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Abstract

This study examines the predicting effect of celebrity involvement on destination authenticity (object-based authenticity and existential authenticity) and hence travel intention in the context of TikTok tourism promotional videos. Data collected from 225 survey respondents indicated that celebrity involvement increases perceived destination authenticities (object-based and existential authenticity) and hence travel intention after watching TikTok celebrity videos. Furthermore, destination authenticities mediate the positive relationship between celebrity involvement and travel intention. The findings contribute to knowledge about social media marketing in tourism literature by blending authenticity theory and celebrity involvement in the context of TikTok celebrity promotions. Meaningful implications are provided for destination marketers.

Keywords: TikTok; celebrity involvement; object-based authenticity; existential authenticity; travel intention.

1. Introduction

Social media marketing has gradually played an important role in tourism marketing, and at the same time, more and more destinations are using user generated content (UGC) to attract tourists (Buhalis et al., 2020; Buhalis & Matloka, 2013; Neuhofer et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2015). Especially during the Covid-19 period, UGC-based social media marketing has emerged as a new means of destination promotion (Wengel et al., 2022). One of the most representative platforms is TikTok. TikTok (called Douyin in Chinese), a video-focused social media platform, has become a part of daily life among Chinese people (Du et al., 2020). Through TikTok, people of different ages can browse videos about food, scenery, stories, etc. (Du et al., 2020; Kaye et al., 2021), which enrich users' lives and alleviate their stress during Covid-19. According to TikTok's official data (<https://www.TikTok.com>), the average daily video search volume amid Covid-19 exceeds 400 million while the number of users keeps increasing. At the same time, the adverse effects of Covid-19 on daily life are substantial, especially for the travel industry (Tran et al., 2020), as government restrictions and safety concerns have reduced chances to travel. As an alternative, users watch TikTok travel videos to satisfy their travel needs (Cao et al., 2021). However, in the meantime, their intention to travel in the future is fostered. From this perspective, TikTok tourism videos are playing a crucial role in affecting tourist destination choice and destination marketing.

The current study identifies two main under-researched areas in the literature. Firstly, celebrity has been previously used as an important marketing tool in consumer marketing (Brooks et al., 2021; Yen & Teng, 2015; Zhu et al., 2022a). However, the

majority of previous research has focused on the celebrity factor in relation to film tourism (Chen, 2018; Teng & Chen, 2020). Yen and Croy (2016) found that the celebrity has a facilitating effect on consumer purchase intention in film tourism contexts. However, Thelen et al. (2020) found that the celebrity negatively influences the behavior of local tourists. Considering UGC-social media as one of the most important marketing tools (Li, 2021), many destination companies have also adopted celebrity factors for promotion on UGC-based media, especially TikTok. However, our review of the literature found that few studies have empirically explored celebrity involvement on the tourist experience (e.g., destination authenticity) and intention.

Secondly, authenticity is the most complex and important concept in tourism research (Rickly, 2022; Zhu et al., 2022b; 2022c). Previous studies involving authenticity research have mostly focused on heritage, cultural and food tourism studies (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Yi et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2019). Studies have found that when tourists' authentic experience in heritage and cultural tourism (Zhang & Yin, 2020), or film tourism experiences (Teng & Chen, 2020), can be converted to destination loyalty. However, with the development of information technology and tourism, more and more research calls for studies of authenticity focusing on technology-mediated tourism experiences (Atzeni et al., 2022; Gao et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2022b; 2022c).

Recently, Atzeni et al. (2022) and Zhu et al. (2022c) found that when Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) experiences exhibit strong authenticity, it can help tourists form positive tourism experiences and behavioral intentions. Similar to VR and AR, TikTok also presents tourism experiences through the use of information technology (Du et al., 2020; Wengel et al., 2022). However, what is its impact on tourists' perceptions of destination when the authentic experience is formed by watching TikTok videos, especially when the destinations incorporate the celebrity factor in their marketing campaigns? To date, few studies have focused on the factors forming perception of authenticity and its subsequent impact on visitor behavior based on TikTok experiences.

To fill these research gaps, the objective of this study is to identify the effects of celebrity involvement in TikTok tourism videos on tourist experience and intention to visit the destination. Furthermore, three specific research purposes were proposed: (1) to examine the effect of celebrity involvement on perception about destination authenticities and travel intention, (2) to examine the relationship between object-based authenticity and existential authenticity, (3) to examine the effect of destination authenticities on tourist travel intention. Furthermore, the study's contributions can be understood as follows: First, this study is the one of the first empirical studies to examine the effects of celebrity involvement on perceived destination authenticity and travel intention based on TikTok experiences. Second, the empirical results of this study provide a reference for future research which focuses on internet celebrity effects. Third, this paper provides insights for government and destination marketers to improve their tourism promotional videos and attract more tourists based on the TikTok platform.

2. Theoretical background and hypothesis development.

2.1. User-generated content-based TikTok in tourism

User-generated content (UGC) refers to “content in the form of images, videos, or text posted by users through social media.” (Li et al., 2020, p. 3). UGC has been used as a powerful tool and approach for marketing by many tourism destination managers (Burgess et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2021). Meanwhile, previous research considered UGC as one of the most important marketing tools which can influence tourists' decisions (González-Rodríguez et al., 2021). For example, one previous study identified that UGC-based social media can influence tourists' image of the destination and tourists' intention and behavior (Borges-Tiago et al., 2019).

TikTok is currently one of the most popular and trendy UGC social media platforms, and thus it has gradually become a necessity in people's lives (Zhang, 2021). Due to the design of the platform's technology and the cultural conditions surrounding it, TikTok has become the most downloaded video app; TikTok video viewership has also grown significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic as most people stayed at home and consumed more digital content (Bresnick, 2019; Li et al., 2021). For these reasons, the current study focuses on video travel experiences hosted on TikTok.

According to Hennig-Thurau et al.'s (2013) study, UGC-based social media marketing can engage consumers through entertainment, interaction, fashion, customization, and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) methods. Thus, many tourist destinations use UGC-based social media for tourism marketing due to the benefits of the medium (Fan et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2017; Yadav et al., 2021). Inspired by previous successful applications of UGC-based social media on destination marketing, many destinations (e.g., Chengdu, China) attract tourists through the combination of TikTok and celebrity effect. In particular, TikTok creators produce destination-related tourism videos that contain local attractions and human features showcased through celebrities. Although destination authenticity and behavioral intention are important factors in technology-mediated tourism experiences (Gao et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2022c), few studies explored the influence of the celebrity factor, especially in TikTok celebrity videos.

2.2. Celebrity Involvement in tourism

Before understanding celebrity involvement, readers need to understand what involvement is. According to Havitz and Dimanche (1997, p. 246), involvement is defined as "an unobservable state of motivation, arousal, or interest in a leisure activity or related product." Celebrity involvement derives from leisure involvement, as celebrities are viewed by their fans as a source of leisure (Lee et al., 2008). Prior research indicated that celebrity involvement is similar to leisure involvement, containing three dimensions: attractiveness, centrality, and self-expression (Yen and

Croy, 2016). Many previous studies have used these three dimensions to examine the effects of celebrity involvement on tourist attitude and behavior in film and advertising marketing (Boerman, 2020; Britt et al., 2020; Chen, 2018; Yen & Teng, 2015). In film destination marketing, for example, one study found that destination managers can enhance destination marketing by employing film celebrities (Yen & Croy, 2016). In the field of advertising, celebrity is considered as an important tool to influence consumer intention. Brooks et al. (2021) explored the formation of a concept of Celebrity Capital from a qualitative research perspective and found three types of practices in influencer “celebrification.” Gräve and Bartsch (2022) found that when celebrity endorsement is combined with intrusive advertising, it enhances consumer intention. However, the current research differs from previous studies which centered on film or advertising celebrities, instead focusing on internet celebrities on TikTok.

Celebrities are individuals recognized by the public for accomplishments in fields other than product categories (Kamins et al., 1989). In addition, celebrities can be classified according to their field of work, for example: entertainers (actors, models, etc.), sports figures, business leaders, or politicians (Silvera & Austad, 2004). Inspired by these different kinds of celebrity, this study describes the “internet celebrity” as a celebrity well-known for their content on social media (e.g., TikTok). The TikTok platform offers various types of videos, including those based on tourist sites introduced by internet celebrities (Kennedy, 2020; Zhang, 2021). Recent studies have found that TikTok celebrities can be an important marketing tool for influencing economic development, and have significant business value (Abidin, 2020; Hu, 2020). Promoting tourist destinations with internet celebrities on TikTok may influence tourists' experience and behavior (Abidin, 2020). However, to our best knowledge, empirical evidence is missing.

2.3. Authenticity theory in tourism

Authenticity is defined as "a phenomenon related to the object or associated with the tourism experience" (Reisinger and Steiner, 2006, P. 299). Wang (1999) hypothesized that tourists' experiences of tourist destinations can be divided into two dimensions of authenticity: object-based authenticity (objective and constructive authenticity) and existential authenticity, respectively. The two dimensions of destination authenticity have been well applied in tourism research (Atzeni et al., 2022; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Park et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2022c). Therefore, the current study refers to Wang (1999) on the authenticity dimension and its application to TikTok experiences.

To truly understand object-based authenticity, two sub-categories need to be discussed: absolutist objective authenticity and constructivist objective authenticity. Absolutist objective authenticity is defined as "a concern with the authenticity of the original object and this authentic tourism experience is equivalent to an epistemological experience of the authenticity of the original object" (Wang, 1999, p. 352). Constructivist objective authenticity is defined as "the authenticity that the tourist or

tourism producer projects onto the tour object in terms of his or her imagery, expectations, preferences, beliefs, power, etc." (Wang, 2000, P. 49). Constructive authenticity provides a further critique of absolutist objective authenticity and defines authenticity from a constructivist perspective. Therefore, an understanding of constructive authenticity needs to be considered based on a constructivist perspective. Constructivism argues that authenticity should not be overly concerned with an objective existentialist perspective, i.e., a black-or-white emphasis on objective authenticity (Olsen, 2002). Because both dimensions of objectivist authenticity (objective and constructive authenticity) emphasize objective objects, the unified object-based authenticity is commonly used in academic research to understand both objective and constructive authenticity.

Unlike object-based authenticity, which is more focused on objective perception, existential authenticity focuses more on the subjective perceptual experience (Yi et al., 2017). Thus, existential authenticity is defined as "the potential state activated by tourism activities" (Wang, 1999, p. 352). Existential authenticity is independent of the authenticity of the tourism object. Instead, it focuses on the tourism process of connection, interaction and experience (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). Further, previous studies have reported that existential authenticity has an impact on visitor loyalty, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions in heritage and cultural tourism experiences (Fu, 2019; Park et al., 2019).

As tourism and information technology continue to develop, the need for authenticity in technology-mediated tourism experiences continues to be spotlighted (Gao et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2022c). For example, recent research has found that consumers are essentially seeking an authentic experience in their technology-mediated tourism experiences (Shehade & Stylianou-Lambert, 2020; Kim et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2022c). Zhu et al. (2022c) found that when destinations create positive object-based and existential authenticity through AR, it can help tourists enhance their travel experience and behavioral intentions. Notably, recent studies have also called for more research on exploring consumer perceptions of authenticity in UGC-based social media (Kim & Kim, 2020; Rickly, 2022; Wellman et al., 2020). Kim and Kim (2020) agree that in social media, authenticity is an important factor that affects visitors' place attachment and satisfaction.

A distinctive feature of information technology is the simulation and recording of destination images and characters through the technology (Kim and Song, 2020), and this technological feature is in line with the theoretical basis of authenticity theory (Zhu, et al., 2022c). Therefore, the current study suggests that TikTok tourism videos could influence tourists' perceived object-based authenticity. Further, TikTok creators produce short tourism videos based on the interactive experience between celebrities and destinations, which may influence users' perceptions of authenticity; the interactivity in the tourism experience influences perceptions of authenticity, as existential authenticity suggests (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). Thus, from this

perspective, it can be understood that TikTok celebrity travel videos can influence tourists' existential authenticity. However, some of the above conjectures on the perception of authenticity on TikTok are still only at the stage of conceptualization, without empirical evidence based on the TikTok experience.

2.5. Hypothesis development.

2.5.1. Relationships between celebrity involvement, object-based authenticity and existential authenticity.

A few prior studies have empirically explored the relationships between celebrity involvement, object-based authenticity and existential authenticity. Authenticity theory suggests that object-based authenticity emphasizes the destination object in the tourism experience (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999). In TikTok celebrity tourism videos, the destination object of attraction is enhanced through the presentation of celebrities (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Celebrity involvement influences authenticity via the interaction in the tourism experience (Lee et al., 2008), which means that tourists can experience authenticity by seeing celebrities and attraction objects in videos. In particular, the authenticity of this celebrity-based presentation of attractions may be enhanced when viewers see their favorite celebrities, as viewers emotionally connect to the authenticity of the destination because of the celebrity association (Kim, 2012).

Further, when viewers watch TikTok celebrity travel videos, they are able to restore the natural scenery of the destination; these TikTok videos can also showcase the interactions between celebrities and locals/attractions, in line with object-based and existential authenticity theory which emphasizes that the viewers are primarily influenced by the interactional process of the tourism experience and objects (Fu, 2019; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Zhu et al., 2022c). Therefore, it can be understood that celebrities can enhance tourists' perceptions of object-based and existential authenticity. Although theoretically grounded in the idea that celebrity involvement can enhance tourists' perceptions of authenticity, this conjecture has not been empirically explored in TikTok-based experiences, and therefore two research hypotheses are proposed.

Hypothesis 1: TikTok celebrity involvement positively predicts object-based authenticity.

Hypothesis 2: TikTok celebrity involvement positively predicts existential authenticity.

2.5.2. Relationship between object-based authenticity and existential authenticity.

The connection between object-based authenticity and existential authenticity has been previously explored in many heritage experience-based tourism studies (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Park et al., 2019; Teng & Chen, 2020; Zhang & Yin, 2020), and it has been found that when destinations create good object-based authenticity, they can significantly enhance existential authenticity (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Park et al., 2019).

As tourism and information technology continue to converge, this relationship is also being gradually explored in technology-mediated tourism experiences (Atzeni et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2022c). In VR, Atzeni et al. (2022) found existential authenticity is enhanced when VR creates good objective authenticity. In AR, it has been found that when object-based authenticity is enhanced, existential authenticity is also enhanced (Zhu et al., 2022c). While in TikTok experiences which are also technology-mediated experiences, the effect on visitors' existential authenticity when they obtain good object-based authenticity remains unknown. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 3: Object-based authenticity positively predicts existential authenticity in TikTok experiences.

2.5.3. Relationships between object-based authenticity, existential authenticity and travel intention.

Previous studies have explored the relationship between destination authenticities (object-based authenticity and existential authenticity) and travel intention across different travel experiences (Lee et al., 2020; See & Goh, 2019; Shang et al., 2020; Tan & Huang, 2020). For example, Tan and Huang (2020) explored the relationship between destination authenticities and travel intention in a theme park context, showing that perceived destination authenticity increased travel intention to the theme park. In addition, Shang et al. (2020) showed that destination authenticities positively enhanced travel intention in slow tourism experiences. In the context of integrating information technology and tourism, research on the impact on tourists' behavioral intention when they gain the perception of authenticity in TikTok experiences is missing in the literature. Therefore, two research hypotheses are proposed.

Hypothesis 4: Object-based authenticity positively predicts travel intention in TikTok experiences.

Hypothesis 5: Existential authenticity positively predicts travel intention in TikTok experiences.

2.5.4. Relationship between celebrity involvement and travel intention.

Previous research studies have examined the relationship between celebrity involvement and travel intention (Chen, 2018; Wu & Lai, 2021; Yen & Teng, 2015). For example, Yen and Teng (2015) revealed that celebrity involvement has a positive effect on travel intention. Wu and Lai (2021) provided further support for this result by revealing that celebrities trigger travel intention. However, the empirical relationship between celebrity involvement and travel intention has mostly focused on cultural tourism experiences (e.g., film tourism). As TikTok has gradually become a major part of consumers' lives, few studies have explored the relationship between celebrity involvement and travel intention based on TikTok experiences; therefore, the following

hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 6: TikTok celebrity involvement positively predicts travel intention in TikTok experience.

According to previous literature review, the above hypotheses are illustrated in the research model in Figure 1.

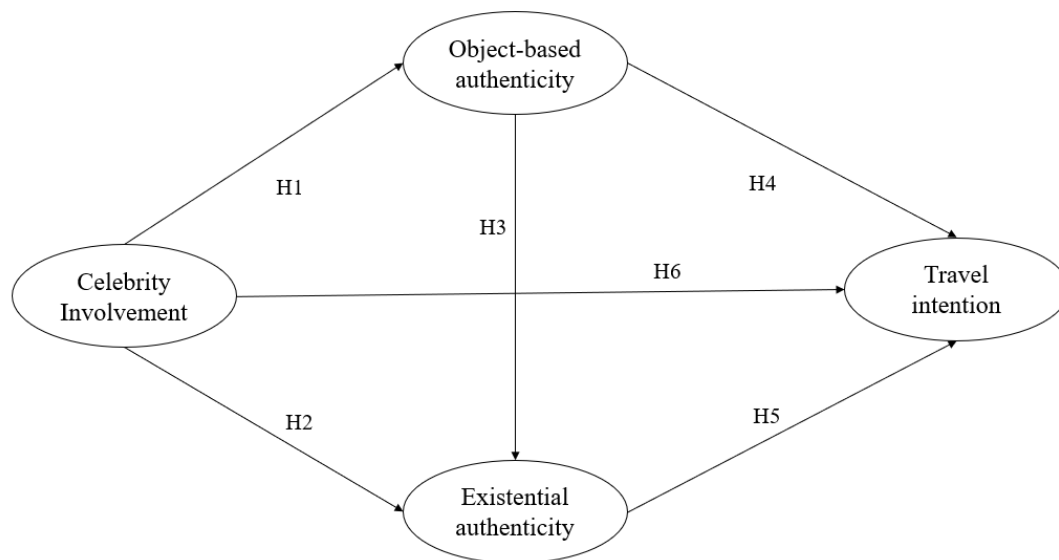


Figure 1. Research model.

3. Research method

3.1. Study site and measurement.

Taikoo Li is an integrated tourism destination located in the Jinjiang District of Chengdu, China. It is a large tourism and leisure platform with over 2.86 million square feet, covering many well-known tourist attractions and well-established tourism product services in the surrounding area (Yongli & Zhongwei, 2018). In addition, well-established tourism and leisure facilities such as the Daci Temple Scenic Area and the Ritz-Carlton gradually improve the infrastructure of related tourist attractions. In recent years, with the popularity of social media, especially the short videos of TikTok, the street photography tourism at Taikoo Li has become more popular. It entices a large number of celebrities and tourists visiting the attractions. According to the official data released by TikTok (<https://www.tiktok.com/>), Taikoo Li Chengdu has been ranked among the top three in terms of the number of TikTok video views (Zhu et al., 2022a). At the same time, with the social media publicity, Chengdu has become an ideal destination for many people, especially its most famous attraction – Taikoo Li. Based on these factors, Taikoo Li, Chengdu was chosen as the site for this study.

To control the effect caused by variations in videos, we chose a single celebrity video - Lu Xianren's video in Taikoo Li, Chengdu. The content of the video showcased the natural and human aspects of Chengdu as a destination through Lu Xianren's street photography. The selection of Lu Xianren was based on two major reasons. First, Lu Xianren has a wide fan base in mainland China. Second, he is considered one of the most influential international internet celebrities in China today (<https://inf.news/en/fashion>). Therefore, the current study considers Lu Xianren's internet celebrity street video to be appropriate. After the visitors watched the internet celebrity street video, they were asked to complete the questionnaire immediately to avoid perceptual errors that can result from a time lapse (Wattanacharoensil & Laornual, 2019).

The questionnaire was divided into three main sections. The first section consists of a screening question (have you watched the TikTok celebrity video), and respondents were invited to complete the questionnaire only when they finished watching the video, in order to ensure the qualification of the participants. The second section measures the four concerned constructs using thirteen questions. A seven-point Likert scale (ranging from 1: strongly disagree to 7: strongly agree) was applied to the measures (Preston & Colman, 2000). The measure of celebrity involvement was adapted from Yen and Croy (2016) (e.g., While watching this video, I really enjoyed this celebrity); the measure of destination authenticities (object-based and existential authenticity) was adapted from Kolar and Zabkar (2010) and Teng and Chen (2020) (e.g., TikTok video reflected the culture of the destination in an authentic way; I enjoyed the unique TikTok culture life experience). Lastly, the measure of travel intention was adapted from Li (2019) (e.g., If I plan for a trip, I will visit Taikoo Li, Chengdu.).

All measurement items have been slightly modified to fit the context. The original measurements were translated into Chinese so as to develop the Chinese questionnaire, and this questionnaire was proofread by two translators who were proficient in Chinese and English. Then, 20 respondents who watched the Chengdu celebrity travel video were invited to participate in the study. They completed the questionnaire after watching the video. They all expressed that they are able to understand the questions and do not have any issues. These 20 responses were not included in the data analysis of main study. The last section consists of respondents' personal information.

3.2. Data collection

Data collection was completed in 7 days (from June 12 to June 18, 2022). The data were collected through cooperation with Tencent Questionnaire (<https://wj.qq.com/>; Tencent-owned companies), one of the largest questionnaire companies in China. Its reliability in sampling has been confirmed by many leading journals (Wan et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2022b). Tencent (<https://www.tencent.com/>), as the largest data service company in China, can find appropriate users based on big data technology. Through a

collaboration with Tencent, potential users who had watched the video were invited to participate in this study. In addition, repeated completion was prohibited, to ensure the reliability and validity of the data. Finally, a total of 225 valid data were collected.

3.3. Data analysis.

Compared with Covariance-based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM), Partial Least Squared Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is suitable for handling small samples, and there is no mandatory requirement for data distribution (Hair et al., 2017). More importantly, the purpose of this study was to predict the impact of celebrity involvement on tourists' authentic experiences and behavioral intentions rather than to compare theoretical models (Hair et al., 2017). Thus, the PLS-SEM model analysis was appropriate, and Smartpls.v.3.2.9 was used to analyze the data (Ringle et al., 2015).

4. Results

4.1. Sample profiles

The participants in this study were mainland Chinese tourists. Approximately 70% of the participants were female, which matches the gender distribution of current Chinese TikTok users (<https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/>). Secondly, the majority of the participants were at the age of 19-25 years old (60%). A large proportion of participants (over 40%) held a bachelor's degree. Finally, most participants earn a monthly salary amounted to CNY3,000 (USD 444.32) or less (42.2%).

4.2. Measurement model.

Table 1 presents the values of PLS outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). All outer loading values, Cronbach's alpha values and composite reliability (CR) values exceeded 0.7, indicating the measurement items are reliable (Hair, 2009). Moreover, as shown in Table 1, all the average variance extracted (AVE) values exceed the recommended value of 0.5, indicating a good convergent validity (Hair et al., 2012). Following the Fornell–Larcker criterion, the square root of AVE for each construct was greater than its correlation coefficient with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Moreover, the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratios were less than 0.9 (Hair et al., 2017), indicating a good discriminant validity (see Table 2). In assessing the potential threat of Common Method Bias (CMB), the variance inflation factor (VIF) values for the constructs are less than the recommended cut-off value of 3.3 (ranging from 1.000-2.582), indicating that CMB is not an issue for the current study (Kock, 2015).

Table 1. Measurement model.

Measurement Item	Outer loading	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
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CI	<i>0.866</i>						
EA	0.585	<i>0.852</i>			0.709		
OA	0.712	0.68	<i>0.793</i>		0.869	0.841	
TI	0.603	0.562	0.593	<i>0.911</i>	0.695	0.657	0.698

Notes: Italic font = square-root of the AVE.

4.3. Structural model.

The bootstrapping technique is used to test the statistical significance of the hypotheses using 225 cases and 5,000 resamples (Hair et al., 2017). As shown in Figure 2, celebrity involvement positively predicts object-based authenticity, existential authenticity and travel intention ($\beta = 0.712, p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.204, p < 0.01$; $\beta = 0.318, p < 0.001$); object-based authenticity positively predicts existential authenticity and tourist travel intention ($\beta = 0.535, p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.206, p < 0.05$); and existential authenticity positively predicts tourist travel intention ($\beta = 0.235, p < 0.01$). Thus, all hypotheses are supported. On the other hand, the effect sizes (f-square values) are calculated to determine whether the omitted construct has a significant impact on the endogenous. The f-square values of significant paths ranged from 0.030–1.029, indicating the effect sizes vary from small to large (Cohen, 1988). In addition, the values of the variance explained (R-square) by object-based authenticity, existential authenticity and travel intention were 50.7%, 48.3%, and 44.7% respectively, indicating a good research model (Hair Jr et al., 2017).

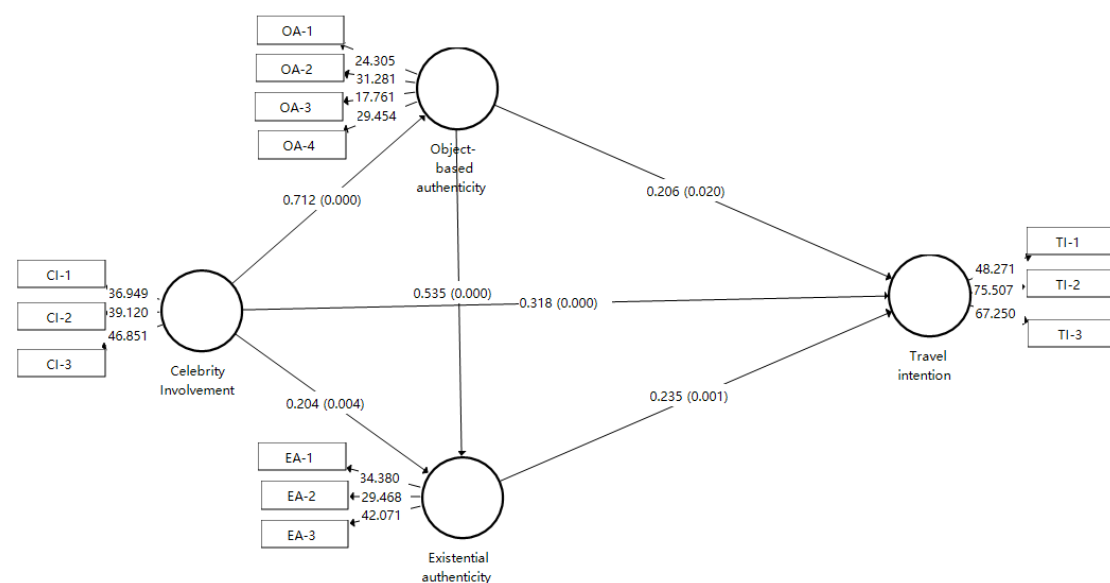


Figure 2. Results of PLS-SEM.

4.4. Meditation effects.

Table 3 presents the mediating effects of destination authenticities (object-based authenticity and existential authenticity) between celebrity involvement and travel intention. Results indicated destination authenticities mediate celebrity involvement

and travel intention ($\beta = 0.147$, $p < 0.05$ and $\beta = 0.048$, $p < 0.05$, respectively). Furthermore, object-based authenticity has a stronger significant mediating effect than existential authenticity.

Table 3. Testing mediation effects.

	Direct Effect	Specific indirect Effect	Mediation
Celebrity involvement → object-based authenticity → travel intention	0.318***	0.147*	Yes
Celebrity involvement → existential authenticity → travel intention	0.318***	0.048*	Yes

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$; * $p < 0.05$.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Along with the growing importance of TikTok in tourism destination marketing, it is crucial that academic research and destination managers investigate the significance of TikTok in destination marketing. This study demonstrates the significant role of TikTok in destination marketing from two main research perspectives: celebrity involvement and destination authenticity. This study found that when there is a celebrity element in TikTok short videos, it can help tourists enhance their perceptions of destination authenticity (*H1*, *H2*). To our knowledge, no previous studies have empirically examined the relationship between celebrity involvement and destination authenticities. Considering that authenticity is influenced by the tourism object and the tourism experience (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 1999), the addition of the celebrity factor in TikTok short videos can increase the richness as well as the interactivity of short video content. Especially when consumers like the celebrity, their involvement will have a significant impact on both types of object-based authenticity. Because object-based authenticity focuses on the absolutist object, the celebrity as an objective being (Gao et al., 2022; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006) undoubtedly creates a strong sense of object-based authenticity for the visitor. In contrast, the existential authenticity places more emphasis on the richness as well as the interactivity during the tourism experience and is more subjective (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006).

This study found that celebrity involvement has a significant but relatively low impact on existential authenticity. This may be because the current content of TikTok short video production still needs to be enhanced and improved, which provides valuable practical direction for destination managers. Finally, the current study also found that travel intention is significantly increased when users have high celebrity involvement (*H6*). This finding supports previous findings regarding celebrity involvement and travel intention based on other people's travel experiences (Yen & Croy, 2016; Yen & Teng, 2015). One possible reason for this is that the current TikTok short video focuses on Lu Xianren, who is a positive internet celebrity in mainland China. He came from a

rural area and gradually made his way internationally through his own efforts, which may have gained him recognition from many people. Therefore, this may explain why visitors' behavioral intentions are significantly higher when they see Lu Xianren videos.

In addition, the current study explores the relationship between object-based authenticity and existential authenticity. The findings show that existential authenticity significantly increases when tourists acquire object-based authenticity (*H3*), which supports previous findings based on different travel experiences (Atzeni et al., 2022; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010), and is further validated in TikTok. A possible explanation is that objectivist authenticity is strongly objective, while existential authenticity comes from the subjective world, and thus object-based authenticity is the basis for the creation of existential authenticity (Zhu et al., 2022c). When TikTok elicits objective perceptions, users' subjective feelings will naturally be enhanced. For example, in the current study, when users gain the perception of authenticity through the introduction of real celebrities, they will then focus on the richness and interactivity of the TikTok experience, and then existential authenticity will be enhanced. This further explains why the current study found that object-based authenticity mediates more strongly between celebrity involvement and travel intention than does existential authenticity. Finally, the study also found that tourists' behavioral intentions were significantly higher when they positively perceived destination authenticities (*H4, H5*), which supports previous research (Lee et al., 2020; See & Goh, 2019). In addition, the current study provides valuable theoretical and practical contributions.

5.1. Theoretical implications

The current study has important theoretical implications. First, the findings contribute to UGC-related knowledge by studying TikTok phenomenon. As one of the most important marketing approaches today, UGC-based social media has been proven effective by many previous studies (Gaffar et al., 2021; Zhang, 2021). Previous studies have argued that effective social media marketing can enhance tourists' destination image, which in turn influences their behavioral intentions (Bahtar & Muda, 2016; Borges-Tiago et al., 2019; González-Rodríguez et al., 2021). This study supports previous research that TikTok plays an important role in marketing during Covid-19 (Wengel et al., 2022). Unfortunately, tourism research on TikTok is still in its infancy, according to recent studies (Li, 2021; Li et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2022a), consequently, this study focuses on the significant role TikTok plays in tourism experiences and destination marketing, and filling the previous research gap and further contributing to knowledge about TikTok in tourism research.

Second, the current research contributes to celebrity research. Celebrity research considers that there are different kinds of celebrities (Silvera & Austad, 2004). The most typical of which is film celebrity, and previous research has found that when destinations and advertising campaigns adopt film celebrities as a marketing tool, they can enhance visitor experience and behavioral intention (Lee et al., 2008; Teng & Chen,

2020). Chen (2018) found that tourists' place attachment is enhanced when film destinations adopt the celebrity factor, so celebrities can be seen as an important marketing tool in destination marketing research. However, amidst the integration of TikTok and tourism, few studies have focused on internet celebrity research in the TikTok experience (Abidin, 2020; Lejie, 2021), and the current study fills this theoretical gap. The study finds that when internet celebrity involvement is added to TikTok video production, it has a significant impact on tourists' experience and behavioral intention, which not only supports previous celebrity studies based on different tourism experiences, but further enriches TikTok internet celebrity studies.

Finally, the current study contributes to destination authenticity literature, where authenticity is considered as an important factor in the tourism experience (Rickly, 2022). Previous research has argued that a fundamental factor in tourists' choice of destination in terms of information technology tourism experiences is authenticity (Kim & Kim, 2020; Shehade & Stylianou-Lambert, 2020). Although authenticity has been extensively researched and considered as a determinant of satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Atzeni et al., 2022), little is known about the impact of celebrity involvement on destination authenticity and the consequent travel intentions based on destination marketing through TikTok. This study expands the understanding of the role of destination authenticity in TikTok experiences. Our findings suggest that object-based authenticity and existential authenticity induce travel intentions. Additionally, it was found that object-based authenticity increases destination existential authenticity based on watching TikTok videos. The findings support the idea that object-based authenticity and existential authenticity play independent roles in travel intention (Atzeni et al., 2022; Fu, 2019; Zhu et al., 2022c), which has important implications for future authenticity research in the context of technology-mediated tourism.

5.2. Practical implications

The current study also provides important practical implications for destination managers. First, the findings show that incorporating celebrity in TikTok marketing can help destination managers enhance visitor experiences and behavioral intentions. This finding echoes previous research on celebrity factors in film-influenced, advertising marketing, and similarly demonstrates that celebrities can play an important role in the TikTok experience. Therefore, in the future, destination managers may consider promoting destination marketing based on collaboration with some internet celebrities. For example, TikTok promotion could be considered with celebrities who can be associated with their destination (e.g., local origin). Finally, given the rapid growth of TikTok, adding an internet celebrity element as a marketing tool is a good idea.

The current study also found that TikTok authenticity significantly mediates the celebrity involvement and behavioral intention when authenticity is explored as an important value of the TikTok visitor experience. Notably, object-based authenticity has a more significant mediating between celebrity involvement and behavioral intentions.

For example, destination managers can produce stories about the destination through professional advertising agencies, and in the process, preserve as much as possible the human and natural scenery of the destination. Specific objective objects are an important factor that affects object-based authenticity. In addition, the production process of TikTok short videos can incorporate some colorful interactive activities to enhance the tourists' existential authenticity, and thus achieve the purpose of attracting more tourists.

Finally, TikTok is an important tourism marketing tool for destination managers. Destination managers need to not only consider the celebrity factor and authenticity experience as important research content in TikTok experiences, but also explore other factors that can influence tourists' behavioral intention and promote destination marketing based on TikTok short video experiences. Therefore, for destination managers, TikTok is not only a new tourism experience platform but also a powerful destination marketing tool. It has important promotional value for future destination marketing.

5.3. Limitations and future study

This study has several limitations. First, although Taikoo Li is a highly representative tourist destination in China, generalization of the implications to other destinations has to be cautious. Future studies should consider re-examination of the conceptual model with different destinations. Second, all respondents were Chinese, so the implications may not be applicable to non-Chinese tourists. Replication of this study with respondents of other cultures can be conducted in future research. Third, this study adopted an online survey approach. Causal relationships cannot be concluded. Future studies could consider other methods such as experimental design. Finally, the sample size is not sufficient to make a valid comparison of demographic differences in the model testing; future studies with larger sample sizes can make different attempts on the comparisons.

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