ACI4                          | .806 | 2.180 |              |       |       |
| ACI5                          | .810 | 2.176 |              |       |       |
| <b>Perceived Safety</b>       |      |       | 0.813        | 0.888 | 0.727 |
| PCS1                          | .904 | 2.158 |              |       |       |
| PCS2                          | .880 | 2.092 |              |       |       |
| PCS4                          | .769 | 1.509 |              |       |       |
| <b>Leisure Pull Motives</b>   |      |       | 0.874        | 0.909 | 0.666 |
| LEI1                          | .825 | 2.108 |              |       |       |
| LEI2                          | .839 | 2.190 |              |       |       |
| LEI3                          | .828 | 2.096 |              |       |       |
| LEI4                          | .816 | 2.005 |              |       |       |
| LEI5                          | .771 | 1.770 |              |       |       |

**Key:** CEL = Celebrity Influence; PTR = Perceived Trust; ACI = Esthetic Country Image; PCS = Perceived Safety; STS = Stereotypical Safety; LEI = Leisure Pull Motives; OL = Outer Loading; VIF = Variance inflation factor;  $\alpha$  = Cronbach’s Alpha; CR = Composite reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

\*Full item list is available in Supplementary Table II.

mainly by the internet (32.95%) in terms of travel and tourism decision-making and indicated that they would consider visiting South Africa as a tourist some day in the future (49.92%).

### Dimension reduction and measurement quality

The EFA [Direct Oblimin with Kaiser Normalisation] was conducted to reduce the data from the composite measurement instrument into discernible variables and assess measurement quality. Using SPSS (IBM v.28), the KMO ( $>.50$ ) and Bartlett's test of Sphericity ( $<.001$ ) statistics for the respective variables indicated that the data was suitable and adequate for factor analyses. As it emerged (Supplementary Data Table 2) Celebrity Influence (CEL: four items,  $EV > 1$ ,  $\bar{x} = 4.14$ ); Perceived Trust (PTR: three items,  $EV > 1$ ,  $\bar{x} = 3.81$ ); Esthetic Country Image (ACI; five items,  $EV > 1$ ,  $\bar{x} = 4.14$ ); and Leisure Pull Motives (LEI: five items,  $EV > 1$ ,  $\bar{x} = 4.02$ ) were variables that could be modeled. Additionally, the EFA resulted in two *Safety* dimensions emerging: Perceived Safety (PCS: three items,  $EV > 1$ ,  $\bar{x} = 3.71$ ) and Stereotypical Safety (STS: two items,  $EV > 1$ ,  $\bar{x} = 3.51$ ). All the variables accounted for between 26.93% and 77.89% of the variance in the data. The Kurtosis ( $-10$  to  $+10$ ) and Skewness ( $-3$  and  $+3$ ) statistics (Supplementary Data Table 2) indicated that the items were within the recommended parameters for SEM (Griffin & Steinbrecher, 2013).

### Common method variance

Common Method Variance (CMV  $< 50\%$ ) was tested based on Harman's one-factor test using

SPSS to assess systematic error variances that may occur. The data reported a CMV of 43.28%, which is below the recommended threshold of 50% (Gui et al., 2022). Hence, CMV analysis indicates that no one variable is exclusively loaded as a single factor, affirming the unlikelihood of bias in the data (Liu & Geng, 2023; Shah et al., 2019).

### Measurement model

Table 1 summarizes the measurement model.

As summarized in Table 1, the outer loadings (OL $>.70$ ) for the variables in the model were above the recommended threshold (Liu & Geng, 2023). The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF  $< 5$ ) statistics ranged between 1.509 and 3.155, indicating the absence of multicollinearity (Zhao et al., 2022), while the Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha>.70$ ), Composite Reliability (CR $>.70$ ) and Convergent validity (AVE  $> 0.5$ ) statistics were also within the recommended reliability and validity parameters (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 2 summarizes the discriminate validity statistics based on the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) and Fornell and Larcker criteria.

As shown in Table 2, the discriminate validity of the measurement model was confirmed by both the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT  $< .850$ ) and the Fornell and Larcker (Square root of AVE $>$ inter-construct correlations) criteria, respectively (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler et al., 2015).

### Structural model

CFA in SMART-PLS4 assessed the structural model, which reported a  $\chi^2 = 471.225$ ,  $df = 160.000$  at  $p < .001$  and CMIN/df of 2.945. After iterations, the best model excluded the STS variable from the model. The final model fit indices: Tucker Lewis Index (TLI = .951); Comparative Fit Index (CFI = .959); Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR = .037); and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = .057) indicated good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Yaslioglu & Toplu-Yaslioglu, 2022). The  $R^2$  index (Table 3) indicated substantial coefficients, ranging between  $R^2 = .384$  and  $R^2 = .580$  (Cohen,

Table 2. Discriminate validity matrix.

|              | ACI         | CEL         | LEI         | PTR         | SSP    | PTR<br>x<br>SSP | PTR<br>x<br>CEL |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|
| ACI          | (.808)      |             |             |             |        |                 |                 |
| CEL          | .725 (.643) | (.882)      |             |             |        |                 |                 |
| LEI          | .781 (.681) | .692 (.615) | (.816)      |             |        |                 |                 |
| PTR          | .718 (.617) | .710 (.621) | .733 (.631) | (.865)      |        |                 |                 |
| SSP          | .697 (.601) | .594 (.521) | .731 (.627) | .880 (.730) | (.853) |                 |                 |
| PTR x<br>SSP | .254        | .270        | .355        | .384        | .356   |                 |                 |
| PTR x<br>CEL | .327        | .471        | .370        | .391        | .261   | .628            |                 |

Key: CEL=Celebrity Influence; PTR=Perceived Trust; ACI=Esthetic Country Image; PCS=Perceived Safety; STS=Stereotypical Safety; LEI=Leisure Pull Motives.

Notes: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations and Fornell and Larcker criteria (in parentheses).

1988), with the variables explaining 58% of the change in *LEI*. The  $Q^2$  statistics (Table 3) also suggested that the structural model had significant predictive power ranging between  $Q^2 = .270$  and  $Q^2 = .412$  (Hair et al., 2022).

Hypothesis testing [Bootstrapping with 10 000 samples, a 95% confidence level - bias-corrected] was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in Smart-PLS4. Table 4 summarizes the outcome of the hypotheses testing (Supplementary Data: Figure 1).

As shown in Table 4 and illustrated in Figure 3, all the direct hypotheses were accepted. *CEL* had a positive significant impact on *LEI* ( $\beta = .194$ ,  $t=3.388$ ,  $p < .05$ ); *PTR* ( $\beta = .621$ ,  $t=18.050$ ,  $p < .001$ ); *PCS* ( $\beta = .133$ ,  $t=3.085$ ,  $p < .05$ ); and *ACI* ( $\beta = .394$ ,  $t=8.811$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Hence, hypotheses  $H_1$ ,  $H_2$ ,  $H_6$ , and  $H_9$  were accepted. *PTR* significantly influenced *ACI* ( $\beta = .179$ ,  $t=3.180$ ,  $p < .05$ ); *LEI* ( $\beta = .119$ ,  $t=2.130$ ,  $p < .05$ ); and *PCS* ( $\beta = .669$ ,  $t=16.526$ ,  $p < .001$ ), thus hypotheses  $H_3$ ,  $H_4$ , and  $H_5$  were accepted. *PCS* had a significant positive influence on *ACI* ( $\beta = .265$ ,  $t=8.811$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and *LEI* ( $\beta = .207$ ,  $t=8.811$ ,  $p < .001$ ), therefore

**Table 3.** Coefficient and model predictive power.

| Variable   | $R^2$ | $Q^2$ |
|------------|-------|-------|
| <b>ACI</b> | .521  | .412  |
| <b>LEI</b> | .580  | .370  |
| <b>PTR</b> | .384  | .383  |
| <b>PCS</b> | .541  | .270  |

**Notes:**  $R^2$  – Coefficient of .02=Weak; .13=Moderate; .26=Substantial;  $Q^2$  – Predictive power of  $>.000$ .

**Key:** PTR=Perceived Trust; ACI=Esthetic Country Image; PCS=Perceived Safety; LEI=Leisure Pull Motives.

hypotheses  $H_7$  and  $H_8$  were accepted. Additionally, hypothesis  $H_{10}$  was accepted as *ACI* significantly influenced *LEI* ( $\beta = .336$ ,  $t=6.784$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

The PLS-SEM also assessed the moderating effect of *PTR* in specific modeled relationships. The relationship between *CEL* and *PCS* was not moderated by *PTR* ( $\beta = .039$ ,  $t=1.101$ ,  $p = .271$ ); hence hypothesis  $H_{11}$  was rejected. *PTR* ( $\beta = -.065$ ,  $t=2.504$ ,  $p < .05$ ) negatively moderated the relationship between *PCS* and *LEI*. Figure 4 illustrates the statistically significant moderation effect.

As illustrated in Figure 4, *PTR* dampens the positive relationship between *PCS* and *LEI*. Table 5 summarizes the mediation hypotheses and results of the study.

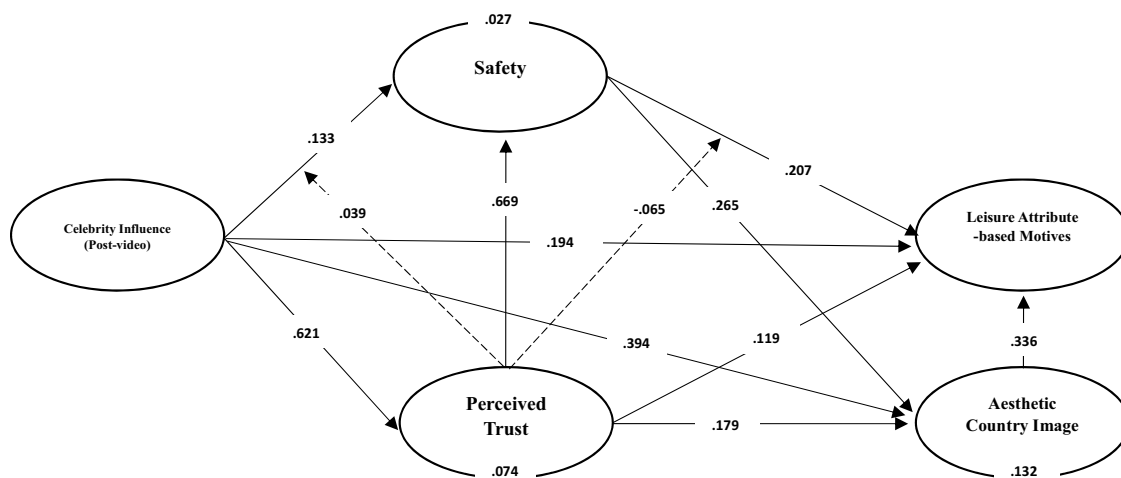
**Table 4.** Direct and moderation hypotheses.

| Hypotheses                                  | * $\beta$ | STDV | t-value | p-value | Out.   |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------|------|---------|---------|--------|
| $H_1$ CEL $\rightarrow$ LEI                 | .194      | .057 | 3.388   | .001**  | Accept |
| $H_2$ CEL $\rightarrow$ PTR                 | .621      | .034 | 18.050  | .000*** | Accept |
| $H_3$ PTR $\rightarrow$ ACI                 | .179      | .056 | 3.180   | .001**  | Accept |
| $H_4$ PTR $\rightarrow$ LEI                 | .119      | .056 | 2.130   | .033**  | Accept |
| $H_5$ PTR $\rightarrow$ PCS                 | .669      | .040 | 16.526  | .000*** | Accept |
| $H_6$ CEL $\rightarrow$ PCS                 | .133      | .043 | 3.085   | .002**  | Accept |
| $H_7$ PCS $\rightarrow$ ACI                 | .265      | .051 | 5.228   | .000*** | Accept |
| $H_8$ PCS $\rightarrow$ LEI                 | .207      | .051 | 4.072   | .000*** | Accept |
| $H_9$ CEL $\rightarrow$ ACI                 | .394      | .045 | 8.811   | .000*** | Accept |
| $H_{10}$ ACI $\rightarrow$ LEI              | .336      | .050 | 6.784   | .000*** | Accept |
| $H_{11}$ PTR $\times$ CEL $\rightarrow$ PCS | .039      | .036 | 1.101   | .271    | Reject |
| $H_{12}$ PTR $\times$ PCS $\rightarrow$ LEI | -.065     | .026 | 2.504   | .012**  | Accept |

**Key:** CEL=Celebrity Influence; PTR=Perceived Trust; ACI=Esthetic Country Image; PCS=Perceived Safety; STS=Stereotypical Safety; LEI=Leisure Pull Motives.

**Relationships are significant at:** \*  $p < 0.100$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ;  $\beta$  = Beta Coefficient; t-value=t – Statistics; p-value=Probability (P) value.

\*See Supplementary Data: Figure I for the SMART-PLS4 SEM Model.



**Figure 3.** PLS-SEM model.

Note: Relationships are significant at: \*  $p < 0.100$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

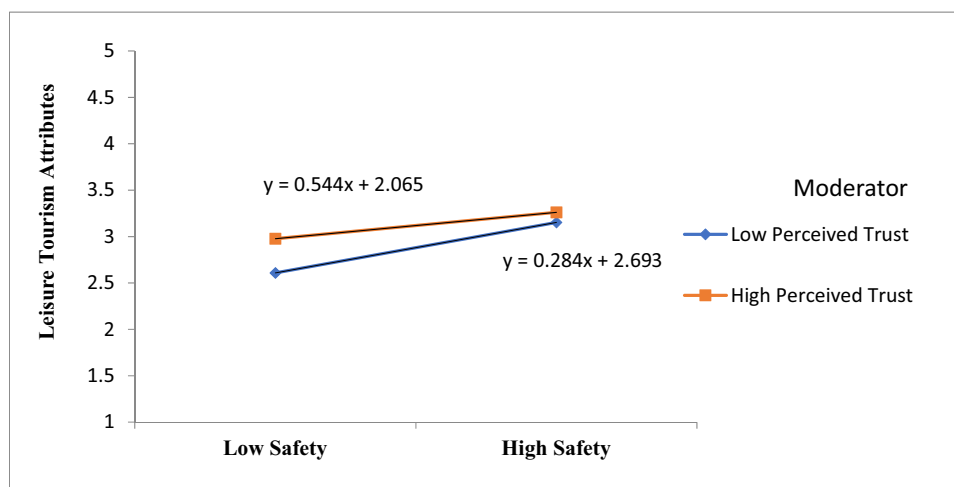


Figure 4. Moderation Simple Slope Plot.

Table 5. Mediation hypotheses summary.

| Hypotheses                | $\beta$ | STDV | t-value | p-value | Boot CI |       | Total effect |         | VAF (%) | Out.   |
|---------------------------|---------|------|---------|---------|---------|-------|--------------|---------|---------|--------|
|                           |         |      |         |         | 2.5%    | 97.5% | $\beta$      | p-value |         |        |
| H <sub>13</sub> CEL → LEI |         |      |         |         |         |       | .600         | .000    |         |        |
| CEL → ACI                 | .132    | .024 | 5.405   | .000*** | .090    | .184  | –            | –       | 22%     | Accept |
| → LEI                     |         |      |         |         |         |       |              |         |         |        |
| H <sub>14</sub> CEL → PTR | .074    | .035 | 2.108   | .035**  | .004    | .143  | –            | –       | 12%     | Accept |
| → LEI                     |         |      |         |         |         |       |              |         |         |        |
| H <sub>15</sub> CEL → PCS | .027    | .011 | 2.560   | .010**  | .011    | .054  | –            | –       | 4.5%    | Accept |
| → LEI                     |         |      |         |         |         |       |              |         |         |        |

Relationships are significant at: \*  $p < 0.100$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ,  $\beta$  = Beta Coefficient; t-value = t – Statistics; p-value = Probability (P) value; VAF = Variance Accounted For [Indirect effect/Total effect x 100].

The mediation analyses established three statistically significant intervening variables in the *CEL-LEI* nexus. As it emerged *ACI* ( $\beta = .132$ ,  $t = 5.405$ ,  $p < .001$ ); *PTR* ( $\beta = .074$ ,  $t = 2.108$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and *PCS* ( $\beta = .027$ ,  $t = 2.560$ ,  $p < .05$ ) mediated the *CEL-LEI* nexus. Significantly, the coefficients of the lower limit and higher limits' coefficients did not include zero. Therefore, the null hypothesis could be rejected, and hypotheses H<sub>13</sub>, H<sub>14</sub> and H<sub>15</sub> were accepted. While the mediation effects were statistically significant, only the esthetic country image's intervening effect was of practical significance, reporting a Variance Accounted For (VAF > 20%) above the minimum threshold of 20%.

### Importance-Performance Analysis

An Importance-Performance Analysis (IPMA—Martilla & James, 1977) was undertaken to establish the performance and importance of the antecedents of *LEI* (Supplementary Data: Figure 2). The performance (determined by the average

scores of the variables) and importance (through the total effects) of the variables were modeled (Buhalis et al., 2020).

As Figure 3 shows, *CEL* (.600) was the most important antecedent of *LEI* in the proposed PLS-SEM model, followed by *PTR* (.377), *ACI* (.336) and *PCS* (.296), respectively. In terms of performance, *CEL* (78.57) reported the highest average score, followed by *ACI* (78.56), *PTR* (70.58), and *PCS* (68.30). It is, therefore, significant that celebrity influence *via* short video marketing is important to tourist conation and should be the focus of destination marketing efforts.

### Discussion

This study is one of the first contemporary post-COVID-19 studies to model the influence of celebrity influencer-short video marketing on international tourist conation in relation to a Global South tourism destination. The empirical evidence from our study corroborates the extant literature (Han & Hwang, 2018; Song et al., 2023;

Tiago et al., 2019; Williams, 2022) on the positive impact of celebrity-social media influencers *via* social media (YouTube) short video marketing content have on potential tourists. Specifically, in line with some scholars (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2019; Wan, 2018; Zhou et al., 2023), celebrity influence directly impacts individuals' consumptive behavior. This also supports Zhang and Huang (2022) acknowledgement that the "celebrity effect" nuances the impact of tourism-oriented short video marketing on the target audience by stimulating the public's interest in travel and tourism. Thus, the notion of the positive influence of celebrities on conation is viable. Similarly, the findings affirm the notion that subjective knowledge generated by celebrity influencers builds tourist trust (Lou & Yuan, 2019), positively influences safety perception (Jiang et al., 2022; Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020; Wan, 2018), and online content informs esthetic image formation (Motahar et al., 2021; Song & Wareewanich, 2023).

Moreover, our findings also support prior studies that have also established that tourists' underlying psychological mechanisms, such as tourist trust (Hernández-Méndez & Baute-Díaz, 2023; Hill & Qesja, 2023; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Moraes et al., 2019), perceived safety (Amir et al., 2018; Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020; Molesworth et al., 2016), and perceived country image (Buhmann, 2016; Matiza, 2022) are influential on the *responsive* behavior of tourists - which based on our findings now include tourists' leisure tourism-oriented conation. Tourist safety perception, for instance, is based on the perceived susceptibility and vulnerability to risk and threats. Hence, other subjective aspects, such as trust in the tourism destination, can be viewed as a function of a tourist's coping (self-efficacy, response efficacy and response cost) appraisal (Bhati et al., 2021). The findings also confirm the influence of short video marketing-induced safety perceptions on the country's image (Amir et al., 2018; Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020) and tourist conation (Çolakoğlu et al., 2021; Han & Hwang, 2018).

Like previous studies, short video marketing-induced trust positively influenced safety perceptions (Kim & Kim, 2021; Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020) and tourists' esthetic country image (Shen et al., 2022). However, the modeled moderation

effect of perceived trust was dichotomous. Trust did not influence the perception of short video marketing on tourist safety. At the same time, trust constrained the effect of perceived safety on tourist conation. Attribution theory (see Drumwright, 1996) may explain the negative moderating effect of perceived trust on the relationship between tourist's perceived safety and the leisure-oriented travel motives of tourists. The influencer's role as an endorser for tourism to South Africa may be viewed as biased and not altruistic since the influencer is South African and does not address the safety issue directly in the promotional video (Hill & Qesja, 2023). The mediation effect of safety, trust and country image on the celebrity influence-tourist conation nexus affirmed the intervening effect of internalized psychological dimensions in the behavior of tourists (Çolakoğlu et al., 2021; Gui et al., 2022; Kim & Kim, 2021; Yang et al., 2022).

## Conclusion

The complexity of modeling the impact of celebrity influence [*via* short video marketing] on consumptive decision-making in tourism is partially predicated on understanding the effect of the underlying psychological mechanisms influencing tourist behavior (see Qiu et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2024). Based on the empirical evidence from this study, we can conclude that celebrity social media influencers, through short video marketing, have a discernable positive effect on tourist conation. Furthermore, celebrity influence extends to tourist trust, safety, and country image perceptions, as well as the induced intervening partial influence these psychological mechanisms have on tourist's decision-making process.

## Theoretical implications

As an approach to establishing more effective destination promotional marketing *via* celebrity influencer-integrated short video marketing, Moraes et al. (2019) suggest that it is critical to examine whether short video marketing-oriented online content affects tourist cognition (stimuli), affect (organism) and conation (response). The theorized interplay between celebrity influencer

content, consumer psychological internalization and anticipated marketing outcomes (conation) sought to extend the stream of work around destination marketing practice *via* contemporary social media-based platforms. More so, the impact of celebrity influence on conation *via* the intervening effects of psychological dimensions. Hence, akin to the limited extent of prior studies (Jiang et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2023), this study addresses a discernable theoretical gap by potentially expanding the scope of the S-O-R model as an explanatory framework in human influencer marketing theory in the international tourism discourse. Limited academic inquiry into human influencer marketing from a Global South perspective implies that the study's results significantly contribute new perspectives to theory development in the emerging discourse. Thus, this confirms the budding theory and affirms the robustness of the association between celebrity influencers' digital social media content, tourist psychology, and tourist behavior (Liu et al., 2022).

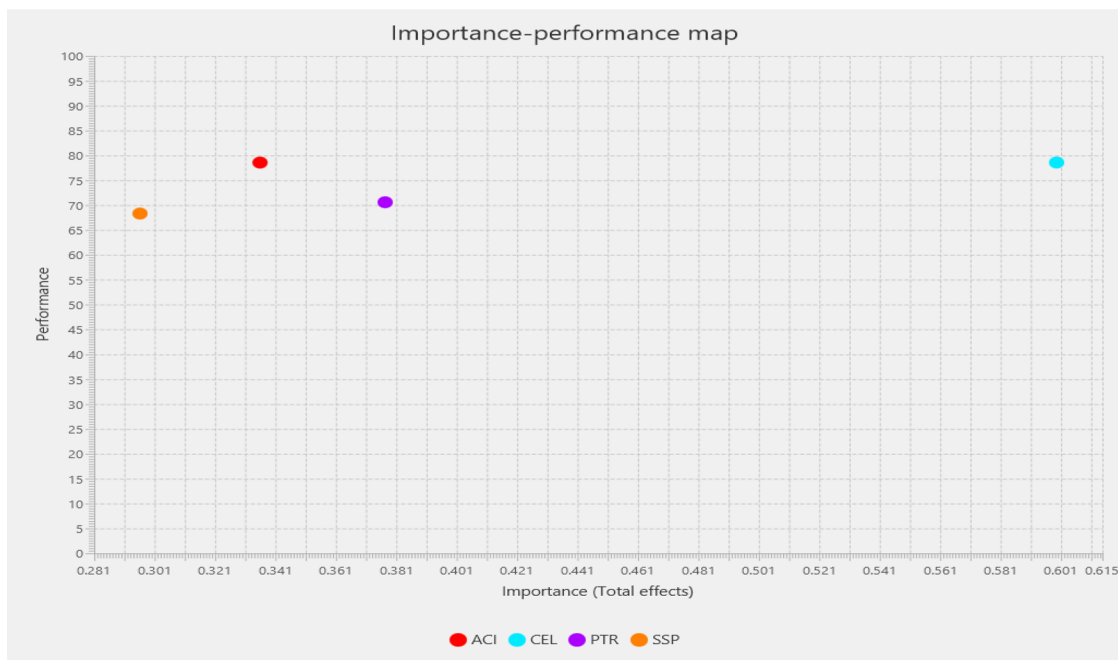
Notably, the modeled evidence that humorous short video marketing content featuring an African mega-celebrity influencer affects the decision-making of potential tourists from a first-world source market makes a significant empirical contribution to the burgeoning theory on social media content and destination marketing. This study also addresses some knowledge gaps, contributing new insights into the role of trust, safety, and country image as mediators in tourist conation to the tourism marketing and management literature. We found empirically that trust diminishes the relationship between celebrity influence and safety perceptions of tourists, indicating a potential trust deficit that contributes to a potential relationship between Attribution theory (Drumwright, 1996) and the S-O-R model in the celebrity influencer-tourist conation context.

### **Practical implications**

This study provides some insightful, practical recommendations. As the IPMA (Figure 3) observed, celebrity influence emanating from the short destination marketing video was typically the priority antecedent to tourists' leisure-oriented

conation. This implies that the inclusion of a celebrity enhances online short video destination marketing (see Jiang et al., 2022; Wan, 2018) and is appropriate for the promotion of "products" that have an inherent psycho-social risk for consumers, require low technology input, and have high symbolic value (see Moraes et al., 2019). The empirical evidence shows that short video marketing effectively eases tourist fears and impacts destination perceptions (see Bhati et al., 2021). This implies that government, quasi-government, and private sector tourism-oriented agencies should sustain resource allocation toward celebrity influencer-short video marketing to actively engage social media networks in promoting tourism destinations, particularly in an uncertain post-pandemic environment (Figure 5).

The literature suggests that prolonged parasocial interaction enhances short video marketing's credibility. This implies that in post-pandemic marketing communication, the acceptance of informational cues from prominent human influencers as reality by potential tourists is predicated on the confidence and credibility that the target audience has in and ascribes to the source of the information (see Kim & Kim, 2021). Thus, by identifying prominent citizens such as global mega-celebrity influencer Trevor Noah to endorse tourism, destination managers can harness the halo effect of their *star power* to nuance the effectiveness of current and future short video marketing campaigns and potentially improve destination trust and safety perceptions in the long term. Moreover, the current short video marketing campaign launched by the TBCSA encompasses the three salient attributes that influence tourist's destination choice (see Jiang et al., 2022): authority (sanctioned by the TBCSA), interactivity (a format that addresses tourist questions *via* a chat-like format), and interest (the use of Trevor Noah a South African short video marketing). As the primary social media platform, YouTube is a practical, contemporary vector for tourism promotional marketing content (see Song & Wareewanich, 2023). It is also recommended that other platforms, such as TikTok, be included as part of a broader spectrum of digital social media campaigns (see Zhu et al., 2024). Incorporating entertainment elements such as humor in short video marketing in content



**Figure 5.** Importance-performance map.

Key: CEL = Celebrity Influence; PTR = Perceived Trust; ACI = Esthetic Country Image; SSP = Perceived Safety; LEI = Leisure Pull Motives

Note: \*See [Supplementary Data: Figure II](#) for the SMART-PLS4 IPMA Model.

creation and dissemination to attract potential tourists to visit scenic destination countries makes short video marketing more effective and impactful.

### Limitations and Future Research

As with all studies, there are some limitations to note. While it was not within the scope of the study, it is important to note that the focus of the study on one influencer did not allow for the testing of the effect of specific influencer-based characteristics. Similarly, the study focuses on one content type, limiting results to the analyzed media content. Future studies may include multiple influencers from different genres and types of digital content to test any variances associated with specific influencer characteristics or content types. As is typical with survey research, incentive compatibility may be a concern - whereby respondent behavior (travel intention) may be overstated and not reflect practical intended behavior. Therefore, the result must be considered with this in mind. The cross-sectional nature and scope of the study limits the generalizability of the findings to the specific case and sample (American social media users) in question. Relatedly, it was noted that more male respondents

participated in the study than females. Therefore, cross-national, longitudinal study replication across various tourist source markets for multiple destinations, based on quotas (gender, age, economic activity), is recommended to validate the measuring instrument further. The exponential growth in short video marketing on social networks opens new avenues of tourism research into, for instance, (1) the impact of individual influencer traits on tourists, (2) potential differences in celebrity influencer effect based on celebrity type and choice of social media platform, and (3) the practical adaptation of short video marketing to foster destination trust and influence safety perceptions. Future studies may also need to explore the potential impact of socio-demographic factors such as gender and age on the celebrity influencer-short video marketing-conation nexus.

### Disclosure statement

Authors have no competing interest to declare. This work is based on research supported by the National Research Foundation (NRF). Any opinion, finding, conclusion or recommendation expressed in this material is that of the authors, and the NRF does not accept any liability in this regard.

## Data availability statement

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author, T. Matiza, upon reasonable request.

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**Annexure 1: List of items for construct measurement**

| Variable                      | Code | Items                                                                                    | Factor Loading<br>(>0.50) |
|-------------------------------|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Celebrity Influence</b>    |      |                                                                                          |                           |
|                               | CEL1 | Through the video, Trevor Noah inspired me to travel to South Africa someday             | .898                      |
|                               | CEL2 | Trevor Noah's message about South Africa motivates me to travel to South Africa          | .904                      |
|                               | CEL3 | Through the video, Trevor Noah made me interested in finding out more about South Africa | .885                      |
|                               | CEL4 | It was enjoyable to watch the official promotion short video                             | .841                      |
| <b>Perceived Trust</b>        |      |                                                                                          |                           |
|                               | PTR1 | I feel South Africa is a safe destination to travel to                                   | .852                      |
|                               | PTR2 | I will not be nervous when traveling to South Africa                                     | .867                      |
|                               | PTR3 | I am not worried to travel to South Africa for tourism purposes                          | .876                      |
| <b>Esthetic Country Image</b> |      |                                                                                          |                           |
|                               | ACI1 | Is home to beautiful cultural assets (arts, architecture, music, film)                   | .826                      |
|                               | ACI2 | Has delicious food and a wonderful cuisine                                               | .805                      |
|                               | ACI3 | Has lots of charismatic people (in politics, sports, media)                              | .784                      |
|                               | ACI4 | Has beautiful scenery                                                                    | .812                      |
|                               | ACI5 | Has a lot of preserved nature.                                                           | .813                      |
| <b>Perceived Safety</b>       |      |                                                                                          |                           |
|                               | PCS1 | South Africa is a safe place to visit                                                    | .898                      |
|                               | PCS2 | South Africa is just as safe as other destinations                                       | .885                      |
|                               | PCS4 | I do not need to worry about security issues when traveling in South Africa              | .780                      |
| <b>Stereotypical Safety</b>   |      |                                                                                          |                           |
|                               | STS3 | Others tell me that South Africa is dangerous                                            | .865                      |
|                               | STS5 | I will remind others to pay attention to safety in South Africa                          | .807                      |
| <b>Leisure Pull Motives</b>   |      |                                                                                          |                           |
|                               | LEI1 | Attend festivals, arts events, music concerts                                            | .820                      |
|                               | LEI2 | Visit museums, monuments, and historical locations and artifacts                         | .837                      |
|                               | LEI3 | Engage in entertainment activities (sports, theme parks, water parks, casinos, resorts)  | .830                      |
|                               | LEI4 | Experience unique food/cuisine experiences (wine, traditional, western, Asian)           | .817                      |
|                               | LEI5 | Engage in outdoor activities (Quad-biking, hiking, bungee jumping, rafting)              | .775                      |

**Key:** CEL = Celebrity Influence; PTR = Perceived Trust; ACI = Esthetic Country Image; PCS = Perceived Safety; STS = Stereotypical Safety; LEI = Leisure Pull Motives.