

Short video marketing in tourism: Telepresence, celebrity attachment and travel intention

Abstract

Drawn upon Telepresence theory, this study aims to identify the relationships between existential authenticity, celebrity attachment, telepresence, and travel intention in the short video experience. Survey results show that existential authenticity fosters user attachment to celebrity and then travel intention, but has no impact on telepresence which is also not related to travel intention; Furthermore, celebrity attachment enhances travel intention. Although existential authenticity has no effect on telepresence, celebrity attachment mediates the relationship between existential authenticity and telepresence. This study offers insights to both scholars and practitioners, informing strategies for enhancing destination competitiveness through TikTok marketing campaigns.

Keywords: destination marketing; existential authenticity; celebrity attachment; telepresence theory; TikTok.

1. Introduction

Advances in social media and its integration with tourism have enhanced the customer experience (Buhalis & Inversini, 2014; Leung et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2022; Gaffar et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2022a; Lei et al., 2022). Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, technology-enabled travel experiences are creating value together with supporting travelers at all stages before, during and after the trip (Buhalis, 2020). For example, livestreaming (Li et al., 2022; Shen et al., 2022; Shang et al., 2022), Virtual tours (Yang et al., 2023), Metaverse (Go & Kang, 2023; Dwivedi et al., 2023; Buhalis et al., 2023), etc. TikTok ranks among the most distinguished technology-enabled travel platforms, offering a range of unique features setting it apart from other social media platforms. Primarily, it functions as a user-generated content (UGC)-based social media platform, allowing its users to promptly upload and share their latest short-form videos with a wide audience. This feature has proven popular among viewers, who can engage with such captivating content through likes and comments (Mou, 2020). Notably, TikTok's editing and music inclusion capabilities are user-friendly, making it a go-to platform for the creation of short micro-videos (Zhu et al., 2020). Hence, the platform is a preferred choice for destination managers aiming to leverage its potential for promoting their destinations. Given TikTok's unique features, the focus of this study lies in examining UGC-based TikTok experiences.

Social media authenticity experiences are critical to destination marketing (Kim & Kim, 2020; Zhu et al., 2022b). Previous scholars have indicated that as digital technology becomes increasingly intertwined, customers are seeking a sense of existential authenticity during their digital experience (Zhu et al., 2023). Similarly, social media

integrated digital technology with tourism. But when short videos are adopted by destinations to build existential authenticity. How does that affect visitors' internal emotions and, in turn, their behavioral intentions? Furthermore, Telepresence is an important theoretical basis to explain the social media experience (Lim & Childs, 2020; Pelet et al., 2017). Telepresence emphasizes that when consumers gain a good sense of being there, they further enhance their virtual experience and behavioral intentions (Bogicevic et al., 2019). In social media experience, the inclusion of celebrity marketing (e.g., celebrity attachment) and perceived authenticity (e.g., existential authenticity) may influence the formation of consumers' telepresence and further influence their travel intention. Although previous studies have found that the inclusion of authenticity and the inclusion of celebrity influence their travel intention (Ying et al., 2022; Park et al., 2019), however, when considering the inclusion of the psychological mechanism (e.g., Telepresence), do existential authenticity and celebrity attachment still influence travel intention? Few studies based on the TikTok platform focused on the telepresence theory interpretation.

To overcome the above shortcomings, this study aims to examine the potential effect of TikTok short video on destination marketing while addressing one main research question: What is the association between existential authenticity, celebrity attachment, telepresence, and travel intention? The present investigation broadens the scope of existential authenticity by elucidating the impact of stimuli on consumer psychological mechanisms during social media interactions. Moreover, the study contributes to the telepresence theory by examining its antecedents and outcomes in the context of TikTok. The findings of this study can potentially inform Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) utilizing short video marketing, enabling them to tailor marketing strategies in accordance with the insights gained through this research.

2. Literature review

2.1. TikTok in tourism

In the post-pandemic period, TikTok is the most popular user-generated content (UGC) platform and the fastest-growing social network (Barta et al., 2023). In China, for instance, TikTok, also known as Douyin, has become an integral part of the lives of Chinese consumers, with viral videos gaining 30–200 million views per day (Lau, 2020; Zhu et al., 2022b). UGC refers to sharing and uploading various contents (e.g., videos and pictures) on social media, thus getting tourists' likes, shares, and comments (Wilson et al., 2012). Destination managers can create and promote TikTok videos based on UGC technology for tourism marketing purposes (Bire & Nugraha, 2022; Chu et al., 2020). The use of social media has a significant impact on the customer decision-making (Nekmahmud et al., 2022), for example, tourists can decide whether or not to participate in a field trip by perusing short videos, comments, and other user-generated content on TikTok platforms before traveling (Wengel et al., 2022). Further, the benefits of TikTok include the following: 1) assisting tourists in selecting food for their travels

(Li et al., 2020), 2) facilitating the tourism industry's efforts in leisure marketing (e.g., Du et al., 2022), 3) contributing to the advancement of tourism education (e.g., Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2021). Although TikTok already has significant potential for tourism development, empirical research on the marketing function of TikTok in tourism destinations remains limited. To fill this research gap, it is worthwhile to investigate TikTok's short video marketing for destination marketing.

2.2. Telepresence theory

Telepresence (or called presence) theory is defined as a sense of being there in the virtual environment (Lee, 2018; Wu & Lai, 2022; Steuer, 1992). Related research identified that telepresence is one of the essential factors in digital destination marketing (Aitamurto et al., 2020; Wagler & Hanus, 2018; Wei et al., 2019). Wu and Lai (2022) found that presence can significantly enhance visitors' affective image, cognitive image, and overall image in the virtual tourism experience. In addition to this, previous studies have found that when hotel managers create a good presence in web marketing, visitor experiences and behavioral intentions are enhanced (Bogicevic et al., 2019). Alongside the growth of UGC-based social media and tourism, TikTok is dependent on digital technology. More scholarly effort on research about the construction of presences in UGC-based experiences has been called for (Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2021; Kaye et al., 2021). Moreover, recent studies have interpreted the customer Tik Tok experience in light of presence theory. Cao et al. (2021) identified that when vivid storyline descriptions were added to TikTok short video productions, it helped visitors form presences. Although prior research identified the role of presence in different tourism contexts, presence in TikTok short video experiences is still under-researched (Merga, 2021). Thus, this study aims to explore how presence is formed from the perspective of authentic experience and celebrities, and in turn, influences travel intention.

2.3. Existential Authenticity

Theoretically, existential authenticity is activity-based and more focused on the activity of subjectivity. It concerns the integrity of one's 'self.' (Fu, 2019). Additionally, it is considered to be related to human nature, the essence of human personality (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). From these concepts, we can see that existential authenticity reflects the perception of authenticity in the process of experience. Thus, scholars believe that existential authenticity is especially suitable for the study of the tourism experience (Jiang et al., 2017; Kim & Jamal, 2007). Indeed, existential authenticity is often used to construct theoretical models to explain tourism experiences. For example, scholars examined the role of market experts among young tourists. Results revealed that existential authenticity positively enhances the co-creation of experiences by young tourists (Javed & Awan, 2022), which echoes the importance of perceived authenticity in tourism co-creation value as previously noted in Ramkissoon and Uysal (2018). In addition to this, previous scholars have explored the effect of authenticity experiences

on tourists' destination image perceptions and behaviors in cultural tourism (Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2011). Moreover, scholars have found that when existential authenticity is added to cultural tourism experiences, it can enhance tourists' well-being (Yu et al., 2020). Along with the integration of social media and tourism, existential authenticity has been increasingly receiving scholarly attention (Lee et al., 2022; Souza & Kastenholz, 2022). However, the combination of existential authenticity and short video experiences is still under-researched.

2.4. Existential authenticity and celebrity attachment.

Unlike prior celebrity research, this study focuses on celebrity attachment which is grounded in attachment theory. Attachment theory emphasizes emotional bond (Snyder et al., 2012; Fitton, 2013), which further influences the psychological mechanism and behavioral intention of the experiencers (Ilicic & Webster, 2011; Özer et al., 2022). Attachment theory is increasingly applied to explain marketing phenomena (Shoukat & Ramkissoon, 2022), notably the notion of celebrity attachment, which refers to the relationship between consumers and celebrity activities (Wong & Lai, 2015). Furthermore, literature about existential authenticity argues that tourists' authenticity perception is an activity-based subjective feeling formed by travel experiences and personal emotions (Brown, 2013; Kim & Jamal, 2007; Zhu, Hall, et al., 2023), which may further enhance the visitor's psychological emotions (e.g., attachment). Prior research in film tourism suggests that consumer attachment (e.g., celebrity attachment) is strengthened when film tourism visitors enjoy a favorable existential authenticity experience (Teng & Chen, 2020). Consequently, the present study argues that TikTok experiences may improve a tourist's attachment to his or her favorite celebrity if existential authenticity is attained. Hence, a research hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 1: Existential authenticity has a positive impact on celebrity attachment.

2.5. Existential authenticity and telepresence

Literature related to telepresence emphasizes virtual immersion perception, which is formed by external stimuli (Lee, 2018). Previous studies have explored how telepresence is formed from different antecedents based on the digital tourism experience (Liu et al., 2022; Ongsakul et al., 2021). However, few studies have focused on the antecedents of telepresence from the perspective of authentic experience. According to literature, existential authenticity is influenced by the experiential process, and these factors (e.g., vividness in short video experience) not only form the basis of existential authenticity but also serve as antecedents that facilitate telepresence (Klein, 2003; Steuer, 1992). During the TikTok watching experience, the experience provided by digital short video may enhance both existential authenticity and telepresence. However, the relationship between existential authenticity and telepresence has rarely been examined. Inspired by previous studies, Zhu et al. (2023) theorized that authenticity affects the formation of presences. Hence, the following hypothesis is

proposed.

Hypothesis 2: Existential authenticity has a positive impact on telepresence.

2.6. Celebrity attachment and telepresence

As discussed earlier, telepresence stresses immersive experience and virtual environment immersion. Past research has discovered that, when applying to digital tourism experiences, celebrity attachment influences customer telepresence (Zhu et al., 2022a). Particularly, vividness and interactivity of celebrity attachment and digital contents can considerably influence the creation of experiencers' sense of presence (Bogicevic et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2023). Following this reasoning, the vividness and interactivity of short videos may be enhanced by the coupling of a celebrity and a destination and then the visitors' telepresence is also strengthened. Yet, empirical research into the relationship between celebrity attachment and telepresence in short video experiences is relatively sparse. Our current investigation proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Celebrity attachment has a positive impact on telepresence.

2.7. Existential authenticity, celebrity attachment, telepresence and travel intention.

In addition, the empirical effects of authentic experience, celebrity attachment, and telepresence on travel intention have been empirically investigated by prior research utilizing various travel frameworks. Park et al. (2019) discovered, for instance, that customer behavior in heritage experiences considerably rises when positive authenticity is present. Wong and Lai (2015) discovered that the attachment to celebrity enhances the intention of travelers to visit a location. Ying et al. (2022) found that effective telepresence considerably facilitates the behavior of tourists. Few studies have studied the empirical correlation between them in short video marketing; consequently, we propose the following three research hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4: Existential authenticity has a positive impact on travel intention.

Hypothesis 5: Celebrity attachment has a positive impact on travel intention.

Hypothesis 6: Telepresence has a positive impact on travel intention.

Figure 1 depicts a proposed conceptual model based on prior literature reviews and the development of hypotheses.

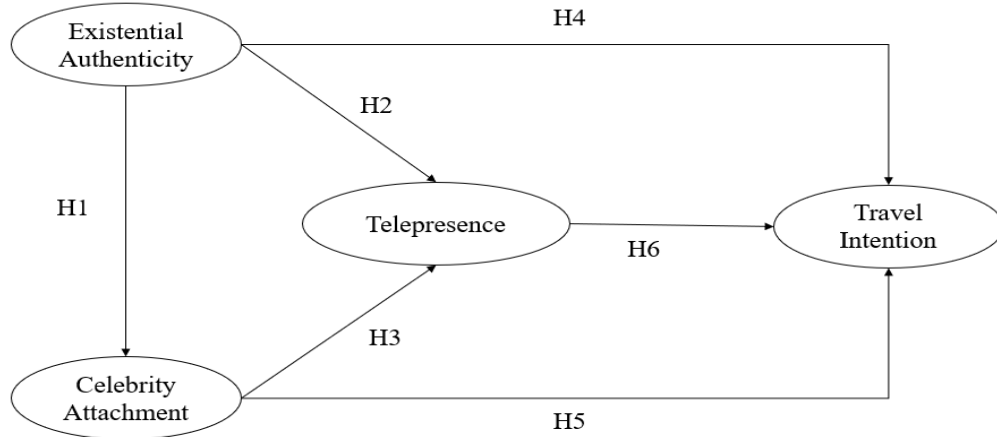


Figure 1. Conceptual model

3. Methods

3.1. Questionnaire design.

The current questionnaire applied the seven-point Likert scale to rate all measuring items (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Moreover, the questionnaire consists of three components. The first portion introduced this study and provided screening instructions (Have you seen the short video of Chengdu we provide?). The introduction describes the content of the video link and informs respondents that this survey is for academic study only, there are no absolute correct answers, and they are required to immediately complete the questionnaire after watching the video.

In the second section. For existential authenticity, the three items were borrowed from Zhu et al. (2022b). Four measurement items from Teng and Chen (2020) were chosen to evaluate celebrity attachment. Three telepresence measurement items were borrowed from Lim and Childs (2020). To evaluate the measurements of travel intention, we refer to Zhu et al. (2022b). All measurable items were adapted to the context of this research. During the translation process, two specialists who are fluent in both English and Chinese translated all measuring items from their original English into Chinese. The third section contains questions regarding the participant profiles. In addition to this, in the third section of the current questionnaire, inspired by the previous questionnaire design of digital destination marketing (e.g., Atzeni et al., 2022), we also included a filter to see ‘if you had been to the destination before’, to explore whether having been to the destination before had an impact on the results. In October 2022, a total of twenty respondents participated in a pre-study. They indicated a full understanding of the research questions. Therefore, no further modifications were made to the questions. These samples were excluded from the primary study's data analysis.

3.2. Study site and data collection

Chengdu, China, has been selected as the location for the current study. According to available data, Chengdu received 18.505 million visitors during the May Day holiday in early 2021, representing a year-on-year increase of 215.2%, and total tourism revenue of 17.02 billion yuan, representing a year-on-year increase of 304.2% (Zhu, et al., 2022a). Furthermore, a single celebrity destination short video was chosen for this study based on suggestions from previous short video studies to avoid research bias (Zhu et al., 2022b). In this study, respondents were asked to watch a video of the famous celebrity Sicong Wang. Wang's video was chosen because he is the founder of many game and entertainment companies, and he is widely popular on the Internet, especially on short video social platforms. The content of this celebrity video is Wang 's street shooting in Chengdu. The respondents can see the combination of celebrities and attractions in the destination. Since the experience of TikTok short videos is mostly accessible via the Internet, this study collected data by online survey. The Tencent questionnaire platform was adopted as it is one of the major data collection firms in China, and its sampling method has been recognized in previous research (e.g., Cambra-Fierro et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2023). Finally, 315 valid questionnaires were utilized for this investigation.

3.3. Data analysis, collinearity issue, and Common method bias.

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was applied because this study focused on predicting the dependent variable and PLS-SEM was suitable for small samples without mandating a normal distribution of the data (Hair Jr et al., 2017). Therefore, the Smart-PLS version 3 software package was utilized to evaluate the data using 1,000 bootstrap samples. Bootstrapping with 1000 samples was also applied in the examination of potential collinearity issue and common method bias in the current research. To assess common method bias as well as collinearity issues in the questionnaire, based on the recommendations of the study by Kock (2015) in the PLS-SEM model, we evaluated it by the variance inflation factor (VIF) values of the constructs and found that all VIF values were below the recommended cut-off value of 3.30 (ranging between 1.000 to 2.677), indicating that the common method bias and collinearity in this study problems were not evident.

4. Results

4.1. Profile of respondents.

Owing to COVID-19 restrictions on overseas travel, this inquiry focused on Chinese visitors. This study consisted of both male (37.5%) and female (62.5%) participants. The majority of participants are between the ages of 19 and 25 (65.7%), which correlates to the age distribution of Generation Z's population engaged in digital technology. The majority of participants held or were pursuing a bachelor's degree (49.8%). The majority of participants (53%) earned less than \$472.25 each month. The

majority of participants in this research (68.3%) had never been to Chengdu.

4.2. Measurement model

Table 1 displays all factor loadings larger than 0.7, indicating that all measurable elements matched the constructs' appropriate loading (Hair Jr et al., 2017). Table 2 indicated all values of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) were greater than 0.70, while the values of average variance extracted (AVE) were greater than 0.50, indicating convergent validity was achieved (Hair Jr et al., 2017). Furthermore, Table 2 shows that HTMT values were less than 0.85, indicating that good discriminant validity was attained (Hair Jr et al., 2017).

Table 1. Factor loadings of measurable items.

Measurement items	Factor loading
Existential authenticity (EA)	
EA-1: I liked special arrangements and events connected to the TikTok destination.	0.843
EA-2: I was informed about the destination culture after visiting the TikTok videos.	0.883
EA-3: I enjoyed the unique TikTok culture life experience.	0.897
Celebrity attachment (CA)	
CA-1: I feel captivated by this celebrity from TikTok.	0.903
CA-2: I feel attached to this celebrity from TikTok.	0.921
CA-3: I love this celebrity from TikTok.	0.881
CA-4: I feel inspired by this celebrity from TikTok.	0.917
Telepresence (TP)	
TP-1: I forgot about my immediate surroundings when I browsed on TikTok	0.914
TP-2: Browsing on TikTok made me forget where I was	0.912
TP-3: After browsing on TikTok, I felt like I came back to the "real world" after a journey	0.884
Travel intention (TI)	
TI-1: In recent years, if I plan for a trip, I will visit the destination.	0.913

TI-2: If I have a chance to travel, I will consider a trip to the destination.	0.891
TI-3: In short, I think the destination is a good place deserving visit.	0.913

Table 2. Reliability and validity of constructs.

	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio			
				CA	EA	TP	TI
Celebrity attachment (CA)	0.927	0.948	0.82				
Existential authenticity (EA)	0.846	0.907	0.765	0.631			
Telepresence (TP)	0.891	0.932	0.821	0.819	0.487		
Travel intention (TI)	0.927	0.948	0.820	0.627	0.793	0.453	

Notes: AVE = average variance extracted; CR = construct reliability.

4.3. Structural model assessment

The findings of the structural equation model are shown in Figure 2. Existential authenticity significantly forms celebrity attachment and travel intention in the TikTok experience ($\lambda = 0.561$, $p=0.000$; $\lambda = 0.537$, $p=0.000$); Celebrity attachment significantly forms telepresence and travel intention in the TikTok experience ($\lambda = 0.736$, $p=0.000$; $\lambda = 0.310$, $p=0.000$). However, existential authenticity has no effect on telepresence which is also not related to travel intention. The levels of variance explained (R-square) for celebrity attachment, telepresence, and travel intention were 31.5%, 55.4%, and 52.2%, respectively, indicating the reliability of the model.

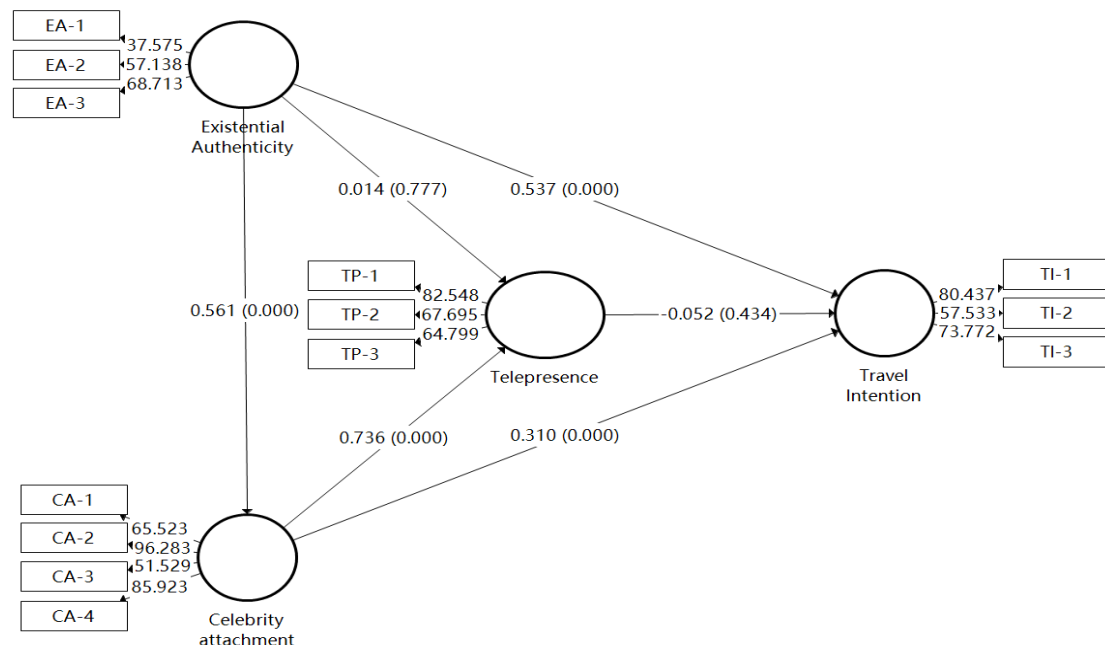


Figure 2. Results of SEM analysis.

4.4. Mediation effects and control variables.

The current study also found that celebrity attachment mediated the relationships between existential authenticity and travel intention, and between existential authenticity and telepresence (see Table 3). Further, previous research suggested that the presence of control variables may affect the validity of the research model hypotheses, so we added control variables (gender, age, salary, education, and previous travel experience) to test the hypotheses of the original model. It was found that the presence of control variables did not affect the validity of the hypotheses of the original model (see Figure 3).

Table 3. Mediation effects.

Hypothesized relationships	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Mediation
From existential authenticity to celebrity attachment and then to travel intention.	0.537***	0.174***	Yes
From existential authenticity to celebrity and then to telepresence.	0.014 ^{ns}	0.413***	Yes

Notes: ***= P<0.001; ns=not significant.

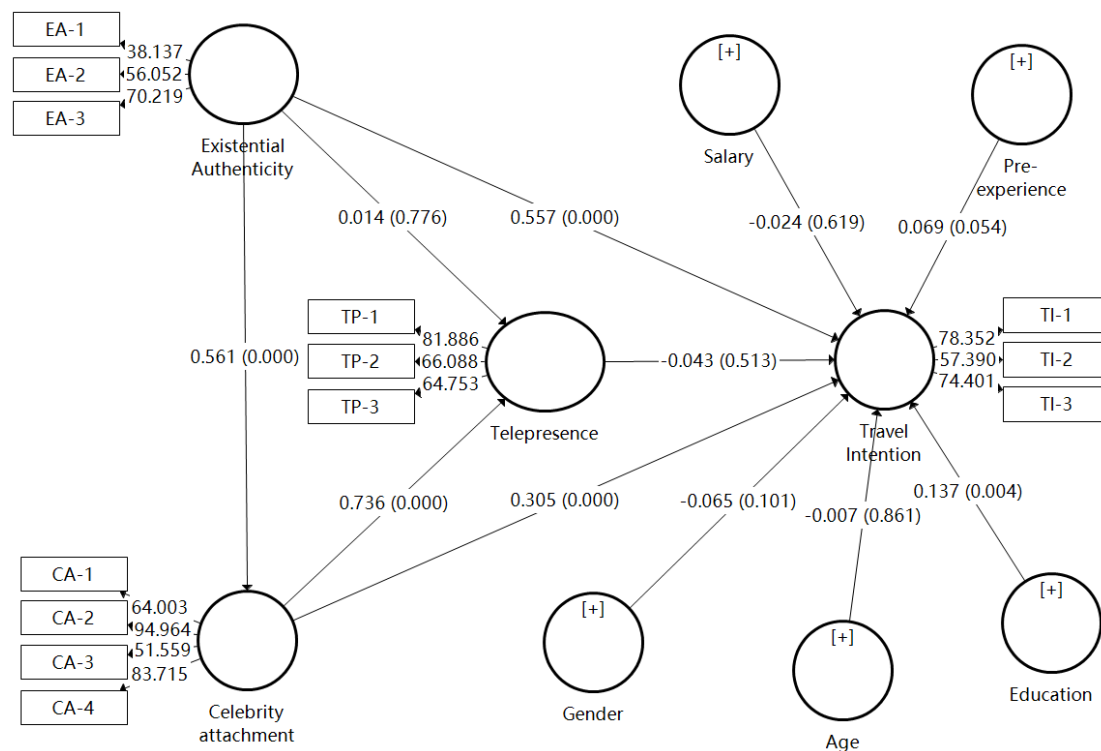


Figure 3. PLS-SEM analysis including control variables.

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1. Discussion

As UGC TikTok travel short videos have steadily improved people's daily lives,

destination managers and academic researchers have begun to acknowledge TikTok's importance in digital tourism marketing (Buhalis, 2020). Results indicated Celebrity attachment can be formed by consumers' acquisition of existential authenticity, but has no effect on consumers' telepresence. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that celebrity attachment positively mediates both existential authenticity and telepresence. This finding differs from the finding of Zhu et al. (2022a) in TikTok experience, where they found a positive effect on travel intention when consumers acquired presence. One possible explanation is that the current study focused on a single celebrity video, and viewers may have a higher level of attachment to the current celebrity, which explains why celebrity attachment is a mediating variable. In addition, considering that there is a lot of homogeneity in TikTok short videos, when consumers watch more videos of the same type, it may cause visual fatigue, further explaining why the effect on consumers' telepresence perception is not significant. Moreover, it was found that consumers' travel intention was significantly enhanced when they received good existential authenticity and celebrity attachment, but the effect of telepresence on consumers' travel intention was not significant. One possible reason is that celebrity attachment emphasizes the customer psychological and celebrity-related attachment levels (Özer et al., 2022). The TikTok-based short videos are characterized by a short viewing period and rapid tempo, which constrain the formation of presence in the experience. Consequently, this explains why consumers' intention to visit the destination is enhanced only by existential authenticity and celebrity attachment, but not the telepresence. This unexpected finding provides valuable theoretical and practical implications which are worthwhile for further examination in future studies.

5.2. Theoretical implications.

To begin with, the current study focuses on the influence of existential authenticity on travel intention based on short video experience and the underlying mechanism. Although previous studies on the role of authenticity in predicting consumer behavior, such as tourist motivation and well-being are not scarce (Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2010, 2011, 2018; Yu et al., 2020), few studies have specifically explored the effect of a single authenticity dimension, existential authenticity, on visitor behavior in the context of short video experience. Our study fills a gap in previous research that has called for future scholars to further empirically substantiate the existential authenticity in social media experiences (Lee et al., 2022; Souza & Kastenholz, 2022). Furthermore, our study extends previous research involving the application of existential authenticity experience in the frameworks of hospitality and tourism (Fu, 2019; Jiang et al., 2017), by contributing empirical evidence to the short video experience.

Finally, our current research also extends the theory of telepresence to social media marketing through identifying antecedents of existential authenticity and celebrity attachment. Telepresence has been demonstrated to be a crucial theoretical concept in both digital tourism marketing and the explanation of tourist behavior (Lee, 2018; Liu et al., 2022; Ongsakul et al., 2021). However, telepresence theory has rarely been

examined in short video-based tourism experiences and tourist behavior. Our study fills this research gap by linking existential authenticity, celebrity attachment, and tourist behavior through telepresence theory. The insignificant predicting effect of telepresence casts doubt on the argument on the importance of telepresence in a virtual environment.

5.3. Managerial implications

This study offers some insightful practical recommendations. This study demonstrates, first and foremost, that the incorporation of existential authenticity into short video production can considerably enhance the sensation of celebrity connection and presence. TikTok content creation can be made more interactive and vibrant by destination managers to further boost the destination image and, consequently, the tourists' perception of its authenticity.

Second, meaningful findings indicated that when destination managers provide good existential authenticity, celebrity attachment is significantly increased, but customer presence is not significantly increased. It is worth noting that celebrity attachment fully mediates existential authenticity and telepresence. Given that when a single celebrity video may have homogenization problems, this puts a higher demand on DMOs. For example, the unique storytelling of short video production content can be further improved to enhance customer experience and short video vividness. These exciting storylines not only enhance visitors' authentic experiences and celebrity attachment but also influence the formation of visitors' presence.

Finally, when visitors have a good existential authenticity and celebrity attachment, their behavioral intentions are significantly enhanced. Therefore, for destination managers, they can further enhance visitors' intentions by creating cultural and historical backgrounds related to the destination, such as including some natural attractions in the TikTok video production process, which may further enhance visitors' enjoyment and thus achieve the ultimate goal of attracting visitors through the TikTok short video platform.

5.4. Limitations and future study.

This study has certain drawbacks. Initially, the present study empirically investigates the impact of existential authenticity on the experiences and behaviors of tourists. Despite the critique of object-based authenticity, there is little doubt that it remains a crucial component in the development of authenticity, therefore, future research may consider adding object-based authenticity to construct new theoretical models to explore social media celebrity attachment experiences. Furthermore, the current study did not know whether the respondents are fans of the celebrity which possibly influence the results. Future research could include related questions and control the effect of it in the analysis. Lastly, as the metaverse experience is similar to the short video experience in that it is based on digital technology, recent studies pointed out that

metaverse has a potential role in the travel experience and consumer behavior (Buhalis et al., 2022, 2023; Dwivedi et al., 2022). From this perspective, future studies can focus on the impact of existential authenticity and the perception of telepresence in the metaverse framework.

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