INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TRAVEL PHOTOS ON FUTURE DESTINATION CHOICE: MEDIATING ROLE OF CELEBRITY-GENERATED CONTENT

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INTRODUCTION

This study aims to examine the attractiveness of travel photos on social media and understand the relationship between travel photo sharing on social media (SM) and destination choice intention. The attractiveness of key travel photos was categorised as 'nature & landscape', 'way of life', 'architecture/ buildings' and 'people' and these categories affected the future destination choices of social media viewers. The quantitative study uses data collected from 388 respondents via convenience sampling.

Hypothesis 1: The attractiveness of travel photos on SM is positively affected to future destination intention. (See Fig. 1a.)

Hypothesis 2: Celebrity-generated content on SM mediates the relationship between the attractiveness of travel photos on SM and future destination intention. (See Fig. 1b.)
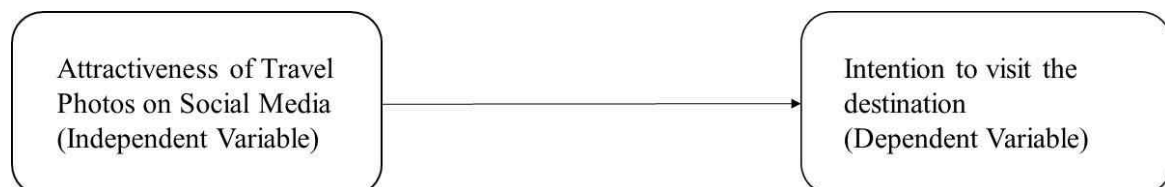
Fig. 1a. Conceptual framework of the total effect model
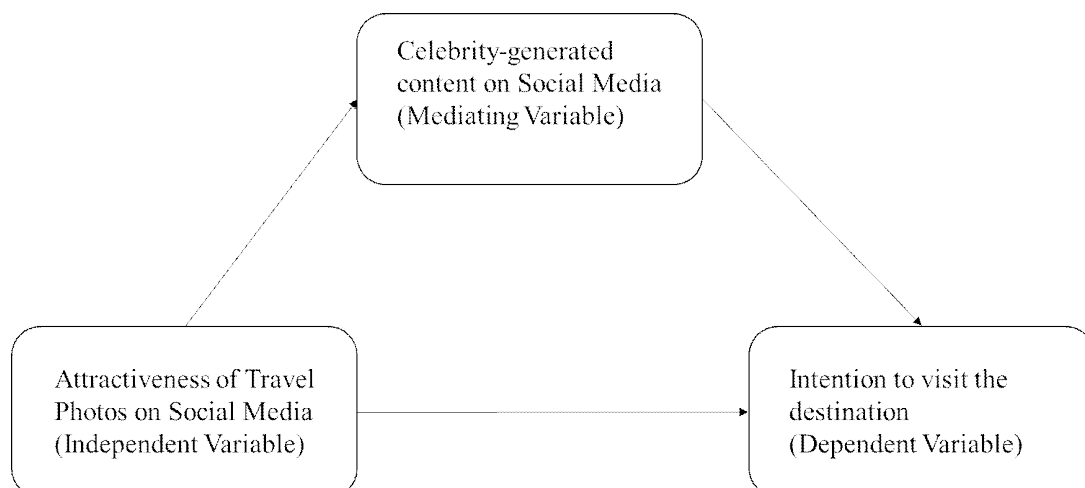
Fig. 1b. Conceptual framework of the mediation model

METHOD

Convenience sampling was used to collect data. Data were collected from January to March 2019 using online and paper-and-pencil surveys. A total of 388 valid questionnaires were collected and used for quantitative analysis. Cape Verde was selected as the future destination for travel photos (UNWTO) because it demonstrates characteristics of the four above key categories. Measurement items were adopted from previous studies (Kim & Stepchenkova, 2015; Filieri et al., 2021) and modified according to the context of this study. The questionnaire consists of four sections, namely, attractiveness of travel photos, respondents' celebrity-generated content, respondents' intention to visit Cape Verde in the future and respondents' demographic information. The questionnaire was originally designed in English, translated by an academic professional to Chinese and retranslated to English (Pham, Tučková & Jabbour, 2019). Respondents were asked to rate their opinion on the attractiveness of travel photos on SM, celebrity-generated content and intention to visit Cape Verde in the future using a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree). The four sub-hypotheses were further analysed and denoted hypotheses 1a, 1b, 1c and 1d. Hypotheses 2a, 2b, 2c and 2d focus on the mediating effect of celebrity-generated content on SM on the relationship between the attractiveness of Cape Verde travel photos on SM under the categories of 'nature & landscape', 'way of life', 'architecture/buildings' and 'people' as well as intention to visit Cape Verde as a future destination. Regression was adopted to test the effect of the developed hypotheses, and the PROCESS model was employed to investigate the interactive influences (Pham, Tučková & Jabbour, 2019). Andrew Hayes' PROCESS (v3.4.1) macro was applied to examine the mediation effect of celebrity-generated content on SM on the relationship between the attractiveness of the identified travel photos on SM and destination intention, with Cape Verde as the destination.

FINDINGS

Figure 2a shows the total effect of the attractiveness of Cape Verde travel photos on SM under the 'nature & landscape' category on intention to visit Cape Verde as a future destination (total effect: 0.38, 95% CI = 0.28–0.49). These findings are consistent with Hypothesis 1a. Figure 2b demonstrates the mediating effect of celebrity-generated content on SM on the relationship between the attractiveness of the Cape Verde travel photos on SM under the 'nature & landscape' category and intention to visit Cape Verde as a future destination. The indirect effect was tested using nonparametric bootstrapping with 5,000 samples. The indirect effect (IE = 0.1187) was statistically significant in the above case, with 95% CI = 0.0657– 0.1707. These results support Hypothesis 2a.

Figure 3a shows the total effect of the attractiveness of Cape Verde travel photos on SM under the 'people' category on intention to visit Cape Verde as a future destination (total effect: 0.39, 95% CI = 0.31–0.47). These findings support Hypothesis 1b. Figure 3b illustrates the mediating effect of celebrity-generated content on SM on the relationship between the attractiveness of the Cape Verde travel photos on SM under the 'people' category and intention to visit Cape Verde as a future destination. The indirect effect was tested using nonparametric bootstrapping with 5,000 samples. The indirect effect (IE = 0.0934) was statistically significant in the above case, with 95% CI = 0.0535– 0.1412. These findings are consistent with Hypothesis 2b.

Figure 4a shows the total effect of the attractiveness of Cape Verde travel photos on SM under the 'architecture/buildings' category on intention to visit Cape Verde as a future destination (total effect: 0.41, 95% CI = 0.33–0.50). These findings support Hypothesis 1c. Figure 4b presents the mediating effect of celebrity-generated content on SM on the relationship between the attractiveness of the Cape Verde travel photos on SM under the 'architecture/buildings' category and intention to visit Cape Verde as a future destination. The indirect effect was tested using nonparametric bootstrapping with 5,000 samples. The indirect effect (IE = 0.1039) in the above case was statistically significant, with 95% CI = 0.0577–0.1591. These findings are consistent with Hypothesis 2c.

Figure 5a illustrates the total effect of the

attractiveness of Cape Verde travel photos on SM under the 'way of life' category on intention to visit Cape Verde as a future destination (total effect: 0.43, 95% CI = 0.34–0.52). These findings are consistent with Hypothesis 1d. Figure 5b demonstrates the mediating effect of celebrity-generated content on SM on the relationship between the attractiveness of the Cape Verde travel photos on SM under the 'way
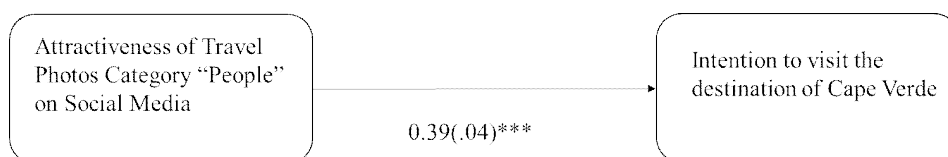
of life' category and intention to visit Cape Verde as a future destination. The indirect effect was tested using nonparametric bootstrapping with 5,000 samples. The indirect effect (IE = 0.0957) was statistically significant in the above case, with 95% CI = 0.0511–0.1498. These findings support Hypothesis 2d.
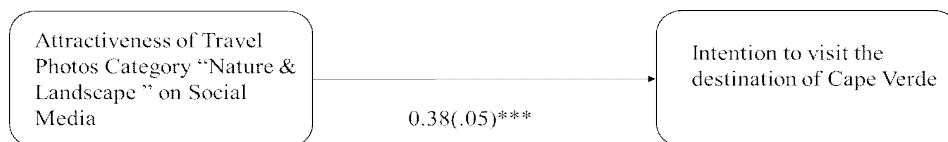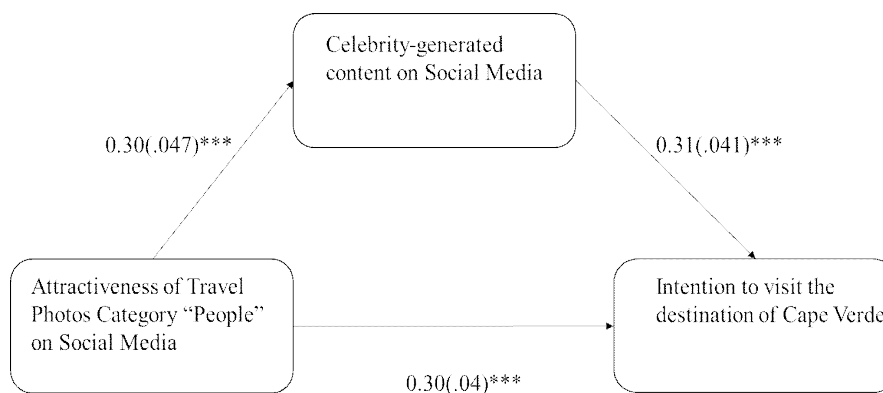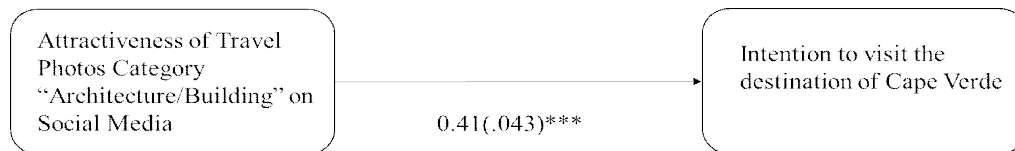

Fig. 2a. Total effect Model
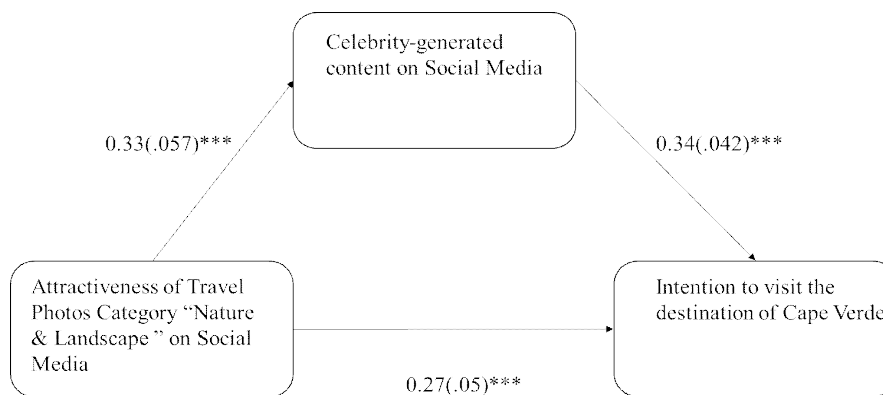
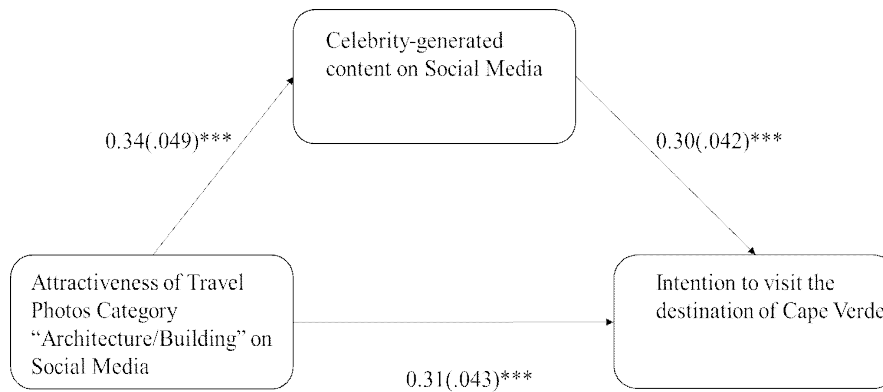**Fig. 2b. Mediation model**
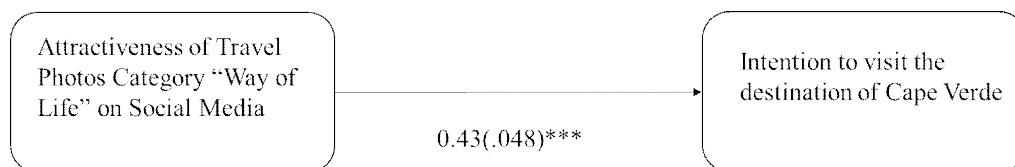

Fig. 3a. Total effect model
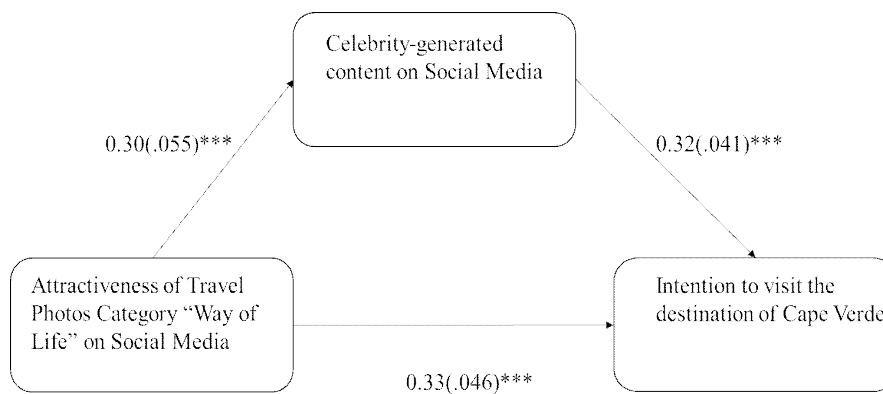

Fig. 3b. Mediation model

Fig. 4a. Total effect model

Fig. 4b. Mediation model

Fig. 5a. Total effect model

Fig. 5b. Mediation model

IMPLICATIONS or CONCLUSION

The impact of celebrity-generated content on SM on destination choice intention is verified. Therefore, the attractiveness of travel photos on SM indirectly affects the destination intention through celebrity-generated content on SM as a mediating variable. The results of the quantitative study showed that all four categories significantly and indirectly affect this relation. Celebrity-generated content on SM can also be an effective means for developing intention towards a destination choice through travel photos. Previous studies revealed that travel photos could affect past and potential tourists' perception attitudes towards a destination and intention to visit (Kim & Stepchenkova, 2015). This study demonstrated an in-depth understanding of various types of travel photos, especially in SM. The

results of this study can provide a theoretical reference for identifying specific types of travel photos affecting tourists' behavioural intentions and help destination marketers identify the most influential domain themes amongst the top four categories of 'nature & landscape', 'way of life', 'architecture/buildings' and 'people' in terms of implications in the industry. Destination marketers can use these domain themes in their online advertising to create and share destination travel photos on SM and attract viewers to future destinations. Celebrity-generated content can also be employed as marketing tools for enhancing the attractiveness of travel photos on SM. Destination marketers can promote destinations through the four identified travel photo categories using SM channels with celebrity-generated content.

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