

# The Impact of Social Media Use on Chinese Tourists' Intention to Visit an Internet Celebrity City: An Application of Theory of Planned Behavior

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**Abstract:** With the rise of social media and online content platforms in China, many cities have become internet celebrities in recent years. The theory of planned behavior (TPB) model will be used to look at the variables that could affect tourists' visit intention to these cities. Using the TPB model, it also aimed to determine how social media use affected internet celebrity city (ICC) tourism. This research employed partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) for the analysis. From the results, we could see that attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavior control all had an impact on tourists' intention, with subjective norm having the biggest impact. Tourists' use of social media also influenced tourists' visit intention, while frequency of social media use did not have a significant moderating effect between subjective norm and visit intention. The findings can be used by organization marketers and city governors to help them make better business decisions.

Keywords: internet celebrity city, social media use, visit intention, theory of planned behavior.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of the Internet gave rise to a wide range of virtual technologies, which also helped social media to flourish in the modern day [1]. According to Nor Azazi and Mohammed Shaed[2], social media has significantly impacted tourism as well as the way people live their daily lives. Social media has emerged as the go-to channel for disseminating travel-related stories and information to all actors in the travel supply chain. On many social media platforms, users can buy, sell, search for, consume, interact with others, and discuss their experiences relating to travel or services[3].

In China, social media, represented by TikTok, WeChat, and Little Redbook, have made a large number of cities such as Chongqing, Xi'an and Chengdu rapidly become an internet celebrity in social media, where they gain a lot of attention and discussion and attract plenty of tourists to visit. According to Jiemian News[4], the number of the visitors to Chongqing ranked the first among all the cities in China for five consecutive years from 2017 to 2021 and was awarded the "Online Popularity City Award 2022" in the "2022 National Tourism City Brand Influence Report" published by Sohu Travel. Therefore, Chongqing is chosen as a typical internet celebrity city (ICC) in this study.

Due to the significance of social networking service in the tourism industry, the influence of social media on tourists has been increasing in recent years [5]. Due to its development and expanded accessibility, social media has a significant impact on how consumers make decisions[6]. People are more inclined to use social media to research destinations, which affects their selection[7].

Even though some have employed the TPB model to study tourists' visit intentions to a destination, there are few research that concentrate on the impact of social media on tourists' intention to visit ICC. In this paper, the TPB model

will be used to assess the impact of social media use on ICC, and the usage of social media will be used to examine how it affects ICC tourism as an independent variable. Thus, the findings will offer beneficial insights for both the city managers and organization marketers.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Internet celebrity city (ICC) and visit intention**

Internet celebrity refers to a person who has become popular in the real world or in internet because of certain behavior or events that have been noticed by the general public[8]. In recent years, the term "internet celebrity" has expanded from initially referring to a person who is very popular in internet to various aspects of social life, such as internet celebrity restaurants, internet celebrity attractions and so on. From this perspective, the term "internet celebrity city" refers to cities where something has become "popular" in internet, gaining a lot of attention and discussion, and influencing people's choice of tourist destinations.

Behavioral intentions are the likelihood or attitudinal disposition of an individual to act or not to act on an activity or object. Researchers can utilize someone's behavioral intentions to understand how they will act. Intentions have been used to predict a number of behaviors, including consumer behavior and travel decision-making behavior.[9]. Studies in the field of tourism have primarily concentrated on travelers' behavioral intentions to select a destination, with visit intention serving as a key outcome variable referring to travelers' likelihood or attitudinal propensity to visit a specific destination[10]. Specifically, visit intention is the tendency of potential tourists to be influenced by the pull of the destination attraction or other factors (e.g. environment), and as a result, whether or not to become interested in visiting a destination[11].

### **Social media use (SMU)**

On basis of the concepts of Web 2.0 and User Generated Content (UGC), Kaplan and Haenlein [12] proposed that social media referred to a variety of internet-based applications that build on the ideas and technologies of Web 2.0 and enable users to produce and share generated content. Obar and Wildman [13] conducted a comprehensive examination of the social media literature and found four key elements: Web 2.0, UGC, production, and interaction. Social media users have been growing exponentially over the past decade or so, and in recent years, social media use has grown even more dramatically, with 2.34 billion social media users worldwide as of 2020[14, 15]. For this study, social media use refers to activities such as users sharing information, opinions and interests through interactive websites and online tools.

The usage of social media has been studied a lot in tourism field, mainly from the supply side and the demand side. From the supply side, social media is taken as an important tool for destination promotion by organizations, and from the tourists' perspective, social media also helps tourists plan their trips and ultimately influences their behavior and decisions in one way or another [16].

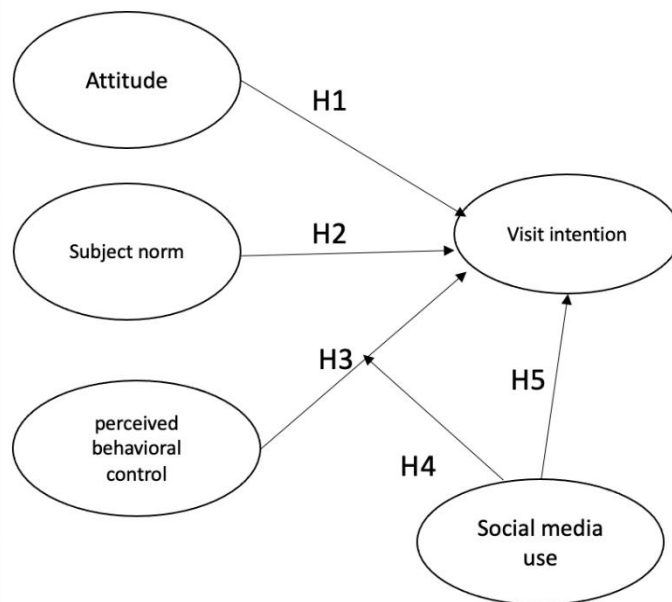
### **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)**

TPB is a famous model developed by Ajzen [17]. In the realms of tourism and marketing, it has been widely applied as a theoretical framework for projecting human behavior. The theory contends that three variables—attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control—determine behavioral intentions. Meanwhile, TPB has also been used to predict behavioral intentions in a number of tourist-related industries, such as wine tourism, rural tourism, medical tourism and so on.

TPB model has already been examined through much research and extensively applied in the tourism area. In a study of young Taiwanese' visit intention to Japan, Hsieh, Park [18] examined the extended TPB and found that attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control positively influenced behavioral intentions, while perceived risks negatively impacted attitude. According to the study of the visit intention to India for medical tourism, attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control are significantly related to visit intention of medical tourists to India, and the perceived time risk and performance risk are not significantly linked with visit intention[19].

## **3. RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS**

According to the literature review, numerous studies have explored the TPB model's validity, and SMU also affects tourists' decision-making process. From another perspective, the exposure of internet celebrity cities in social media is much higher than that of the average city, and the higher the use of social media, the higher the exposure of city's tourism message to potential visitors through social media. Therefore, tourists are more likely to be influenced by social media and intend to visit the city. Hence, this study proposes hypotheses to understand ICC tourists from China with TPB and the role of SMU. According to above illustration, a research framework is formulated as figure 1 and following five hypotheses are proposed accordingly:



**Figure 1:** Framework

Hypothesis 1: Attitude toward ICC will have a direct effect on tourists' visit intention.

Hypothesis 2: Subjective norms will have a direct effect on tourists' visit intention to ICC.

Hypothesis 3: Perceived behavioral control will have a direct effect on tourists' visit intention to ICC.

Hypothesis 4: Intensity of SMU will have a direct effect on tourists' visit intention to ICC.

Hypothesis 5: Intensity of SMU will have moderate effects on the subjective norm and visit intention to ICC

## 4. METHODOLOGY

### Study Instrument and Measurement

Through a survey of the published literature, this study establishes the measurement scales regarding TPB. The survey questionnaire was developed using five constructs with a seven-point Likert scale. Attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control and visit intention were developed and updated on basis of the measurement scales of previous studies [17, 18, 20]. Meanwhile, the intensity of SMU was applied in this study with the measurements derived from Joo, Seok [20].

### Data Collection and Procedures

A sample of Chinese people not living in Chongqing participated for purpose of testing the proposed hypotheses. An online survey was used for collecting the sample data. Investigators distributed surveys through four WeChat tourism groups with total 2000 members in March 2023, with 100 surveys for each group. Totally, 368 surveys were collected, 35 of which were found to not be valid owing to missing information.

PLS-SEM was utilized to test the model since it included moderating variable. Meanwhile, even though the TPB model is a classic, this framework includes new paths, which are H4 and H5, PLS-SEM is an appropriate method for analysis.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Respondents profile

Table 2 includes demographic characteristics of the sample. The average age of the respondents was 32.3 years old, and 47.7% were men, whereas 52.3% were women. 60.4% of the sample was single. Income was low to medium, as 43.3% of the sample earned a monthly income of more than RMB20000. Most of the respondents had graduated from university and above (64.9%).

**Table 2. Demographics of respondents (n = 333)**

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	159	47.7%
Female	174	52.3%
Age		
20–29	105	31.5%
30–39	85	25.5%
40–49	83	24.9%
50 and above	60	18.1%
Marriage		
Married	132	39.6%
Not married	201	60.4%
Education		
High school and below	45	13.5%
College	72	21.6%
University	165	49.6%
Graduate school and above	51	15.3%
Monthly income		
RMB4999 and below	23	6.9%
RMB5000-RMB9999	70	21%
RMB10000-RMB14999	55	16.5%
RMB15000-RMB19999	61	18.3%
RMB20000-RMB24999	52	15.7%
RMB25000-RMB29999	47	14.1%
RMB30000 and above	25	13.5%

### Measurement model

In this study, SmartPLS (Version 3, SmartPLS GmbH) was used to analyze the confirmatory factor. To evaluate the measurement model, both convergent validity and discriminant validity were used. Table 3 displays the findings of the measurement model's convergent validity statistics. The statistics must comply with the three acceptable levels for assured convergent validity. To begin with, all factor loadings must be more than 0.7. The second requirement is for composite reliability (CR) to exceed 0.7. Each latent variable's average extracted variance (AVE) should be greater than 0.5. All factors had factor loadings, composite reliability, and AVE that were more than 0.7. Additionally, Rho\_A must be greater than 0.7. The measurement model statistics show that the model is capable of analysis.

**Table 3. The measurement model statistics.**

Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE	Factor Loading
Attitude	0.939	0.945	0.940	0.789	
	Going to Chongqing for a travel is good				0.868
	Going to Chongqing for a travel is valuable				0.829
	Going to Chongqing for a travel is beneficial				0.920
	Going to Chongqing for a travel is enjoyable				0.940
Subjective norm	0.934	0.934	0.935	0.782	
	Most people who are important to me think I should travel to Chongqing				0.897
	Most people who are important to me approve of me travelling to Chongqing				0.859
	Most people who are important to me support that I travel to Chongqing				0.877
	Most people who are important to me agree with me about travelling to Chongqing				0.892
Perceived behavior control	0.849	0.861	0.855	0.713	
	I am capable of travelling to Chongqing				0.821
	I am confident that, if I want to, I can travel to Chongqing				0.861
	I have enough resources and opportunities to travel to Chongqing				0.767
Intention	0.972	0.978	0.974	0.911	
	I intend to travel to Chongqing in the next two years				0.981
	I am planning to travel to Chongqing in the next two years				0.912
	I will try to travel to Chongqing in the next two years				0.954
	I will certainly pay time and money to travel to Chongqing in the next two years				0.973
Intensity of SMU	1	1	1	1	
	How many hours do you take on social media per week?				1
Subjective norm * Intensity of SMU	1	0.867	1	1	

Table 4 shows the results of the discriminant validity test. In order to have discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE for each variable needs to be greater than the correlations between constructs. Because all correlations are smaller than the square root of the AVE which is in bold, it is simple to observe that all factors have discriminant validity. Additionally, according to the model heterotrait-monotrait ratio results, none of the variables had a value of 1 within a confidence interval of 2.5 to 97.5%. To sum up, the study model achieved acceptable discriminant validity for analysis.

**Table 4. Discriminant validity**

Variables	1.Attitude	2.Intention	3.Perceived Behavior Control	4.Subjecti ve Norm	5.Subjective Norm * Intensity of SMU	6.Intensity of SMU
1	<b>0.888</b>					
2	0.661	<b>0.954</b>				
3	0.669	0.639	<b>0.844</b>			
4	0.801	0.748	0.678	<b>0.884</b>		
5	-0.049	-0.081	-0.132	-0.126	<b>1.000</b>	
6	0.124	0.125	0.169	0.139	-0.098	<b>1.000</b>

The results from Table 5 show that H1 to H4 were supported. The findings suggest that attitude, perceived behavior control, subjective norm and SMU have positive and significant effects on intention to visit ICC. The  $\beta$  values of attitude, perceived behavior control, subjective norm and SMU were 0.208, 0.207, 0.514 and 0.109. The T values were 2.261, 2.453, 5.525 and 2.837. The moderating effect of intensity of SNS use was non-significant for subjective norm on visit intention.

**Table 5. Result of the structural model.**

H	Estimated Path	Path Coeff( $\beta$ )	T Statistics	p-Values	F Square
H1	Attitude-Visit Intention	0.208	2.261*	0.014	0.049
H2	Perceived behavior control-Visit Intention	0.207	2.453*	0.015	0.052
H3	Subjective norm-Visit Intention	0.514	5.525 ***	0.000	0.209
H4	Intensity of SMU-Visit Intention	0.109	2.837*	0.004	0.021
H5	Subjective norm* Intensity of SMU-Visit Intention	-0.029	0.654	0.511	0.002

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ /F square  $> 0.02$ .

Respectively, F square indices of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 mean a small, medium, and large effect size. It was found that the subjective norm had a medium effect on visit intention, while the values obtained for the attitude, perceived behavior control and SMU had a small effect size.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Through the TPB model analysis, this study analyzes the role of attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and SMU concerning the Chinese tourists' visit intention to ICC. The main objective of this study was to expand the theory of planned behavior for explaining the visit intention to ICC in China. The results of this study supported four out of five hypotheses that were developed for this study. However, subjective norm shows stronger explanatory power than attitude and perceived behavioral control in this study, and this is inconsistent with the research of Hsieh, Park [18] and Wu and Chen [21], which showed attitude had stronger impact on visit intention.

This study investigated Hypotheses 4 and 5, and intended to know how SMU impacts ICC tourism using the model of TPB. Hypotheses 4 was supported, which related to the impact of SMU on visit intention, while the moderating effects of SMU were partly supported. The results showed that the intensity of SMU did not have a significant moderating effect between subjective norm and visit intention, but it had significant impact to visit intention. As discussed, an ICC often gains huge exposure and discussion in internet, and can be easily reached and attracted by long duration of SMU.

Furthermore, appropriate recommendations can be drawn from the findings to destination managers and marketers. This study revealed that the three variables of TPB were valid predictors of Chinese tourists' visit intention to ICC, local government and destination managers should pay more attention to the content related to subjective norm. With the widespread use of daily life social sharing platforms, online marketing and promotion can be more effective to aid city tourism growth. Marketers can also be suggested to host some events or sharing activities in social media.

This study used the TPB model to study the impact of SMU on ICC tourism, but a couple of limitations need to be addressed. First is a sample problem, this study is restricted to the view of 333 respondents from WeChat group, which is a major social networking platform in China, however, respondents from diverse channel can bring a more convincing outcome. Second, only one moderating variable that is the duration of SMU was considered, which is not enough. In the future study, a more extensive study model could be developed including more representative variables that can be studied.

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