**The Impact of Live Streaming on the Visit Intention of Audiences in the Tourism Industry Under the Epidemic**

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**ABSTRACT**

Tourism, the world's most significant and growing service industry, makes a non-negligible contribution to the gross national product of the host country. However, the industry has been hit hard since the global pandemic outbreak in 2019. As one of the emerging Internet industries in recent years, the live streaming industry has effectively alleviated this situation in the tourism industry. It has attracted the interest of a large group of people, intending to meet the needs of consumers and vividly show the live situation to viewers through the Internet. This study explores the effect of three aspects of social presence theory on the actual visit intentions of people who watch travel live streaming, which are the destination image, interaction, and production. At the same time, this article also considers destination trust as a mediating variable and self-construction as a moderating variable to study the role they play between the three social presence factors and visit intention. The data were collected through a structured and logical questionnaire based on research variables, containing the responses of 250 Chinese viewers who watched the tour live. In this study, the Process Macro of SPSS was used as a tool to examine the collected data. The findings demonstrate that the presence of destination image, interaction, and production have a significant relationship via destination trust on the visit intention. By analyzing the collected data, the consequences also indicate the mediating effect of destination trust among the three social presence factors and visit intention and the moderating effect of self-construction among all variables. Since the epidemic has occurred in recent years, few authors have studied the impact of live broadcasts under the epidemic on viewers' inner activities and travel willingness. It is one of the few studies investigating the effect of self-construal as a moderating variable and destination trust as a mediating variable in the live travel industry in the context of the epidemic. It will significantly help strengthen the interaction between anchors and viewers and improve the quality of the live webcast environment. The findings of this paper will help marketers in the tourism area understand customers' attitudes and behavior, thus, implementing better live streaming and other related technologies to increase tourist visiting intention.

*Keywords:* Social presence theory (SPT), live streaming, visit intention, tourism, China

**Introduction**

Tourism, the world's most significant and growing service industry, makes a non-negligible contribution to the gross national product of the host country (Andersson, 2007). However, the industry has been hit hard since the global pandemic outbreak in 2019. In the face of the virus, which has a high transmission rate and mortality rate, people have reduced the number of trips and even stayed away from home for a long time out of fear of the virus, while local governments have taken active measures to limit the number of people traveling in each region, such as banning entry and closing attractions. One comparison shows that before the global pandemic began, tourism accounted for 10.6% (334 million) of all jobs and 10.4% ($9.2 trillion) of global GDP, whereas the industry generated $4.7 trillion in revenue in 2020, and its share of GDP fell to 5.5% due to COVID-19 and a sharp drop in tourist liquidity (Roman et al., 2022).

Given the epidemic’s impact above, many people cannot go out to travel. As one of the emerging Internet industries in recent years, the live streaming industry has effectively alleviated this situation in the tourism industry because it has attracted the interest of a large group of people, intending to meet the needs of consumers and vividly show the live situation to viewers through the Internet (Zhao et al., 2018). With the rapid development of Internet media, thousands of Internet users, after understanding the advantages of live streaming, are marketing to a vast number of consumers through this channel in various fields. After obtaining sales data and product review data from Taobao, which is an internationally renowned live streaming platform, Chen et al. (2019) and Zhang et al. (2019) discovered that live reception fundamentally increased transaction volume by 22%, especially for experience goods ( e.g., apparel), where the value was 28% more prominent than for search goods (e.g., PC). This finding can demonstrate that online anchors generate rapidly growing profits for significant e-commerce and media platforms by live streaming for these platforms.

Based on the above, the effect brought by the network anchor should not be underestimated, and this effect will also be brought into the travel live broadcast. Travel anchors in the live streaming industry are also tourists. They organize the places they have visited into video logs or use live broadcasts to present them to the audience, which can easily immerse them in the scene. It has optimized the industry's publicity model, making more and more viewers increase their visiting intentions to tourist places through various kinds of streaming ways. At the same time, many viewers become interested in previously underappreciated tourist destinations after watching live streams.

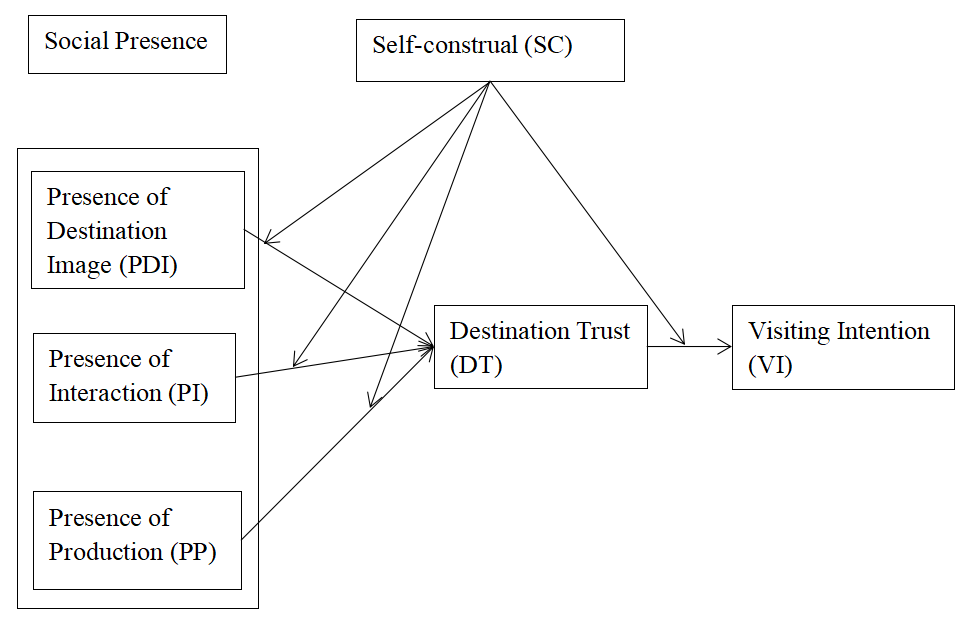
To deeply understand the impact of live streaming on the tourism industry under the epidemic, it is an excellent choice to start with the effect of live broadcasting on the audience's willingness to visit, that is, visiting intention. A theory framework named the social presence theory is built to explore this study. As Rice (1993) stated, Social Presence Theory (SPT) is widely used in research on how social presence affects the nature of the interaction, thereby changing the user's interactive experience, which can also impact users’ decisions. In this paper, the theory is shown that the social presence perspective displayed in the live tourism broadcast affects the viewers' interactive experience and thus their willingness to go on the trip. At the same time, the theory also adds research and discussion on destination trust, a self-recognition of the subjective perception of the destination (Roodurmun & Juwaheer, 2010), and self-construction, a way of personal understanding and perception (Han & Humphreys, 2016). In this way, the theory is consistent with the research topic, so it is recommended to be used for this study.

**Literature Review**

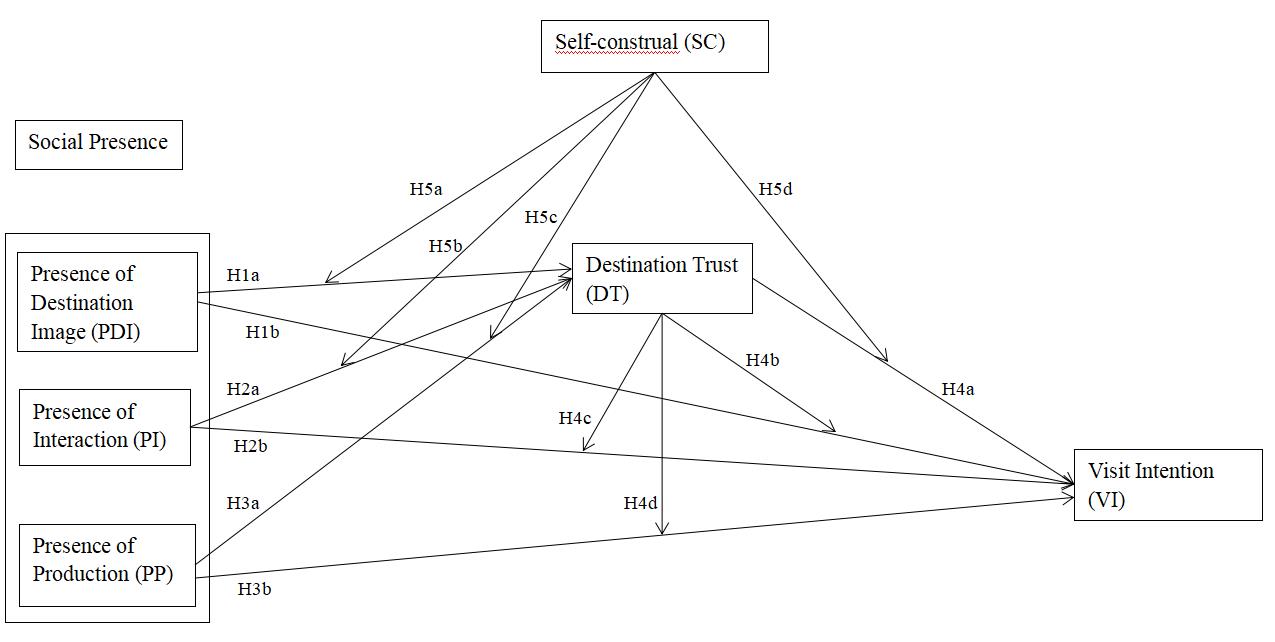
1. The Social Presence Theory (SPT) framework

Social presence theory (SPT) refers to the extent to which a person is seen to have a real presence in the communication or virtual surroundings of online media, and its level influences the experience and outcome of people's interactions with others in the online virtual world (Bickle et al., 2019). In the view of Mallmann & Maçada’s(2019), the concept of social presence is relevant to an increasing number of online users in today's era of increasing use of online media programs (e.g., communication, information sharing). When people use network media programs, they are already in a network virtual environment, so the things they feel and experience are not real in essence. However, with the advancement of Internet technology and the continuous improvement of the virtual network environment, many users will have an immersive feeling and feel the real existence in this virtual world. The theoretical framework of social existence is relatively broad, and can be used by scholars to study the influence of different social existence factors on different variables. Since this paper is to study the impact of travel live broadcast on the audiences’ willingness to travel, it adopts the theory of Zhang et al.(2021), which includes three social presence factors, presence of destination trust (PDI), presence of interaction (PI) and presence of production (pp), as well as destination trust as a mediator variable and self-construal as a moderator variable.

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework - SPT



1. Conceptual Framework

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**Research Method**

In order to ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of the test results, all variables and questions are derived from previous studies by scholars. The measures of the three different dimensions of social presence for the presence of destination image (PDI), presence of interaction (PI), and presence of production (PP) are taken from Mahasuweerachai & Qu (2011), Deng et al. (2022), and Zhang et al. (2021), respectively. The items used to study destination trust (DT) and self-construal (SC) are derived from Ansi & Han (2019) and Wang et al. (2015). Visit intention (VI) uses questions from Abubakar & Ilkan (2016) to assess. The instrument used to test all variables is a seven-point Likert, from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree), representing the different levels of agreement of the participants for each test question.

**Findings**

All the hypotheses are significantly accepted as shown in the table 1.

Table 1. Conclusion of Hypotheses

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| --- | --- |
| Hypothesis | Results |
| H1a: The presence of destination image has a positive relationship with destination trust. | Supported |
| H1b: The presence of destination image has a positive relationship with visiting intention. | Supported |
| H2a: The presence of interaction has a positive relationship with destination trust. | Supported |
| H2b: The presence of interaction has a positive relationship with visiting intention. | Supported |
| H3a: The presence of production has a positive relationship with destination trust. | Supported |
| H3b: The presence of production has a positive relationship with visiting intention. | Supported |
| H4a: Destination trust has an essential influence on visiting intention. | Supported |
| H4b: Destination trust positively mediates the relationship between the presence of destination image and visiting intention. | Supported |
| H4c: Destination trust positively mediates the relationship between the presence of interaction image and visiting intention. | Supported |
| H4d: Destination trust positively mediates the relationship between the presence of production image and visiting intention. | Supported |
| H5a: Self-construal positively moderates the relationship between presence of destination image and destination trust. | Supported |
| H5b: Self-construal positively moderates the relationship between presence of interaction and destination trust. | Supported |
| H5c: Self-construal positively moderates the relationship between presence of production and destination trust. | Supported |
| H5d: Self-construal positively moderates the relationship between destination trust and visiting intention. | Supported |

**Conclusion**

The outcomes strongly suggest that live streaming has a significant effect on the willingness of viewers in the tourism industry to visit during the epidemic outbreak. Meanwhile, the SPT model also demonstrates the reliability and acceptability of the hypothesis proposed in the paper in terms of three different social presence aspects. It will also be of great help to strengthen the interaction between anchors and viewers and to improve the quality of the live webcast environment.

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