Impulsive travel intention induced by sharing conspicuous travel experience on social media: A moderated mediation analysis[1]

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Abstract: Not all travel decisions are based on a careful search for information. Tourists increasingly make such decisions on impulse, driven in part by the widespread use of social media. However, few studies have examined the psychological mechanism behind impulsive travel decisions. Utilizing two scenario-based experiments, we investigate the psychological mechanism and boundary condition under which perceived conspicuousness of travel experiences shared on social media influences tourists' impulsive travel intention. The results indicate that tourists are more likely to experience impulsive travel intention when they perceive shared travel experiences as conspicuous (vs. inconspicuous) consumption. This relationship may be due to tourists experiencing a greater sense of relative deprivation when they view others' experiences of conspicuous travel consumption that they have shared on social media. In particular, this effect is magnified for tourists with higher levels of materialism. The theoretical and managerial implications for tourism of this effect are discussed.

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1. Introduction

> One should do at least two things out of impulse in his/her life: To forget yourself in a relationship and to go on a trip without a plan.
> Andy Andrews, *The Traveler's Gift*: *Seven Decisions that Determine Personal Success* (2005)

Most previous studies of tourism consumption have assumed that travel involves logical and complicated decision-making processes (Ahn et al., 2020; March & Woodside, 2005). However, this assumption fails to cover all contemporary travel behaviors. With the ubiquity of tourism e-commerce and mobile payment technologies, tourists can now order travel products online, regardless of time and place. These conveniences have largely supported impulsive travel behaviors (Laesser & Dolnicar, 2012). Impulsive travel, also known as unplanned travel, emphasizes the short time between the impulsive intention to travel and the departure (Laesser & Dolnicar, 2012; Park & Roehl, 2016). Previous studies have shown that approximately 44% of trips include at least one impulsive visit (Hwang & Fesenmaier, 2011). A new report from Hotels.com titled "The 2021 Upgrade" reveals that "89 percent of U.S. travelers intend to be more impulsive than ever," indicating impulsive travel is becoming a substantial segment of the tourism industry (Turner, 2021). As for materialistic Chinese consumers, they are more likely to experience spontaneous buying stimuli and engage in more sudden, spontaneous buying decisions during their long-haul travel destinations (Meng et al., 2019). In fact, the topic of impulsive travel has been increasingly discussed in social media, and it can occur under different circumstances. This was illuminated by posts on Zhihu.com (the Chinese Quora) where one user asks, "Under what circumstances will you take a trip impulsively?" The responses include a romantic break-up, feeling bored with day-to-day life; however, the most-cited stimulus is viewing travel experiences shared on social networking sites (SNSs).

Indeed, the viability of SNSs does play a great role in affecting consumers' impulse buying (Wu et al., 2020). SNSs in the modern era are flooded with posts by tourists about ostentatious travel (Narangajavana et al., 2017). As it can carry more symbolic significance (of wealth, social status, and happiness) than the travel itself (Dedeoglu et al., 2020), sharing travel experiences on SNSs is often thought to offer the potential for showcasing conspicuous consumption (hereafter referred to as "conspicuousness" for simplicity) (Bronner & de Hoog, 2019). If the characteristic of conspicuousness is perceived by viewers, it may inspire them to make impulsive purchases (Zhou & Wong, 2010). This is especially true for Chinese consumers, who are becoming more impulsive in recent years due to their growing incomes and greater access to conspicuous goods. Moreover, word of mouth from friends is the number-one factor influencing their impulsive purchase decisions (Bu et al., 2017). Based on this, the question of whether conspicuous travel experiences shared by friends on SNSs can drive impulsive travel decisions is worthy of attention.

Perceived disadvantage is a common behavioral response by individuals to cues of conspicuous consumption (H. Zhang & Zhang, 2016), yet this concept is relatively underdeveloped in the literature on tourism. Perceived disadvantage, also referred to as relative deprivation, does not necessarily correspond to individuals' objective shortages of

resources but is a consequence of social comparison (Zhai et al., 2020). Specifically, people with high levels of materialism will be more inclined to engage in social comparison (Dittmar et al., 2014) and thus experience a stronger sense of disadvantage. However, impulse buying can serve a self-regulatory function by offsetting one's negative self-evaluation (Lucas & Koff, 2017). Individuals who perceive themselves as being at a disadvantage tend to buy something impulsively in the hope of improving their negative state of mind (Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012). However, little is known about whether relative deprivation on SNSs can drive impulsive travel decisions by tourists. This study proposes that relative deprivation may be the psychological mechanism behind the formation of impulsive travel intention and that materialism may serve as a boundary condition.

Most prior research has focused only on conscious travel behaviors (e.g., intention to revisit), ignoring unconscious ones (e.g., impulsive travel intention) (Hajli et al., 2018). In particular, a previous study of the relationship between travel experience sharing and the intention to visit a destination only focused on the intention to visit the same destination as a sharer and ignored the intention to visit anywhere else (Liu et al., 2019). According to the self-evaluation maintenance theory, individuals tend to behave in such a manner as to maintain a positive self-evaluation (Crawford, 2007). Better performance by others can result in one's self-evaluation becoming lower. To improve their self-evaluation, individuals may make choices that are different from those against whom they compare themselves (Crawford, 2007). Therefore, conceivably, when tourists are exposed to conspicuous travel experiences shared by their friends on SNSs, the visit intention they experience is not limited to the destination mentioned by the sharer but could include anywhere else.

Based on this, the current study, utilizing the self-evaluation maintenance theory, investigates the psychological mechanism and boundary condition under which travel experiences shared on SNSs influence potential tourists' impulsive travel intention. In this study, the intention to engage in impulsive travel can be related to any destination, not just the one visited by the subject of comparison. Specifically, this study conducts two experiments in the social media context, and social media users are taken as subjects to explore three questions: (1) Whether the perceived conspicuousness of travel experience sharing on SNSs affects tourists' impulsive travel intention; (2) If so, does relative deprivation mediate such a relationship; (3) Whether materialism can serve as a boundary condition for this effect. This research advances our knowledge of how impulsive travel intention is stimulated by travel experience sharing on SNSs, and provides industry practitioners with insights to better understand and attract impromptu tourists.

2. Literature review

2.1 Impulsive travel intention

Impulsive buying refers to an unplanned and immediate purchase with no pre-shopping intention (Ahn et al., 2020). As travel is a portfolio-based decision incorporating a multiplicity of partial decisions (Li et al., 2015), the theoretical development of impulsive buying in the tourism field is limited. Studies in this tradition have usually assumed that travel starts with a complicated plan or a search for information (March & Woodside, 2005). However, tourism scholars have recently recognized that although the information search

paradigm is a very useful tool, it does not account for all travel decisions (Park & Roehl, 2016). An increasing number of tourists are making spur-of-the-moment decisions to visit places (Zalatan, 2004). They are intentionally not pre-planning or just making brief plans so that they can enjoy spontaneous travel experiences (Kah & Lee, 2014).

There has been some controversy over the conceptualization of impulsive travel. Laesser and Dolnicar (2012) defined it as planned impulse purchasing with a maximum of one week (short-term plan) between the decision to take a trip and the departure. Park and Roehl (2016) argued that it was a spontaneous trip without any plan. In either definition, impulsive buyers were believed to experience an impulse to travel before booking. Thus, in this study, we suggest that impulsive travel is related to a rapid decision-making process that emphasizes the short time between the impulsive decision to travel and the departure, whether they make a brief plan or have made no plan in advance. Impulsive travel intention refers to a sudden, unconscious, and usually powerful desire to travel that stimulates individuals not to make the majority of their decisions until arrival.

Impulsive buying indeed represents a sizable segment of travelers' purchases at the destination (Hanks & Mattila, 2014). The situational stimulus is considered to be the most influential antecedent. For example, the use of web-based navigation tools during trips can increase tourists' unplanned travel activities (Kah & Lee, 2014). Exposure to on-site promotional factors at the destination is likely to induce tourists' unplanned consumption of travel products (Chang et al., 2014). Nevertheless, whether the situational stimulus can trigger pre-travel impulsive purchasing has not been studied extensively or empirically.

2.2 Perceived conspicuousness of travel experiences shared on SNSs

It is becoming prevalent for travelers to brag about their travel experiences on SNSs (Liu & Li, 2020). For some tourists, the purpose of their trip is no longer to have a memorable experience but to share pictures on SNSs (Wang, 2017). As tourism consumption is associated with high levels of income and leisure time (Bronner & de Hoog, 2019), travel experiences made visible socially through sharing may be perceived as conspicuous by viewers (Todd, 2001).

Indeed, perceived conspicuousness is generally used to distinguish a tourist destination and its amenities. Specifically, a destination can be perceived as conspicuous, neutral, or inconspicuous (Phillips & Back, 2011); the criteria are subjective and relative, depending on tourists' status and social position (Correia et al., 2016). Generally, however, travel to unusual overseas destinations is perceived by tourists as more conspicuous than travel to domestic destinations (Todd, 2001), as foreign brands are associated with higher social status and prestige in the minds of local consumers (Zhou & Wong, 2010). Furthermore, experiences of exquisite destinations that offer exclusivity and uniqueness are often seen as conspicuous by ordinary people (Correia et al., 2016). Meanwhile, the subtle signals in tourist experiences that demonstrate their social status, aesthetic taste, and cultural capital are also perceived as conspicuous by viewers (Liu & Li, 2020).

Previous studies have suggested that the conspicuous characteristics of products significantly affect consumers' purchase motivation (Zhou & Wong, 2010). Consumers have a higher

incentive to buy materials associated with social status (Kim & Jang, 2014). Messages that demonstrate wealth, happiness, and success of ownership are more likely to trigger the desire to consume among buyers, especially those who are in low-power states and attempt to alter their status through buying something impulsively (Thoumrungroje, 2018). Moreover, the attributes implied by conspicuous travel experience sharing (e.g., exclusivity, being visually appealing, and having greater hedonic value) have been proven to stimulate consumers' impulsive buying intention (Correia et al., 2016). An existing study has also confirmed that viewing shared travel experiences of luxury destinations can induce tourists' desire to travel (Liu et al., 2019). Based on this, we argue that due to its association with greater symbolic meaning, perceived conspicuous travel experiences (vs. inconspicuous) are more likely to stimulate tourists' impulsive travel intention. It is proposed that:

H1: The perceived conspicuousness of travel experiences shared on SNSs positively influences impulsive travel intention.

2.3 The mediating role of relative deprivation

Relative deprivation refers to feelings of anger and resentment stemming from an individual's perception that, compared to others, they do not have what they deserve (Zhai et al., 2020). According to the theory of relative deprivation, a person's position in the social hierarchy can instigate their interpersonal comparison with similar others; if this person concludes that others are better off, they will respond with negative feelings of anger and resentment (Dai et al., 2016). However, this negative feeling of deprivation derives from comparison with a reference individual or group rather than absolute deprivation (Zoogah, 2010).

Previous studies have shown that exposure to cues of conspicuousness, particularly highly exclusive and symbolic materials, can stimulate the perception of relative deprivation. For example, pictures of luxurious goods can inspire a greater sense of relative deprivation than those of non-luxurious goods (H. Zhang & Zhang, 2016), as luxurious materials are associated with higher levels of power, success, and social status and are thus more likely to evoke the comparison process and remind people of their disadvantaged social positions (Liu et al., 2019). Similarly, conspicuous travel experiences shared on SNSs can represent economic success and social status (Phillips & Back, 2011); when compared with inconspicuous travel experiences, they are more likely to trigger the psychological response of comparison and elicit a perceived sense of inferiority (De Veirman et al., 2017). Thus, we propose that:

H2: The perceived conspicuousness of shared travel experiences on SNSs positively influences the sense of relative deprivation.

Individuals who feel a sense of relative deprivation may respond in a number of ways (Dai et al., 2016), including negative responses such as voicing objections to or quitting the context of the deprivation (Dai et al., 2016; Xu & Sun, 2020). However, responses can also be positive (Zoogah, 2010). The sense of relative deprivation induced by higher-income neighbors can motivate children to improve themselves (Turley, 2002). The perceived relative deprivation elicited by living in wealthy neighborhoods can inspire people to

purchase impulsively things that others possess (J. W. Zhang et al., 2016). This is because relative deprivation creates a tendency for instant gratification, and impulsive buying can provide instant gratification to people with a low self-evaluation (Chung et al., 2017; Lucas & Koff, 2017). Previous studies have revealed the important role of negative feelings in impulsive purchases (Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012). Hence, relative deprivation induced by travel experience sharing on SNSs, as a negative emotion, is also suggested to trigger tourists' impulsive travel intention. Thus, we propose that:

H3: Relative deprivation is positively related to tourists' impulsive travel intention.

According to the self-evaluation maintenance theory, social comparison with others may trigger feelings of inferiority. However, once people feel disadvantaged in the comparison, they will be further motivated to maintain a positive self-evaluation (Liu et al., 2019). In other words, to prevent the comparison process from lowering their self-evaluation, people tend to adopt choices or improve their performance to keep up with the subject of comparison (Crawford, 2007). Based on this, we argue that when exposed to conspicuous travel experience sharing on SNSs, tourists are likely to experience a sense of relative deprivation. To alleviate their negative self-evaluation, obtain instant gratification, and make themselves feel better, tourists may further develop an impulsive intention to travel. Only in this way can they keep up with the object of comparison. Therefore, we propose that:

H4: Relative deprivation mediates the relationship between perceived conspicuousness (vs. inconspicuousness) and tourists' impulsive travel intention.

2.4 The moderating role of materialism

Materialism is a set of centrally held beliefs about the importance in one's life of the ownership of money and luxury items (Durvasula & Lysonski, 2010). Highly materialistic individuals pursue extrinsic goals such as material wealth and status rather than internal goals. Material possessions represent a primary source of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with life (Durvasula & Lysonski, 2010). In particular, highly materialistic individuals tend to buy expensive materials to enhance their social prestige (Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012). The buying tendencies of materialists have been greatly stimulated by the proliferation of SNSs, as social media postings confirm their belief that material goods and wealth are desirable (Kim & Jang, 2014). In addition, due to their high symbolic value, conspicuous products and services are especially appealing to materialistic individuals (Kim & Jang, 2014). It is difficult for them to resist the temptation of material cues (Dittmar et al., 2014). In this way, we argue that conspicuous travel experiences shared on SNSs are likely to stimulate tourists' impulsive travel intention, especially for highly materialistic tourists, as they are more susceptible to material cues. We propose that:

H5: Materialism moderates the relationship between perceived conspicuousness (vs. inconspicuousness) and tourists' impulsive travel intention. Specifically, for highly materialistic tourists, the perceived conspicuousness of shared travel experiences will lead to higher levels of impulsive travel intention than less materialistic tourists.

Highly materialistic individuals place acquisition at the center of their lives; they evaluate themselves and others in terms of the quality and quantity of their material possessions

(Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012). Compared with non-materialistic individuals, they have stronger comparison goals and desire for status. If, during the comparison process, they see that they have fewer possessions than the other person, they develop a stronger negative self-evaluation, such as a sense of relative deprivation (Dittmar et al., 2014). The literature suggests that when faced with conspicuous material cues, individuals with a high level of materialism are more likely to experience a sense of relative deprivation from comparison than individuals with a low level of materialism (H. Zhang & Zhang, 2016). Therefore, when highly materialistic tourists are exposed (on SNSs) to shared travel experiences that they perceive as conspicuous, their comparison goals are activated, their desire for status increases and they thus suffer a greater sense of relative deprivation. Moreover, this sense of relative deprivation will further drive their impulsive travel intention. Hence, we propose that:

H6: Materialism moderates the indirect effect of perceived conspicuousness (vs. inconspicuousness) and tourists' impulsive travel intention. Specifically, for highly materialistic tourists, the perceived conspicuousness of shared travel experiences will trigger a greater sense of relative deprivation compared to less materialistic tourists.

Based on the self-evaluation maintenance theory and the above hypotheses, the study's conceptual framework is depicted in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

3. Research design

Two studies are included in this research. Study 1 used a one-way (shared travel experiences: conspicuous vs. inconspicuous) between-group experiment to test the psychological mechanism linking perceived conspicuousness and tourists' impulsive travel intention. Study 2 conducted a 2 (shared travel experiences: conspicuous vs. inconspicuous) × 2 (materialism: high vs. low) between-group experiment to explore the boundary condition. To enhance the rigor of the experimental research, different experimental settings, including social media, destinations, and travel amenities, were used in the two studies.

4. Study 1

4.1 Design and stimuli

According to the self-evaluation maintenance theory, individuals like to compare themselves with close others (e.g., friends, classmates, colleagues; Crawford, 2007). Thus, in this study, the popular personal social media platform in China based on acquaintances' social relationships (e.g., Sina Weibo) was selected, and the travel experience sharers were depicted as a friend on the focal SNS. As an open social media site, Sina Weibo has been well received by ordinary Chinese people, who often use blogs to express and broadcast themselves, including on travel topics.

The purpose of Study 1 was to test the main effect (H1) and the mediating effect of relative deprivation (H2, H3, H4). A one-way (shared travel experiences: conspicuous vs. inconspicuous) between-group design was conducted. The subjects were asked to read a hypothetical scenario and then complete a survey that included our measures of interest. In

the scenario, subjects were asked to imagine that "After a few busy working days, the weekend finally comes, and you enjoy leisure time at home. When you open Sina Weibo, you find that your friend 'A' has published a travel post accompanied by text and pictures."

A travel post was used to manipulate the perceived conspicuousness of shared travel experiences. The design process of the travel post comprised two steps: selecting the destination and the travel amenities there, both of which can be perceived as either conspicuous or inconspicuous. For example, overseas destinations are widely recognized as more conspicuous than domestic destinations (Phillips & Back, 2011); exquisite travel attractions, luxury facilities, and superior activities (involving more advanced skills) are considered more conspicuous than non-exquisite attractions, non-luxury facilities, and ordinary activities (Correia et al., 2016; Liu & Li, 2020). On these bases, we selected overseas destinations as conspicuous destinations and domestic destinations as inconspicuous destinations. For each destination, we selected exquisite travel attractions, expensive facilities, and superior activities as conspicuous amenities and selected non-exquisite travel attractions, inexpensive facilities, and ordinary activities as inconspicuous amenities. All destinations and amenities were depicted pictorially. To reinforce the differences between conspicuous and inconspicuous conditions, textual descriptions matching the pictures of the selected destinations and travel amenities were added.

A pretest to select appropriate destinations was run using 54 adult participants in China. As coastal tourism is becoming popular among Chinese tourists, and coastal tourists accounted for 21% of China's tourism market in 2018 (Ma, 2018), a coastal destination was chosen as the theme. Moreover, as a leisure destination, coastal destinations are usually considered to have conspicuous potential (Phillips & Back, 2011). The participants were recruited by two research assistants on a busy street in a city in northern China using the street-intercept method. The subjects were asked to list three overseas coastal destinations they perceived as conspicuous and three domestic coastal destinations they perceived as inconspicuous. Dubai and Hawaii were identified as the top conspicuous destinations, and Rizhao and Weihai (both in China) were identified as the top inconspicuous destinations. Therefore, Dubai (overseas) and Rizhao (domestic) were selected as the conspicuous and inconspicuous destinations, respectively, for Study 1.

4.2 Participants

The experiment was conducted in mainland China, and 128 Chinese adult users on Sina Weibo were recruited through a random search. The participants needed to satisfy three criteria: (1) they were regular users of Sina Weibo; (2) they were not residents of Dubai or Rizhao; and (3) they had never traveled to Dubai or Rizhao. After obtaining their consent, we sent them a message containing a link to the experiment website. By following this link, they were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions. Of the 128 recruits, 33 were excluded as they failed to understand the stimuli information. The final sample comprised 95 respondents: 67.4% female; 57.9% aged 25–30 years old; 88.4% with a bachelor's or higher degree. The sample demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 here]

4.3 Measurement

As a measure for impulsive travel intention is not available in the current literature in the tourism field, it was assessed by three items adapted from a measure for impulsive buying intention in consumer and marketing studies (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998; Dey & Srivastava, 2017): "When I viewed A's post, I felt a spontaneous urge to go traveling"; "When I viewed A's post, I intended to travel immediately"; "When I viewed A's post, I couldn't resist thinking about traveling" (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The measure's Cronbach's alpha was 0.747.

Relative deprivation was measured using two items from Zagefka et al. (2013), covering the cognitive and affective components of deprivation: "How do your financial situation and social position compare with A?" (1 = not at all well, 7 = very well); "How satisfied are you with your financial situation and social position compared with A?" (1 = not at all satisfied, 7 = very satisfied). The measure's Cronbach's alpha was 0.747.

The respondents' perceived control over their travel behavior was measured as a control variable to reduce its interference with the results. It was measured using one question from Lin and Utz (2015): "Currently, how difficult would it be for you to arrange such a vacation?" (reverse coded, 1 = not at all difficult, 7 = very difficult). Moreover, the respondents' demographics (i.e., age, gender, income, education level) were also captured and classified as additional control variables in the experiment.

4.4 Common method variance

As a self-administered survey was used in data collection, it was necessary to control for common method variance. Several measures were taken to deal with this potential issue in this study. First, the measurement items were adapted from well-developed scales that had been tested in previous studies. Second, the subjects were requested to answer the items with honesty. Third, a Harman's single-factor test was created. The results showed the first component was not a dominant variable (it captured only 26.833% of variance); thus, common method bias seems not to be of significance in this study.

5. Results of Study 1

5.1 Manipulation check

To test the effectiveness of the manipulation, the respondents were asked to indicate how conspicuous they perceived the travel post to be (1 = extremely inconspicuous, 7 = extremely conspicuous). As expected, the participants assigned to the conspicuous condition perceived the travel post as significantly more conspicuous than did the participants assigned to the inconspicuous condition ($M_{Conspicuous} = 4.721$, $M_{Inconspicuous} = 3.865$; $t = 2.682$, $p < .01$). This implies that our manipulation was effective.

5.2 Main effect

The main effect was tested using a one-way ANOVA. The results showed that the respondents assigned to the conspicuous condition group felt a higher level of impulsive travel intention ($M_{Conspicuous} = 4.674$, $M_{Inconspicuous} = 4.115$, $F (1, 93) = 7.288$, $p < .01$) and a

higher level of relative deprivation ($M_{Conspicuous} = 4.965$, $M_{Inconspicuous} = 3.962$, $F(1, 93) = 21.379$, $p < .001$) than those assigned to the inconspicuous condition. These results lend support to H1 and H2.

5.3 Mediation analysis

Bootstrapping was used to test the mediating role of relative deprivation. The PROCESS macro in SPSS (Model 4) was selected and used to generate 5,000 bootstraps with a 95% confidence interval. In this model, the perceived conspicuousness of shared travel experiences was dummy coded: inconspicuous condition = 0, conspicuous condition = 1. Perceived control and the respondents' demographics were controlled for. As expected, the results reveal a significant indirect effect of perceived conspicuousness on impulsive travel intention via relative deprivation ($\beta = 0.528$, CI = [0.226, 0.888]). However, when the mediator, relative deprivation, was included, the direct effect was not significant (CI = [−0.284, 0.536]). This implies that relative deprivation played a fully mediating role in the relationship between perceived conspicuousness and impulsive travel intention. The findings support H3 and H4.

6. Study 2

6.1 Design and stimuli

This study aimed to test the moderation effect of materialism (H5, H6). A 2 (shared travel experiences: conspicuous vs. inconspicuous) × 2 (materialism: high vs. low) between-group design was used. The design and stimuli for this study were identical to those used in Study 1. However, to test the generalizability of the findings and gain additional insights, we conducted Study 2 with a different experimental setting, namely, WeChat Moments. This is China's largest SNS and is built on the WeChat platform, an instant messaging application used on over 90% of smartphones in China (Wang, 2017). WeChat Moments provides users with an effective vehicle for information sharing, particularly regarding travel experiences. The destination names of the travel posts in Study 2 were changed to Hawaii (overseas) and Weihai (domestic) and labeled as conspicuous and inconspicuous destinations, respectively. Meanwhile, the pictorial and text descriptions of travel posts were also modified to match the selected destinations.

6.2 Participants

The study was conducted from September to November 2019 in mainland China. A total of 218 Chinese adult users on WeChat were recruited through snowball sampling. We asked colleagues, friends, and acquaintances to invite other people who met the criteria (i.e., used WeChat Moments regularly; did not reside in Hawaii or Weihai; had never traveled to Hawaii or Weihai) to participate in the experiment. The respondents were also randomly assigned to one of the two conditions. After removing subjects who failed to understand the scenario, the final sample comprised 185 participants: 70.3% female; 75.2% aged 25–30 years old; 78.4% with a bachelor's or higher degree (see Table 1).

6.3 Measurement

In addition to the variables measured in Study 1, this study included materialism as a

moderating variable. Materialism was measured by six items adopted from Richins (2004), such as "I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes"; "The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life." For each item, the participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; Cronbach's alpha = 0.893). We divided the subjects into high- and low-materialism groups based on the average score. Respondents who scored above average were classified as 'high materialism', and those scored below the average were classified as 'low materialism'. Perceived control and respondents' demographics were controlled for as well.

6.4 Common method variance

The control for common method variance is consistent with that used in Study 1. The results of a Harman's single-factor test showed the first component captured only 28.783% of the variance. Therefore, common method variance did not appear to be a problem in this study.

7. Results of Study 2

7.1 Manipulation check

Through an independent sample *t*-test, we found that respondents in the conspicuous condition group perceived the shared travel experiences as significantly more conspicuous than participants in the inconspicuous condition group ($M_{Conspicuous}$ = 4.450, $M_{Inconspicuous}$ = 3.906; t = 2.458, p < .05). Our manipulation of perceived conspicuousness was successful.

7.2 Main effect

We examined the main effect through ANOVA and found that participants in the conspicuous condition group reported a higher level of impulsive travel intention ($M_{Conspicuous}$ = 4.727, $M_{Inconspicuous}$ = 4.384, F (1, 183) = 4.774, p < .05) and higher relative deprivation ($M_{Conspicuous}$ = 4.780, $M_{Inconspicuous}$ = 4.029, F (1, 183) = 24.127, p < .001) than those in the inconspicuous condition group. These results further support H1 and H2.

7.3 Moderation analysis

The results of a two-way ANOVA indicated that there were significant two-way interaction effects between perceived conspicuousness and materialism on impulsive travel intention (F (1, 183) = 101.01, p < .001) as well as relative deprivation (F (1, 183) = 101.693, p < .001).

To better understand the interaction effect, two simple slope tests were conducted. As shown in Fig. 2, when the participants' level of materialism was high (+1SD), there were significantly different effects between perceived conspicuousness and perceived inconspicuousness on impulsive travel intention ($M_{Conspicuous}$ = 5.900, $M_{Inconspicuous}$ = 5.420, β = 0.857, p < .001) and on relative deprivation ($M_{Conspicuous}$ = 6.712, $M_{Inconspicuous}$ = 5.742, β = 0.970, p < .001). However, when the participants' level of materialism was low (−1SD), perceived conspicuousness and perceived inconspicuousness did not significantly differ in predicting participants' impulsive travel intention ($M_{Conspicuous}$ = 4.195, $M_{Inconspicuous}$ = 4.462, β = −0.267, p = .189) and relative deprivation ($M_{Conspicuous}$ = 5.531, $M_{Inconspicuous}$ = 5.323, β = 0.208, p = .268). This implies that highly materialistic tourists experienced a much

stronger sense of relative deprivation and impulsive travel intention when confronted with travel experiences that they perceived as conspicuous rather than inconspicuous. H5 and H6 were, thus, supported.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

7.4 Results of moderated mediation analysis

To further verify if the indirect effect of perceived conspicuousness on impulsive travel intention was conditionally mediated by relative deprivation, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 8. As Table 2 reports, the conditional indirect effect of the perceived conspicuousness on impulsive travel intention via relative deprivation was significant only when the level of materialism was high ($\beta = 0.506$, CI = [0.235, 0.812]). This effect was non-significant when the level of materialism was low ($\beta = 0.164$, CI = [−0.015, 0.355]). This suggests that the indirect impact of perceived conspicuousness on impulsive travel intention via relative deprivation is only true for highly materialistic tourists.

[Insert Table 2 here]

8. Discussion and conclusion

8.1 Summary of results
The main objective of this study was to confirm the occurrence of impulsive purchasing in the tourism context and to examine the psychological mechanism and boundary condition linking travel experience sharing on SNSs with impulsive travel intention. Specifically, two experimental studies were conducted: Study 1 identified the mediating effect of relative deprivation; Study 2 explored the interaction effect between perceived conspicuousness and tourists' materialism. The key findings are as follows.

First, as expected, travel experiences shared on SNSs by close others can stimulate tourists' impulse to travel, with relative deprivation as a complete mediator. To summarize, exposure to friends' travel-related posts produces a negative feeling of relative deprivation in tourists, which then positively affects their impulsive travel intention. Specifically, tourists experience higher relative deprivation and impulsive travel intention if they perceive shared travel experiences as conspicuous, indicating that conspicuous travel experience sharing on SNSs is more likely to evoke tourists' social comparison and elicit their sense of inferiority.

Second, there are significant interaction effects between materialism and perceived conspicuousness on impulsive travel intention and relative deprivation. In particular, a significant indirect effect of perceived conspicuousness on impulsive travel intention via relative deprivation was only found for highly materialistic participants. This implies that compared with less materialistic tourists, highly materialistic tourists show higher relative deprivation and impulsive travel intention if they perceive the shared travel experiences as conspicuous.

8.2 Theoretical implications

First, this study provides insights into the conditions under which impulsive travel intention occurs, which fills the significant research gap whereby impulse buying receives a great deal of attention in the consumer and marketing fields but is rarely studied in tourism research (Ahn et al., 2020). However, consistent with research in the field of marketing (Thoumrungroje, 2018; Zafar et al., 2019), we found that impulsive buying in the travel context can also be stimulated by external situational factors. This confirms the previous idea that tourists' impulsive decisions can be driven by any information that might inspire them to travel, such as a TV show, an attractive package deal, etc. (Zalatan, 2004).

Second, although the relationship between materialism, conspicuous consumption, and impulsive buying has been well established in consumer research (Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012), conspicuous consumption has always been regarded as the outcome variable (Meng et al., 2019). Unlike previous research, conspicuous purchase in the current study was taken as an antecedent variable. Perceiving others' travel experience sharing as conspicuous can stimulate the impulsive travel intention of materialistic tourists. This proves that individuals with a higher level of materialism can not only be tempted by desirable yet unattainable goods (Dittmar et al., 2014) but also by travel experiences shared by others, which adds to the literature on the relationship between materialism and impulsive buying.

Third, this study is one of the first to investigate the role of relative deprivation in an impulsive travel context, which adds to the literature on the role of relative deprivation in driving impulsive purchases. Unlike previous studies that showed that relative deprivation negatively influences tourists' travel intention (Zhai et al., 2020), this study empirically verifies that relative deprivation, as a form of negative self-evaluation, can also produce a positive effect (Turley, 2002; J. W. Zhang et al., 2016). Moreover, this study confirms the self-regulatory function of impulsive travel behavior by revealing that tourists alleviate their sense of relative deprivation by generating an impulse to travel. This result also verifies that the self-evaluation maintenance theory is especially suitable for studying the psychological mechanism behind impulsive travel intention.

Last, unlike visit intention in the existing literature (Liu et al., 2019), impulsive travel intention in this study is relatively more intense and irresistible, emphasizing the rapid decision-making and the short time between the visit intention and actual travel action (Ahn et al., 2020; Laesser & Dolnicar, 2012). In addition, impulsive travel intention includes the desire to travel to any destination, not just the one mentioned in a friend's shared travel experience. This, to some extent, can free potential tourists from the constraints imposed by a planned visit to a pre-specified destination and increases the possibility of their actual impulsive travel. Meanwhile, this research adds to the literature by revealing that travel experience sharing on SNSs can not only trigger tourists' intention to visit the same destination as a sharer but also stimulate their intention to visit any other destination.

8.3 Managerial implications

This research has practical implications for tourism marketing. First, it is crucial for managers to understand how to attract impromptu tourists. As travel experience sharing on SNSs can stimulate potential tourists' impulse to travel, practitioners could encourage tourists (e.g., provide them with incentives; persuade them emotionally) to share their positive travel

experiences (e.g., selfie pictures, videos) on SNSs. This is particularly true for perceived conspicuous destinations, as travel experiences in such destinations are usually perceived as more symbolic and attractive and are thus likely to evoke strong comparisons by the viewer with the sharer. Additionally, marketers should encourage tourists to share their travel experiences with targeted groups (e.g., friends, peers) rather than with the general population, as individuals pursue the "good performance" of close others rather than that of everyone (Crawford, 2007).

Second, the current research shows that "superior others" could serve a self-enhancement function by encouraging people to achieve the same status. This can be utilized by tourism organizations to promote their brands and products among tourists who can afford exquisite travel attractions and expensive travel facilities. This is particularly true for managers in China, where wealthy tourists tend to have a stronger interest in and desire to spend (Bu et al., 2017). It is easier for Chinese marketers to motivate "superior others" to visit a destination and then use their influence by sharing their travel experiences to attract ordinary tourists. Furthermore, although the overall quality of people's lives in China has generally improved, some problems like the large income gap and feelings of unfairness remain significant (Xu & Sun, 2020). Destinations should take advantage of this problem effectively to select superior others as dream tourists. By inciting comparisons between ordinary and superior people, the stimulating effect of shared travel experiences may be greatly enhanced.

Third, this study suggests that the sharing of travel experiences on SNSs is more effective in stimulating the impulsive travel intention of highly materialistic tourists. Thus, it is beneficial for tourism marketing professionals to pay greater attention to highly materialistic tourists. For example, practitioners may consider showing some conspicuous cues (e.g., luxury facilities, superior activities) to materialists to convince them that visiting this place can improve their social prestige. Moreover, simply reminding materialists of better-off others in their surroundings may trigger their sense of relative deprivation and impulsive travel intention.

8.4 Limitations and future research directions

This study has a few limitations that should be recognized. First, potential tourists' socio-economic status, and the tie strength between them and the poster may also affect their impulsive travel intention. These factors could be incorporated into future research. Second, only using coastal destinations as situational stimuli may limit the generalizability of our results, which should be tested in future studies by utilizing other destination types. Third, the sample in this research mostly belongs to the young and female demographic. It will be valuable for future scholars to extend the current study to different age groups and male subjects. Fourth, the respondents in this research were asked to imagine viewing a travel post shared by a friend rather than viewing a posting by one of their real friends. Future researchers could conduct a field study to test whether the results are consistent across different settings. Finally, the current study was conducted before the COVID-19 outbreak. Although its theoretical and practical implications for the post–COVID-19 travel world should be valuable, it may provide only limited insights for understanding tourist behavior during the outbreak.

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Appendix A: Travel post

Study 1: Sina Weibo

Inconspicuous   Conspicuous

Study 2: WeChat
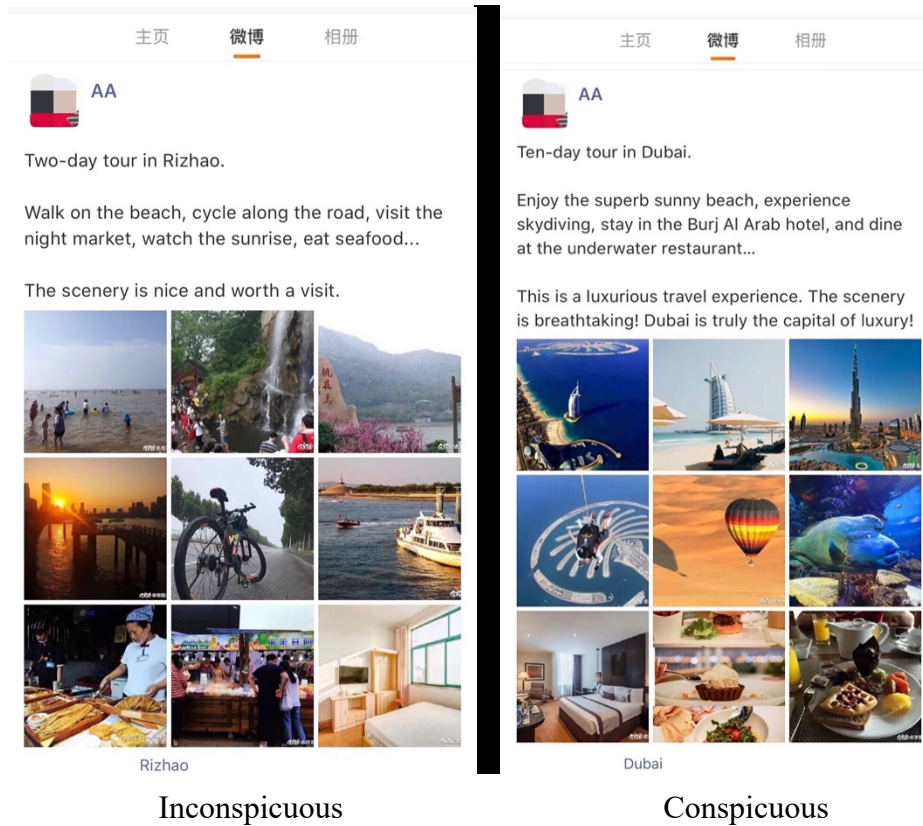
Inconspicuous   Conspicuous
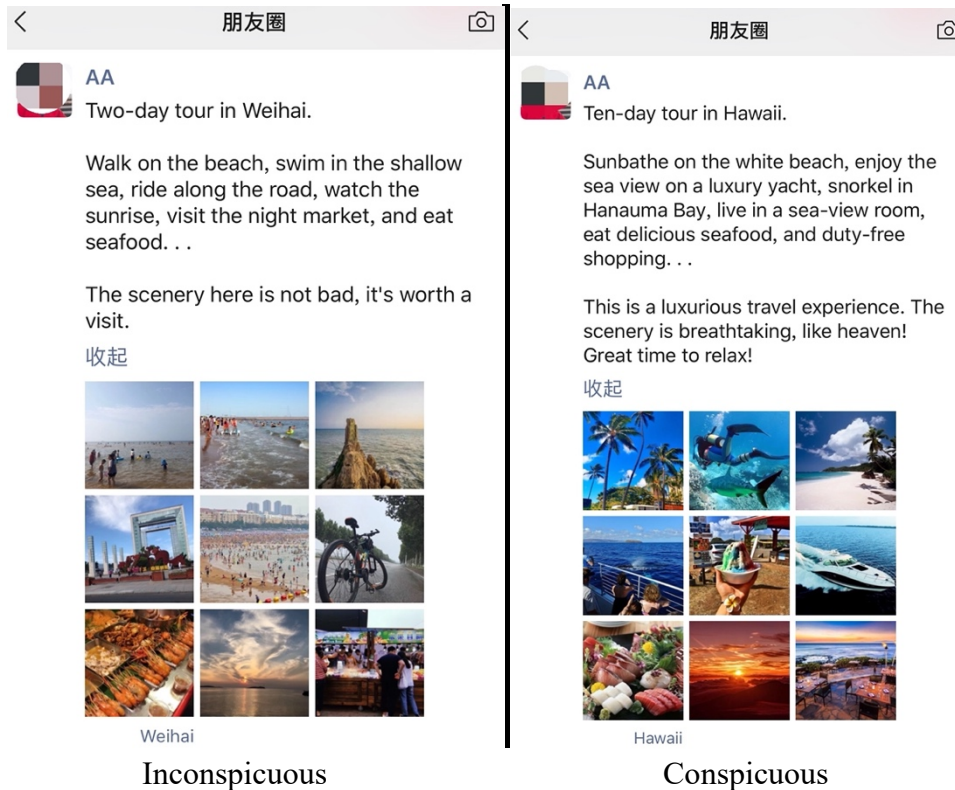
Appendix B: Measurement Scale

Perceived conspicuousness of shared travel experiences
How conspicuous do you think the travel post is?
(1 = "extremely inconspicuous", 7 = "extremely conspicuous")

Relative deprivation
1. How does your financial situation and social position compare with A?
(1 = "not at all well", 7 = "very well")
2. How satisfied are you with your financial situation and social position compared with A?
(1 = "not at all satisfied", 7 = "very satisfied")

Materialism
1. I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes.
2. The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.
3. Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.
4. I like a lot of luxury in my life.
5. My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.
6. I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.
(1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree")

Impulsive travel intention
1. When I viewed A's post, I felt a spontaneous urge to go traveling.
2. When I viewed A's post, I intended to travel immediately.
3. When I viewed A's post, I couldn't resist thinking about traveling.
(1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree")

Perceived control over travel behavior
Currently, how difficult would it be for you to arrange such a vacation?
(1= "not at all difficult", 7 = "very difficult")