

Delineating the interplay between subjective safety and country image in influencing international tourists' extrinsic travel motives

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Abstract | This paper examines the intervening effect of the subjective safety of travel and tourism activity in the relationship between country image and attribute-based travel motives. Data from an online survey of 454 international tourists were subjected to mediation analyses via Model 4 of Process Macro. The results generally indicate that the effect of country image on travel motives is significantly nuanced by the perceived safety of travel and tourism activity associated with the destination. Intriguingly, in line with the S-O-R model, the perceived safety of travel and tourism activity fully mediates the relationship between a country's functional image and the outdoor-experiential-oriented travel motives of international tourists. Thus, it underscores the practical significance of country image and subjective safety on international tourists' cognition and their subsequent conative behaviour. The findings extend the seminal theory and advance African tourism research to travel motivation during crises. The significant implications for African tourism practitioners and policymakers regarding tourists' travel motives amid a crisis are discussed.

Keywords | Country image, mediation analysis, subjective safety, travel motives, South Africa

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1. Introduction

African tourism, with its vast and unparalleled natural (the Victoria Falls, Table Mountain, Mount Kilimanjaro) and man-made (Egyptian Pyramids, Kruger National Park, Sun City) attributes, is synonymous with leisure-oriented tourism, accounting for up to 70% of all travel and tourism activity on the continent in 2019 and generating upwards of USD102.8 billion in tourism receipts (World Travel and Tourism Council – WTTC, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic set off a cascade of deleterious events that resulted in a well-documented tourism crisis characterised by an unprecedented contraction in tourism demand to Africa of up to 77% in 2020 and 74% in 2021 (compared to 2019 international arrivals) and global job losses (Mohammed Said Al-Mughairi, Bhaskar & Khal-fan Hamood Alazri, 2021; World Tourism Organisation, 2022; WTTC, 2022). Akin to past health crises in tourism such as the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), H1N1 (Swine flu) and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) outbreaks, while the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have receded, academic inquiry into the impact of the pandemic on the psyche and the travel behaviour of tourists is an ongoing and iterative process due to the enduring effects of the crisis (Mayo, Maglasang, Moridpour & Taboada, 2021; Wang, Yeh, Chen & Huan, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the negative stereotypes associated with travel and tourism activity as a vector for disease spread during health crises (Xie, Zhang & Huang, 2022). These stereotypes *feed into* the heightened emotional sensitivity of tourists toward the safety of travel and tourism activities in specific countries such as the United States of America, Brazil and India (Abbas, Mubeen, Iorember, Raza & Mamirkulova, 2021). Despite accounting for only 2.5% of all global infections and 4.1% of the mortality rates at the peak of the pandemic in 2021 (World Health Organisation - Africa, 2022), the African continent

somehow managed to accrue a disproportionately negative image due to mostly biased media coverage and thus attracted red-travel listings during the pandemic (Gabore, 2020). However, one may argue that it is the heterogeneity in the responses of countries to the pandemic that has influenced how countries such as the United States of America, China and South Africa are now perceived (Shen, Jo & Joppe, 2022), suggesting that the pandemic may have disproportionately significant ramifications for the country images (CI) of African countries.

Although the influence of CI on consumer perceptions in their product evaluation and consumptive decision-making is well established in the literature (Magnusson, Westjohn & Sirianni, 2019; Silva & Costa, 2017; Woo, 2019), the role and influence of CI on tourist perception and behaviour towards destinations in general (Kosmaczewska & Kim, 2022) and, more pertinently, during a crisis, is still nascent (Wang, 2020). Academic inquiry into the interplay between the CI, the subjective safety of travel and tourism activity and travel motives amid crises has, to the best of the authors' knowledge, not been explored in tourism research, more so from an African perspective. The present study fills this research gap and advances African tourism research within the contemporary global tourism environment. Perceived risk during health crises is not an 'absolute' barrier to travel and tourism (Aebli, Volgger & Taplin, 2022; Köchling et al., 2022); hence the burgeoning literature on the COVID-19 pandemic in tourism signals the re-ignited interest in examining various aspects of the decision-making and behaviour of tourists during crises (Fedeli, Nguyen, Williams, Del Chiappa & Wassler, 2022). However, to date, little insight relating to the travel motivation of tourists during prolonged crises also exists, with a critique of the current state of research regarding travel motivation during crises bemoaning both the ad hoc and generic nature of previous studies (Aebli et al., 2022). The present study applies the Stimuli-

Organism-Response framework (S-O-R) to address three gaps in chronicling advances in African tourism.

First, the influence of the CI of African countries on the travel motives of international tourists is under-researched compared to the extant literature emanating from and contextualised within Western and Eastern tourism destination countries. Second, the underlying mediation mechanisms relating to subjective safety associated with travel and tourism activities in tourism in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic have yet to be fully explored, more so within the context of CI and travel motives. Third, there is also discernibly limited *in-situ* empirical evidence modelling the motivation behaviour of tourists amid crisis, more so from an African tourism perspective. Hence, the study is opportune as it was conducted amid an unprecedented tourism crisis and is one of the first to explore the influence of CI on the travel motives of international tourists from an African tourism perspective while considering the potential intervening effect of crisis-induced safety perceptions.

2. Theoretical framework

The S-O-R model is predicated on the notion that external *stimuli* trigger an internal 'state' in consumers as *organisms*, which then induces either a positive or negative behavioural *response* (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). *Stimuli* refer to external environmental factors such as marketing, branding, promotion, country image, and risk communication that influence individuals (Dela-Cruz & Lapcap, 2022; Lu, Poon & Weng, 2018). *Organism* refers to the individual or consumer whose cognitive or affective state is triggered by the stimuli, with conditions including risk perceptions, subjective preferences, bias and destination trust (Xie et al., 2022). *Response* in the model is the outcome or conative behaviour [such as travel inten-

tion, satisfaction, loyalty] of the organism in response to the stimuli and affective state (Zhang, Yue, Ye & Peng, 2021). Goi, Kalidas and Zeeshan (2014) identify several studies that have applied the S-O-R models to profile consumer behaviour, including some leisure-oriented industries such as the restaurant, casino, theme park and hospitality sectors. More contemporary tourism studies have applied the S-O-R model to explore internal mediation mechanisms in various contexts, including modelling the interplay between risk communications framing, perceived safety and travel intentions (Xie et al., 2022) and confirming the role of soundscapes in nature-based tourism experiences (Jiang, 2022) or the role of cognitive and affective responses in the virtual reality travel context (Kim, Lee & Jung, 2020). This study extends the S-O-R model to the context of tourism amid crises from a uniquely African tourism destination perspective. Country Image (CI) refers to the extrinsic stimuli, while subjective safety perception of travel and tourist activity represents the state of the organism, and travel motives represent the behavioural response of international tourists.

2.1. Country image in tourism (Stimuli)

Country Image (CI) is at the confluence of inherent beliefs (cognitive) and perceptions (affective) of a country that have a subsequent causal effect on country-specific conations (Wang, 2020). Therefore, CI may be characterised as "the total of all descriptive, inferential, and informational beliefs one has about a particular country" (Martin & Eroglu, 1993, p.193). The present study examines the effect of CI as an exogenous variable based on the three cognitive components of Buhmann and Ingenhoff's (2015) four-dimensional model (4D Model) of CI, namely the functional, normative and aesthetic dimensions. The fourth dimension of the 4D Model is the sympathetic dimension, which is affective in nature and does not fall within the

scope of the study. Functional CI (FCI) consists of location-specific attractions and facilities utilised as heuristic cues by tourists for information symmetry (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015; Chaulagain et al., 2019). While normative CI (NCI) considers the influence of value systems, norms, culture and inherent traditions of the country, aesthetic CI (ACI) is associated with the tangible and intangible qualities related to the beauty and attractiveness of the country based on scenic attributes and other assets (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015).

Country Image (CI), irrespective of the dimensional perspective, is a very influential and often inherent stereotypical view of a country that significantly affects how countries are evaluated and, subsequently, influences consumer attitudes towards their products, including tourism experiences (Palau-Saumell, Forgas-Coll, Amaya-Molinar & Sanchez-García, 2016; Sampaio, Régio & Mogollón, 2021). As an adaptive behaviour, when seeking information symmetry to inform their decisions during crises, tourists tend to rely on external cues as heuristics in their decision-making (Xie et al., 2022). Country Image (CI) is one external heuristic cue that influences the subjective knowledge and trust associated with the destination, more so during crises (Shen et al., 2022). For instance, crises such as SARS and the COVID-19 pandemic are adverse events that have become synonymous with specific Asian countries, some of which are globally significant tourism destination countries and tourist source markets (Chen et al., 2020). As a result of these crises, some of these countries have faced corresponding CI challenges and significant contractions in tourism demand (Mayo et al., 2021).

Notwithstanding advances in tourism research, certain authors observe that little is known about the influence of CI on tourist behaviour during crises (Shen et al., 2022; Wang, 2020). They acknowledge that during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the CI most likely exerts a more significant influence on tourists' decision-making

than the conventional tourism destination image. Hence, Wang (2020) identifies the dichotomy between CI and destination image, advocating for more empirical research that interrogates their mutually exclusive roles in influencing tourist travel behaviour. To this end, some of the literature (Chaulagain, Wiitala & Fu, 2019; Matiza & Slabbert, 2020a; Wang, 2020) accept that CI influences the attitude of tourists towards a tourism destination due to the halo effect of the CI on the tourism destination image. Prior studies also indicate that CI affects tourists' travel behaviour, including their travel intentions (Kosmaczewska & Kim, 2022) and, more pertinently, their extrinsic 'pull' travel motives (Hwang, Asif & Lee, 2020).

2.2. Subjective safety and travel behaviour (Organism)

According to Zou and Yu (2022, p.1), subjective safety in the travel context refers to the overall perception of, "stable and orderly conditions, namely - being protected and free from injury or danger during tourism activities". They view subjective safety as a five-dimensional construct consisting of facility and equipment, natural, social, human, and management elements that influence subjective safety perception. Subjective safety is, therefore, a critical antecedent to the competitiveness and attractiveness of tourism destinations (Rittichainuwat, Chakraborty & Rattanaphinanchai, 2014; Xie et al., 2022). Subjective safety is idiosyncratic in nature, implying that perceptions of safety are based on an individual's assessment of the level of risk associated with tourism activity and the extent to which extrinsic factors and safety conditions fall within the individual's risk tolerance and management level (Köchling et al., 2022; Zou & Meng, 2020). The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB - Ajzen, 1991), via its triad of dimensions (attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control - PBC), suitably pre-

dicts behaviour within the perceived subjective safety context, encapsulating the influence of a tourist's affective state (such as subjective safety perceptions) on tourist's conative behaviour.

Prior studies have established that extrinsic aspects such as CI influence a tourist's attitude towards a destination (Shen et al., 2022) and the subjective norms that emanate from a tourist's social reference groups (Hwang et al., 2020; Kosmaczewska & Kim, 2022). However, pertinent to this study from the TPB is the extent to which tourists perceive their ability to manage and change their behaviour (PBC) when faced with perceived barriers or challenges that may inhibit their intended behaviour (Hardin-Fanning & Ricks, 2017; Wang et al., 2022). Information symmetry via external heuristic cues such as CI is thus critical to the perception of control as individuals estimate the external factors that may inhibit their behaviour and exert a motivational influence (Wang et al., 2022). There is empirical evidence that subjective safety (akin to risk perception) is a precursor to travel motivation in cases of heightened risk such as during crises (Sano & Sano, 2019). For instance, Pawaskar and Goel (2016) identify safety perceptions as one of the main factors influencing the travel motives of tourists. It follows that, during a crisis, subjective safety is a function of PBC, whereby increased perceived subjective safety has an inverse effect on the risk associated with travel and tourism activity - translating to an increased likelihood that the tourist will be less risk averse, increasing PBC and the possibility of engaging in travel and tourism.

A prior study (Matiza & Slabbert, 2021) has established that the perception of the safety of specific travel and tourism-oriented activities within a particular destination influences the choices that tourists must make across the spectrum of the tourism value chain, including the option of the mode of transport, accommodation preferences, and choice of tourist activities to engage in. A positive assessment of these choices will invariably

positively influence travel motives due to improved PBC when engaging in travel and tourism during a crisis. The emerging literature suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has, in some instances, re-established the significance of health and safety concerns as a demotivator of travel and tourism activity (Aebli et al., 2022). For example, during the pandemic, the ability of travellers to use public transit was predicated on PBC due to the strictness of the moratoriums on specific transport modes and the perceived efficacy of health protocols in preventing transmission and infection during travel, as well as the confidence of the traveller in their knowledge about the pandemic and the subsequent precautions that would protect them from COVID-19 infection as a result of their choice of transport mode (Cahigas, Prasetyo, Persada, Ong & Nadlifatin, 2022). A study on a Gen Z cohort during the pandemic found that the choice of hotel and staycation activity was most significantly influenced by PBC, compared to the effect of attitude and subjective norms on tourist behaviour (Choirisa & Rizkalla, 2021). A Chinese study (Li, Nguyen & Coca-Stefaniak, 2021) found that there was an uptake in the use of private transport, such as personal vehicles for tourism, while public transport (aero planes, buses, trains and ferries) declined significantly. A similar trend was observed by Shen et al. (2022). They found that once the restrictions on travel had been lifted, American travellers were motivated to travel, albeit inclined to travel by private car rather than by air, thus localising their destination choice due to the distance decay phenomenon.

2.3. Travel motives and tourism (Response)

Motivation is one of the most significant antecedents to travel behaviour (Rittichainuwat et al., 2014). Crompton's (1979) Push-Pull Theory (PPT) is an integral concept that underpins the intuitive approach to travel motivation - propaga-

ting the notion that intrinsic forces 'push' tourists to engage in tourism activity, while extrinsic destination attribute-based factors 'pull' them to specific destinations (Kara & Mkwizu, 2020; Pawaskar & Goel, 2016). Leisure tourism involves the consumption of products and services associated with man-made (theme parks, up-market hotels) as well as naturally occurring (beaches, museums, botanical gardens, national park) attractions (Allaberganov & Preko, 2022). Therefore, attribute-oriented travel motives are influenced by the availability of leisure assets and products at a particular destination. The availability of these attributes at the destination represents the destination-specific extrinsic 'pull' factors considered by tourists to satisfy their intrinsic 'push' motives (Hwang et al., 2020; Rittichainuwat et al., 2014).

Previous studies show that attribute-based travel motives are location-specific (Aebli et al., 2022; Eskelinen, 2022). For instance, prior studies (Allaberganov & Preko, 2022) have associated leisure travel motives with specific countries based on their ability to offer leisure tourists a variety of nature and landscapes (Zimbabwe), heritage based on unique ecology (Ghana), and attractions of historical and cultural significance (Malaysia), as well as enhanced accessibility to travel and tourism activity (Turkey). As a behavioural response, it is also evident from the literature that the travel motives of tourists are idiosyncratic and susceptible to the influence of extrinsic forces and stimuli, including the subjective conations of tourists (Allaberganov & Preko, 2022; Eskelinen, 2022). Hence, a critical antecedent to travel motivation is information symmetry, with information sources ranging from organic [personal experience, stereotypes, subjective norms] to induced [social media, mass media, and destination marketing] bases (Pawaskar & Goel, 2016).

2.4. Hypothesis formulation

Due to the transmissibility of the COVID-19 virus and the subsequent social distancing protocols and moratoriums on travel for leisure, tourists have become very circumspect in their decision-making and subsequent behaviour. In our adaptation and extension of the S-O-R model to travel motives amid crisis, the heuristic cues drawn from the CI (independent variables) are critical antecedents of the subjective safety perceptions of travel and tourism activity (mediator) within a specific destination country. The inductive processing of the stimuli to psychologically adjust how to frame the perceived safety of travel and tourism activity impacts the tourist's motives (dependent outcome variable). Buhmann and Ingenhoff's (2015) 4D Model supports the potential direct effect of CI on subjective safety perceptions by providing the heuristic cues that facilitate the information symmetry influencing perception formation. The TPB (Ajzen, 1991) via the PBC dimension affirms the role of tourist perceptions leading to an enhanced sense of subjective safety associated with travel and tourism activity (Xiaolong, Litian, Lu & Rong, 2022; Zou & Yu, 2022). Overall, the PPT (Crompton, 1979) acknowledges how both external cues and the subjective state of the tourist may have a direct augmenting effect on the 'pull' travel motives of leisure tourists based on an intuitive assessment of a leisure destination's attributes. The potential direct relationships discussed support the hypothesised mediation effect amongst the variables under investigation. The S-O-R Model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) provides the theoretical foundation for the potential mediating effect of the perceived subjective safety of travel and tourism activity in the CI-leisure travel motives nexus amid the COVID-19 era. Therefore, the study tests hypotheses of both the direct and indirect effects between the exogenous (CI) and two endogenous (subjective safety of travel and tourism activity and travel motives) variables (Gedikli et

al., 2022). The following hypotheses were formulated and conceptualised in Figure 1 as follows:

H₁: Functional- [H_{1a}], normative- [H_{1b}], and aesthetic- [H_{1c}] country image have a direct positive influence on leisure travel motives.

H₂: Functional- [H_{2a}], normative- [H_{2b}], and aesthetic- [H_{2c}] country image have a direct positive influence on the subjective safety of travel &

tourism activity.

H₃: The subjective safety of travel & tourism activity has a direct positive influence on travel motives.

H₄: The subjective safety of travel and tourism activity positively mediates the relationship between functional- [H_{4a}], normative- [H_{4b}], and aesthetic- [H_{4c}] country image and travel motives.

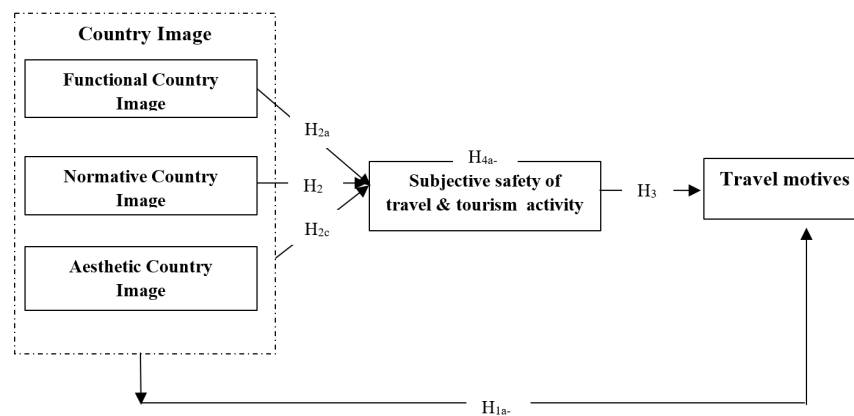


Figure 1 | Hypothetical framework
Source: Own elaboration

3. Methods

Data were generated from a deductive-cross sectional quantitative study conducted between the 30th of January and the 4th of February 2022. An online approach was adopted due to the constraints associated with travel and tourism moratoriums during the ongoing pandemic. A structured self-administered survey questionnaire was developed and published using QuestionPro. In line with several tourism studies (see Huang, Chen & Ramos, 2022; Sthapit, Björk & Coudounaris, 2022; Sun, Chien, Ritchie & Pappu, 2022) conducted during and soon after the various peak waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, a stratified purposive-convenient sample was drawn from the online crowdsourcing platform Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) whereby the QuestionPro survey link and all the relevant information regarding the survey were broadcast to potential international respondents on the MTurk platform, soliciting

voluntary participation.

3.1. Sample

Based on specific location-based criteria (located in the United States of America - USA, Brazil, the United Kingdom - UK, Germany and India), 800 potential respondents viewed the survey on MTurk. The USA, UK and Germany represented South Africa's pre-COVID-19 top source markets, while India and Brazil represented the emerging source markets for the country (Kruger & Snyman, 2017; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020). A total of 84.5% (675) of the potential respondents participated in the survey, of which 221 responses were deemed to be incomplete and disregarded from data analysis. The final sample of n=454 was of practical significance since the results could be generalised based on the

sampling heuristics of Krejcie and Morgan (1970, p.607). To safeguard the quality of the data, the single response setting in QuestionPro was applied to eliminate ballot stuffing. In line with crowd-sourcing practice (Cobanoglu, Cavusoglu & Turk-tarhan, 2021), Captcha verification was applied to eliminate the potential use of bots in the survey and responses were also timed. Each respondent who submitted a valid, complete survey received a USD1 stipend.

3.2. Instrument

Composite scales were developed for the study. The measuring instrument was peer-reviewed by a scientific committee of tourism experts and was subjected to an ethical clearance process. Items were drawn from previous studies and scales with responses recorded on different five-point Likert-type scales.

- *Independent variable:* Country Image (CI) of South Africa was measured as the *stimuli* in the S-O-R model. Based on the three cognitive dimensions of Buhmann and Inge-nhoff's (2015) 4D Model CI was measured as Functional CI, Normative CI and Aesthetic CI, each with five items. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert-type scale of agreement where '1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree'.
- *Mediator variable:* Perceived subjective safety measured the *organism's* state in the S-O-R model. Ten items were adapted from the literature (see Adam, 2015; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005; Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2012) to measure the perceived subjective safety of tourists associated with travel and tourism activity to and in South Africa. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert-type safety scale where '1 = Very risky and 5 = Very Safe'.
- *Outcome variable:* 'Pull' travel motives were measured as the outcome variable representative of the *response* aspect of the S-O-R model. Ten leisure tourism-oriented attributes were adapted from the literature (see Filistanova, 2017; Gautam, 2018; Mapingure, du Plessis & Saayman, 2019; Saiprasert, 2011; Seyidov & Adomaitienė, 2016). Respondents were asked how likely they were to engage in tourism to South Africa based on the location-specific attributes of the country. The responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert-type likelihood scale where '1 = Extremely unlikely and 5 = Extremely likely'.

3.3. Data analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (V.27) was used to analyse the data. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test of sampling adequacy ($KMO > 0.7$) and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p < 0.05$) determined sample adequacy and factorability of the data before data reduction (Dziuban & Shirkey, 1974; Kaiser, 1960). Employing the Oblimin rotation with Kaiser normalisation, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed to identify the CI, subjective safety and extrinsic leisure-oriented travel motive dimensions of potential international tourists to South Africa. The EFA tests [$EV > 1$, Factor Loading ≥ 0.05] were followed by a reliability test, Cronbach alpha value (α) at > 0.6 (Cronbach, 1951; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2014). Direct effect testing via regressions sought to verify the predictive relationships within the potential path relationships to determine the viability of mediation analyses and to assess the data for any statistical violations such as multicollinearity and normality (Kane & Ashbaugh, 2017). Model 4 of Hays's (2022) PROCESS Macro in SPSS was used to test the respective direct and indirect hypotheses.

4. Results

4.1. Respondent profile

Table 1 summarises the respondent profile of the study.

| Table 1 Socio-demographic profile of respondents | |
|--|--|
| Socio-Demographic Variable | Profile (n=454) |
| Gender | Male (66%); Female (33%); Non-binary (1%) respondents |
| Age | 25-34 (46%); 35-44 (28%); 18-24 (13%) |
| Qualifications | Bachelor's Degree (56%); Post-graduate degree (17%); High school diploma (12%) |
| Marital status | Married (60%); Single (31%) |
| Country of origin | USA (27%); Brazil (24%); UK (22%) |
| Economic activity | Employed in the public sector (70%); Employed in the private sector (15%) |
| Travel companion(s) | With partners (33%); Family (adults and children) (25%); Family and friends (13%) |
| Income | Same as the average monthly gross income in home country (40%); Above the average income (34%) |
| Travel to SA | Would consider visiting (65%); Have travelled before (22%) |
| Prior international travel | More than once (46%); Once (29%) |
| Most influential media channels | The internet (53%) |
| International travel in the near future | Yes (82%); No (18%) |
| Domestic travel in the near future | Yes (85%); No (15%) |

Source: Own elaboration

As shown in Table 1, the typical survey respondent was American, male, aged between 25 and 34 years old and possessed a bachelor's degree. The typical respondent was also married, employed in the public sector and considered their monthly income to be the same as the average monthly gross income in their home country. Regarding the travel profile, the majority usually travelled with their partners and had travelled internationally at least once and more than once in the two years preceding the survey. However, they did plan to travel internationally or domestically in the near future (one year). The Internet was the most influential media channel for tourism-related information. Indications were that the typical respondent would consider visiting South Africa for tourism someday, while 4% indicated they would never travel to South Africa.

4.2. Dimension reduction

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin ($KMO > .05$) and Bartlett's Sphericity ($p = .000$) statistics confirmed the

suitability of the data ($n=454$) for dimension reduction via EFA, Oblimin with Kaiser Normalisation [$EV > 1$, loading coefficient of ≥ 0.5]. Annexure 1 comprehensively lists items and their factor loadings. The EFA (Table 2) extracted three CI dimensions, *Functional CI* [FCI: 10 items; $\bar{x} = 3.46$; $\alpha = .902$]; *Aesthetic CI* [ACI: 3 items; $\bar{x} = 4.08$; $\alpha = .718$]; and a new dimension, *Aesthetic-Normative CI* [A-NCI: 11 items; $\bar{x} = 3.93$; $\alpha = .775$]. South Africa's well-functioning infrastructure was the most highly rated FCI aspect ($\bar{x} = 3.60$). While South Africa's vast preserved nature was the highest-rated ACI item ($\bar{x} = 4.11$), South Africa's very fascinating history was the highest-rated A-NCI item ($\bar{x} = 4.16$).

Regarding the perceived safety, ten items [$\bar{X} = 3.47$; $\alpha = .915$] loaded on the factor *Safety of Travel and Tourism Activity* which was labelled *Safe Travel and Tourism Activity* (SFT) since the mean score suggested all the travel and tourism activities that loaded were perceived to be safe on the 5-point Likert scale of safety. While travel and tourism activity in South Africa was rated as safe, the

highest-rated *SFT* factor was travelling to South Africa by air ($\bar{x} = 3.66$). The EFA for travel motives extracted two factors *Outdoor Experiential* [*OEXP*: 7 items; $\bar{x} = 4.13$; $\alpha = .849$] and *Entertainment* [*EMNT*: 7 items; $\bar{x} = 3.70$; $\alpha = .658$]. On the 5-point Likert-type likelihood scale, both these factors were rated as activities leisure tourists were likely to engage in when in South Africa.

The highest-rated *OEXP* aspect was that tourists were extremely likely to engage in tourism in South Africa to experience the country's great weather ($\bar{x} = 4.50$). In contrast, the extreme likelihood of engaging in entertainment activities associated with sports, theme parks, water parks, casinos, and resorts in the country was the highest-rated *EMNT* aspect ($\bar{x} = 3.76$).

Table 2 | Dimension reduction (EFA)

| Factor | *Items | Eigenvalue (EV) | Variance (%) | Factor Loading (>.50) | | Cronbach Alpha (α) | Mean (x̄) | Communalities | |
|--------------------------------------|---|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|------|--------------------|-----------|---------------|------|
| | | | | Min | Max | | | Min | Max |
| ¹ Country Image (CI) | | | | | | | | | |
| Functional CI (FCI) | FCI1 – FCI6; NCI1; NCI2; NCI3; NCI5 | 6.821 | 37.89 | .579 | .799 | .902 | 3.46 | .428 | .723 |
| Aesthetic CI (ACI) | ACI1; ACI3; ACI5 | 2.243 | 12.46 | .655 | .723 | .718 | 4.08 | .568 | .635 |
| Aesthetic-Normative CI (A-NCI) | NCI4; NCI6; ACI2; ACI4; ACI6 | 1.412 | 7.84 | .524 | .780 | .775 | 3.93 | .517 | .634 |
| ² Perceived Safety | | | | | | | | | |
| Safe Travel & Tourism Activity (SFT) | SFT1 – SFT10 | 5.708 | 57.06 | .605 | .806 | .915 | 3.47 | .366 | .676 |
| ³ Travel Motives | | | | | | | | | |
| Outdoor Experiential (OEXP) | DAI2; DAI4; DAI6; DAI7; DAI8; DAI9; DAI10 | 4.307 | 43.07 | .570 | .826 | .849 | 4.13 | .416 | .661 |
| Entertainment (EMNT) | DAI1; DAI3; DAI5 | 1.287 | 12.87 | .501 | .840 | .658 | 3.70 | .464 | .687 |

Source: Own elaboration

*Full item list, means and communalities are summarised in Annexure 1

¹KMO of .919 and Bartlett's test of Sphericity of (χ^2 (153) = 3559.577, $p < 0.000$)²KMO of .905 and Bartlett's test of Sphericity of (χ^2 (45) = 2630.800, $p < 0.000$)³KMO of .869 and Bartlett's test of Sphericity of (χ^2 (45) = 1522.239, $p < 0.000$)

4.3. Correlation and direct effect analyses

The Pearson product matrix (Table 3) correlations (2-tailed, $p > .01$) indicated that all the variables were cognate, with the matrix reporting statistically significant linear associations between the dimensions, ranging from small (FCI/ OEXP: $r = .207$) to large (FCI/SFT: $r = .662$) correlations.

Table 3 | Correlation matrix

| Variable | FCI | ACI | A-NCI | SFT | OEXP | EMNT |
|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|
| FCI | 1 | | | | | |
| ACI | .306** | 1 | | | | |
| A-NCI | .652** | .531** | 1 | | | |
| SFT | .662** | .229** | .521** | 1 | | |
| OEXP | .207** | .497** | .510** | .310** | 1 | |
| EMNT | .484** | .394** | .447** | .515** | .483** | 1 |

Source: Own elaboration

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

Direct effect testing (Table 4) sought to establish the predictive nature of the exogenous variables (*FCI*, *ACI* and *A-NCI*) on the endogenous variables (*SFT*, *OEXP* and *EMNT*). Regression analyses examined the following predictive relationships: X of Y (path c), X of M (path a), and M of Y (path b). Due to the extraction of two endogenous outcome variables, six mediation models were tested, where X_1 is *FCI*, X_2 is *ACI*, X_3 is *A-NCI*; M is *SFT*; Y_1 is *OEXP* and Y_2 is *EMNT*.

All the tested paths (Table 4) reported significant predictive effects at $p < .001$. The statistically significant models and residuals indicated no violations of normality assumptions [the normal probability plots were assessed to verify the underlying assumption of normality in the data] and the absence of multicollinearity for the predic-

Table 4 | Direct effect testing

| | Unstandardized coefficients | | Standardised coefficients | t-value | Sig. |
|---|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|---------|------|
| | B | Std. Error | β | | |
| Path c: X_1 (FCI); X_2 (ACI); X_3 (A-NCI) – Y_1 (OEXP) | | | | | |
| $X_1 - Y_1$: $R^2=.043$, $F(1,452)20.291$, $p=.000$ | .170 | .038 | .207 | 4.505 | .000 |
| $X_2 - Y_1$: $R^2=.247$, $F(1,452)147.941$, $p=.000$ | .449 | .037 | .497 | 12.163 | .000 |
| $X_3 - Y_1$: $R^2=.260$, $F(1,452)158.953$, $p=.000$ | .526 | .042 | .520 | 12.608 | .000 |
| Path c: X_1 (FCI); X_2 (ACI); X_3 (A-NCI) – Y_2 (EMNT) | | | | | |
| $X_1 - Y_2$: $R^2=.235$, $F(1,452)138.641$, $p=.000$ | .523 | .044 | .484 | 11.775 | .000 |
| $X_2 - Y_2$: $R^2=.156$, $F(1,452)83.300$, $p=.000$ | .469 | .051 | .394 | 9.127 | .000 |
| $X_3 - Y_2$: $R^2=.200$, $F(1,452)113.147$, $p=.000$ | .607 | .057 | .447 | 10.637 | .000 |
| Path a: X_1 (FCI); X_2 (ACI); X_3 (A-NCI) – M (SFT) | | | | | |
| $X_1 - M$: $R^2=.438$, $F(1,452)351.877$, $p=.000$ | .699 | .037 | .662 | 18.758 | .000 |
| $X_2 - M$: $R^2=.052$, $F(1,452)25.013$, $p=.000$ | .267 | .053 | .229 | 5.000 | .000 |
| $X_3 - M$: $R^2=.271$, $F(1,452)168.292$, $p=.000$ | .692 | .053 | .521 | 12.937 | .000 |
| Path b₁₋₃: M (SFT) – Y_1 (OEXP) | | | | | |
| $R^2=.096$, $F(1,452)47.903$, $p=.000$ | .240 | .035 | .310 | 6.921 | .000 |
| Path b₁₋₃: M (SFT) – Y_2 (EMNT) | | | | | |
| $R^2=.265$, $F(1,452)163.288$, $p=.000$ | .526 | .041 | .515 | 12.778 | .000 |

Source: Own elaboration
Statistically significant at $p < .001$

tive relationships (Hayes, 2013). The data were also subjected to Harman's single-factor test at the <50% threshold (Rodríguez-Ardura & Meseguer-Artola, 2020). The data reported a 29.64% variance, indicating no threat of Common Method Variance (CMV) bias. Table 5 summarises the result of the mediation analyses for *OEXP* and *EMNT* recreational travel motives to test the following expanded hypotheses:

H_{1a}: Functional- [H_{1a1}], aesthetic- [H_{1a2}], and aesthetic-normative [H_{1a3}] country image have a direct positive influence on outdoor experiential travel motives.

H_{1b}: Functional- [H_{1b1}], aesthetic - [H_{1b2}], and aesthetic-normative [H_{1b3}] country image have a direct positive influence on entertainment travel motives.

H_{2a}: Functional- [H_{2a1}], aesthetic- [H_{2a2}], and aesthetic-normative- [H_{2a3}] country image have a direct positive influence on the subjective safety of travel & tourism activity in the country image - outdoor experiential travel motives nexus.

H_{2b}: Functional- [H_{2b1}], aesthetic- [H_{2b2}], and aesthetic-normative- [H_{2b3}] country image have a direct positive influence on the subjective safety of travel & tourism activity in the country

image - entertainment travel motives nexus.

H_{3a1-3}: The subjective safety of travel & tourism activity has a direct positive influence on outdoor experiential travel motives.

H_{3b1-3}: The subjective safety of travel & tourism activity has a direct positive influence on entertainment travel motives.

H_{4a}: The subjective safety of travel and tourism activity positively mediates the relationship between functional- [H_{4a1}], aesthetic- [H_{4a2}], and aesthetic-normative- [H_{4a3}] country image and outdoor experiential travel motives.

H_{4b}: The subjective safety of travel and tourism activity positively mediates the relationship between functional- [H_{4b1}], aesthetic- [H_{4b2}], and aesthetic-normative- [H_{4b3}] country image and entertainment travel motives.

4.4. Hypotheses testing

Mediation analyses established the direct and indirect effects. In line with the literature, the coefficients reported are unstandardised [95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CI) based on 5000 bootstrap samples] (Hayes, 2013).

4.4.1. Mediation of the CI – Outdoor Experiential travel motives nexus

In the respective mediation models for *OEXP* (Table 5), *FCI* ($\beta = .6995$, $p = .0000$), *ACI* ($\beta = .2666$, $p = .0000$), and *A-NCI* ($\beta = .6924$, $p = .0000$) reported statistically significant positive direct effects ($p < .001$) on *SFT* (Path a_{1-3}), thus confirming hypotheses H_{2a1} , H_{2a2} and H_{2a3} . Paths b_1 ($\beta = .2380$, $p = .0000$) and b_2 ($\beta = .1604$, $p = .0000$) also reported statistically significant positive direct effects ($p < .001$) on *OEXP*, affirming hypotheses H_{3a1} and H_{3a2} . Hypothesis H_{3a3} was rejected since Path b_3 ($\beta = .0467$, $p = .2043$) was not statistically significant, indicating no direct effect between *SFT* and *OEXP* in Model 3. In Model 1, Path c' was insignificant ($\beta = .0036$, $p = .9414$); hence hypothesis H_{1a1} was not accepted. The indirect effect (IE) in Model 1 for *OEXP* $a_1b_1 = .1665$ [95% bootstrap CI (LL = .0912, UL = .2474)] indicated that *SFT* mediated the *FCI-OEXP* nexus. The Variance Accounted For¹ (VAF = 98%) confirmed the full mediation of *SFT* in the *FCI-OEXP* nexus. Hence, hypothesis H_{4a1} was accepted.

Hypothesis H_{1a2} was accepted since Path c' on Model 2 was statistically significant ($\beta = .0460$, $p = .0000$). The IE in Model 2 for *OEXP* $a_2b_2 = .0428$ [95% bootstrap CI (LL = .0173, UL = .0785)] indicated that *SFT* statistically mediated the *ACI-OEXP* nexus, confirming hypothesis H_{4a2} . However, the VAF of 10% indicated the practical insignificance [while the effect is of statistical significance, practical insignificance indicates that the effect is not large enough to be meaningful] of the partial mediation of *SFT* in the nexus (Ali & Park, 2016). Path c' in Model 3 was statistically significant ($\beta = .4939$, $p = .0000$), confirming hypothesis H_{1a3} . The indirect effect (IE) in the model for *OEXP* $a_3b_3 = .0324$ [95% bootstrap CI (LL = -.0175, UL = .0891)] specifies the null hypothesis could not be rejected as the confidence interval of LL, and UL passed through zero; thus, hypothesis H_{4a3} for the indirect mediating effect of *SFT* in the *A-NCI – OEXP* nexus could not be accepted (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). The VAF of 6% confirmed the practical insignificance of the partial mediation of *SFT* in the *A-NCI – OEXP* nexus.

Table 5 | Mediation analyses results

| Testing Path | β | BootSE | 95% BootCI | | t-value | Sig. | Testing Path | β | BootSE | 95% BootCI | | t-value | Sig. |
|--|---------|--------|-------------|-------------|---------|----------|--|---------|--------|-------------|-------------|---------|----------|
| | | | Lower Limit | Upper Limit | | | | | | Lower Limit | Upper Limit | | |
| Model 1: FCI – SFT- OEXP | | | | | | | Model 4: FCI – SFT- EMNT | | | | | | |
| Path c: $R^2 = .0430$, $F(1,452)20.2911$, $p = .0000$ | .1701 | .0378 | .0959 | .2443 | 4.5046 | .0000*** | Path c: $R^2 = .2347$, $F(1,452)138.6409$, $p = .0000$ | .5229 | .0444 | .4356 | .6102 | 11.7746 | .0000*** |
| Path a: FCI – SFT [$R^2 = .4377$, $F(1,452)351.8772$, $p = .0000$] | .6995 | .0373 | .6262 | .7728 | 18.7584 | .0000*** | Path a: FCI – SFT [$R^2 = .4377$, $F(1,452)351.8772$, $p = .0000$] | .6995 | .0373 | .6262 | .7728 | 18.7584 | .0000*** |
| Path b: SFT – OEXP [$R^2 = .0958$, $F(2,451)23.9016$, $p = .0000$] | .2380 | .0463 | .1469 | .3291 | 5.1355 | .0000*** | Path b: SFT – EMNT [$R^2 = .3021$, $F(2,452)90.6070$, $p = .0000$] | .3533 | .0536 | .2481 | .4586 | 6.5976 | .0000*** |
| Path c': FCI – OEXP | .0036 | .0490 | -.0927 | .0999 | .0736 | .9414 | Path c': FCI – EMNT | .2758 | .0566 | .1645 | .3870 | 4.8702 | .0000*** |
| Effect: a_1b_1 | .1665 | .0399 | .0912 | .2474 | | | Effect: a_1b_1 | .2472 | .0465 | .1565 | .3394 | | |
| Model 2: ACI – SFT- OEXP | | | | | | | Model 5: ACI – SFT- EMNT | | | | | | |
| Path c: $R^2 = .2466$, $F(1,452)147.9405$, $p = .0000$ | .4488 | .0369 | .3763 | .5213 | 12.1631 | .0000*** | Path c: $R^2 = .1556$, $F(1,452)83.3000$, $p = .0000$ | .4689 | .0514 | .3679 | .5698 | 9.1269 | .0000*** |
| Path a: ACI – SFT [$R^2 = .0524$, $F(1,452)25.0126$, $p = .0000$] | .2666 | .0533 | .1619 | .3714 | 5.0013 | .0000*** | Path a: ACI – SFT [$R^2 = .0524$, $F(1,452)25.0126$, $p = .0000$] | .2666 | .0533 | .1619 | .3714 | 5.0013 | .0000*** |
| Path b: SFT – OEXP [$R^2 = .2871$, $F(2,451)90.8002$, $p = .0000$] | .1604 | .0317 | .0981 | .2227 | 5.0603 | .0000*** | Path b: SFT – EMNT [$R^2 = .3461$, $F(2,451)119.3412$, $p = .0000$] | .4577 | .0399 | .3792 | .5362 | 11.4612 | .0000*** |
| Path c': ACI – OEXP | .0460 | .0369 | .3335 | .4785 | 10.9942 | .0000*** | Path c': ACI – EMNT | .3469 | .0465 | .2555 | .4383 | 7.4600 | .0000*** |
| Effect: a_2b_2 | .0428 | .0156 | .0173 | .0785 | | | Effect: a_2b_2 | .1120 | .0311 | .0654 | .1858 | | |
| Model 3: A-NCI – SFT- OEXP | | | | | | | Model 6: A-NCI – SFT- EMNT | | | | | | |
| Path c: $R^2 = .2602$, $F(1,452)158.9529$, $p = .0000$ | .5262 | .0417 | .4442 | .6083 | 12.6077 | .0000*** | Path c: $R^2 = .2002$, $F(1,452)113.1465$, $p = .0000$ | .6071 | .0571 | .4950 | .7193 | 10.6370 | .0000*** |
| Path a: A-NCI – SFT [$R^2 = .2713$, $F(1,452)165.2918$, $p = .0000$] | .6924 | .0534 | .5875 | .7972 | 12.9727 | .0000*** | Path a: A-NCI – SFT [$R^2 = .2713$, $F(1,452)168.2918$, $p = .0000$] | .6924 | .0534 | .5875 | .7972 | 12.9727 | .0000*** |
| Path b: SFT – OEXP [$R^2 = .2688$, $F(2,451)80.3928$, $p = .0000$] | .0467 | .0368 | -.0255 | .1190 | 1.2712 | .2043 | Path b: SFT – EMNT [$R^2 = .3094$, $F(2,451)101.0331$, $p = .0000$] | .3952 | .0468 | .3032 | .4897 | 8.440 | .0000*** |
| Path c': A-NCI – OEXP | .4939 | .0489 | .3978 | .5899 | 10.1075 | .0000*** | Path c': A-NCI – EMNT | .3335 | .0622 | .2113 | .4558 | 5.3621 | .0000*** |
| Effect: a_3b_3 | .0324 | .0273 | -.0175 | .0891 | | | Effect: a_3b_3 | .2736 | .0505 | .1803 | .3788 | | |

Source: Own elaboration

Statistically significant at * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

¹VAF = variance accounted for; VAF that is above 80% designates full mediation, VAF between 20% and 80% shows partial mediation, while VAF that is less than 20% indicates no practical mediation (Ali & Park, 2016)

4.4.2. Mediation of the CI – Entertainment motives nexus

The respective mediation models for *EMNT* (Table 5) indicated positive direct effects ($p < .001$) of all country image dimensions, *FCI* ($\beta = .6995$, $p = .0000$), *ACI* ($\beta = .2666$, $p = .0000$), and *A-NCI* ($\beta = .6924$, $p = .0000$) on *SFT* (Path a_{1-3}), thus, confirming hypotheses H_{2b1} , H_{2b2} and H_{2b3} , respectively. Each of the respective Paths b_{1-3} also had direct positive effects on *EMNT*, Model 4 ($\beta = .3533$, $p = .0000$); Model 5 ($\beta = .4577$, $p = .0000$), and Model 6 ($\beta = .3952$, $p = .0000$), thus supporting hypotheses H_{3b1} , H_{3a1} and H_{3a2} . The IEs for the three models for *EMNT* were significant, indicating partial mediation, each with practically significant VAFs as follows, Model 4: $a_1b_1 = .2472$ [95% bootstrap CI (LL = .1565, UL = .3394, VAF = 47%)]; Model 5: $a_2b_2 = .1120$ [95% bootstrap CI (LL = .0654, UL = .1858, VAF = 24%)], Model 6: $a_3b_3 = .2736$ [95% bootstrap CI (LL = .1803, UL = .3788, VAF = 45%)]. Therefore, hypotheses H_{4b1} , H_{4b2} and H_{4b3} were accepted. When adjusted for *SFT*, the mediated models reported statistically significant Path c' direct effects, Model 4 Path c' ($\beta = .2758$, $p = .0000$), Model 5 Path c' ($\beta = .3469$, $p = .0000$), and Model 6 Path c' ($\beta = .3335$, $p = .0000$). Therefore, hypotheses H_{1b1} , H_{1b2} and H_{1b3} were accepted.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The present study explored the interplay between CI dimensions (functional, aesthetic and normative aesthetic), the subjective safety perception, and the travel motives (outdoor experiential and entertainment-oriented) of potential international tourists to South Africa. Six models tested the direct effects associated with three dimensions. In all six models, the three cognitive CI dimensions directly influence the subjective safety percep-

tion of travel and tourism activity in South Africa. Hence, regardless of leisure motivation, CI influences the subjective safety perceptions of tourists. Although limited, the extant literature corroborates the findings of the study in as far as CI-oriented heuristic cues such as well-functioning infrastructure providing location-specific information symmetry (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015) for tourists to make critical subjective safety assessments about travel and tourism activity such as choice in mode of transport (Cahigas et al., 2022), or accommodation (Choirisa & Rizkalla, 2021), more so amid crises (Shen et al., 2022; Xie et al., 2022).

Subjective safety perception in all the tested models has a direct positive effect on both leisure travel motivation typologies, except for subjective safety perception in the aesthetic-normative CI - outdoor experiential leisure motives nexus. Therefore, generally, in line with the literature (Aebli et al., 2022; Allaberganov & Preko, 2022; Choirisa & Rizkalla, 2021; Matiza & Slabbert, 2021), tourist decision-making considering safety concerns or a lack thereof, as is the case in this study, in terms of subjective safety, enhances PBC of travel and tourism activity; thus, positively influencing the travel motives of international tourists considering leisure tourism to South Africa. Furthermore, when adjusted for the influence of subjective safety perception, only aesthetic and aesthetic-normative CI retain a partial direct effect on outdoor experiential travel motives. In contrast, all three CI dimensions retain a partial direct effect on entertainment-oriented travel motives. This direct effect corresponds with certain previous studies (Magnusson et al., 2019; Sampaio et al., 2021; Wang, 2020; Woo, 2019; Zhang, Wu, Morrison, & Tseng, 2016) that indicate how CI predicts tourists' evaluations of a destination's attributes and, ultimately, their co-native behaviour towards that destination.

The empirical evidence indicates that, except for the aesthetic-normative CI - outdoor experiential leisure motives nexus, the positive partial indirect effect of subjective safety perception is sta-

tistically significant. However, while statistically significant, of the remaining five models considered, the partial mediation in the aesthetic CI - outdoor experiential leisure motives and aesthetic-normative CI - the relationships of outdoor experiential leisure motives were not of practical significance (Ali & Park, 2016). The functional CI - outdoor experiential travel motivation nexus yielded the most intriguing mediation outcome. When adjusting for the influence of the perceived subjective safety of travel and tourism activity, functional CI has no significant direct effect on outdoor experiential travel motivation; instead, the influence of South Africa's functional CI is fully mediated by the subjective safety perception of travel and tourism activity. This is the only nexus to fully confirm the S-O-R model within the context of the present study.

The critical finding of full mediation generally aligns with the notion of the symbiotic relationship hypothesised by the S-O-R model whereby the intervening effect of the tourist's (organism) cognition regarding the subjective safety of travel and tourism activity neutralises the direct CI (stimuli) – travel motives (response) nexus. Prior studies (Köchling et al., 2022; Matiza & Slabbert, 2020b) have determined that safety and image perceptions influence tourists' decision-making. Moreover, experiences and overall satisfaction with a destination may be mediated by perceived safety, albeit within the risk messaging-travel intention nexus during the COVID-19 outbreak (Xie et al., 2022). At the same time, Xiaolong et al. (2022) furnish additional supporting anecdotal evidence of the positive mediating effect of perceived safety on the travel behaviour of tourists. Therefore, in the absence of prior research explicitly examining the intervening effect of subjective safety perception in the relationship between a country's functional CI and the outdoor experiential travel motives of tourists, the direct relationships affirmed by prior studies and the anecdotal evidence of the mediating effect of perceived safety in tourist behaviour

amid crisis supports the statistically and practically significant full mediation model.

5.1. Theoretical implications

To the best of the authors' knowledge, this study is one of the first to establish the predictive relationships between CI as an exogenous variable and subjective safety and travel motives as respective endogenous constructs. The present study builds on pre-pandemic studies that advocate for the reflexive management of CI to aid in international crisis management (Heslop, Lu & Cray, 2008; Maher & Mady, 2010; Matiza & Slabbert, 2020b), as well as post-crisis tourism recovery (Chan, Chan & Leung, 2010). Moreover, the study advances African tourism research by providing empirical evidence supporting the utility of CI in managing tourism 'fallout' on the African continent during crises (Avraham & Ketter, 2017; Neagu, 2017).

Re-examining Azjen's (1991) TPB, Buhmann & Ingenhoff's (2015) 4D Model, and Crompton's (1979) PPT extended the seminal theory to leisure-oriented travel motivation amid a prolonged crisis, hence, addressing a discernable gap identified in travel motivation research (Aebli et al., 2022) as well as within African tourism research (Dieke, 2020; Matiza & Slabbert, 2020b; Van Der Merwe & Saayman, 2008). In addition, the findings also provide *in-situ* empirical evidence that supports the notion that the travel motives of tourists are susceptible to external stimuli (Hwang et al., 2020; Kosmaczewska & Kim, 2022) and is also predicated on the interaction between intrinsic subjective safety perceptions (Hardin-Fanning & Ricks, 2017; Wang et al., 2022) and extrinsic motivational aspects (Allaberganov & Preko, 2022; Eskelinen, 2022). Exploring these relationships during crisis through the S-O-R lens is a novel contribution that advances African tourism research within the broader global context. Establishing the direct and indirect nuances of subjective safety

perception on the travel motives of tourists improves the overall conceptualisation of travel and tourism safety in tourist behaviour. Overall, the study contributes a critical African perspective to the under-researched area of travel motivation during crises. Moreover, a robust model was developed to re-examine the seminal theory via an integrated measuring instrument and is subsequently affirmed within the African tourism context, thereby enriching and advancing tourism theory.

5.2. Practical implications

The study's findings may particularly interest African Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs), tourism-oriented government and quasi-government practitioners, and African tourism-oriented academics. There are two critical practical implications for African scholars and practitioners related to leisure travel motivation amid crises in Africa, namely (1) the prudent management of the image of a country for tourism and (2) the imperative augmentation of subjective safety perceptions towards travel and tourism activity during a crisis.

5.2.1. Country image implications

When faced with the events of global crises of the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic, CI serves the dual purpose for tourism, namely that of crisis communications and managing the meaning (stereotypical or induced perception) of the crisis within the context of the country in general and the country as a tourism destination (see Avraham & Beirman, 2022). By all indications, the contemporary literature acknowledges that more developed countries such as Australia, Italy, Japan and the United States appear to distinguish between CI and destination image, harnessing the former to aid tourists in circumscribing vast amounts of subjective and often negative crisis-related informa-

tion (see Matiza & Slabbert, 2020b). The COVID-19 pandemic appears to be a watershed moment for African countries like South Africa, as they increasingly realise the value and utility of the CI to tourism. The constructs explored in the study and their respective items indicate the critical aspects of CI and their symbiotic relationship with the travel motivation of tourists.

One of the key lessons drawn from the pandemic for national governments is that they must be acutely cognisant of the impact of their crisis-induced policies and mitigation strategies, as they may have significant repercussions that transcend the crisis period. The study highlights that tourists are, for instance, susceptible to the influence of macro-CI aspects such as the availability of a well-functioning infrastructure, a country being a global cultural leader, being a socially responsible member of the international community, and taking responsibility for helping in international crises such as was the case during the COVID-19 pandemic. These aspects, as they emerged, are directly linked to entertainment-oriented activities such as sports, theme parks, water parks, casinos, and resorts and, indirectly, to outdoor-experiential-oriented (visiting national parks, conservancies and nature reserves, as well as experiencing great weather in the country) activities as attribute-based travel motives. Thus, specific perceived competencies espoused by the CI are the essential positive stimulus that positively influences travel motivation.

5.2.2. Safety of travel and tourism activity implications

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the susceptibility of the global tourism sector to external shocks such as health pandemics. More so, of particular concern is the inability of African destination countries to fully comprehend the intricate relationship between the CI, subsequent subjective safety perceptions and tourists' travel mo-

tives. “When a destination is involved in a crisis, marketers have to address tourist hesitancy about visiting destinations perceived as risky or unsafe” (Avraham & Beirman, 2022, p.3). This denotes the importance of profiling the subjective safety perceptions towards travel and tourism activities within a specific destination when seeking to encourage tourists to visit.

The results can be utilised as a reference to guide tourism practitioners towards managing specific subjective safety issues. For instance, considering that South Africa is a long-haul destination for international tourists, it is not surprising that air travel to and within South Africa were the top two-rated safety factors tourists considered. As it emerged from our study, tourists’ confidence in safely engaging in long-haul travel to consume South African outdoor-experiential tourism products amid a crisis is informed by tourist assessments based on heuristic cues on South Africa’s competent infrastructure management (pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions and protocols) and constructive global citizenship (robust virus detection systems and vaccine advocacy on the continent) exclusively via subjective safety. Tourists’ enhanced circumspection and self-congruence suggest that they are more susceptible to heuristic cues as stimuli to support their cognition. Hence, practitioners must consider that the creation and sustenance of competitive advantage during crises are predicated on enhanced trust and confidence (subjective safety) across the spectrum of critical tourist choices, including how to travel to the destination, where to stay, which tourism activities to engage in, and whether to interact with other tourists. Moreover, subjective safety nuances the influence of CI on travel motivation.

5.3. Limitations and future research

The empirical findings of the study are from the South African perspective. Therefore, the re-

plication of the study across other major African tourism destination countries is recommended to accelerate post-COVID-19 tourism recovery on the continent via a more holistic approach to tourism promotion. The sample was stratified based on South Africa’s top and emerging source markets; hence, the interpretation of the findings needs to be contextualised as such. Future studies may incorporate a broader cross-section of international tourists to accommodate diverse perceptions and perspectives. The study, akin to a significant proportion of tourist behaviour studies, is cross-sectional and speaks to tourist perceptions post the pandemic’s peak. A longitudinal approach may yield exciting outcomes for leisure travel motivation in South Africa and Africa as a whole.

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Annexure 1

Table 1 | Exploratory Factor Analysis Results Summary

| Code | Item | Factor Loading coefficient (>.05) | Comm. |
|--|--|-----------------------------------|-------|
| Functional CI (1 = Strongly disagree – 5 = Strongly agree) | | | |
| FCI1 | Has an economy that is highly innovative and fit for the post-COVID future | 3.40 | .599 |
| FCI2 | Has a well-functioning infrastructure | 3.60 | .851 |
| FCI3 | Provides for the safety of citizens and visitors | 3.43 | .583 |
| FCI4 | Holds a strong position in the global economy | 3.38 | .591 |
| FCI5 | Has a globally influential culture | 3.54 | .482 |
| FCI6 | Has a very stable political system | 3.30 | .723 |
| NCI1 | Is very active in protecting the environment | 3.11 | .616 |
| NCI2 | Is known for its strong commitment to social issues (e.g. development aid, civil rights) | 3.43 | .642 |
| NCI3 | Is a socially responsible member of the international community | 3.58 | .542 |
| NCI5 | Takes responsibility for helping out in international crises. | 3.49 | .533 |
| Aesthetic CI (1 = Strongly disagree – 5 = Strongly agree) | | | |
| ACI1 | Is home to beautiful cultural assets (e.g. arts, architecture, music, film etc.) | 4.05 | .635 |
| ACI3 | Has a lot of preserved nature | 4.11 | .568 |
| ACI5 | Is an attractive country | 4.09 | .601 |
| Aesthetic-Normative CI (1 = Strongly disagree – 5 = Strongly agree) | | | |
| NCI4 | Respects the values of other nations and peoples | 3.83 | .517 |
| NCI6 | Is a welcoming country | 3.98 | .518 |
| ACI2 | Has a very fascinating history | 4.16 | .634 |
| NCI4 | Respects the values of other nations and peoples | 3.86 | .524 |
| ACI6 | Has rich traditions | 4.10 | .616 |
| Perceived Subjective Safety (SFT) (1 = Very risky – 5 = Very Safe) | | | |
| SFT1 | International travel to South Africa | 3.41 | .649 |
| SFT2 | Localised travel within South Africa | 3.49 | .619 |
| SFT3 | Visiting South African attractions most popular with international tourists | 3.43 | .607 |
| SFT4 | Visiting South African attractions most popular with locals | 3.48 | .676 |
| SFT5 | Travelling by air to South Africa | 3.66 | .462 |
| SFT6 | Travelling by air within South Africa | 3.65 | .558 |
| SFT7 | Self-drive or private transport in South Africa | 3.45 | .365 |
| SFT8 | Public transport in South Africa (train, bus, taxi) | 3.22 | .554 |
| SFT9 | Travelling in groups in South Africa (bus tours, cruises) | 3.37 | .606 |
| SFT10 | Interacting with tourists of other nationalities while visiting South Africa | 3.54 | .608 |
| Outdoor Experiential (OEXP) (1 = Extremely unlikely – 5 = Extremely likely) | | | |
| DAI2 | Visit museums, monuments, and historical locations and artefacts | 4.09 | .483 |
| DAI4 | Experience unique food/cuisine experiences (wine, traditional, western, Asian) | 4.08 | .567 |
| DAI6 | Visit locations with beaches (Durban, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth) | 4.11 | .498 |
| DAI7 | Travel to places that offer a variety of unique of flora and fauna | 4.11 | .483 |
| DAI8 | Visit national parks, conservancies and nature reserves | 4.20 | .609 |
| DAI9 | Enjoy various natural attractions (mountains, lakes, rivers) | 4.18 | .535 |
| DAI10 | Experience great weather in the country | 4.50 | .606 |
| Entertainment (EMNT) (1 = Extremely unlikely – 5 = Extremely likely) | | | |
| DAI1 | Attend festivals, arts events, music concerts | 3.51 | .601 |
| DAI3 | Engage in entertainment activities (sports, theme parks, water parks, casinos, resorts) | 3.78 | .687 |
| DAI5 | Engage in outdoor activities (Quad-biking, hiking, bungee jumping, rafting) | 3.13 | .467 |

Source: Own elaboration