THE INFLUENCE OF TRAVEL SAFETY MEDIA STIMULI AND CELEBRITY-RELATED NEWS EFFECT ON TOURISTS' PERCEIVED TRAVEL SAFETY RISK, DESTINATION SAFETY TRUST, AND SAFETY-ORIENTED TRAVEL BEHAVIORAL INTENTION*

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Abstract

This study aims to: 1) Examine how travel safety media stimuli (TSMS) shape perceived travel safety risk (PTSR) and destination safety trust (DST). 2) Investigate how PTSR and DST affect safety-oriented travel behavioral intentions (SOTBI). 3) Assess the moderating role of the celebrity-related news effect (CRNE) on the relationship between TSMS-PTSR and TSMS-DST. Drawing on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework, this study conducted an empirical investigation. Questionnaire data were collected from 600 Chinese tourists, yielding 462 valid samples, which were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM).

The results indicated that: 1) TSMS positively influence both PTSR and DST; 2) PTSR and DST significantly predict SOTBI; and 3) CRNE negatively

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moderates the TSMS-PTSR relationship but not the TSMS-DST relationship. These findings advance research on tourism safety communication by demonstrating that safety media exposure can simultaneously increase risk awareness and destination trust. Implications for destination crisis communication and tourist safety management are discussed.

Keywords: Travel Safety Media Stimuli, Celebrity-Related News Effect, Perceived Travel Safety Risk, Destination Safety Trust, Safety-Oriented Travel Behavioral Intention

Introduction

Against the backdrop of intensifying competition in the global tourism market and increasingly rational tourist decision-making, perceived travel safety risk and destination safety trust serve as core psychological variables in travel choices. These factors directly shape tourists' decision-making logic, are closely tied to destination competitiveness and sustainable development, and serve as key indicators of tourism development quality (Williams & Baláž, 2021).

The rise of tourism and online media has transformed how information is disseminated (Christou et al., 2025), turning tourists from passive recipients into active producers, disseminators, discussants and affected participants. The disappearance of Chinese actor Wang Xing near the Thailand Myanmar border in January 2025 triggered massive online debates, involving over 1.3 million news reports and 99,908 online participants (Qing, 2025). The incident raised widespread concerns about Thailand's travel safety, leading to a 34.23% drop in Chinese tourist arrivals from January to July 2025 compared with the 2019 pre-pandemic level (NationThailand, 2025). This case fully demonstrates media opinion's substantial influence on tourism destinations.

Against this backdrop, this study employs the SOR model with celebrity-related news effect as a moderator to examine how tourism safety media

coverage affects travel safety risk perception, destination safety trust, and travel intention. Existing research mainly examines celebrities' positive effects on destination image. This study analyzes celebrity-related mechanisms under negative crisis context to fill theoretical research gaps and offers practical references for destination safety crisis management.

Objectives

1. To examine how travel safety media stimuli shape perceived travel safety risk and destination safety trust.

2. To investigate how perceived travel safety risk and destination safety trust affect safety-oriented travel behavioral intentions.

3. To assess the moderating role of the celebrity-related news effect on the relationship between travel safety media stimuli and cognitive evaluations (i.e., perceived travel safety risk and destination safety trust).

Literature Review

1. SOR Framework in Tourism Safety Communication

The SOR theory posits that external environmental stimuli trigger individuals' internal cognitive and emotional states, which in turn drive their behavioral responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The framework is particularly well suited for this study because travel safety media stimuli and celebrity-related news serve as external environmental cues (S) that shape tourists' perceived risk and destination trust (O), subsequently influencing their safety-oriented behavioral intentions (R).

2. Travel Safety Media Stimuli as External Stimuli

As external stimuli, travel safety media stimuli (TSMS) cannot be fully summarized by a single theory, this study therefore integrates multiple perspectives to analyze their mechanisms. Media exposure theory (Lazarsfeld et

al., 1968) and cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1969) note that media coverage intensity shapes audience cognition. Vivid information with sensory details, emotional impact, and concrete imagery draws more attention and evokes stronger emotional responses (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Tversky and Kahneman (1973) indicate that individuals rely on accessible vivid information for risk assessments rather than rational analysis. Hovland et al. (1953) argue information effectiveness depends on content and communicator credibility. Framing theory (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974) holds media shape audience interpretations via meaning frameworks. Blumler and Katz (1974) suggest audiences actively select media content to meet their needs. Consistent with these perspectives, empirical tourism studies further confirm that media stimuli significantly influence tourists' risk perceptions, destination trust, and behavioral intentions (Alghamdi & Abdulwahid, 2025).

H1a: Travel safety media stimuli positively influence perceived travel safety risk.

H1b: Travel safety media stimuli positively influence destination safety trust.

3. Perceived Travel Safety Risk and Destination Safety Trust as Organism States

Perceived travel safety risk (PTSR) is individuals' subjective judgment of the severity and probability of travel risk, shaped by psychological, social, cultural, and institutional factors (Sjöberg et al., 2004). It correlates negatively with city image evaluation and travel intention (Sharma et al., 2020), and can be mitigated through safety guarantees, social support, and improved self-control to restore travel willingness (Li & Huang, 2023).

H2a: Perceived travel safety risk positively influences safety-oriented travel behavioral intention.

Destination safety trust (DST) refers to tourists' overall assessment of a destination's reliability and credibility (Artigas et al., 2017). Media content, communication formats, and word-of-mouth effects directly shape tourists' cognitive judgments of destination safety, significantly affect destination safety trust, reduce uncertainty in travel decision-making, and enhance visit intention, revisit intention, and recommendation behavior (Alghamdi & Abdulwahid, 2025).

H2b: Destination safety trust positively influences safety-oriented travel behavioral intention.

4. Safety-Oriented Travel Behavioral Intention as Response

Behavioral intention is defined as individuals' willingness to invest effort in performing an action (Ajzen, 1991). In this study, the construct is refined into safety-oriented travel behavioral intention (SOTBI), which emphasizes rational protective decision-making: an active and purposive choice based on safety evaluations, rather than mere avoidance of a destination. This construct integrates dimensions including destination switching, travel avoidance, and trip cancellation, all of which reflect the core logic of prioritizing safety in travel decisions. This intention is jointly shaped by perceived travel safety risk and destination safety trust (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005).

5. Moderating Role of Celebrity-Related News Effect

Celebrity-related news effect reflects celebrities' influence on audiences' information perception and behavioral intentions (McCracken, 1989). In tourism context, it can shape tourists' destination risk perception and travel intention, and also moderate the persuasive effect of media information (Coffie et al., 2023).

H3a: Celebrity-related news effect moderates the relationship between travel safety media stimuli and perceived travel safety risk.

H3b: Celebrity-related news effect moderates the relationship between travel safety media stimuli and destination safety trust.

6. Research Gaps and Theoretical Framework

While tourism safety research has examined media influences on risk perceptions, few studies have systematically integrated multi-dimensional travel safety media stimuli to simultaneously explain both perceived risk and destination trust within a unified framework. Furthermore, celebrity-related news effects in tourism have primarily been studied in positive contexts, leaving underexplored how celebrity involvement as safety event victims shapes responses to safety media. This study addresses these gaps by synthesizing media and tourism behavior theories within the SOR framework to examine the proposed relationships.

Methodology

1. Research Population and Sampling Design

Responders in this study meet the following criteria: Chinese nationality, aged 18 or above, at least one international leisure trip in the past 3 years, basic online media usage, and exposure to tourism-related violent crime news in the past 12 months. Non-probability purposive sampling was employed through online questionnaires and social media. Based on SEM empirical standards, the sample size should be 5-10 times the number of items, with at least 300-400 valid samples for complex models. This study therefore set a target of over 400 valid samples to ensure robust model estimation.

2. Research Instruments

This study adopted an exploratory approach and used questionnaires as the core research instrument. All measurement items were adapted from existing literature. Given that the respondents were Chinese tourists, the questionnaire was translated into Chinese prior official distribution. All items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale. The questionnaire also collected respondents'

demographic information for further analysis. It consists of three parts, all designed with closed-ended questions.

3. Reliability and Validity

This study assessed scale reliability via α, with a threshold of 0.7. Based on 50 pre-survey samples; all variables exceeded 0.7, indicating good internal consistency (Table 3.1). Content validity was evaluated by three experts, with items screened and revised according to the 0.75 criterion. Construct validity was tested via CFA. Overall convergent validity was acceptable, with all item loadings and CR meeting criteria. Discriminant validity was generally acceptable, with only two variable pairs showing marginal excess of the HTMT index.

Table 3.1 Scale Reliability Coefficients

Variable	α
Travel Safety Media Stimuli (TSMS)	0.896
Perceived Travel Safety Risk (PTSR)	0.745
Destination Safety Trust (DST)	0.729
Celebrity-Related News Effect (CRNE)	0.796
Safety-Oriented Travel Behavioral Intention (SOTBI)	0.728

1. Data Collection

Questionnaires were distributed to and collected from Chinese tourists via online platforms from December 2025 to January 2026. A total of 600 responses were retrieved. After data screening based on filter questions and attention checks, 138 invalid responses were excluded, leaving 462 valid questionnaires with an effective response rate of 77.0%.

2. Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted in three stages using SPSS and SmartPLS. First, descriptive analysis summarized respondents' profiles, travel

experience, and news exposure. Second, PLS-SEM was used to assess the measurement model via α, CR, AVE, Fornell-Larcker criterion and SRMR. Third, SmartPLS was employed to examine the structural model and hypotheses, using R^2, Q^2, f^2, and bootstrapped path coefficients.

Results

1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The 462 valid respondents were predominantly female young adults aged 18–34, with middle-to-high income and international travel experience within the past three years. Most respondents accessed tourism-related news through mainstream and social media channels, with exposure frequency mainly 1–10 times. Detailed sample profiles are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Profiles of Respondents (n=462)

Variable	Category	Distribution	Percentage
Last international trip timing	Within 12 months	169	36.6
	1–3 years ago	293	63.4
Gender	Male	143	31
	Female	318	68.8
	Prefer not to specify	1	0.2
Age	18–34	288	62.3
	35–54	115	24.9
	≥55	59	12.8
Education	High school or below	165	35.7
	Undergraduate	157	34
	Graduate	140	30.3
Monthly personal income (CNY)	≤6,000	80	17.3
	6,001–15,000	199	43.1

Variable	Category	Distribution	Percentage
	≥15,001	181	39.2
	Prefer not to say	2	0.4
Total number of	1~2	133	28.8
international trips	3~5	206	44.6
	≥6	123	26.6
Exposure to news	1~4	138	29.9
	5~10	143	30.9
	≥11	181	39.2
Trip Type*	leisure trip	454	-
	Business travel	449	-
	Visiting friends or relatives	447	-
	Other	5	-
News Channel*	Mainstream news	457	-
	Social media	461	-
	Friends or family	457	-

*Note: Multiple-choice items, percentage is not applicable.

2. Measurement Model Assessment

2.1 Internal Consistency Reliability

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using α and CR. As shown in Table 4.2, α ranged 0.643–0.87. Although SOTBI and PTSR fell slightly below 0.7, values ≥0.6 are considered acceptable for exploratory research (Hair et al., 2006). CR ranged 0.799–0.906, met the 0.7 benchmark. Since CR is more robust indicator in SEM (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), the constructs exhibit adequate internal consistency reliability.

2.2 Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was assessed using indicator loadings and AVE. As shown in Table 4.2, most loadings exceeded 0.708, supporting indicator reliability. PTSR4 (0.687) and CRNE3 (0.693) were retained despite moderate loadings. Their removal did not improve model fit, and such values are acceptable in PLS-SEM (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). All AVE values were near or above 0.5. PTSR's AVE of 0.498 was acceptable given its CR of 0.799. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), values between 0.4 and 0.5 are considered acceptable in exploratory research when CR exceeds 0.7. The measurement model exhibits adequate convergent validity.

Table 4.2 Validity and Reliability of Variables

Measurement Items		NO.	Loading	α	CR	AVE
Travel Safety Media Stimuli (TSMS)	Frequency of Exposure (TSMS1)	FE1	0.933	0.876	0.906	0.618
		FE2	0.830			
	Salience/ Vividness (TSMS2)	SV1	0.828			
		SV2	0.798			
	Proximity/ Relevance (TSMS3)	PR1	0.835			
		PR2	0.820			
	Source Credibility (TSMS4)	SC1	0.804			
		SC2	0.857			
	Message Framing / Valence (TSMS5)	MFV1	0.846			
		MFV2	0.818			
	Attention/ Intentional Exposure (TSMS6)	AIE1	0.822			
		AIE2	0.849			
Perceived Travel Safety Risk (PTSR)		PTSR1	0.704	0.664	0.799	0.498
		PTSR2	0.709			
		PTSR3	0.721			

Measurement Items	NO.	Loading	α	CR	AVE
	PTSR4	0.687			
Destination Safety Trust (DST)	DST1	0.705	0.706	0.819	0.532
	DST2	0.716			
	DST3	0.755			
	DST4	0.739			
Celebrity-Related News Effect	CRNE1	0.756	0.715	0.824	0.539
(CRNE)	CRNE2	0.755			
	CRNE3	0.693			
	CRNE4	0.731			
Safety-Oriented Travel	SOTBI1	0.785	0.643	0.808	0.584
Behavioral Intention (SOTBI)	SOTBI2	0.714			
	SOTBI3	0.791			

2.3 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed via the Fornell–Larcker criterion. As shown in Table 4.3, the square root of each construct's AVE exceeded all inter-construct correlations, confirming discriminant validity. Supplementary checks using cross-loadings and HTMT supported this conclusion.

Table 4.3 Fornell-Larker Criterion

Variables	TSMS	PTSR	DST	CRNE	SOTBI
TSMS	0.837				
PTSR	0.554	0.706			
DST	0.44	0.557	0.729		
CRNE	0.402	0.495	0.655	0.734	
SOTBI	0.393	0.476	0.519	0.587	0.764

2.4 Overall Model Fit

Model fit was evaluated using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), the primary fit index recommended for PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2019). The SRMR values for both the saturated and estimated models were below the 0.08 threshold, indicating an acceptable overall model fit (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	95%	99%
Saturated model	0.063	0.049	0.052	0.053
Estimated model	0.072	0.051	0.055	0.057

Structural Model Assessment

3.1 Collinearity Assessment

Multicollinearity was tested by VIF. Values spanned 1.019 to 1.449, below the 3.3 threshold, showing no multicollinearity (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 Structural Model Path Effect Estimation Results

Paths	Std. Beta	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Result	VIF	f^2
Direct & Moderation Paths							
TSMS ⟶ PTSR	0.606	0.038	16.038	<0.001	√	1.361	0.578
TSMS ⟶ DST	0.303	0.04	7.606	<0.001	√	1.361	0.135
PTSR ⟶ SOTBI	0.271	0.048	5.634	<0.001	√	1.449	0.074
DST ⟶ SOTBI	0.368	0.052	7.076	<0.001	√	1.449	0.137
CRNE × TSMS ⟶ PTSR	-0.078	0.029	2.716	0.007	√	1.019	0.024
CRNE × TSMS ⟶ DST	-0.044	0.025	1.767	0.077	×	1.019	0.007

Paths	Std. Beta	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Result	VIF	f^2
Indirect Path							
TSMS -> PTSR -> SOTBI	0.164	0.031	5.303	<0.001	√	-	-
TSMS -> DST -> SOTBI	0.112	0.022	4.983	<0.001	√	-	-
CRNE × TSMS -> PTSR -> SOTBI	-0.021	0.008	2.688	0.007	√	-	-
CRNE × TSMS -> DST -> SOTBI	-0.016	0.009	1.798	0.072	×	-	-

Note: √ = supported; × = not supported.

3.2 Hypothesis Testing

The structural path estimates confirmed that all direct effect hypotheses (H1a, H1b, H2a, H2b) were supported. Among the moderation effect hypotheses, H3a was supported while H3b was not supported (Table 4.5).

3.3 Mediation Analysis

Bootstrapping results showed that both mediating paths of TSMS ⟶ PTSR ⟶ SOTBI and TSMS ⟶ DST ⟶ SOTBI were significant and supported (Table 4.5).

3.4 Moderated Mediation Effect

The moderated mediating effect test indicated that the path of CRNE × TSMS ⟶ PTSR ⟶ SOTBI was supported, while the path of CRNE × TSMS ⟶ DST ⟶ SOTBI was not supported (Table 4.5).

3.5 Model Explanatory Power and Predictive Relevance

The model's explanatory power and predictive relevance fully meet academic standards, with qualified R^2, f^2 and Q^2predict metrics (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6 Structural Model Fit and Predictive Validity Metrics

Endogenous Constructs	R^2	$Q^2predict$
PTSR	0.533	0.521
DST	0.501	0.491
SOTBI	0.320	0.345

Summary

The structural model results are summarized in Figure 1. The figure presents the direct effects, moderation effects, and supported/non-supported hypotheses tested in this study.

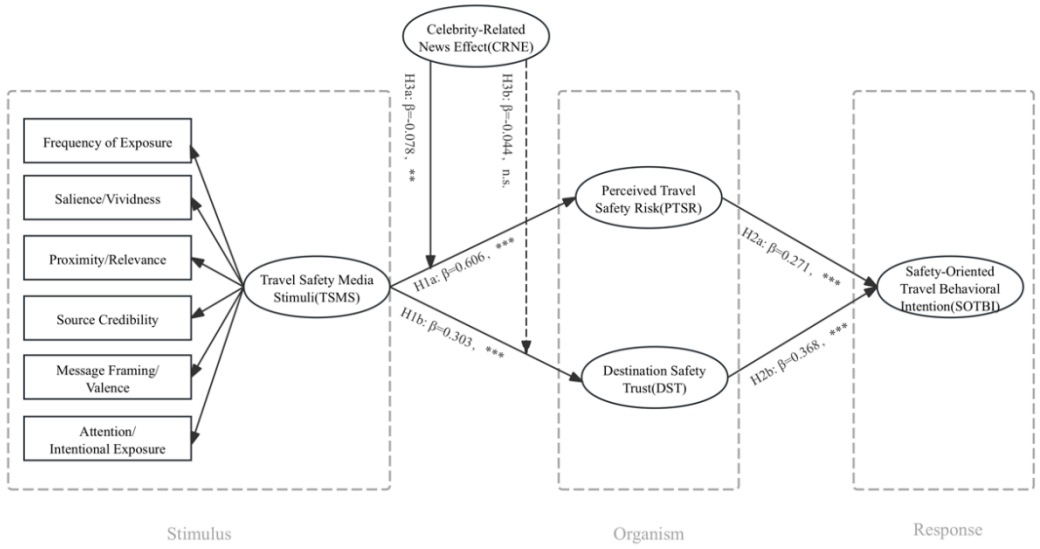


Figure 1 Structural Model Results of Relationships among TSMT, PTSR, DST, CRNE and SOTBI

Discussion

1. H1a: TSMS Exerts a Significant Positive Effect on PTSR

The results show that TSMS exerts a significant positive effect on PTSR (β = 0.606, t = 16.038, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1a, meaning that travel safety media stimulation enhances tourists' perceived travel safety risk.

This result is consistent with existing research (McClinchey & Dimanche, 2023), and can be explained by the availability heuristic (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973): frequent vivid negative information is easily retrieved, leading to risk overestimation, and TSMS as a higher-order construct further strengthens this risk perception path.

2. H1b: TSMS Exerts a Significant Positive Effect on DST

The results show that TSMS exerts a significant positive effect on DST (β= 0.303, t = 7.606, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1b, meaning that travel safety media stimulation enhances tourists' destination safety trust.

Mainstream viewpoints hold that negative safety news increases tourists risk perception and weakens their trust in destination safety (McClinchey & Dimanche, 2023). This study draws an opposite conclusion, which can be explained by three core mechanisms. First, intensive information exposure encourages people to actively seek out information and conduct thorough cognitive processing. This reduces biased negative impressions and helps people form comprehensive judgments (Ahluwalia, 2002). Second, widely concerned publicized events improve information transparency. The enhanced completeness and credibility of information effectively facilitate the development of tourists’ trust (Wang & Yan, 2022). Third, public supervision urges local authorities to respond in a timely manner and improve governance practices (Langer et al., 2025). Tourists will believe that relevant incidents have been addressed and properly resolved. This reduces the perceived possibility of risk recurrence and strengthens tourists’ trust in destination.

3. H2a: PTSR Exerts a Significant Positive Effect on SOTBI

The results show that PTSR exerts a significant positive effect on SOTBI (β = 0.271, t = 5.634, p < 0.001), supporting H2a, meaning that higher perceived risk increases safety-oriented behavioral intention.

This study conceptualizes SOTBI as tourists' protective travel decision-making, including avoiding unsafe destinations, changing destinations, postponing travel, or choosing safer alternatives, rather than simply rejecting specific destinations. Tourists with higher safety risk perception show stronger intentions to avoid potential risks, adjust travel plans, and choose secure destinations. This finding aligns with existing research (Sharma et al., 2020).

4. H2b: DST Exerts a Significant Positive Effect on SOTBI

The results show that DST exerts a significant positive effect on SOTBI (β = 0.368, t = 7.076, p < 0.001), supporting H2b, meaning that destination safety trust enhances safety-oriented travel behavioral intention.

Tourist trust in a destination does not result in risk neglect, but rather promotes rational and safety-oriented travel adjustments. Safety oriented behavioral intention reflects rational risk prevention rather than simple destination rejection, which aligns with existing empirical findings. This result can be interpreted from the perspective of trust transfer theory (Stewart, 2003), and is consistent with recent research findings (Alghamdi & Abdulwahid, 2025).

5. H3a: CRNE Significantly and Negatively Moderates the Relationship Between TSMS and PTSR

The results show that CRNE significantly and negatively moderates the relationship between TSMS and PTSR (β = -0.078, t = 2.716, p = 0.007 < 0.01), supporting H3a, meaning that celebrity-related news effect weakens the positive linkage between travel safety media stimuli and perceived travel safety risk.

The finding contrasts with mainstream research, which holds that the celebrity effect enhances information influence and intensifies risk perception

(Coffie et al., 2023). This result can be explained by three core mechanisms aligned with relevant classic and contemporary research: information bias correction (Entman, 1993), empathy replacing panic (Scherer et al., 2022), and systematic cognitive processing (Zhang et al., 2024). All three processes weaken the amplifying effect of negative media on public risk perception.

6. H3b: CRNE Has No Significant Moderating Effect on the Relationship between TSMS and DST

The results show that CRNE has no significant moderating effect on the relationship between TSMS and DST (β = -0.044, t = 1.767, p = 0.077 > 0.05), H3b is not supported.

Mainstream studies suggest that celebrity news effect can moderate the link between media stimuli and destination trust by enhancing information credibility and public emotional recognition (McCracken, 1989). This study found an insignificant moderating outcome. This outcome can be explained by trust stability theory (Jebbouri et al., 2022) and cognitive resistance theory (Petty & Cacioppo, 1977). Destination safety trust is a stable, long-term attitude shaped by accumulated travel experience (Delgado-Ballester, 2004), and is hardly affected by short-term information exposure (Jebbouri et al., 2022). Form a cognitive resistance perspective, tourists actively defend existing beliefs and resist persuasive attempts from incongruent celebrity-related information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1977). Consequently, they maintain established destination trust rather than adjusting it in response to transient media content. Further research may explore other potential influencing factors.

Recommendation

Media information significantly affects risk perception and destination safety trust, which in turn shape travel intention. Destinations should therefore communicate safety information effectively rather than only promoting

attractions, especially after major incidents. Since celebrity factors do not moderate the impact of media on safety trust, restoring trust requires direct safety improvements, not over-reliance on celebrities.

Authorities should acknowledge negative media coverage and release official investigation results and safety measures to offset one-sided narratives. Celebrity victims should not be the primary vehicle for rebuilding destination safety image. Instead, systematic safety upgrades and third-party certifications are more reliable.

This study adopted purposive sampling through an online platform, which introduced self-selection bias and online sampling bias. The sample was also limited to Chinese tourists, so cross cultural applicability is limited. Future research should use broader and more diverse samples to improve the generalizability of the findings. It should also explore why media stimuli simultaneously affect risk perception and safety trust and why celebrity effects failed to moderate the relationship between media and safety trust.

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