

Destination Selection in the Digital Age – The Impact of Social Media Usage on Travel Destination Selection

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ABSTRACT

Social media and travel are two incredibly large and important global markets, which both experienced enormous growth over the years. This research investigated the effects of exposure to travel-related content through social media on travel intention. Through literature review, a conceptual framework with 5 variables was formed. An online questionnaire was then distributed, and was completed by 92 participants. Principal component analysis, Spearman's correlation test, and regression analysis was used to examine the data. Analysing the results, it was found that eWOM Exposure is positively related to Travel Inspiration and Destination Image, Destination Image is positively related to Destination Attractiveness, and both Travel Inspiration and Destination Attractiveness are positively related to Travel Intention. Overall, the conclusion that eWOM Exposure is positively related to Travel Intention is drawn. Therefore, this paper concluded that destinations can increase tourism through effective usage of social media, and offers valuable new additions to existing literature.

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Keywords

social media, electronic word of mouth, travel inspiration, destination image, destination attractiveness, travel intention

1. Introduction

Since its inception, social media has seen enormous growth. Over the span of two decades, a multitude of platforms have grown to contain hundreds of millions of monthly users (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). According to statistics published by GWI, these users spend an average of 2 hours and 23 minutes per day on social media in 2023, and 44 percent of US social media users born between 1997 and 2007 mention that exploring the world is important to them (GWI, 2024). Social media can be defined as internet-based services relying on user-generated content where individuals make their own, individualized profiles and/or groups (Obar & Wildman, 2015).

The modern-day travel market made up around 9.1% of global GDP in 2023 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024) and is predicted to grow at a faster relative pace than the overall economy in the next decade (Binggeli et al., 2023). It is estimated that around 1.46 billion people travelled internationally in 2019, which is equal to around one in five people on the planet at that time (Arruat-Padis, 2021).

It has been found that online media, such as reviews, can be an important source of information upon which travellers base their decisions. Around 60 percent of American travellers state that they base their decision (in part) on online reviews (HTrends, 2011), and over 80 percent of visitors of travel sites have their accommodation choice affected by them (Milan, 2007). Accordingly, existing literature has found that online media can have significant impact on tourists' travel intention (Filieri & McLeay, 2013). However, this study focuses on online media as a whole – a broader scope than just social media. Previous research has also indicated that user-generated travel short videos can positively influence tourists to visit a destination (Bai et al., 2023; Xue et al., 2023). These studies reveal that, through various factors - such as being exposed to cultures and activities, video design, and destination attractiveness - short-form travel videos have a significant influence on tourists' intentions when travelling. However, this research is limited to user-generated content in the form of short videos, which is a limited part of social media, and therefore notes looking at other forms of social media for potential future research.

1.1 Research Objective and Question

Thus, due to the importance of the two aforementioned sectors and the gap in existing research, this study aims to answer the following research question: “*What is the effect of consuming travel-related social media content on travel destination selection?*” This research paper will make use of systematic literature review and quantitative research methods through means of a survey in order to collect data from participants.

2. Literature Review

The following literature review further explains relevant concepts and theories which assist in answering the proposed research question.

2.1 Electronic Word of Mouth

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) can be seen as the digital extension of the more traditional Word of Mouth (WOM), including any expressions – be it positive or negative - uploaded to the internet by consumers for a wide range of people to see (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). According to Hennig-Thurau et al., eWOM has a number of unique aspects when compared to WOM, such as the anonymity, duration of availability, and it being directed at multiple, unspecified individuals; it can also take place in various ways, like forums, websites, and more.

eWOM has the potential to be up to 20 to 30 times more effective for marketing purposes than traditional WOM depending on its usage, due to an added sense of reliability and relevance (Trusov et al., 2009). It has the potential to introduce customers to new experiences and increases customers' intent to purchase goods (Jeong & Jang, 2011). Furthermore, eWOM plays a key role in the decision-making process among consumers (Jalilvand et al., 2011) and in travel intention (Kuo, 2022). eWOM can also have a significant effect on customers' perceived value, and modern-day social platforms are an important source for consumers to learn about products and experiences (Nofal et al., 2022). In fact, existing research suggests that eWOM can be a cost-effective way of advertising in the tourism industry, replacing the classic WOM in recent decades and gaining ever-more traction among potential future tourists (Litvin et al., 2008).

For the purpose of answering this research question, eWOM will be centred around social media platforms. Such platforms may include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Instagram, X, and Reddit.

2.2 *Travel Inspiration*

In existing literature, *travel inspiration* is defined as the inspirational state that makes future travellers turn their potential travel plans into action (Dai et al., 2022). Inspiration is mentioned as an important aspect in the trip-planning process by Dai et al., as it can be a driving force behind consumer journeys. Furthermore, inspiration can motivate consumers and help drive them towards their end goal (Nguyen et al., 2023). Previous research has found that travel inspiration can be triggered and positively influenced by certain social media content, such as short-form videos (Xue et al., 2023). Inspiration has been found to be of importance in regards to eliciting a positive first impression in tourism (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008). While there are certain variables which lead to a higher level of inspiration when comparing social media content, such as enthusiasm and passion being shown by content creators (Cheng et al., 2020), the focus of this research lies on social media as a whole instead of comparisons between social media content pieces.

2.3 *Destination Image and Destination Attractiveness*

2.3.1 *Destination Image*

Destination image of a country is defined as the sum of all descriptive, inferential, and informational beliefs an individual has about a given country. This image can be altered through various means, such as an individual's travel experience or from outside information (Martin & Eroglu, 1993; Souiden et al., 2017). In the case of this research, social media could be seen as one such source of outside information. For example, Kim et al. (2017) report that many content cues in social media affected destination image. Image influences the way individuals judge quality, and a positive image correlates to a higher judgement of quality – this, in turn, influences a consumer's satisfaction level (Assaker et al., 2011).

The concept is further defined as a construct comprising of one's impression of

beliefs, feelings and general idea of a destination (Baloğlu & McCleary, 1999), or the expectations of what a future visit might be like (Govers et al., 2007). The image an individual has of a destination is a key factor in the decision of destination selection (Buhalis, 2000), and can influence travel intention and destination choice (Bigné et al., 2001). Destinations with positive destination images have an increased likelihood of being considered in an individual's final decision-making process (Baloğlu & McCleary, 1999; Bigné et al., 2001). It has also been found that a positive image of a destination leads to a higher likelihood of an individual revisiting said destination (Kim & Lee, 2015).

2.3.2 *Destination Attractiveness*

Destination Attractiveness refers to the extent to which a destination mirrors the viewpoint and feelings of the tourists visiting it in regards to the discerned ability to meet their needs. The closer a destination gets to meeting said needs, the more attractive it is considered and the higher the odds are of said destination being selected (Vengesai, 2003; Kim & Perdue, 2011). Henkel et al. (2006) also conclude that as a destination becomes more attractive, the probability of it being chosen as a tourist's final destination rises.

Current literature has two main concepts for destination attractiveness (Reitsamer et al., 2016). The first of these concepts entails that attractiveness is based on a destination's physical features, whereas the second concept entails that attractiveness is based on the image perception that tourists have of a destination (Formica & Uysal, 2006). Furthermore, existing research argues that in the current day and age, destinations are no longer seen as a bunch of loose factors, but instead as one whole product (Buhalis, 2000).

2.4 *Travel Intention*

Travel intention can be defined as the desire to visit a destination, and is argued to be a calculated summation of advantages and drawbacks between various destinations inspired by outside information, through means such as eWOM (Chen et al., 2014). Other previous research supports the claim that travel intention can be influenced through various means, one of which being eWOM (Filieri & McLeay, 2013).

Relevant information obtained through such means can influence the intention to travel to a destination, leading to the conclusion that eWOM can be deployed as a potent marketing tool in the tourism sector (Chen et al., 2014). Another previously mentioned concept which influences travel intention according to research is destination image. A positive destination image has been argued to have a higher likelihood of being considered in an individual's decision-making process (Milman & Pizam, 1995). A positive destination image has also been found to have a positive influence on travel intentions (Nadeau et al., 2008; Zhang et al., 2018), and can increase travel intention when revisiting a destination (Assaker et al., 2011). The same can be said for destination attractiveness, as Mursid & Anoraga (2021) found that destination attractiveness can lead to increased revisit intentions, and Henkel et al. (2006) found that destination attractiveness impacts travel intention.

3. Hypotheses

In order to answer the question “*What is the effect of consuming travel-related social media content on travel destination selection?*”, five sub-hypotheses have been worked out to measure correlation between the aforementioned constructs. Furthermore, a conceptual framework will be introduced to clearly conceptualize the process of answering the research question.

3.1 eWOM exposure and Travel Inspiration

Existing research in multiple domains has indicated that inspiration can be found through the usage of social media. For example, Yang et al. (2024) identified various factors as precursors to customer inspiration through social media, and Andonopoulos et al. (2023) concluded that social media can influence both customer inspiration and purchase intention. Furthermore, Xue et al. (2023) found that social media content can elicit travel inspiration. Based on this information, the following hypothesis has been formed:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between eWOM exposure and travel inspiration.

3.2 eWOM exposure and Destination Image

Multiple existing studies have concluded that an individual's image of something, such as a product or destination, can be affected by outside sources such as social media (Martin & Eroglu, 1993; Souiden et al., 2017). For instance, Abubakar et al. (2016) concluded that eWOM can have a positive and significant effect on a brand's image. Exposure through social media channels has also been found to influence a destination's image (Bolourchian & Karroubi, 2020). Therefore, the following hypothesis has been composed:

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between eWOM exposure and destination image.

3.3 Destination Image and Destination Attractiveness

Previous research has found that there is a correlation between a destination's image and attractiveness. For example, Kim & Perdue (2011) concluded that destination attractiveness can be notably influenced by the destination's image. Furthermore, Pompurová & Šimočková (2014) found that if a widespread awareness and image of a destination was lacking, the attractiveness of said destination would also decrease. Thus, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between destination image and destination attractiveness.

3.4 Travel Inspiration and Travel Intention

Assiouras et al. (2024) noted that tourists start establishing their travel intention after being inspired. This is in line with other research, such as Dai et al. (2022), who conclude that inspiration can be a key factor in a tourist's planning process, and Nguyen et al. (2023), who mention inspiration as a driving force to help reach an end goal – in the case of this research, travel intention. Therefore, the following hypothesis was formulated:

Hypothesis 4: There is a positive relationship between travel inspiration and travel intention.

3.5 Destination Attractiveness and Travel Intention

In a study by Mursid & Anoraga (2021), it was found that destination attractiveness can lead to increased revisit intentions. Furthermore,

Henkel et al. (2006) also argue that a more attractive destination has a higher chance of being chosen as a destination, which is supported by findings from other studies such as Lee et al. (2009). Thus, the final sub-hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 5: There is a positive relationship between destination attractiveness and travel intention.

3.6 Conceptual Framework

In order to visualize the aforementioned hypotheses, the following model will be utilized:

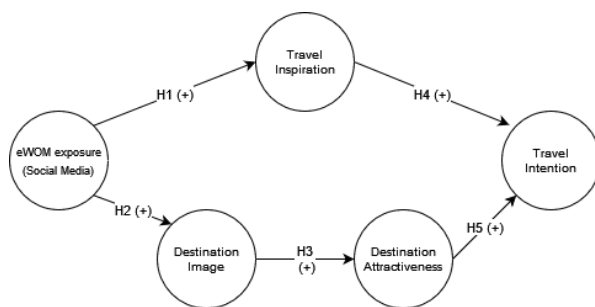


Figure 1 – Conceptual framework

In summary, the hypothesized relationships between the variables are as follows: eWOM exposure → Travel Inspiration → Travel Intention.

eWOM exposure → Destination Image → Destination Attractiveness → Travel Intention. All of these relationships are hypothesized to be positive relationships.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Sample

In total, 117 participants responded to an online questionnaire. Participants were reached through personal networks and social media platforms, namely WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. Additionally, spreading the survey through personal networks lead to some snowball sampling, where new participants are found through existing participants, as described by Goodman (1961). In order to ensure that the surveys were fully confidential, a single anonymous link was utilized and distributed among participants. 92 out of the 117 participants completed the questionnaire fully. Furthermore, respondents who were under the age of 18 and/or do not use social media were not included in the

final sample. This led to a final sample consisting of 86 respondents.

4.2 Research Design

This study aims to understand the dynamic between social media usage and Tourists' destination choice. More precisely, *what is the effect of consuming travel-related social media content on Travel Destination Selection?* As the aim of this research is to find a correlation between variables and test the aforementioned hypotheses to eventually answer this research question, the research will be based on quantitative analyses, utilizing data gathered from the previously mentioned online questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of a multitude of multiple choice questions, with answers utilizing a 1-through-7-ranking Likert scale, with most items ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). An exception to this rule can be found for Destination Image, where different answers were adapted and used. This variable instead asks for “bad - good”, “negative - positive”, “unworthwhile - worthwhile”, and “unfavourable - favourable” on a scale of 1 to 7. The Likert scale offers a way to quantify indiscernible concepts and has historically proven to be an effective tool in influential quantitative research (Jebb et al., 2021).

The online questionnaire was composed of 6 main parts. To help ensure content validity, survey items for the utilized variables were borrowed from existing studies where validity was tested, and were then applied to this research. The questionnaire started with a small description of the research and information for respondents who were filling out the survey. Respondents were subsequently asked if they use social media. Following this, respondents were presented with questions regarding the variables presented in the literature review. These questions were shown on a separate page for each one of the five variables, with a small description at the top of each page to tell respondents how the questions worked. Finally, demographic information on age, gender, employment status, and income was collected. The full questionnaire as it was presented to respondents can be found in appendix 10.7. The items upon which the questionnaire is based can be found in table 1.

Table 1 – Operationalisation table

Variable	Adapted From	Number of Items
eWOM Exposure	Chung & Koo, 2015	3
Travel Inspiration	Böttger et al., 2017	5
Destination Image	Kock et al., 2016	4
Destination Attractiveness	Wu et al., 2015	4
Travel Intention	Kock et al., 2016	3
Socio-Demographics		4

4.3 Data Analysis

The collected data will be analysed by utilizing RStudio. Due to the usage of the aforementioned Likert scale in the questionnaire, collected data will be quantifiable and the hypotheses can be analysed. This way, all variables can be tested for correlation, including socio-demographic factors such as gender, age, and income. A Shapiro-Wilk test will be run to check if the data is normally distributed. Depending on the outcome of this test, one of two methods will be used to test for correlation between variables. Should the data be normally distributed, a Pearson correlation coefficient test will be used. If the data is not normally distributed, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient test will be utilized instead. Scales will be validated using Cronbach's alpha, following standards from J.A. Gliem & R.R. Gliem (2003), who aim for a Cronbach alpha of 0.8 when measuring Likert scale items. To further make sure that the dataset is suitable for analysis, a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test will be used. According to Kaiser (1974), values upwards of 0.5 are acceptable, although higher values are considered better. If acceptable values are observed, Principal Component Analysis will then be utilized to reduce component size and allow for more efficient analysis of the data. After this, a correlation analysis will be performed utilizing either one of the aforementioned methods, based on whether or not the data is normally distributed. Lastly, regression analysis

will be carried out to measure the significance of relationships between the variables and test whether the hypotheses can be accepted or have to be rejected.

5. Results

After gathering data from the online questionnaire, it was analysed using RStudio. Consequently, a Shapiro-Wilk test was utilized to test for normal distribution across all variables (Appendix 10.2, table 6). Given the low significance values of all variables – significantly below a p-value of .05 – we can conclude that the data is not normally distributed. Because normality was rejected, the Spearman rank correlation method will be utilized to measure correlations. Furthermore, the histograms of the distributions (appendix 10.2) show that the distributions for the variables are largely left-skewed, ranging from small to moderate skews.

5.1 Respondents' socio-demographics

The socio-demographic distribution of respondents can be found in the table below.

Table 2 – Socio-demographic distribution (N = 86)

Variable & Answers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	40	46.512
Female	46	53.488
Non-binary/Third gender	0	0
Prefer not to say	0	0
Age		
Under 18	0	0
18-24	21	24.418
25-34	18	20.930
35-44	8	9.302
45-54	23	26.744
55-65	11	12.791
Over 65	5	5.814
Employment Status		
Student	14	16.279
Employed, part-time	15	17.442

Employed, full-time	50	58.140
Not currently employed	3	3.488
Retired	4	4.651
Monthly Income		
€500 or less	10	11.628
€501 to €1000	4	4.651
€1001 to €1500	3	3.488
€1501 to €2000	10	11.628
€2001 to €2500	12	13.953
€2501 to €3000	13	15.116
€3001 to €3500	11	12.791
€3501 to €4000	6	6.977
€4001 or more	17	19.767

5.2 Descriptive Analysis

Table 3 – Descriptive Analysis

Variable & Items	Mean	SD	α
eWOM exposure			0.82
eWOM1	4.767	1.747	
eWOM2	3.872	1.877	
eWOM3	4.686	1.810	
Travel Inspiration			0.94
Tins1	5.140	1.448	
Tins2	5.035	1.553	
Tins3	4.919	1.536	
Tins4	4.849	1.499	
Tins5	4.105	1.763	
Destination Image			0.94
DI1	5.163	1.061	
DI2	5.151	1.079	
DI3	4.709	1.126	
DI4	5.012	1.090	
Destination Attractiveness			0.86
DA1	5.221	1.350	
DA2	5.640	1.073	
DA3	4.860	1.365	
DA4	4.988	1.576	
Travel Intention			0.93
Tint1	4.570	1.857	
Tint2	4.116	1.758	
Tint3	4.200	1.807	

Items measured on a scale from 1 to 7
(1 = low, 7 = high).

In table 3, descriptive statistics for the variables and their items can be found. Observing this table, it can be seen that most items within the different variables have relatively consistent means and standard deviations. A few outliers can nevertheless be found, such as eWOM2 and Tins5. The same can be argued for the observed standard deviations. Outliers in this area include DA2 and DA4, between which lies a large gap. An overview of all variables and the items and questions related to them can be found in the appendix (table 5).

5.3 Validation

5.3.1 Cronbach's Alpha

To ensure the validity of the aforementioned items, a calculation has been made to obtain Cronbach's Alpha value. This value is shown in the table above (table 3) for each variable. According to J.A. Gliem & R.R. Gliem (2003), an alpha of 0.8 is a good benchmark to aim for when utilizing items based on a Likert scale. Using this benchmark, it can be concluded that the utilized items are valid, as the presented Cronbach alpha values range from a minimum of 0.82 to a maximum of 0.94.

5.3.2 Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin

Analysing the five variables through means of a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test, it can be concluded that all variables are acceptable, with the lowest MSA score being 0.65 for eWOM Exposure. This is 0.15 over the minimum acceptable score as noted by Kaiser (1974), meaning sampling is adequate. For the variables Travel Inspiration and Destination Image, strong MSA scores of 0.9 and 0.84 respectively were found. Destination Attractiveness and Travel Intention also have an acceptable score of 0.78 and 0.73 respectively. A more detailed view of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test can be found in appendix 10.3.

5.3.3 Principal Component Analysis

After concluding that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test results are acceptable for all variables, the variables can be simplified through means of Principal component analysis. Using this, the number of variables in the dataset can be vastly reduced without sacrificing much detail (IBM, 2023), allowing for the hypotheses to be tested

more efficiently. Kaiser's rule states that only principal components which have an eigenvalue higher than 1 should be retained (Rudolph et al., 2023). For eWOM Exposure, principal component (hereinafter PC) 1 has an eigenvalue of 2.23 and explains 74.38% of total variance. The other PCs for this variable have an eigenvalue smaller than 1, and thus will not be utilized for the correlation analysis. For Travel Inspiration, PC1 has an eigenvalue of 4.04, explaining 80.73% of variance. PC1 for Destination Image has an eigenvalue of 3.42, explaining 85.38% of variance. Regarding Destination Attractiveness, PC1 has an eigenvalue of 2.84, explaining 71.11% of variance. Finally, for Travel Intention, PC1 has an eigenvalue of 2.62, which explains 87.43% of variance. Similar to eWOM Exposure, all other variables only have a singular PC with an eigenvalue higher than 1 – thus, the other PCs will not be used for the following analysis. A more detailed view of the principal component analysis can be found in appendix 10.4.

5.4 Correlation Analysis

Using the aforementioned principal components, a correlation matrix consisting of the five variables' PCs and the four socio-demographic variables "gender", "age", "employment status", and "income" has been formed (appendix 10.5, table 9), displaying correlation coefficients between all of the variables. This correlation matrix shows a positive correlation between all PC variables. Firstly, eWOM Exposure has a strong positive correlation with all four other variables – Travel Inspiration (0.62), Destination Image (0.42), Destination Attractiveness (0.51), and Travel Intention (0.72). Next, Travel Inspiration also shows strong positive correlations with Destination Image (0.55), Destination Attractiveness (0.73), and Travel Intention (0.64). Looking at Destination Image, a strong correlation with Destination Attractiveness (0.68) and Travel Intention (0.55) can be observed. Finally, Destination Attractiveness shows a strong correlation with Travel Intention (0.66).

Looking at socio-demographic data, more strong correlations can be observed. For example, age and income show a strong correlation (0.58), as do income and employment status (0.46).

5.5 Hypotheses Testing

After performing regression analysis for all the hypothesized relationships between variables, including socio-demographic variables (appendix 10.6), observations can be made to answer the five hypotheses. Calculating the R-squared of the full model with Travel Intention as the dependent variable yields an adjusted R-squared value of 0.6209, meaning approximately 62.1% of the total variance in Travel Intention can be explained by this model. To determine statistical significance, a significance level of 5% (0.05) will be used. Key information for the testing of the hypotheses has been summarized in table 4.

5.5.1 Hypothesis 1

As shown in table 4, the relationship between the variables eWOM Exposure and Travel Inspiration have a p-value of 4.82e-8 and a coefficient (β) of 0.7465. This p-value constitutes a statistically significant relationship between the variables, which means there is enough evidence to support H1. Therefore, it can be concluded that eWOM Exposure has a positive relationship with Travel Inspiration.

5.5.2 Hypothesis 2

Observing the variables eWOM Exposure and Destination Image, a p-value of 0.0013 and β of 0.4547 can be found. This p-value indicates a statistically significant relationship between these two variables, providing enough evidence to support H2. For this reason, it can be concluded that eWOM Exposure is positively related to Destination Image.

5.5.3 Hypothesis 3

Looking at the variables Destination Image and Destination Attractiveness, a p-value of 8.05e-8 and β of 0.4807 can be perceived. Using this p-value, it can be said that the relationship between these variables is statistically significant, supporting H3. Consequently, the conclusion can be drawn that Destination Image is positively related to Destination Attractiveness.

5.5.4 Hypothesis 4

Regarding the relationship between Travel Inspiration and Travel Intention, a p-value of 0.0017 and β of 0.4059 can be discerned. This

p-value indicates that the relationship between the variables is statistically significant, supporting H4. As a result, it can be concluded that Travel Inspiration is positively related to Travel Intention.

5.5.5 Hypothesis 5

Finally, when observing the relationship between the variables Destination Attractiveness and Travel Intention, a p-value of 0.021 and a β of 0.2486 can be found. Using a significance level of 5% (0.05), the conclusion can be made that there is a significant statistical relationship between said variables due to the aforementioned p-value of 0.021, and there is enough evidence to support H5. Thus, it can be said that Destination Attractiveness is positively related to Travel Intention.

Table 4 – Summary of key regression results

DV	IV	Coefficient	Significance
Tins	eWOM	0.7465	4.82e-8 ***
DI	eWOM	0.4547	0.0013 **
DA	DI	0.4807	8.05e-8 ***
Tint	Tins	0.4059	0.0017 **
Tint	DA	0.2486	0.0210 *

*, **, and *** represent significance levels of 0.05, 0.01, and 0.001 respectively.

DV = Dependent Variable

IV = Independent Variable

5.6 Socio-demographic variables

When observing socio-demographic variables in the regression tables (appendix 10.6), very little significance can be observed. Only one instance of a socio-demographic variable meeting a 10% significance level can be seen, that being gender for Destination Attractiveness. Overall, it can only be concluded that socio-demographic variables in this dataset are not of statistical significance.

5.7 Summary of Results

By executing a Shapiro-Wilk test, it was observed that normality is not met. Conversely, by looking at Cronbach's Alpha and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test, it can be concluded that validity is met and the sampling is adequate, with Cronbach Alpha scores ranging from 0.82 to 0.94, and MSA scores ranging from 0.65 to 0.90. Principal component analysis was then used to

reduce the number of dimensions in the dataset, resulting in 1 principal component being utilized for each variable.

Because the data was found not to be normally distributed, Spearman's rank correlation was used to form a correlation matrix. Looking at this correlation matrix, strong correlation can be observed between most variables. Furthermore, regression analysis showed that all hypothesized relationships are statistically significant and are therefore supported, meaning positive relationships for all hypotheses were confirmed. Finally, it was concluded that socio-demographic variables are not statistically significant.

6. Discussion

This research aimed to measure the effect of eWOM Exposure in the form of social media on Travel Intention.

The first hypothesis, "there is a positive relationship between eWOM Exposure and Travel Inspiration", showed statistically significant results when performing regression analysis. Furthermore, the correlation matrix displays a positive relationship between these variables. This indicates that people who are more inclined to use social media for travel related content have a higher degree of travel inspiration. This is a similar conclusion to Andonopoulos et al. (2023), who found that social media can trigger customer inspiration, and Xue et al. (2023), who concluded that social media content can elicit travel inspiration.

For the second hypothesis, "there is a positive relationship between eWOM Exposure and Destination Image", significant results can be observed from the regression analysis. The correlation matrix also displays a positive relationship between the variables. This shows that people who are more inclined to use social media for travel related content also have a more positive destination image. This conclusion is in line with Abubakar et al. (2016), who found that social media can have a positive effect on the image of a brand, and Bolourchian & Karroubi (2020), who concluded that social media can have a significant effect on a destination's image.

The third hypothesis, "there is a positive relationship between Destination Image and Destination Attractiveness", showed statistically

significant results when observing regression analysis. The correlation matrix also shows a positive relationship between the variables. This indicates that people who have a more positive destination image are more likely to be attracted to a destination. This relationship was also found by Kim & Perdue (2011), who found that destination attractiveness could be notably influenced by destination image, and Pompurová & Šimočková (2014), who found that destination attractiveness would decrease if destination image was lacking.

For the fourth hypothesis, “there is a positive relationship between Travel Inspiration and Travel Intention”, statistically significant results can be observed from the regression analysis. The correlation matrix also displays a positive correlation between the variables. This means that people who have a higher level of travel inspiration are more likely to travel to a destination they have seen on social media. These results match the results drawn from existing research such as Assiouras et al. (2024), who concluded that tourists’ travel intention starts being formed after being inspired. Furthermore, it is also in line with Nguyen et al. (2023), who mention inspiration as a driving force to reach an end goal.

The fifth and final hypothesis, “there is a positive relationship between Destination Attractiveness and Travel Intention”, also showed statistical significance through regression analysis. Moreover, the correlation matrix exhibits a positive correlation between the variables. This indicates that people who have a higher level of destination attractiveness are more likely to travel to a destination they have seen on social media. This is in line with results from Mursid & Anoraga (2021), who found that higher destination attractiveness can lead to increased revisit intentions. Furthermore, Henkel et al. (2006) and Lee et al. (2009), also found that more attractive destinations lead to increased visit intentions.

Finally, it was found that socio-demographic factors such as gender, age, and income do not appear to have a statistically significant effect on any of the variables.

7. Conclusion

By looking at the results of the study, the research question “*What is the effect of consuming*

travel-related social media content on travel destination selection?” can be answered. The study shows significant positive effects between all hypothesized relationships, suggesting that exposure to travel-related social media content positively influences tourists’ travel intentions through these relationships. Results suggest that eWOM Exposure has a significant positive effect on Travel Inspiration and Destination Image, Destination Image has a significant positive effect on Destination Attractiveness, and Destination Attractiveness and Travel Inspiration have a significant positive effect on Travel Intention. Thus, it can be said that people who spend more time looking at travel-related content on social media are more likely to travel to a destination they have seen on social media, and vice versa.

7.1 Implications

7.1.1 Practical Implications

A number of practical implications can be derived from the results of this research. First off, the research shows that people who spend more time using social media for travel-related content are more likely to travel to a destination they have seen on social media. For this reason, it could be in a country’s or destination’s best interest to promote themselves on social media as much as possible if they wish to attract a greater amount of tourists. For example, advertisements could be deployed on social media to help promote such destinations and increase awareness of them among potential future tourists.

Secondly, these countries and destinations should aim to increase their attractiveness to tourists, as well as attempt to get potential tourists to reach an inspired state, as these two variables were positively related to travel intention. Doing so may therefore lead to an increase in visitors. Increasing these variables does not necessarily have to be done through eWOM Exposure – for example, it has been found that Destination Attractiveness can be increased by increasing a destination’s ability to meet tourists’ needs (Vengesai, 2003; Kim & Perdue, 2011). Putting a focus on meeting these needs could therefore increase tourism activity through increased Travel Intention.

Lastly, as can be observed through the positive relationship between eWOM Exposure and Destination Image, social media could be

utilized to improve a destination's image among people. If this is considered valuable by a country or destination, they should ensure that they promote themselves through social media, as is discussed by the first practical implication.

7.1.2 Theoretical Implications

Multiple theoretical implications can be deduced from the results of this research. Firstly, it is a helpful contribution to existing literature such as Chen et al. (2014) and Filieri & McLeay (2013), who state that Travel Intention can be influenced through eWOM. This paper further contributes to this conclusion by expanding on this finding through the usage of a more specific version of eWOM in the form of social media as opposed to eWOM as a whole, adding valuable new insights. Similarly, Xue et al. (2023) found that social media in the form of short-form content can elicit travel inspiration. This paper further contributes to these findings by concluding that travel-related social media content in general also elicits travel inspiration. Secondly, The results of this research also build on evidence found by previous research, such as Bolourchian & Karroubi (2020), who found that social media can influence destination image, Kuo (2022), who found that eWOM can be a key factor in travel intention, and Nguyen et al. (2023), who stated that inspiration can be a driving force for an end goal. In the context of this paper, travel inspiration was found to be a driving force for travel intention.

7.2 Limitations and Future Research

It is important to note that the study has a few limitations, as well as opportunities for future research. Firstly, because the research was conducted from a Dutch university and by utilizing personal networks, a disproportionate share of participants could be of Dutch nationality.

Future research could therefore focus on different regions or take a more international approach to see if results are consistent across various regions and cultures. Secondly, due to the broad focus of social media in this research, there is room left for research to dive deeper into the details of this topic. For example, another avenue which could be further explored is what type of social media content being consumed has the largest impact on travel intention, and if all types of social media have a similar impact on Travel Intention. Similarly, the research does not explore the kind of destinations about which social media content is being consumed. A number of other variables could come into play regarding destination selection, such as distance, cost, and safety. Therefore, a more specific focus on which kinds of destinations are most likely to be selected - and which variables are important in determining this - could also be researched in the future. Finally, the sample size of 86 could be seen as relatively small, thus being a limitation.

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10. Appendix

10.1 Scales

Table 5 - Scales

eWOM Exposure		Adapted from: Chung & Koo (2015)
		From 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”)
eWOM1	I use social media for searching travel content (pre-travel)	
eWOM2	I use social media to create an actual travel-plan after I have chosen a destination (pre-travel)	
eWOM3	I use social media to obtain extra information while traveling	
Travel Inspiration		Adapted from: Böttger et al. (2017)
		From 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”)
Tins1	I am inspired to experience more of destinations I have seen on social media	
Tins2	When I see destinations on social media, I feel a desire to experience more of them	
Tins3	My interest in experiencing destinations I have seen on social media has increased since seeing them on social media	
Tins4	I am motivated to experience more of destinations I have seen on social media	
Tins5	I feel an urge to experience more of the destinations I have seen on social media	
Destination Image		Adapted from: Kock et al. (2016)
		Various scales ranging from 1 to 7
DI1	Overall, traveling to a destination I see on Social Media is: Bad (1) – Good (7)	
DI2	Overall, traveling to a destination I see on Social Media is: Negative (1) – Positive (7)	
DI3	Overall, traveling to a destination I see on Social Media is: Unfavorable (1) – Favorable (7)	
DI4	Overall, traveling to a destination I see on Social Media is: Not worthwhile (1) – Worthwhile (7)	
Destination Attractiveness		Adapted from: Wu et al. (2015)
		From 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”)
DA1	I am impressed by the destinations I see on social media	
DA2	The destinations I see on social media look appealing	
DA3	When I see an appealing destination on social media, I want to learn more about it	
DA4	When I see a destination on social media, I wish I could spend time there	
Travel Intention		Adapted from: Kock et al. (2016)
		From 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”)
Tint1	I would like to visit destinations I have seen on social media in the upcoming 12 months	
Tint2	I intend on visiting destinations I have seen on social media in the upcoming 12 months	
Tint3	It is likely that I will be visiting destinations I have seen on social media in the upcoming 12 months	

10.2 Normal distribution test results

Table 6 – Shapiro-Wilk test		
Variable	Statistic (W)	Significance
eWOM Exposure	0.940	5.792e-4
Travel Inspiration	0.925	9.312e-5
Destination Image	0.937	4.159e-4
Destination Attractiveness	0.947	0.001426
Travel Intention	0.947	0.001505

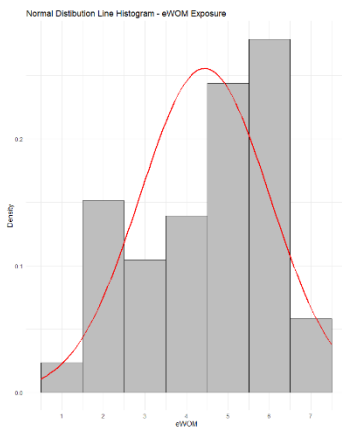


Figure 2 – Normal Distribution Histogram (eWOM Exposure)

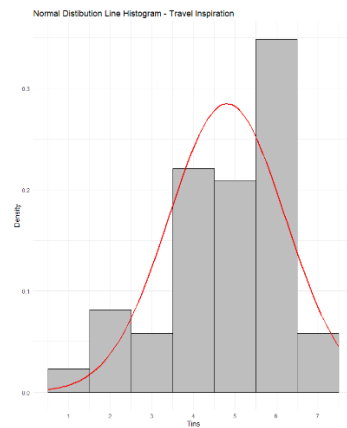


Figure 3 – Normal Distribution Histogram (Travel Inspiration)

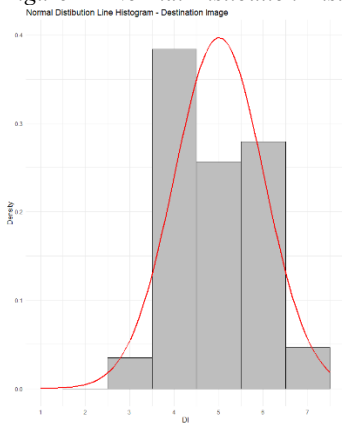


Figure 4 – Normal Distribution Histogram (Destination Image)

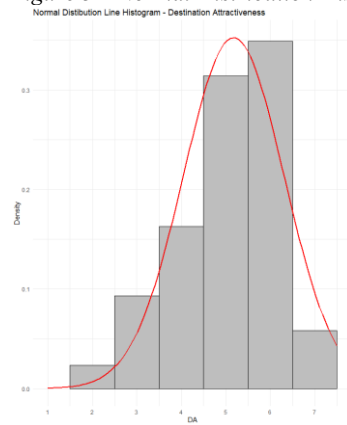


Figure 5 – Normal Distribution Histogram (Destination Attractiveness)

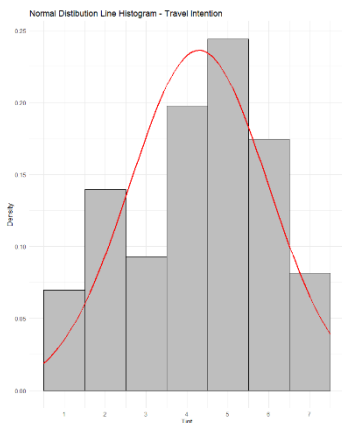


Figure 6 – Normal Distribution Histogram (Travel Intention)

10.3 *Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test results*

Table 7a - eWOM Exposure

Item	KMO Value (MSA)
Overall	0.65
eWOM1	0.60
eWOM2	0.69
eWOM3	0.68

Table 7b- Travel Inspiration

Item	KMO Value (MSA)
Overall	0.9
Tins1	0.92
Tins2	0.91
Tins3	0.92
Tins4	0.86
Tins5	0.92

Table 7c - Destination Image

Item	KMO Value (MSA)
Overall	0.84
DI1	0.86
DI2	0.77
DI3	0.91
DI4	0.87

Table 7d - Destination Attractiveness

Item	KMO Value (MSA)
Overall	0.78
DI1	0.76
DI2	0.76
DI3	0.81
DI4	0.80

Table 7e - Travel Intention

Item	KMO Value (MSA)
Overall	0.73
DA1	0.79
DA2	0.66
DA3	0.75

10.4 *Principal Component Analysis results*

Table 8a – Principal Component Analysis (eWOM Exposure)

Component	St.dev.	Variance (%)	Cumulative (%)	Eigenvalue
1	1.4938	74.38	74.38	2.2314
2	0.7262	17.58	91.96	0.5274
3	0.4912	8.04	100	0.2413

Table 8b – Principal Component Analysis (Travel Inspiration)

Component	St.dev.	Variance (%)	Cumulative (%)	Eigenvalue
1	2.0091	80.73	80.73	4.0366
2	0.5650	6.38	87.12	0.3192
3	0.5163	5.33	92.45	0.2666
4	0.4808	4.62	97.07	0.2311
5	0.3828	2.93	100	0.1465

Table 8c – Principal Component Analysis (Destination Image)

Component	St.dev.	Variance (%)	Cumulative (%)	Eigenvalue
1	1.8481	85.38	85.38	3.4154
2	0.5530	7.64	93.03	0.3058
3	0.4276	4.57	97.60	0.1829
4	0.3099	2.40	100	0.0960

Table 8d – Principal Component Analysis (Destination Attractiveness)

Component	St.dev.	Variance (%)	Cumulative (%)	Eigenvalue
1	1.6865	71.11	71.11	2.8444
2	0.7615	14.50	85.61	0.5800
3	0.5691	8.10	93.71	0.3239
4	0.5017	6.29	100	0.2517

Table 8e – Principal Component Analysis (Travel Intention)

Component	St.dev.	Variance (%)	Cumulative (%)	Eigenvalue
1	1.6200	87.43	87.43	2.6228
2	0.5068	8.56	95.99	0.2568
3	0.3469	4.01	100	0.1203

10.5 *Correlation results*

Table 9 – Correlation results matrix (Spearman)

<i>Item</i>	eWOM	Tins	DI	DA	Tint	Gender	Age	Employ	Income
eWOM	1								
Tins	0.6229	1							
DI	0.4184	0.5512	1						
DA	0.5101	0.7273	0.6770	1					
Tint	0.7198	0.6367	0.5480	0.6565	1				
Gender	-0.3218	-0.3381	-0.1994	-0.3091	-0.2550	1			
Age	0.2778	0.3055	0.2764	0.3515	0.2628	-0.2230	1		
Employ	0.2108	0.2751	0.2400	0.3439	0.1944	-0.2820	0.4670	1	
Income	0.3122	0.3508	0.2608	0.3265	0.2817	-0.2698	0.5844	0.4574	1

The following items in this table refer to their principal component (PC1): eWOM, Tins, DI, DA, Tint.

Employ refers to “current employment status”.

Spearman’s rank correlation function was used for this table.

10.6 Regression analysis results

Regression analysis executed in R using lm() function.

., *, **, and *** indicate statistical significance levels of 0.1, 0.05, 0.01, and 0.001 respectively.

Table 10a - Regression Table with Travel Inspiration as Dependent Variable

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	Significance
(intercept)	-0.2375	0.8566	0.782
eWOM	0.7465	0.1238	4.82e-8 ***
Gender	-0.4186	0.3613	0.25
Age	0.0381	0.1386	0.785
Employment status	0.0893	0.2183	0.684
Income	0.0878	0.0840	0.299
Residual standard error: 1.53 on 80 degrees of freedom Multiple R-squared: 0.4545 Adjusted R-squared: 0.4204 F-statistic: 13.33 on 5 and 80 degrees of freedom p-value: 1.89e-9			

Table 10b - Regression Table with Destination Image as Dependent Variable

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	Significance
(intercept)	-0.9666	0.9403	0.3071
eWOM	0.4547	0.1359	0.0013 **
Gender	-0.0787	0.3966	0.8433
Age	0.0950	0.1523	0.5345
Employment status	0.2286	0.2396	0.3430
Income	0.0190	0.0922	0.8373
Residual standard error: 1.679 on 80 degrees of freedom Multiple R-squared: 0.2232 Adjusted R-squared: 0.1746 F-statistic: 4.596 on 5 and 80 degrees of freedom p-value:0.00098			

Table 10c - Regression Table with Destination Attractiveness as Dependent Variable

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	Significance
(intercept)	-0.1063	0.7324	0.8850
Destination Image	0.4807	0.0814	8.05e-8 ***
Gender	-0.4971	0.2965	0.0975 .
Age	0.0880	0.1182	0.4585
Employment status	0.0821	0.1869	0.6617
Income	0.0537	0.0710	0.4518
Residual standard error: 1.305 on 80 degrees of freedom Multiple R-squared: 0.4369 Adjusted R-squared: 0.4017 F-statistic: 12.41 on 5 and 80 degrees of freedom p-value: 6.359e-9			

Table 10d - Regression Table with Travel Intention as Dependent Variable

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	Significance
(intercept)	0.2901	0.6648	0.6637
Travel Inspiration	0.4059	0.1246	0.0017 **
Destination Attractiveness	0.2486	0.1056	0.0210 *
Gender	-0.1564	0.2776	0.5748
Age	-0.0082	0.1075	0.9390
Employment status	-0.0526	0.1699	0.7575
Income	0.0216	0.0653	0.7420
Residual standard error: 1.183 on 79 degrees of freedom Multiple R-squared: 0.5039 Adjusted R-squared: 0.4662 F-statistic: 13.37 on 6 and 79 degrees of freedom p-value: 2.117e-10			

10.7 *Survey*

Below, the survey can be found in the exact way it was presented to respondents via Qualtrics.

Introductory Page



The Impact of Social Media Usage on Travel Destination Selection

The following questionnaire and its corresponding research aims to gather insights into participants' usage of social media platforms (e.g. Instagram, Tiktok, X, Reddit, Facebook, YouTube, etc.) and its influences on their travel behavior.

Your responses are kept fully confidential and will be used solely for the purpose of this research. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and anonymous. By finishing this questionnaire, you consent to the usage of your answers for the purpose of this research.

This survey consists of closed questions and should take around 5 minutes to complete. Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire; your participation and honest answers are greatly appreciated.



Q1 (Screening question)



Do you use social media? (platforms such as Instagram, Tiktok, X, Reddit, Facebook, and YouTube)

Yes

No

Q2 – Q4 (eWOM Exposure)



The following questions are centered around usage of social media. Please select the answers which most accurately reflect your experience.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I use social media for searching travel content (pre-travel).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use social media to create an actual travel-plan after I have chosen a destination (pre-travel).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use social media to obtain extra information while traveling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q5 – Q9 (Travel Inspiration)



The following questions are about destinations you have seen on social media. Please select the answers which most accurately reflect your experience.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I am inspired to experience more of destinations I have seen on social media.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see destinations on social media, I feel a desire to experience more of them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My interest in experiencing destinations I have seen on social media has increased since seeing them on social media.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am motivated to experience more of destinations I have seen on social media.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel an urge to experience more of destinations I have seen on social media.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q10 – Q13 (Destination Image)



The following question asks for your thoughts and opinions on traveling to destinations you have seen on social media. These can be destinations you have visited, but may also be destinations you have not visited. Please select the answers which most accurately reflect your opinions.

Overall, traveling to a destination I see on social media is:

Extremely bad	Moderately bad	Slightly bad	Neither good nor bad	Slightly good	Moderately good	Extremely good
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Overall, traveling to a destination I see on social media is:

Extremely negative	Moderately negative	Slightly negative	Neither positive nor negative	Slightly positive	Moderately positive	Extremely positive
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Overall, traveling to a destination I see on social media is:

Extremely unfavorable	Moderately unfavorable	Slightly unfavorable	Neither unfavorable nor favorable	Slightly favorable	Moderately favorable	Extremely favorable
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Overall, traveling to a destination I see on social media is:

Extremely unworthwhile	Moderately unworthwhile	Slightly unworthwhile	Neither unworthwhile nor worthwhile	Slightly worthwhile	Moderately worthwhile	Extremely worthwhile
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q14 – Q17 (Destination Attractiveness)



The following questions are about your feelings towards destinations you have seen on social media. Please select the answers which most accurately reflect your experience.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I am impressed by the destinations I see on social media.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The destinations I see on social media look appealing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see an appealing destination on social media, I want to learn more about it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see a destination on social media, I wish I could spend time there.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q18 – Q20 (Travel Intention)



The following questions are about your feelings towards destinations you have seen on social media. Please select the answers which most accurately reflect your experience.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I would like to visit destinations I have seen on social media in the upcoming 12 months.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I intend on visiting destinations I have seen on social media in the upcoming 12 months.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is likely that I will be visiting destinations I have seen on social media in the upcoming 12 months.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q21 – Q23 (Socio-demographic variables)



The final set of questions is used for the purposes of gathering demographic data. Please select the options that best reflect your current situation.

Please select your gender:

Please select your age range:

Which category best reflects your current employment status?

Student

Employed, part-time

Employed, full-time

Not currently employed

Retired

Variable “gender” had 4 options: “male”, “female”, “third gender/non-binary”, and “prefer not to say”

Variable “age” had 7 options: “under 18”, “18-24”, “25-34”, “35-44”, “45-54”, “55-64”, and “65 or older”

Q24 (Socio-demographic variables)

Which category which best reflects your current (monthly) income?

€500 or less

€501 to €1000

€1001 to €1500

€1501 to €2000

€2001 to €2500

€2501 to €3000

€3001 to €3500

€3501 to €4000

€4001 or more

Closing Page



This is the end of the questionnaire. Thank you for taking your time to participate in this study by filling out the questionnaire. Your participation is greatly appreciated.