



Received: 15-01-2026  
Accepted: 25-02-2026

ISSN: 2583-049X

## **Travel-Related Reality Programs as a Tool to Arouse Tourists' Travel Inspiration: A Case Study in Vietnam**

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### **Abstract**

Research on travel-related reality programs has expanded significantly in recent years. However, studies exploring the psychological and behavioral influences of reality show participants on tourists' travel planning behavior remain limited. This study investigates the connections and underlying mechanisms between perceptions of the charisma and humor of reality show participants and tourists' travel planning behavior. Using structural equation modeling and bootstrapping analysis, this study tests the hypotheses on a sample of 403 respondents, focusing on the popular travel reality program "2 days 1 night" (Vietnamese version). The results demonstrate the partial mediating role of inspiration in the relationship between perceived sincerity, perceived professionalism, perceived humor, and tourists' travel planning behavior. Meanwhile, the indirect effect of perceived attractiveness on tourists' travel planning

behavior is fully mediated by inspiration. These findings better explain how reality show participants influence tourists' travel planning, using the source credibility theory and cognitive-emotional theory to analyze audience engagement through sincerity, humor, and professionalism. The study highlights inspiration as a key emotion driving travel desires, extending behavioral research by incorporating emotional stages often overlooked in prior studies. In addition, the study highlights tourism reality shows as effective destination marketing tools. Key factors for success include selecting credible, charismatic, and humorous participants over mere physical attractiveness, as they inspire travel planning. Program producers should design engaging, emotionally resonant content that allows participants to showcase their knowledge and humor to enhance persuasion.

**Keywords:** Travel-Related Reality Program, Source Credibility, Humor, Inspiration, Travel Planning Behavior

### **1. Introduction**

In recent years, reality programs have become dominant in the global entertainment industry, shaping perceptions, behaviors, and even travel decisions (Fu *et al.*, 2016) <sup>[17]</sup>. Reality programs featuring travel, cultural exploration, or challenges in exotic and novel locations have particularly influenced viewers' desire to visit the depicted destinations (Ruebottom *et al.*, 2022) <sup>[39]</sup>. This phenomenon, often referred to as "film-induced tourism" or "media-related tourism," highlights the powerful role of visual storytelling in shaping consumer desires and travel motivations (Beeton, 2021) <sup>[7]</sup>. While traditional media, such as films, documentaries, and user-generated videos (UGV), have long been recognized for their impact on tourism (Connell, 2012; Nguyen *et al.*, 2025) <sup>[12, 35]</sup>, reality television is unique due to its unscripted nature, relatability, and frequent portrayal of authentic travel experiences (Steeves, 2008) <sup>[44]</sup>.

In Vietnam, the recent surge in travel-related reality programs, such as "2 Days 1 Night" (Vietnamese version), "Running Man" (Vietnamese version), and "Brilliant Journey", has positively impacted the tourism industry (Vietnam Report, 2024) <sup>[48]</sup>. Participants in these programs are often famous artists (singers, actors, comedians, etc.) or social media influencers (TikTokers, YouTubers, etc.) (Barta *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[4]</sup>. According to a survey in the Vietnam Report (2024) <sup>[48]</sup>, 55.8% of respondents said that reality programs had influenced their travel plans. Of these, 75.7% changed their travel destinations based on locations featured in the programs, 54.1% chose to use services at hotels or restaurants that had appeared in the shows, and 45.9% noted an increase in travel frequency due to inspiration from these programs.

Previous studies suggest that viewers often develop parasocial interactions (PSI) with reality show participants, leading to emotional connections and an increased desire to emulate their experiences (Fu *et al.*, 2016; Bi *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[17, 8]</sup>. Beyond PSI, Kim and Kim (2020) <sup>[27]</sup> took a motivation-based approach, arguing that the relationship between viewers' motivations and

their satisfaction with the viewing experience is mediated by presence, which positively influences attitudes toward tourist destinations.

While existing research focuses on viewer motivations and PSI, Jung and Childs (2020) <sup>[25]</sup> and Qiu *et al.* (2024) <sup>[38]</sup> approached the research field from the perspectives of destination and fandom. Specifically, Jung and Childs (2020) <sup>[25]</sup> emphasized that tourists' familiarity with a destination can strengthen the relationship between destination placement and beliefs. Qiu *et al.* (2024) <sup>[38]</sup> concluded that the influence of fandom on travel intention is sequentially mediated through destination brand equity and destination attachment.

Despite shedding light on mechanisms by which reality programs influence tourists' travel intentions, the extent to which these intentions translate into actual behavior remains an underexplored gap in current research. According to Ajzen (1991) <sup>[1]</sup> and Song and Witt (2012) <sup>[43]</sup>, travel intentions do not always translate into actual behavior due to unforeseen barriers (e.g., financial constraints, time limitations, or external shocks like pandemics). Therefore, studying only intention may limit the marketing benefits of travel reality TV shows for tourism. Meanwhile, behavioral data (e.g., GPS tracking and booking records) provide valuable insights for tourism businesses' infrastructure development and marketing strategies (Shoval and Ahas, 2016) <sup>[42]</sup>. But to date, we know little about the potential impact of these reality shows on tourist behavior. Therefore, investigating the effect of reality shows on tourist behavior may offer more practical implications for tourism practitioners.

In addition to the gaps in behavioral research in the context of experiencing reality shows about tourism, Santos *et al.* (2022) <sup>[40]</sup> and Shields (2006) <sup>[41]</sup> also argued that behavioral studies in travel planning through online platforms often overlook the essential aspect of emotions. In this regard, Bastiaansen *et al.* (2020) also stated that emotional factors are the basis for proposing effective marketing strategies. Therefore, studying this factor in the current context can provide meaningful marketing solution proposals.

Finally, while existing studies have focused on the influence of reality shows on audience travel intentions, to date, no study has thoroughly analyzed the attributes and mechanisms by which reality TV show participants may influence tourists' travel decisions. In this regard, Le and Hancer (2021) <sup>[29]</sup> noted that although anyone can share opinions through online platforms, few can significantly influence audiences' travel decision-making processes. Hence, it is essential to understand why viewers want to imitate travel vloggers, examining the traits that enable these figures to impact their audience.

This study provides a framework for addressing existing gaps by applying the Cognitive-Emotional Theory (CET). This theory describes how reality programs influence tourists' travel behavior through cognition, emotion, and behavior. In the cognitive stage, the authors incorporate characteristics that tourists may perceive about reality show participants, which can be stimuli for tourists' emotions. The authors conceptualize inspiration as an emotion mediating the relationship between cognition and tourists' travel planning behavior. Such a research implementation process helps the authors answer the following research questions: (1) What attributes of celebrities participating in reality travel shows can be perceived by tourists during their

experience of those shows? (2) What are the mechanisms by which these attributes influence tourists' travel planning behavior?

This study is among the first to explore the role of this intriguing tourism marketing tool in developing tourism in Vietnam. Theoretically, the study provides a framework describing how reality programs influence tourists' behavior. It also extends CET by incorporating factors related to the role of reality show participants identified in the cognitive stage. The study clarifies how inspiration informs and impacts tourists' travel planning behavior. The research outcomes aid tourism marketers in picking the most inspiring celebrities from travel reality programs to better connect with consumers and impact their travel choices.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Theoretical foundation

This study applies CET, proposed by Arnold (1960) <sup>[2]</sup>, to develop a comprehensive framework for how reality programs influence tourists' travel planning behavior. Specifically, CET suggests that when an individual faces an external stimulus, cognitive evaluations of the stimulus will occur, generating an emotional response mechanism and performing avoidance or approach behaviors towards the stimulus (Arnold, 1960) <sup>[2]</sup>. Nguyen *et al.* (2025) <sup>[35]</sup> argued that CET is valuable and has been validated in the tourism context. CET can be used to explain variations in emotions and provides a rich basis for understanding the antecedents and outcomes of these emotions (Hosany *et al.*, 2020). In particular, when investigating the origins of specific emotions, CET offers the best solution (Hosany *et al.*, 2020).

Over the past two decades, CET has been the most prominent tool used in emotion investigation studies (Xu and Zhao, 2020). These perspectives allow us to explore the fit between the identified research gaps and CET. To apply CET in the research context, we argue that the influence of reality show participants on tourists' travel planning behavior consists of three stages: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral.

In the cognitive stage, individuals process information to form perceptions of external stimuli (Akram *et al.*, 2017). Here, reality programs are considered external stimuli. When watching these programs, tourists form perceptions about the participants, who interact with and provide information to the audience (Bi *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[8]</sup>. Through their interactions and sharing, tourists gain valuable information about destinations, and tourists expect this source to be credible (Nguyen *et al.*, 2025) <sup>[35]</sup>. To assess source credibility, the authors applied the Source Credibility Theory (SCT) proposed by Eisend (2006) <sup>[15]</sup>, where the information source is conceptualized as a "spokesperson" comprising three components: sincerity, attraction, and professionalism. Thus, when watching reality programs, tourists may perceive the participants as "credible spokespersons."

Sincerity refers to the spokesperson's internal attributes, including honesty and trustworthiness, in their sharing (Eisend, 2006) <sup>[15]</sup>. Jensen *et al.* (2021) emphasize that audiences evaluate sincerity through external expressions and internal emotions. Consistency between external expressions (e.g., speech and facial expressions) and internal emotions indicates high sincerity, while inconsistency suggests a lack of sincerity. Attraction pertains to

presentation (Eisend, 2006) <sup>[15]</sup>. Participants strive to present and share destination-related information emotionally, while being engaging and attractive. Eisend (2006) <sup>[15]</sup> notes that audiences value information more when it is presented attractively. Professionalism refers to the participants' achievements, knowledge, experience, accuracy, diversity of information, presentation skills, and professional attitude in narrating and presenting destinations.

In addition to the spokesperson's credibility, at this cognitive stage, the authors argue that visitors also evaluate the participants' humor. Perceived humor refers to an individual's subjective assessment or interpretation of a stimulus (e.g., a joke, situation, or comment) as funny or interesting (Martin, 2007). Perceived humor emphasizes the audience's personal experience and judgment (Martin, 2007). In the tourism context, Tu *et al.* (2020) <sup>[47]</sup> argue that humor is essential for tour guides, as it facilitates pleasant interpersonal interactions, maintains satisfaction, and significantly impacts the quality of tourists' experiences. Tu *et al.* (2020) <sup>[47]</sup> view reality show participants as tour guides, defining perceived humor as the audience's subjective perception of the participants' ability to create joy and amusement through interactions and information sharing.

The second stage is emotion. Perceptions influence individuals to convert their mental states (psychological/emotional factors) in response to external events or stimuli. Arnold (1960) <sup>[2]</sup> emphasizes that subsequent behavioral tendencies will depend on whether emotions are positive or negative. The specific emotional factor highlighted here is inspiration. Thrash and Elliot (2003) <sup>[45]</sup> define inspiration as being evoked by external stimuli, such as individuals or phenomena. Inspired individuals are moved by the superiority of the inspiring object (e.g., truth, skill, kindness, or beauty) and are motivated to transmit, realize, or emulate these qualities. Nguyen *et al.* (2025) <sup>[35]</sup> note that the concepts of emotion and inspiration share similar characteristics, as both reflect products of perceptions about external stimuli and guide subsequent behavior. Thus, the authors argue that perceptions from reality programs inspire tourists to travel.

It is important to emphasize that conceptualizing inspiration as an emotion is particularly relevant in travel planning. Thrash and Elliot (2003) <sup>[45]</sup> argue that inspiration exists at two levels: as a personality trait and as a state. Between individuals, there is a pre-existing trait of inspiration (as a personality trait), which is short-lived. Meanwhile, individuals can also experience inspirational states in daily life through social interactions, which last longer than trait inspiration.

In the current context, Jung and Childs (2020) <sup>[25]</sup> argue that reality programs are an essential source of travel information for tourists to plan trips. Information-seeking activities for travel are complex and multi-stage (Liao *et al.*, 2010), requiring time for consideration (Valdés and Cubillos, 2009). The information-seeking process can inspire tourists. However, it is essential to note that individuals with a pre-existing trait of inspiration may have it activated by reality programs, leading to an inspired state that motivates travel planning behavior. If the planning goal is not yet achieved, trait inspiration can serve as an anchor to maintain inspiration until the planning goal is completed. Based on these arguments, the authors conclude that inspiration is an emotion that can emerge from tourists'

cognitive processes in response to reality programs and guide destination-oriented behavior.

The final stage is behavior, which results from cognitive and emotional evaluations (Arnold, 1960) <sup>[2]</sup>. This stage describes the activities when individuals organize and prepare for a trip, including destination selection, information gathering, budgeting, booking accommodations and transportation, itinerary planning, and risk assessment (e.g., health, safety, or weather concerns) (Xiang *et al.*, 2015) <sup>[49]</sup>. In the context of seeking travel information on online video platforms, Nguyen *et al.* (2025) <sup>[35]</sup> define travel planning behavior as when tourists plan items, destinations, and activities for future trips by referencing vivid footage and evaluations of other people's experiences at destinations. Based on these definitions, the authors argue that travel planning behavior in the context of reality programs involves tourists seeking and considering travel information from these programs to plan transportation, activities, and accommodations for future trips.

## 2.2 Hypothesis development

### 2.2.1 Source credibility and travel planning behavior

When seeking travel information from visual content, such as travel videos, tourists choose credible sources (Hautz *et al.*, 2014). To enhance credibility, presenters must share information sincerely and knowledgeably (Hautz *et al.*, 2014). In a survey, van Dam and van Reijmersdal (2019) found that most adolescents consider user-generated content authentic and sincere, valuing sincerity as a key factor for continued engagement and behavior alignment.

Crowel *et al.* (2014) note that tourists rely on travel videos for planning due to the perceived professionalism, which requires investment and resources from content creators. Tourists prioritize a presenter's professionalism over video quality, using the presenter's insights to decide destinations (Maria-Irina and Istudor, 2019). Communication style, information depth, and quality represent a "professional personal brand," which tourists value highly when planning trips (Stoldt *et al.*, 2019).

Attraction stems from appearance, charisma, personality, and lifestyle (Erdogan, 1999). This factor positively impacts brand image, attitudes, and purchase intentions (Nguyen *et al.*, 2025) <sup>[35]</sup>. Greater attraction drives product- or brand-oriented behavior (Kamins, 1990). For example, a vlogger's positive emotions toward advertised products can influence consumer behavior (Muda and Hamzah, 2021), and a YouTuber's engaging product reviews can directly impact purchase intentions (Till and Busler, 2000).

Travel reality programs and videos are visual content that tourists use for planning. Presenters or vloggers in travel videos play roles similar to reality show participants, interacting with and providing travel information. Thus, tourists may gain perceptions of participants' sincerity, professionalism, and attraction when watching reality programs. Based on these arguments, the study proposes hypotheses H1, H2, and H3:

*H1: Sincerity positively influences tourists' travel planning behavior.*

*H2: Professionalism positively influences tourists' travel planning behavior.*

*H3: Attraction positively influences tourists' travel planning behavior.*

**2.2.2 Perceived humor and travel planning behavior**

Tsaur and Teng (2017) [46] argue that humor enhances tour guides’ charm and service quality, encouraging tourists to maintain relationships and exhibit positive behavioral responses. Humorous tour guides can promote environmentally responsible behavior (Lin *et al.*, 2022) [31]. Similarly, Ji *et al.* (2024) [24] found that humorous reminders at heritage sites encourage responsible tourism. In the context of travel reality programs, participants provide destination information, making humor essential for a positive audience reaction. Thus, the study proposes hypothesis H4:

*H4: Perceived humor positively influences tourists’ travel planning behavior.*

**2.2.3 Mediating effect of inspiration**

Many scholars support the view that positive emotions evoked by stimuli influence tourists’ vacation choices (Kim *et al.*, 2014; Walters *et al.*, 2012). Travel videos shared by users can trigger mental enjoyment, motivating tourists to realize their “dreams” at destinations (Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009). Emotional responses can mediate the relationship between perceptions and behavioral outcomes (Hosany *et al.*, 2020). Van Tilburg *et al.* (2018) identify inspiration as an emotional experience that motivates behavior when triggered by external factors. Thus, inspiration can mediate the relationship between perceptions and behavior (Böttger *et al.*, 2017; Thrash and Elliot, 2003 [45]), and online platforms can inspire potential tourists to plan trips (Shan and King, 2015).

Travel reality programs are information sources conveyed through participants. Their content and presentation can inspire tourists to visit destinations. Based on this, the study proposes hypotheses H5a, H5b, H5c, and H5d:

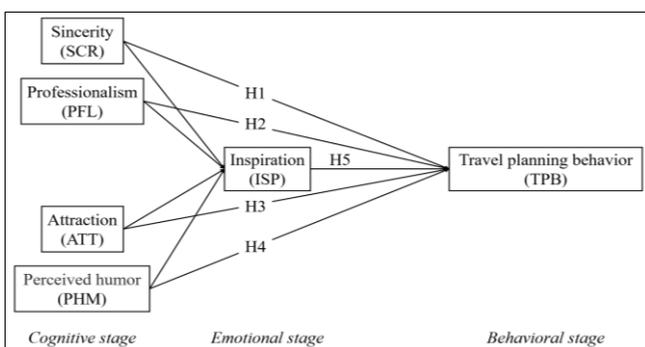
*H5a: Inspiration mediates the relationship between perceived sincerity and travel planning behavior.*

*H5b: Inspiration mediates the relationship between perceived professionalism and travel planning behavior.*

*H5c: Inspiration mediates the relationship between perceived attraction and travel planning behavior.*

*H5d: Inspiration mediates the relationship between perceived humor and travel planning behavior.*

Figure 1 illustrates a conceptual framework derived from earlier literature reviews and hypothesis formulation.



**Fig 1:** Proposed conceptual framework

**3. Methodology**

**3.1 Measurements**

For the empirical, the study identified measurements for research variables based on the literature review. The measurement model used a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Sincerity, professionalism, and attraction scales were adapted from Eisend (2006) [15], with sincerity (three items), professionalism (six items), and attraction (five items). Perceived humor (three items) was adapted from Barta *et al.* (2023) [4]. Inspiration (four items) was adapted from Thrash and Elliot (2003) [45]. Travel planning behavior (six items) was adapted from Nguyen *et al.* (2025) [35].

**3.2 Data Collection**

The study surveyed viewers of the travel reality program “2 Days 1 Night” who used the program for travel planning. The program was selected due to its more than 3 billion views on social media, ranking it as the most-watched social media content in 2022 (Kompa, 2023) [28].

Participants were recruited via snowball sampling, starting with the authors’ networks. The authors offered a small gift to all participants to increase survey participation. Screening questions ensured participants watched reality programs and used them for travel planning:

1. Have you watched the travel reality program “2 Days 1 Night”?
2. After watching, have you visited the featured destinations?
3. When was your last visit to a featured destination?
4. Which destinations have you visited?

Surveys were conducted online and offline over three months (January to March 2025), yielding 438 responses, and 403 were valid. Descriptive analysis showed more female (60.19%) than male (39.81%) respondents. This number is quite consistent with Nielsen’s report (2022) [32], which mentioned that more female audiences watch television. The majority of respondents aged 25–35 (41.16%), single (64.21%), and earning over 25 million VND (46.19%).

**3.3 Data Analysis**

This study analyzed the data using partial least squares (PLS) with the support of SmartPLS software for the following reasons: (1) PLS is capable of simultaneously estimating complex research models with numerous variables using numerous parameters (Hair *et al.*, 2014) [22]; (2) PLS is frequently employed in travel research (Do Valle and Assaker, 2016) [14] and is particularly well-suited for research that is prediction-oriented (Khoi *et al.*, 2020) [26], in line with the objective of this study; (3) PLS also enables simultaneous testing of structural and measurement models, which can lessen bias in the estimates (Hair *et al.*, 2019) [21]. Furthermore, measures of internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were taken to reduce the possibility of systematic measurement error.

Prior to measurement model and hypothesis testing, this study evaluated the potential for common method variance (CMV). Using Harman’s single-factor test, the analysis showed that the first factor accounted for 47.087% of the variance, indicating that CMV was not present (Cooper *et al.*, 2020) [13].

### 4. Results

#### 4.1 Measurement Model Evaluation

This study applied the procedure proposed by Hair *et al.* (2019) [21] to evaluate the measurement model. First, the authors used Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , composite reliability (CR), and outer loadings to test the scale's reliability and show the consistency of the measurement items (Hair *et al.*, 2023) [18]. The results in Table 1 show that the outer loadings of all items are greater than 0.7, and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  and the CR of all the constructs are also greater than 0.7. Therefore, it can be concluded that the current measurement model is reliable.

**Table 1:** Reliability of the measurement model

Variables	Outer loadings	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Composite reliability	AVE
Sincerity	0.870-0.947	0.912	0.945	0.851
Professionalism	0.779-0.881	0.925	0.942	0.730
Attraction	0.874-0.912	0.936	0.951	0.797
Humor	0.918-0.925	0.913	0.945	0.852
Inspiration	0.836-0.936	0.927	0.948	0.821
Travel planning behavior	0.837-0.908	0.939	0.952	0.767

Second, the researchers assessed validity using the AVE method. AVE measures the variance captured by a latent construct relative to measurement error, and a threshold above 0.5 is considered acceptable (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) [16]. As presented in Table 1, the AVE values for all the constructs ranged from 0.730 to 0.852, confirming the convergent validity of the measurement scales.

**Table 2:** Fornell-Larcker criterion for discriminant validity

	PAT	PHU	PPS	PSC	TIS	TPB
PAT	<b>0.893</b>					
PHU	0.564	<b>0.923</b>				
PPS	0.566	0.567	<b>0.854</b>			
PSC	0.264	0.416	0.502	<b>0.922</b>		
TIS	0.590	0.563	0.584	0.407	<b>0.906</b>	
TPB	0.493	0.616	0.545	0.468	0.672	<b>0.876</b>

Note. The bold values in the diagonal of the matrix are the square roots of AVE.

Finally, to assess discriminant validity, the study applied Fornell and Larcker's (1981) [16] criterion, which requires the square root of the AVE to exceed the correlations between constructs. As shown in Table 3, all constructs meet this condition, confirming discriminant validity. Following Hair *et al.* (2023) [18], the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio was used as a supplementary measure, with values below 0.85 indicating strong discriminant validity. Table 5 demonstrates that all HTMT ratios were within this threshold, further supporting the discriminant validity of the constructs.

**Table 3:** HTMT criterion for discriminant validity

	PAT	PHU	PPS	PSC	TIS	TPB
PAT						
PHU	0.610					
PPS	0.608	0.617				
PSC	0.284	0.454	0.546			
TIS	0.632	0.612	0.629	0.441		
TPB	0.526	0.665	0.584	0.506	0.720	

#### 4.2 Structural Model Evaluation

Following the recommendations of Hair *et al.* (2011) [20],

this study employed a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples to assess the structural models. The results in Table 4 reveal that PSC (p-values = 0.005) and PHU (p-values = 0.000) positively influence TPB. Thus, H1 and H4 are supported. Meanwhile, the influence of PPS and PAT on TPB is not statistically significant. Thus, hypotheses H2 and H3 are rejected. In addition, all four indirect effects were statistically significant. Specifically, ISP mediates the positive relationships between PSC ( $\beta = 0.05$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), PPS ( $\beta = 0.092$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ), PAT ( $\beta = 0.126$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and PHU ( $\beta = 0.083$ ,  $p = 0.027$ ) with TPB, thereby supporting H5a, H5b, H5c and H5d.

**Table 4:** Analysis of direct effects

Hypotheses	Relationships	$\beta$	t-values	p-values	Decision
H1	PSC $\rightarrow$ TPB	0.150	2.790	0.005	Supported
H2	PPS $\rightarrow$ TPB	0.063	1.243	0.214	Not supported
H3	PAT $\rightarrow$ TPB	0.023	0.465	0.642	Not supported
H4	PHU $\rightarrow$ TPB	0.277	5.773	0.000	Supported
H5a	PSC $\rightarrow$ TIS $\rightarrow$ TPB	0.05	2.215	0.000	Supported
H5b	PPS $\rightarrow$ TIS $\rightarrow$ TPB	0.092	3.287	0.004	Supported
H5c	PAT $\rightarrow$ TIS $\rightarrow$ TPB	0.126	4.520	0.001	Supported
H5d	PHU $\rightarrow$ TIS $\rightarrow$ TPB	0.083	2.911	0.027	Supported

The study followed the analytical approaches of Zhao *et al.* (2010) [53] and Nitzl *et al.* (2016) [36], utilizing variance accounted-for (VAF) indices to determine the type of mediation effects. As presented in Table 5, the VAF values for the indirect effect of PSC, PPS and PHU on TPB are 25.09%, 59.61% and 23.17%, respectively, indicating partial mediation within the 20-80% range established by Hair *et al.* (2016) [19]. Meanwhile, the indirect effect of PAT on TPB exhibited VAF values of 84.69%, indicating full mediation because  $VAF > 80\%$  (Hair *et al.*, 2016) [19].

**Table 5:** Result of the mediation effect of inspiration

Hy po.	Relationshi ps	Indirect effect coefficients	Direct effect coefficients	Total effect coefficients	VA F	Mediatio n type
H5 a	PSC $\rightarrow$ TIS $\rightarrow$ TPB	0.050	0.150	0.201	25.09%	Partial mediation
H5 b	PPS $\rightarrow$ TIS $\rightarrow$ TPB	0.092	0.063	0.155	59.61%	Partial mediation
H5 c	PAT $\rightarrow$ TIS $\rightarrow$ TPB	0.126	0.023	0.149	84.69%	Full mediation
H5 d	PHU $\rightarrow$ TIS $\rightarrow$ TPB	0.083	0.277	0.360	23.17%	Partial mediation

This study evaluated the predictive validity of the structural model using two indices,  $R^2$  and  $Q^2$ . The results in Table 6 show that the  $R^2$  indices of TIS and TPB are 0.479 and 0.559, respectively. These indices mean that TIS has moderate explanatory power while TPB has substantial explanatory power (Chin, 1998) [10]. At the same time, the results show that the  $Q^2$  indices of TIS and TPB are greater

than 0, meaning that the predictive values of these variables are acceptable (Chin, 1998) [10].

**Table 6:** Analysis result of R<sup>2</sup> and Q<sup>2</sup> values

Variables	R <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>
TIS	0.479	0.392
TPB	0.559	0.424

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study was conducted to address research gaps related to the role of participants and the need for behavioral studies in travel planning using reality shows. The study uses CET as a theoretical foundation to describe the process through which reality shows influence tourists' travel planning in three stages: cognition, emotion, and behavior. In the cognition stage, the authors argue that tourists gain perceptions of participants' characteristics when watching reality shows. These perceptions include credibility and humor, in which credibility is conceptualized as the spokesperson's credibility (including sincerity, professionalism and attraction) based on Eisend (2006) [15]. The results showed that sincerity and humor positively influenced tourists' travel planning behavior. Meanwhile, professionalism and attractiveness indirectly influenced tourists' travel planning behavior. Such results shed light on the first research question regarding the influence of the attributes of celebrities participating in travel reality shows on tourists' travel planning behavior. The authors also suggest that these perceptions influence tourists' emotions and that inspiration is an emotion triggered by tourists' perceptions of the participants. This emotion, in turn, influences tourists' travel planning behavior. The results of the analysis of the mediating role of inspiration help the author conclude the mechanism of influence of the attributes of celebrities participating in reality tourism programs on tourists' travel planning behavior. Thus, the second research question has also been resolved.

The study shows a positive relationship between sincerity and travel planning behavior, contrary to Lee and Eastin (2020) [30], who found that the sincerity of social media influencers did not affect customers' online purchase intentions. To explain this difference, the authors suggest that, in the current context, participants approach destinations in an unscripted manner (Steeves, 2008) [44]. Thus, they show their most authentic self, making them more likely to create empathy with the audience, thereby increasing the likelihood of persuading the audience to approach a destination.

The study also shows that inspiration partially mediates the relationship between perceived sincerity and travel planning behavior. Since the online environment is challenging to control and evaluate, the sincerity of media figures easily arouses positive emotions in online users, leading them to perform beneficial behaviors (Cheng *et al.*, 2020) [9]. This study emphasizes that tourists rely on the sincerity of reality show participants to plan and are influenced by the affective evaluation stage.

This study also identifies statistically insignificant relationships between perceived professionalism, attractiveness, and travel planning behavior. These results support Xu *et al.*'s (2021) [50] conclusion that employees' sales and presentation skills do not influence tourists' purchase behavior for tourism products and services. In addition, the study results are similar to Zhang and Yang's

(2022) [52] finding that online celebrity attractiveness does not influence customers' willingness to repurchase. In the present context, to explain these insignificant effects, the authors suggest that it may be due to tourists' preconceived notions about a destination (Moufakkir, 2013) [34]. Hence, tourists will ignore what participants present or demonstrate on reality shows.

However, the research results also show the indirect influence of perceived professionalism and perceived attractiveness on tourists' travel planning behavior through inspiration. These results emphasize that destination experiences through the lens of participants can provide new and positive aspects of a destination, helping tourists feel that they can relax, boosting tourists' optimism, and making them want to travel more. Therefore, even if tourists do not appreciate the professionalism and attractiveness of participants in terms of spirit, if the participants inspire tourists, tourists can still take action in relation to the destination.

Finally, the findings indicate that perceived humor indirectly influences tourists' travel planning behavior through inspiration. This finding is consistent with Ji *et al.*'s (2024) [24] study that humorous prompts at destinations can influence tourists' responsible travel behavior by expressing enjoyment of the content. Such findings emphasize that humor evokes tourists' positive emotions to persuade them to perform the behavior.

Validating the relationships between cognition, emotion, and behavior in the context of travel planning through tourism reality shows not only supports the completion of the academic aspects of the research field but also helps managers and strategic marketers outline the directions of destination brand communication and business development.

## 6. Contributions

### 6.1 Theoretical contributions

The findings enrich our understanding of the context of travel planning through reality shows. Instead of describing how audiences interact with reality show participants, which Fu *et al.* (2016) [17] and Bi *et al.* (2021) [8] refer to as PSI, this study uses SCT to describe how reality show participants interact with audiences. Specifically, these participants present "travel stories" with sincerity, professionalism, attraction, and humor to keep viewers engaged, leading to the desire of tourists to fulfill their own wishes. Furthermore, the findings provide further evidence of the diversity and suitability of SCT when investigating tourists' travel planning behavior across different media.

This study also enriches the literature on emotional tourism by using CET to investigate tourists' positive emotions aroused through reality shows. Previous studies have concluded that inspiration from tourism experiences formed after a trip motivates tourists to return (Khoi *et al.*, 2019; He *et al.*, 2021). This study conceptualizes inspiration as an emotion, thereby showing that inspiration is also evoked from vicarious experiences. From the research model, it can be seen that inspiration is formed after tourists perceive the credibility and humor of participants in travel reality programs. This inspirational experience motivates tourists to want to enjoy everything they have learned about the destination. The results from this study provide strong evidence to explain the process of forming inspiration.

Based on developing a research framework consistent with CET and integrated with SCT, this study extends the existing literature to provide predictive capabilities for travel planning behavior. By examining the mediating role of inspiration, this study addresses the shortcomings associated with omitting the emotional stage in behavioral investigations (Shields, 2006) <sup>[41]</sup>.

## 6.2 Practical Contributions

This study contributes practical implications for destination management agencies, tourism businesses, and even producers of tourism reality shows. First, the findings suggest that tourism reality shows can be considered an effective marketing tool. Collaborating with producers of reality shows to promote tourism-related products, services, or destination values could be considered. Such collaboration could improve brand and destination image while reducing costs.

Second, the research findings provide criteria that tourism practitioners should consider when seeking collaboration to develop a brand or destination image. Specifically, practitioners should only select programs featuring credible participants who demonstrate sincerity, professionalism, charisma, and humor. Such attributes will inspire tourists, motivating them to engage in destination-related behaviors.

It is crucial to emphasize that the selection of participants must be carefully evaluated. Many studies suggest that vloggers or celebrities promoting a destination should be attractive or appealing (Pornpitakpan, 2003 <sup>[37]</sup>; Cohen *et al.*, 2021; Le and Hancer, 2021 <sup>[29]</sup>). However, in travel planning—where destination attributes are often intangible and difficult to assess since tourists have not yet visited (Aye *et al.*, 2013) <sup>[3]</sup>—relying on physical attractiveness to drive behavioral intention seems less logical. Instead, tourists value information sources with opinion-based benefits, experiential insights (Ye *et al.*, 2011) <sup>[51]</sup>, and entertainment from humorous moments created by media personalities (Barta *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[4]</sup>.

Finally, for reality show producers, designing shows that allow participants to demonstrate their travel knowledge, engaging presentation skills, and humor is essential to increase persuasiveness and inspire visitors to travel. For instance, the thoughtfully crafted tasks in “Where Are We Going, Dad?” evoke emotions among audiences, including happiness and affection when fathers and children work together (such as while cooking), as well as compassion and sorrow when the children struggle or get injured (Barta *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[4]</sup>. The show’s popularity stems from featuring celebrities (like singers, actors, and athletes) and skillfully structured activities that resonate emotionally with viewers. Furthermore, incorporating destination features that offer family-friendly experiences can effectively spark viewers’ interest in traveling with their loved ones (Barta *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[4]</sup>.

## 7. Limitations

Despite its contributions to travel reality program literature, the research has a few constraints. First, as a cross-sectional study, it cannot fully determine causality, a longitudinal approach would offer a clearer understanding of the model’s relationships. Other researchers can also conduct an experiment in which viewers are shown various episodes to determine which produces stronger audience responses, like audience involvement or destination appeal. Additionally,

comparing Eastern and Western audiences could reveal compelling findings due to their differing cultural values.

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