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Exploring the Role of Mental Imagery in Destination Short-Form Video Marketing

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Abstract

Purpose: Short-form travel video plays a significant role in promoting the development of the global tourism industry and the recovery of tourism after prolonged health crises. However, only a limited number of studies have explored the specific influence of short-form video tourism content on individuals' travel behavioral intentions particularly from the perspectives of mental imagery formation and information processing fluency. This study bridges this gap by integrating the theory of mental imagery with processing fluency, applying these concepts to the domains of tourism and short-form video research. **Research design, data and methodology:** Data were gathered using a web-based survey method with Chinese short-form video users ($N=390$). Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were employed to assess the research model and test the hypotheses. **Results:** This study examines the structural influence of comprehension fluency and imagery fluency, which act as both direct and indirect antecedents to mental imagery elaboration, ultimately shaping individuals' intentions to visit a destination. **Conclusions:** This study delves deeper into the role of processing fluency in mental imagery, addressing the gaps in existing research on the "processing fluency-mental imagery" framework. The findings provide both theoretical and practical insights into how individuals process short-form travel video and how this processing influences their intentions regarding travel behavior.

Keywords: Short-Form Travel Videos, Mental Imagery Process, Processing Fluency, Need for Cognition, Destination Marketing

JEL Classification Code: C12, C51, C83, L83, M31

1. Introduction

Short-form travel videos (SFTVs) play a vital role in enhancing online travel experiences and facilitating destination marketing (Wengel et al., 2022). According to statistics from ByteDance, TikTok's parent company, over 400 million Chinese individuals with an interest in travel consumed destination-related short-form video content (Oceanengine, 2023). This form of travel content has become a crucial tool in global tourism development and supporting the industry's recovery from the prolonged health crisis. The effectiveness of SFTVs in destination marketing

has garnered considerable attention and discussion among destination marketers (Zhou et al., 2023).

SFTV contributes to disseminating online destination marketing information and enhancing individuals' destination visit intention (Du et al., 2020). When individuals are exposed to online destination marketing information, they tend to visualize the journey to the destination featured in the content within their minds (Le et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2010). The processing of this visual presentation of sensory information is referred to as mental imagery in the existing literature (MacInnis & Price, 1987; Yoo & Kim, 2014). Mental imagery is one of the main components of narrative transportation (van Laer et al., 2013), and mental imagery processing has also been

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identified as a key process in information processing and imagery persuasion (Ha et al., 2019; Lee & Gretzel, 2012; McLean & Barhorst, 2022).

Existing research suggests that as a form of cognitive processing, mental imagery is at the core of decision-making and can lead to positive outcomes (Lee & Gretzel, 2012; Wu & Lai, 2022). When individuals process marketing information, the mental imagery of a product or service promotes the formation of their positive emotions and confidence in their attitudes (Lee & Gretzel, 2012; Yoo & Kim, 2014). Mental imagery also serves as a trigger, driving individuals' behavioral intentions and future actual behaviors (Bogicevic et al., 2019; Heller et al., 2019; Yoo & Kim, 2014; Zheng et al., 2022). A high level of mental imagery can even encourage individuals to skip the trial or evaluation process of a product or service, leading directly to purchasing behavior (Yoo & Kim, 2014). It can be said that during the pre-consumption evaluation stage, the role of mental imagery processing cannot be underestimated (Heller et al., 2019).

Compared to regular retail products, tourism products are characterized by intangibility, inseparability, and variability (Williams & Baláz, 2013). Since it is difficult to assess experience-based products like tourism during the pre-consumption step (Williams & Baláz, 2013), the role of mental imagery processing becomes particularly crucial. Although mental imagery is considered an important antecedent of behavioral intentions, only a few studies mention the impact of mental imagery in the context of short-form video (Zhou et al., 2024). This has sparked our curiosity to further explore the role of mental imagery in the context of short-form videos.

Existing mental imagery research is primarily considered to be composed of two aspects/dimensions: mental imagery elaboration and mental imagery quality (Walters et al., 2007). Mental imagery elaboration refers to the amount of imagery an individual forms and the degree of involvement in imaginative imagery, while mental imagery quality refers to the vividness and clarity of the imagery (Bogicevic et al., 2019; Yoo & Kim, 2014). In the fields of tourism and short-form video studies, how these two dimensions of mental imagery stimulate people's destination visit intention remains an underexplored area. Therefore, the first research question is proposed as follows.

RQ1: How do two dimensions of mental imagery derived from the interaction with SFTV influence individuals' destination visit intentions, respectively?

In the existing research, Maier and Dost (2018) synthesized the concepts of processing fluency and mental imagery theory, proposing and empirically validating the "processing fluency-mental imagery" framework. Then, Huang and Ha (2020), in their study on image-based social

media, further subdivided processing fluency into comprehension fluency and imagery fluency. After that, Zhou et al. (2024) validated the effectiveness of the "processing fluency-mental imagery" framework in the short-form video context. Although the "processing fluency-mental imagery" framework has been confirmed by a limited number of studies, the exploration of the concept of mental imagery in these studies remains vague. How exactly imagery fluency and comprehension fluency influence the elaboration and the quality of mental imagery still represents a gap in the literature. To further expand the exploration of the existing influence structure and address the aforementioned gap, this study also proposes the following research questions.

RQ2: How do comprehension fluency and imagery fluency specifically affect the elaboration and quality of mental imagery?

In response to these research questions, this study aims to explore how the formation of different dimensions of mental imagery is influenced by destination information fluency and information comprehension fluency, as well as their impact on the subsequent process of destination visit intention in the context of SFTV. The results of this study will further contribute to the expansion of research on processing fluency, mental imagery, tourism literature, and short-form video studies, while also assisting tourism marketing practitioners and scholars in better understanding the process of mental imagery formation as a key antecedent in potential tourists' decision-making during their interaction with short-form videos.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Information Processing Fluency

Processing fluency is a subjective experience that arises from external information stimuli, describing the individual's judgment of the difficulty, speed, and effort required to process the information (Chang, 2013; Huang & Ha, 2020; Luna-Nevarez & McGovern, 2021). When individuals are exposed to external information stimuli, they tend to assess the ease or difficulty of processing the information (Huang & Ha, 2020). When the information aligns with their existing knowledge system, individuals are more likely to perceive the information as easier to process, which leads to more positive attitudes (Luna-Nevarez & McGovern, 2021). Higher processing fluency also enhances individuals' judgments regarding the quality of visual information and the vividness and comprehensibility of the information (Huang & Ha, 2020).

In the context of social media, processing fluency is

further conceptualized into two dimensions: comprehension fluency and imagery fluency (Chang, 2013; Huang & Ha, 2020). Comprehension fluency and imagery fluency capture the ease with which individuals process visual stimulus information (Huang & Ha, 2020). Comprehension fluency refers to the perceived ease with which an individual comprehends information, while imagery fluency refers to the ease with which an individual generates mental imagery based on the information (Chang, 2013).

The concepts of comprehension fluency and imagery fluency are not considered to exist independently; instead, they are believed to have a hierarchical relationship. Existing research within the context of narrative advertising has predicted and confirmed that individuals exhibit a higher degree of comprehension fluency when faced with advertisements that are easier to understand (Chang, 2013). This comprehension fluency helps facilitate individuals' mental simulation of the advertisement content (Chang, 2013), meaning that comprehension fluency positively influences imagery fluency. Based on this conclusion, this study believes that individuals' fluency in understanding short-form video content helps to promote a smoother generation of imagery related to the video content. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Comprehension fluency positively affects imagery fluency.

2.2. Mental Imagery Theory

Mental imagery is defined as the immediate experience of visualizing objects or information in the mind (Ha et al., 2019; Heller et al., 2019; Lee & Gretzel, 2012; MacInnis & Price, 1987; Yoo & Kim, 2014). Mental imagery is considered a key process in imagery persuasion and information processing (Ha et al., 2019; Lee & Gretzel, 2012; McLean & Barhorst, 2022). During the process of information processing, individuals comprehend the narrative within the information, which leads to the generation of mental images related to the information (Chang, 2013; Huang & Ha, 2020).

In consumer psychology research, mental imagery is believed to help consumers compensate for the lack of product information and assist them in establishing an imagination-based consumption experience through mental imagery of the product or the usage environment (Heller et al., 2019). If consumers are unable to smoothly form mental images related to using the product in their minds, they may feel uneasy about their choices and even engage in protective behaviors, such as deciding not to purchase (Heller et al., 2019). In the existing advertising literature, mental imagery is often used to study how individuals process image-based advertising information (Kim et al., 2014). Existing research indicates that visual advertising

information can influence individuals' cognition, emotions, and subsequent behavioral responses by stimulating the formation of mental images (Yoo & Kim, 2014).

For experiential product marketing, leveraging online marketing information to facilitate the formation of mental imagery is particularly important for enhancing marketing effectiveness (Heller et al., 2019). Tourism products are a prime example. Due to the intangible nature of tourism products, tourists tend to gather and evaluate information about unfamiliar destinations before their trips to reduce potential risks and uncertainties in travel decision-making (Luo & Lam, 2020). This information, along with the destination-related mental images formed during the information processing stage, becomes a crucial information source for tourists (Walters et al., 2007). Individuals may imagine themselves being immersed in and physically present at the destination in the future (Le et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2010). When the imagery generated by individuals is more vivid and clear, they tend to experience a higher degree of sense of presence (Wu & Lai, 2022), which can further significantly influence their subsequent travel decisions (Walters et al., 2007).

In tourism research on imagery processing, the assessment of mental imagery is typically divided into two dimensions: the mental imagery elaboration and the mental imagery quality (Walters et al., 2007). The mental imagery elaboration refers to the quantity of imagery formed in an individual's mind upon receiving information stimuli, as well as the degree of the individual's involvement in imaginative imagery. The mental imagery quality refers to the vividness, sharpness, clarity, intensity, and appeal of the imagery generated by the individual (Yoo & Kim, 2014).

However, in the existing literature, discussions regarding mental imagery elaboration and mental imagery quality appear to be independent of each other. To our knowledge, the relationship between these two concepts has not yet been mentioned. As an exploratory study, this research proposes that higher-quality imagery is more likely to elicit more associations, meaning that more vivid mental imagery will facilitate the enhancement of mental imagery elaboration. Since clear and vivid mental images are more likely to evoke stronger sensory stimuli and emotional responses, thus prompting the recall of a broader range of related images. For instance, when the visual presentation of a scene or object is particularly detailed or intense, people may find it easier to associate it with relevant environments, details, or similar scenes, and the sensory experiences triggered may lead to more related imagery being recalled in the brain. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Mental imagery quality positively affects mental imagery elaboration.

The generation of mental imagery stems from individuals' perception and response to immediate

information (Heller et al., 2019; MacInnis & Price, 1987). The creation, decay, transformation, distortion, and disappearance of mental imagery are closely related to the individual's attentional resources (Heller et al., 2019). When individuals experience high cognitive load, the quality and vividness of mental imagery are significantly diminished (Heller et al., 2019). In other words, information that is easy to process and consumes a low cognitive load facilitates the generation of mental imagery (Huang & Ha, 2020).

Although the relationship between processing fluency and mental imagery seems self-evident, the literature discussing this topic remains limited (Huang & Ha, 2020). Aside from the works by Huang and Ha (2020), Maier and Dost (2018), and Zhou et al. (2024), other existing studies have focused only on the antecedents and effects of these two concepts separately, without connecting them to discuss the relationship between processing fluency and mental imagery (Maier & Dost, 2018).

Existing research indicates that processing fluency and mental imagery have similar effects on individual attitude formation. For example, in the field of tourism, both high levels of processing fluency and mental imagery encourage tourists to form more positive attitudes toward a destination (Lee & Gretzel, 2012; Tang et al., 2014; Walters et al., 2007). However, these findings are insufficient to clarify whether the positive effects arise from the fluency of destination information processing or mental imagery related to the destination (Maier & Dost, 2018; Zhou et al., 2024). Therefore, it is essential to connect and establish a causal relationship between these two concepts (Maier & Dost, 2018).

Based on this perspective, Maier and Dost (2018) were the first to combine the concepts of processing fluency and mental imagery theory, proposing and empirically testing the "processing fluency (imagery fluency)–mental imagery" influence structure. They found that the perceived imagery fluency of sensory information is a condition that triggers mental imagery. In other words, fluent imagery processing facilitates the formation of mental imagery in individuals (Maier & Dost, 2018). Building on the results of Maier and Dost (2018), Huang and Ha (2020) further incorporated a discussion on comprehension fluency into the "processing fluency–mental imagery" influence structure. Huang and Ha (2020) discovered that both comprehension fluency and imagery fluency jointly contribute to the formation of individuals' mental imagery. Similarly, in a study by Zhou et al. (2024), the processing fluency–mental imagery influence structure was validated in the context of short-form videos. Zhou et al. (2024) found that the higher the processing fluency of the destination short-form video information, the higher the degree of destination-related mental imagery formed.

Although the three existing studies mentioned above

have demonstrated the effective impact of processing fluency on mental imagery, the specific ways in which imagery fluency and comprehension fluency influence the elaboration and quality of mental imagery remain a mystery. To further explore the influence structure of processing fluency on mental imagery in detail, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3-H4: Comprehension fluency positively affects mental imagery elaboration (H3) and mental imagery quality (H4).

H5-H6: Imagery fluency positively affects mental imagery elaboration (H5) and mental imagery quality (H6).

Existing research suggests that mental imagery evoked by visual and linguistic information can stimulate individuals' further cognitive, emotional, and conative responses (Yoo & Kim, 2014). Mental imagery related to destination information positively influences attitude confidence (Lee & Gretzel, 2012), positive emotions and attitudes (Yoo & Kim, 2014; Zhou et al., 2024), and future actual visitation behavior (Bogicevic et al., 2019; Zheng et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2024). High-level mental imagery can persuade individuals to make behavioral decisions by bypassing the product trial phase (Yoo & Kim, 2014). In the tourism domain, pre-trip experiential marketing information about destinations can lead individuals to form future-oriented imagery (Le et al., 2019), prompting them to imagine themselves present at the destination (Lee et al., 2010). For individuals with no prior visit experience, the mental imagery formed about a destination can serve as an initial information source, influencing their travel decisions (Walters et al., 2007). For experienced travel consumers, they evoke mental imagery by combining previous experiences to determine their travel intentions (Yoo & Kim, 2014).

Although mental imagery is considered an important antecedent of behavioral intention, research focusing on the relationship between these concepts is quite limited, especially regarding the specific dimensions through which mental imagery influences individuals' behavioral intentions. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses.

H7-H8: Mental imagery elaboration (H7) and mental imagery quality (H8) positively affect the destination visit intention.

2.3. Need for Cognition

Due to differences in individuals' information processing styles, there may be considerable heterogeneity in the way people process mental imagery (Heller et al., 2019). Therefore, the concept of the need for cognition has been incorporated into this study.

The need for cognition refers to an individual's tendency to put effort into cognitive processes (Huang & Ha, 2020). The degree of need for cognition varies from person to person (Heller et al., 2019). Existing research suggests that different levels of need for cognition can affect information comprehension, the extent of visual information processing, and the formation of mental imagery (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; Huang & Ha, 2020).

As an important characteristic of individual heterogeneity, this study analyzes the influence of different levels of need for cognition on the perception of processing fluency, the formation of mental imagery, and subsequent outcomes (destination visit intentions). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses.

H9a-H9e: High levels of need for cognition lead to higher comprehension fluency (H9a), imagery fluency (H9b), mental imagery elaboration (H9c), mental imagery quality (H9d), and destination visit intention (H9e).

Given the aforementioned concepts and hypotheses, this study proposes the following research model, as shown in Figure 1.

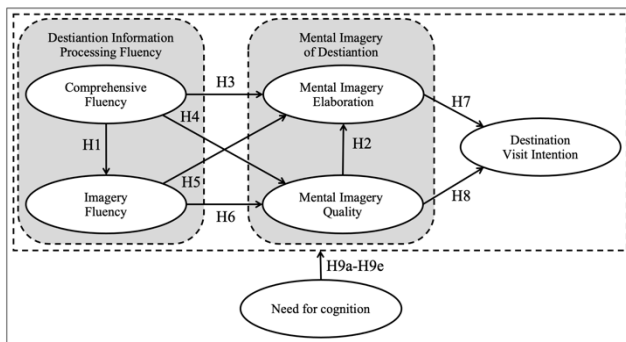


Figure 1: Research model

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

An online experiment was conducted in 2023. Respondents were randomly recruited from a reliable Chinese online survey platform called Credamo, with over 3 million registered participants. The reason for using the online experiment is that, compared to onsite experiments, online experiments are not restricted by geographical location and are able to collect data from a broader group of respondents.

Regarding the detailed experimental process, this study first screened short-form video users from the online survey platform's users through a screening question (i.e., "Have you ever used short-form video services such as Douyin or

Kuai?"). A total of 416 Chinese short-form video users were recruited.

After introducing the overall procedure and key points of the experiment, all participants were instructed to watch a prepared SFTV of approximately 1 minute and 30 seconds in duration. The prepared SFTV was embedded within the online questionnaire on the online survey platform to ensure that participants could complete the short-form video viewing without leaving the survey platform. All respondents were required to watch the video under consistent settings, including keeping the audio on and disabling real-time comments. Furthermore, to reduce recall bias, all participants were required to answer the questionnaire immediately after watching the video (Wattanacharoensil & Laornual, 2019; Zhu et al., 2022).

The questions in the questionnaire consisted of three parts: quality control questions, research concepts-related questions and demographic questions. All participants were first required to answer a series of quality control questions regarding both the audio and video, such as whether specific images or sounds appeared in the SFTV they had just watched. These questions ensured that the video was watched attentively and completely, as well as the audio system functioned as expected (Wang et al., 2021). Responses from participants who did not watch the video attentively or completely were excluded as invalid samples.

After the quality control questions, participants were asked to answer questions related to research concepts. The measurement items were all adapted from existing literature. Following the precedent set by previous studies, a 7-point Likert scale was employed to measure various constructs: 5 items concerning the need for cognition from Huang and Ha (2020), six items for comprehension fluency from Huang and Ha (2020), three items addressing imagery fluency from Huang and Ha (2020), nine items evaluating mental imagery elaboration from Bogicevic et al. (2019), and three items focused on destination visit intention from Skard et al. (2021). Additionally, the quality of mental imagery was assessed using a 7-point semantic differential bipolar scale (Bogicevic et al., 2019).

This study also gathered information regarding demographic details such as gender, age, and previous visit experiences. To safeguard the integrity of the survey, attention check questions were interspersed throughout. Responses that did not pass these checks were also marked as invalid and removed from the sample.

The data analysis process was split into two stages. The first stage employed partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to evaluate how processing fluency, induced by SFTV information, influences the formation of mental imagery and, subsequently, the intention to visit the destination.

The second stage aimed to identify how the variables and

different sections of the research model varied between participants with distinct levels of need for cognition. First of all, a k-mean cluster analysis using SPSS was conducted to separate the participants into two groups: those with a high need for cognition and those with a low need for cognition. Then, ANOVA was conducted several times to examine the variation in mean values of comprehension fluency, imagery fluency, mental imagery elaboration, mental imagery quality, and destination visit intention across respondents with the two different levels of a need for cognition.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

The attributes of the respondents are summarized in Table 1. After the screening of quality control questions and attention check questions, 26 invalid samples were excluded. A total of 390 valid samples were obtained. The gender distribution is nearly balanced, with a male-to-female ratio of about 3:5. This is consistent with TikTok's official statistics, which suggest that female users are more engaged in online tourism than male users (Oceanengine, 2023). Therefore, the gender ratio of the respondents is appropriate for this research. Most respondents belong to younger generations, specifically Generation Z and Millennials, who are the primary users of TikTok and often use social media to gather travel information (Zhou et al., 2024). Additionally, regarding the past visit experience, 77.18% of respondents had been to the destination that appeared in the video, and 46.15% reported visiting the destination multiple times.

Table 1: The attributes of the respondents ($N = 390$)

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	147	37.69%
	Female	243	62.31%
Generation	Generation Z (18-26)	222	56.92%
	Millennials (27-42)	145	37.18%
	Generation X or others (Over 43)	23	5.90%
Past Visit Experience	None	89	22.82%
	Once	121	31.03%
	Repeat	180	46.15%

4.2. Research model validation (H1-H8)

In this research, PLS-SEM was applied to assess and validate the structural model and hypotheses (H1-H8), utilizing the SmartPLS software. The decision to use PLS-SEM over Covariance-Based SEM (CB-SEM) was driven

by several factors. PLS-SEM is considered more appropriate for exploratory and predictive studies, as well as having lower requirements regarding data normality, residual distributions, and sample size (Hair et al., 2013, p. 18, p. 79).

Table 2: Results of measurement model test

Measurement	Loading	Mean	SD
<i>Need for Cognition (NFC)</i> (Cronbach's α : 0.859, CR: 0.899, AVE: 0.643)			
NFC1	0.888	4.653	1.704
NFC2	0.89	4.867	1.753
NFC3	0.718	4.264	1.595
NFC4	0.694	4.887	1.527
NFC5	0.797	5.003	1.458
<i>Comprehension Fluency (CF)</i> (Cronbach's α : 0.814, CR: 0.878, AVE: 0.642)			
CF1	-	6.036	0.729
CF2	0.809	6.326	0.771
CF3	-	6.303	0.762
CF4	0.776	6.215	0.823
CF5	0.809	5.933	0.889
CF6	0.809	5.908	1.016
<i>Imagery Fluency (IF)</i> (Cronbach's α : 0.885, CR: 0.930, AVE: 0.815)			
IF1	0.836	5.931	0.962
IF2	0.928	5.967	1.006
IF3	0.941	6.108	0.856
<i>Mental Imagery Elaboration (MIE)</i> (Cronbach's α : 0.878, CR: 0.904, AVE: 0.542)			
MIE1	0.778	5.738	0.955
MIE2	0.752	5.767	0.995
MIE3	0.678	6.131	0.878
MIE4	0.765	5.577	1.042
MIE5	0.765	5.803	0.96
MIE6	-	4.708	1.487
MIE7	0.786	5.764	0.98
MIE8	0.659	5.769	0.87
MIE9	0.695	5.292	1.218
<i>Mental Imagery Quality (MIQ)</i> (Cronbach's α : 0.783, CR: 0.860, AVE: 0.606)			
MIQ1	0.743	6.079	0.854
MIQ2	0.782	5.751	0.954
MIQ3	0.808	5.879	1.014
MIQ4	0.777	5.974	0.92
<i>Destination Visit Intention (DVI)</i> (Cronbach's α : 0.702, CR: 0.834, AVE: 0.626)			
DVI1	0.822	6.077	0.774
DVI2	0.752	6.003	0.843
DVI3	0.799	6.205	0.767

Note: "-": Deleted items (Low outer loadings).

As shown in Table 2, Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs exceeded the threshold of 0.7, ranging from 0.702 to 0.885, indicating sufficient internal consistency. The composite reliability (CR) values were above the critical

value of 0.7 and fell within the range of 0.834 to 0.930. The average variance extracted (AVE) values were greater than 0.5, between 0.542 and 0.815. These results show enough evidence for the measurement model's reliability and validity (Hair et al., 2011; Hair et al., 2013, p. 107). As shown in Table 3, the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlation (HTMT) for all variables is less than 0.85, which satisfies the HTMT.85 criterion, demonstrating adequate discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 3: Results of HTMT

Constructs	CF	IF	MIE	MIQ	DVI
CF	-	-	-	-	-
IF	0.572	-	-	-	-
MIE	0.468	0.741	-	-	-
MIQ	0.457	0.684	0.839	-	-
DVI	0.433	0.580	0.711	0.593	-

Note: CF = Comprehension Fluency, IF = Imagery Fluency, MIE = Mental Imagery Elaboration, MIQ = Mental Imagery Quality, and DVI = Destination Visit Intention.

Table 4: Results of VIF

Paths	VIF (Inner model)
CF → IF	1.000
CF → MIE	1.328
CF → MIQ	1.309
IF → MIE	1.710
IF → MIQ	1.309
MIQ → MIE	1.507
MIE → DVI	1.955
MIQ → DVI	1.955

Note: CF = Comprehension Fluency, IF = Imagery Fluency, MIE = Mental Imagery Elaboration, MIQ = Mental Imagery Quality, and DVI = Destination Visit Intention.

According to the results of Stone-Gaiser's Q-square test, which were found to be greater than zero, indicating that the exogenous variables in the structural model have adequate predictive relevance for the endogenous variables within the structural model (Hair et al., 2011). The inner model variance inflation factor (VIF) values for all constructs were less than 3.3, between 1.000 and 1.955 (see Table 4), meeting the criteria and ruling out the problem of multicollinearity and the problem of common method bias (Hair et al., 2011; Kock, 2015).

The adjusted R square values were 23.4% for imagery processing fluency, 58.5% for mental imagery interpretation, 33.3% for mental imagery quality, and 31.8% for destination visit intention. The results of the adjusted R square indicate that all the endogenous variables were explained to a stronger extent except for imagery processing fluency which was explained to a moderate extent by its exogenous variable (Cohen, 1988).

Khalilzadeh and Tasci (2017) propose that f square values can be interpreted as follows: 0.01 for a small effect size, 0.06 for a medium effect size, and 0.14 for a large effect size. The results show very small effects of comprehension fluency on mental imagery elaboration and mental imagery quality on destination visit intention. Considering the non-significant results for these two paths, the very low effect size is reasonable. The present results of f-square values also show very medium effects of comprehension fluency on mental imagery quality. Other exogenous variables had a large effect on endogenous variables.

The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) value of 0.063 falls within the recommended threshold of less than 0.08, indicating a good fit for the overall model in accordance with the guidelines established by Hu and Bentler (1998).

Regarding the results of path coefficient significance, comprehension fluency on mental imagery elaboration and mental imagery quality on destination visit intention showed non-significant results, rejecting H2 and H8. All other hypotheses have been supported. The detailed results are displayed in following Table 5 and Figure 2.

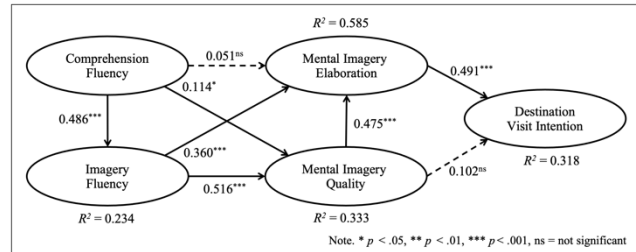


Figure 2: Results of path coefficient significance

Given that the results for the paths from comprehension fluency to mental imagery elaboration and from mental imagery quality to destination visit intention were not statistically significant, an additional indirect effects analysis was applied. As shown in Table 6, the results confirmed that the path from comprehension fluency to mental imagery elaboration was significantly mediated by imagery fluency and mental imagery quality, while the path from mental imagery quality to destination visit intention was mediated by mental imagery elaboration.

4.3. Cluster Analysis

To achieve a meaningful division of need for cognition into two homogeneous sub-groups, this study performed a k-mean cluster analysis using SPSS. In line with recommendations from previous studies, the k-mean approach was selected since the sample size exceeded 200 (Gon et al., 2016). The respondents were clustered according to their need for cognition scores based on the

minimum distance between the cases and the cluster centroids (Gon et al., 2016). After four iterations, two clusters were identified, with centers at 5.50 and 3.13. As shown in Table 7, two need for cognition clusters were

labeled as high need for cognition and low need for cognition, respectively. The majority of the respondents in this sample show a higher level of need for cognition.

Table 5: Results of path coefficient significance

Paths	β	t-value	f ²	95% C.I.	Results
H1: CF → IF	0.486	8.767***	0.309	[0.375, 0.593]	Supported
H2: CF → MIE	0.051	1.033 ^{ns}	0.005	[-0.042, 0.154]	Rejected
H3: CF → MIQ	0.114	2.093*	0.015	[0.004, 0.218]	Supported
H4: IF → MIE	0.360	7.401***	0.184	[0.266, 0.454]	Supported
H5: IF → MIQ	0.516	7.525***	0.307	[0.378, 0.645]	Supported
H6: MIQ → MIE	0.475	12.193***	0.363	[0.395, 0.548]	Supported
H7: MIE → DVI	0.491	5.978***	0.181	[0.297, 0.629]	Supported
H8: MIQ → DVI	0.102	1.334 ^{ns}	0.008	[-0.049, 0.249]	Rejected

Note: * p < .05, *** p < .001, β = Standardized regression weight. f² = effect sizes. 95% C.I. = 95% Confidence Interval, CF = Comprehension Fluency, IF = Imagery Fluency, MIE = Mental Imagery Elaboration, MIQ = Mental Imagery Quality, and DVI = Destination Visit Intention.

Table 6: Results of indirect effects

Path	β	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
CF → IF → MIE	0.175	0.031	5.610	.000
CF → IF → MIQ → MIE	0.119	0.019	6.218	.000
CF → MIQ → MIE	0.054	0.026	2.055	.040
MIQ → MIE → DVI	0.233	0.045	5.193	.000

Note: β = Standardized regression weight. CF = Comprehension Fluency, IF = Imagery Fluency, MIE = Mental Imagery Elaboration, MIQ = Mental Imagery Quality, and DVI = Destination Visit Intention.

Table 7: Cross-tabulation profile × NFC (H/L)

Characteristics		High need for cognition (n = 264)		Low need for cognition (n = 126)	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	106	40.15%	41	32.54%
	Female	158	59.85%	85	67.46%
Generation	Generation Z (18-26)	131	49.62%	91	72.22%
	Millennials (27-42)	115	43.56%	30	23.81%
	Generation X or others (Over 43)	18	6.82%	5	3.97%
Past Visit Experience	None	51	19.32%	38	30.16%
	Once	81	30.68%	40	31.75%
	Repeat	132	50.00%	48	38.10%

Table 8: Results of ANOVA

Constructs	High need for cognition (n = 264)		Low need for cognition (n = 126)		M Diff. (High - Low)	F
	M	SD	M	SD		
Comprehension Fluency	6.1742	0.63556	5.9306	0.80476	0.2436	10.498**
Imagery Fluency	6.1503	0.72477	5.6905	0.99704	0.4598	21.398***
Mental Imagery Elaboration	5.8546	0.63784	5.4692	0.83167	0.3854	21.126***
Mental Imagery Quality	6.0123	0.65373	5.7302	0.84179	0.2821	10.992**
Destination Visit Intention	6.1641	0.57625	5.9497	0.70939	0.2144	8.753**

Note: 1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree. **: p < .01, ***: p < .001 level. M Diff. = Mean difference.

4.4. Mean Differences between NFC Groups

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to ascertain group differences with different levels of need for cognition (NFC). The results of ANOVA revealed that respondents with a high need for cognition and those with a low need for cognition did differ significantly in all variables (comprehension fluency, imagery processing fluency, mental imagery elaboration, mental imagery quality, and destination visit intention), which supports H9a-H9e. Specifically, respondents in the high need for cognition group had higher processing fluency (including both comprehension and imagery), higher levels of mental imagery (including both elaboration and quality), and higher destination visit intention than those in the low need for cognition group, as shown in Table 8.

5. Conclusion

5.1. General Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the context of SFTV, this study explores how the formation of individual mental imagery during the interaction with SFTV is specifically influenced by the comprehension fluency and imagery fluency of destination information imagery. This study also examines the impact of different dimensions of mental imagery on subsequent intentions to visit the destination. This study presents three main findings:

5.1.1. The Detailed Version of the Processing Fluency-Mental Imagery Framework

The results of this study indicate that the fluency of information processing facilitates the formation of mental imagery. This finding also re-validates the conclusions of Zhou et al. (2024). Moreover, our further exploration of the processing fluency-mental imagery framework has led to some more specific conclusions.

First, while previous studies have pointed out that both comprehension fluency and imagery fluency influence the formation of mental imagery (Huang & Ha, 2020), when we specifically break down mental imagery into two dimensions: mental imagery elaboration and mental imagery quality, results show that comprehension fluency affects mental imagery quality but does not directly influence mental imagery elaboration. In contrast, the results show that imagery fluency plays a more significant role in stimulating mental imagery (both mental imagery elaboration and mental imagery quality). The results of indirect effects also support this finding to some extent, indicating that imagery fluency acts as an important mediator in the

influence of comprehension fluency on the two types of mental imagery.

This result is rational. Comprehension fluency reflects the ease or difficulty an individual experiences when receiving and understanding information. When comprehension fluency is high or when the information is better understood, individuals can process information more effortlessly. This smoother cognitive process allows them to create more vivid, lively, and clear mental imagery (i.e., mental imagery quality). However, the extent of mental imagery reflects the depth and quantity of an individual's involvement with the imagery, which is more related to the person's imagination and creative processing. Comprehension fluency focuses on the processing and understanding of information, primarily influencing the speed and accuracy of information processing, but does not directly impact the individual's elaboration or involvement with the information. Therefore, comprehension fluency cannot directly drive the detailed depiction of mental imagery. In contrast, imagery fluency is directly related to how individuals generate and manipulate mental images. Thus, when imagery fluency is high, individuals are more likely to generate rich, detailed, vivid, and clear mental imagery.

5.1.2. Mental Imagery Elaboration Promotes the Intention to Visit a Destination

The results of this study found that only mental imagery elaboration directly affects destination visit intention. Mental imagery quality does not directly influence destination visit intention but instead indirectly affects it through mental imagery elaboration. In other words, compared to the vividness of mental imagery, the quantity of mental imagery and the level of personal involvement more significantly and effectively influence individuals' behavioral intentions. This is a very interesting finding.

This study believes that more elaborate mental imagery means that individuals can think about problems from multiple perspectives and at multiple levels, thereby gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the situations related to perception and behavior. When individuals generate a large amount of imagery in their minds, their imagination may not only focus on the outcomes of the behavior but also a more detailed visualization of the execution process. This suggests that individuals will think more thoroughly about the specific steps of action, which in turn is more conducive to forming an executable plan. In contrast, while vivid imagery can stimulate motivation for action, if there is a lack of sufficient planning and detail, the behavior may still be difficult to implement.

5.1.3. Differences Caused by Need for Cognition

The results of this study also reveal that the need for cognition, as a form of individual heterogeneity, leads to differences in information processing and subsequent behavioral intentions. This study found that individuals with a high need for cognition, compared to those with a low need for cognition, exhibited higher levels of perceived processing fluency, high levels of mental imagery, and a greater intention to visit the destination.

This study tends to explain such results based on the definition of cognitive needs. Specifically, individuals with a high need for cognition are more proactive in understanding information and utilize more cognitive resources when processing it. As a result, they experience less perceived difficulty in understanding information, manifesting as higher processing fluency. In contrast, individuals with a low need for cognition often tend to avoid complex cognitive activities and invest fewer cognitive resources, leading to more obstacles in the understanding process, which results in lower fluency.

On the other hand, individuals with a high need for cognition allow them to more actively and smoothly convert complex information into mental imagery. As a result, they are able to generate more detailed, clear, and vivid mental images when processing information. Also, the mental imagery they generate will be more elaborate, containing more details and complexity. Because they generate more vivid and detailed destination imagery, individuals with a high need for cognition are better able to experience the attraction and value of a destination, thereby enhancing their intention to visit.

5.2. Theoretical Implications

This study is one of the earliest to integrate mental imagery theory with processing fluency in the fields of tourism study and short-form video research. The findings provide a more detailed explanation of the role of processing fluency on mental imagery, supplementing the limited results of previous studies by Huang and Ha (2020), Maier and Dost (2018), and Zhou et al. (2024) on the “processing fluency-mental imagery” framework. This study identifies the structure of influence, where the comprehension fluency and imagery fluency in short-form videos within the tourism context act as both indirect and direct antecedents of mental imagery elaboration, impacting individuals’ intentions to visit a destination.

First, this study re-examines the stimulating effect of information processing fluency (comprehension fluency and imagery fluency) on the formation of mental imagery within the context of dynamic visual information about destinations (SFTV). This research responds to the calls from Huang and Ha (2020) as well as Maier and Dost (2018) for further investigation into

visual information processing and mental imagery processing. Moreover, this study extends the existing “processing fluency-mental imagery” framework, enhancing the depth of discussion regarding information processing fluency and mental imagery. Building on previous research, this study further subdivides the concepts of processing fluency and mental imagery within the processing fluency-mental imagery framework and delves deeper into their respective dimensions to explore their distinct effects. The findings provide a more detailed analysis of visual information processing and mental imagery processing.

Secondly, this study also explores the relationship between the two dimensions of mental imagery and their distinct connections with destination visit intention. The results indicate that mental imagery quality contributes to the enhancement of mental imagery elaboration. The findings particularly emphasize the importance of mental imagery elaboration in increasing destination visit intention, providing insights into the mechanisms through which mental imagery in sensory information processing influences audience responses. This offers valuable references for short-form video destination content marketing as well as research on tourism-related short-form videos.

Finally, this study reveals the outcome differences caused by individual traits, i.e., the need for cognition. The study finds that varying levels of need for cognition result in differences in three aspects: information processing, mental imagery formation, and the formation of behavioral intentions. Individuals with a high need for cognition, who are willing to invest more effort in information processing, demonstrate higher levels of perceived processing fluency, higher levels of mental imagery, and greater destination visit intentions when processing destination marketing information. This result also provides both support and expansion for research on the need for cognition in the field of information processing.

5.3. Practical Implications

This study provides practical implications for destination-related marketers and stakeholders involved in tourism short-form video marketing. The results of this study indicate that, in the process of handling short-form video content, imagery fluency plays a more significant role in triggering the formation of mental imagery (mental imagery elaboration and mental imagery quality). Short-form video content that is easy to process fluently can lead to smoother imagery generation, thereby indirectly influencing the formation of individuals’ destination-related behavioral intentions. Therefore, this study first suggests that destination-related short-form video marketers create or adopt destination-related short-form video content that is easy

to understand and imagine in order to enhance the subjective visual presentation experience of individuals.

Specifically, when creating destination short-form videos, marketers should employ concise, direct, and compact narratives that are easy to understand while skillfully using sound, images, and stories to capture the attention and interest of viewers (Gan et al., 2023; Moin et al., 2020). When short-form video users can easily identify the tourism marketing information in the videos, they will generate smoother, more vivid, and more detailed immediate mental imagery of the destination or service embedded in the information, thereby enhancing their behavioral intentions towards the destination or service.

The results of this study also suggest that short-form video content related to destinations primarily influences individuals' intention to visit by stimulating mental imagery elaboration. Based on this finding, this study recommends that short-form video content creators and marketers try to enhance the visual appeal, employ vivid storytelling, incorporate interactive elements, and consider multi-sensory stimuli to create high-quality SFTV that engage viewers' imagination, thereby increasing their intention to visit.

Furthermore, it is crucial for short-form video creators or online experiential tourism marketers to employ various strategies to enhance users' need for cognition. Given that the essence of cognitive needs lies in an individual's tendency to invest more effort and energy in the cognitive process, this study suggests that short-form video content creators and destination marketers optimize content quality and enhance interactivity. These strategies aim to encourage individuals to invest more cognitive resources during their interaction with the content, thereby improving the processing of visual information, mental imagery elaboration, and the formation of behavioral intentions, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of destination marketing through short-form videos.

5.4. Limitations

As a limitation of this study, regarding individual heterogeneity characteristics, this research only focused on the need for cognition. Generational differences and differences in past visiting experiences may also lead to variations in individuals' information processing. These remaining issues will be left for future research.

Moreover, as Wu and Lai (2022) mentioned, there is still academic disagreement regarding the dimensional division of mental imagery. As an exploratory study, this research preliminarily examined the antecedents and impacts of mental imagery under a dual-dimensional framework. Future researchers are encouraged to further explore the processing framework of mental imagery

and its effects under other mainstream dimensional divisions.

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