

The Role of Virtual Acculturation via Social Media on Travel Destination Choice

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ABSTRACT,

The increasing trend of using social media is closely connected to the tourism context. Virtual acculturation, which shows the degree of people adapting to different cultures virtually via social media before visiting the place physically. This study examines the influence of virtual acculturation on travel destination choice among international students, where social media serves as an agent. Data collection was carried out using an online survey asking about students' age, gender, nationalities, and current country studying. The result showed social media usage has a positive impact on virtual acculturation. Online knowledge contribution and sense of belonging under the context of social media did not show an effect on virtual acculturation. The positive and significant relationships are displayed between virtual acculturation and travel destination choice. Destination image stands out to be significantly related to both virtual acculturation and travel destination choice. The discussion of the results in this research contributes further analysis of the concepts of 'virtual acculturation' in the tourism context. The implication and limitations of this research are provided afterward.

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Keywords

Social media, virtual acculturation, travel destination choice, sense of belonging, online knowledge contribution, international students

1. INTRODUCTION

At the present time, social media platforms have been closely connected to individuals' daily lives. As of January 2016, there were over 2.3 billion people who own active accounts on social media platforms and averagely, spent more than two hours a day on them (Kim et al., 2017). According to Xiang & Gretzel (2010), social media stands out as an essential role in trip planning in the context of tourism. The platforms provide an online space allowing users to share and post travel-related information such as experiences, comments, video clips, etc. They serve as information that is received by others to become acquainted with the travel destinations. Travelers choose a specific travel destination choice when they travel to a new location seeking novel experiences (Pandey & Joshi, 2021). Cohen (1972) also identified that various traveler groups give destination preference based on the extent of familiarity of the host culture aligned with their original culture or the strangeness they expect a specific destinations holds. At the same time, the concept of acculturation emerges. Previous tourism-oriented acculturation studies had found the relationship between bilateral adoption of the cultures between tourists and local people (Özekici & Ünlüönen, 2019). For example, tourists tend to acculturate into host cultures when communicating with local people, and at the same time, the local people adopt the culture of the tourists (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2015). By means of using social media, the role of virtual acculturation in the tourism context has been researched by Li et al.(2019) using a qualitative study, confirming that social media usage facilitated an individual's perception and expectation of the culture within the travel destination. Hence, their cultural orientation and identifications could be shaped differently.

On the other hand, the increasing trend of international students revealed in various countries who chose to leave their own country temporarily and study abroad to achieve academic qualifications (Glover, 2011). When considering planning a trip for travelling, they common opt to travel independently (Gardiner et al., 2013). Their preference in choosing travel and holiday destinations were relaxation, natural attractions and experiencing local cultures (Deng & Ritchie, 2016). However, the purpose of travelling for Chinese international students was highlighted differently. They take trips for a shorter period of time and seek sightseeing and shopping rather than gaining traditional experiences (Gardiner & Kwek, 2017, King & Gardiner, 2015).

Despite the existing literatures on acculturation in the tourism context, the studies that researched virtual acculturation in choosing travel destinations were limited. Furthermore, international students were frequently investigated under the context of tourism with destination choice preference, but empirical evidence on the occurrence of virtual acculturation was not enough. The researches on international student engagement in travel destination cultures through social media also need to be extended.

Therefore, the aim of this research is to examine the relationship between virtual acculturation formed by social media has influence on international students' choice of travel destinations. In order to achieve this objective, my research question is lead and state as follows:

To what extent does virtual acculturation through social media influence travel destination choice among international students?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides background knowledge about social media and virtual acculturation based on existing literatures.

2.1 Social Media

Social media is defined as a representation showing various forms of user-generated content created and exchanged online via internet-based applications (Whiting & Williams, 2013). It has been classified into six types: Blogs, collaborative projects, social networking sites, content communities, virtual social worlds, and the virtual game worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social networking sites facilitate communication between users by allowing them to create personal information profiles, invite friends to view the profile, and send e-mail messages to each other. As social networking sites increased popularity among young users, they became essential for maintaining and fostering social relationships by exchanging ideas and opinions (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kizgin et al., 2019).

In the tourism context, the content communities support the exchange of common interests on experiences and information, which several researchers have found effect on travel decisions (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). The understanding of blog usage was also previously researched and revealed the underscore of its function in the trust-building among virtual communities (Mack et al., 2018) and sharing travel experiences (Pudliner, 2007). As the media content shared on social media is exposed in various forms, including text, photos, videos, PowerPoints, etc., which draws tourism researcher's attention to the content and information shared that relates to travel experiences and selections (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, Li et al., 2019, Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). In addition, to achieve better travel information being searched by potential customers, tourism businesses analyze the comments and opinions made by virtual communities by platforms like TripAdvisor to get acquainted with consumer preferences (Leung et al., 2013).

2.2 Virtual Acculturation

The concept of virtual acculturation was derived from the term 'Acculturation', referring to the degree in which people adapt to a new culture or keep their cultural identity when moving to a different society (Phinney, 1996). It entails changes in a person's behavioral repertoire on an individual level consisting use of language, interactions, food, behaviors, values, social relationships and traditions. (Berry, 2015; Chen & Hanasono, 2016) One of the approaches to conceptualizing acculturation was Berry's bidimensional model that possesses home and hosts cultural identities arranged in two separate continua (Chen & Hanasono, 2016). Based on Berry's model (1997), acculturation takes place in four different ways: Assimilation, Integration, Separation, and Marginalization. Assimilation occurs when individuals' behavioral repertoire seeks with the host culture and rejects their original cultural identity. Integration occurs when individuals maintain their original cultural identity and adapt themselves to both their original and host culture. Separation occurs when individuals maintain themselves with the original culture but reject the adaption to the host culture. Lastly, Marginalization occurs when individuals are not involved in the original and host cultures.

Berry (2015) emphasized that the processes and activities in acculturation resembled socialization, where these two features contribute to cultural transmission. The virtual acculturation framework conducted by Li et al.(2019) suggested socialization process from using social media creates a pre-transitional stage showing the occurrence of virtual cultural learning and exchange before the tourist physically visits the host country's culture. The cultural learning approach was described as developing essential skills enabling them to survive or thrive in a new environment. Remote culture exchange implies that people shape the new cultural milieu by acquiring information from social media. Thus, the received information serves is recognized as the

backbone of obtaining the asked skills. Lastly, the framework showed the positive relationship between virtual social contact the psychological and sociological acculturation. The result from Li et al.(2019) additionally emphasized that the cultural learning process resulted in tourists getting more familiar with the host culture based on observation on social media, which contributes to the reduction in unfamiliarity.

2.2.1 Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitan literally means global citizen who possess relationships between multiple cultures and sensing belongingness globally (Salazar, 2010). It was disclosed under the context of acculturation in global consumer culture, described as the interpretation of individuals on willingness to engage with different culture and their capabilities of obtaining skills, knowledge and behaviors which are attached to different cultures (Cleveland and Laroche, 2007). Szelényi and Rhoads (2007) argued the increased awareness of national issues such as economic, political and cultural factors has led to cosmopolitan orientation embedded among international students studied in the US. It entails the openness of international students to involving themselves into the new place and people. Saito (2010) also argued that the development of cosmopolitanism relies on interpersonal communications on social networks.

3. RESEARCH MODEL DEVELOPMENT AND HYPOTHESES FORMULATION

3.1 Conceptual model

As the present study examines the extent of virtual acculturation on the basis of social media influence the international students' choice of travel destination. Figure 1 displayed that social media usage, online knowledge contribution and sense of belonging under the context of social media has influence on the virtual acculturation. The virtual acculturation is advanced relate to destination image and travel destination choice. Destination image is proposed to have a direct relationship with travel destination choice. The relationships presented in the model and its hypotheses are being discussed in following subsections.

Figure 1

Proposed conceptual model



3.2 Social media usage and virtual acculturation

Various researchers have investigated the impact of social media influencing the acculturation of the host society based on its usage. It was argued that most people use social media to acquire important information and news timely (Yang et al., 2015). According to Li & Tsai (2015), when an ethnic group communicate with people who share the same culture through social media, they reinforce and maintain the original culture. They also found that increased usage of social media from the host culture or country contributes to strengthening the host culture while preventing individuals from losing their original culture. Yang (2018) suggested that Chinese students' usage of US-based social media is recognized as acculturating platform contributing to their familiarity with agendas in America. The result of his study also found the satisfaction between social media usage and requirements to be acculturated into the host society. As the relationships between social media usage and

acculturation were confirmed by previous studies, the underlying assumption is that more usage of social media, especially under host culture, will also contribute to acculturation virtually. Thus, our first hypothesis is stated as follows:

H1. Social media usage is positively related to virtual acculturation.

3.3 Online knowledge contribution and virtual acculturation

Online knowledge contribution is defined as an individual behaviors they explore and communicate among their identities on provided social media platforms (Turkle, 1997). Kim et al (2011) supports that individuals' role is different from others online. Proceeding with individuals' behavior on social community, Mitra & Evanslunong (2019) categorized into content creators and passive receiver of the social community. Passive receiver exhibit little engagement with people from the host society but obtain information required through social media. In contrast, the content creator who share their knowledge and actively post content appreciate the communication among both people from their own culture as well as host culture. Furthermore, the findings from Yu et al. (2019) revealed the better psychological and behavioral acculturation of Chinese students who studied in UK universities was based on time spent on knowledge sharing. Concerns are raised if virtual acculturation is positively associate with the extent of online knowledge sharing on social media, implying more active shares means more engagement and integration into the host culture. Accordingly, the next hypothesis is stated as:

H2: Online knowledge contribution is positively related to virtual acculturation.

3.4 Sense of belonging and virtual acculturation

Sense of belonging emerges when individuals positioned themselves as essential and integral part of the virtual community from operated activities and communications (Lin, 2008). It also explains the extent of individuals' willingness and perception of belonging into the virtual community (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Chai & Kim, 2012). Based on the category 'everyday Spatio-temporal interaction with others' from Mitra & Evanslunong (2019), the conscious exchange of experiences and communication with individuals from host cultures stimulates building bilateral trust. The study further revealed frequent socialization with people from the host culture lead to their sense of belonging. In the study from Chai & Kim (2012), they additionally stated individuals' sense of belonging into host culture serve as an feature to consider in acculturation researches. Thus, when individuals sensed belonging and attachment to virtual community on social media, they opt to adapt and engage themselves to the new culture and traditions. Based on this discussion, the next hypothesis is proposed:

H3. The sense of belonging is positively related to virtual acculturation.

3.5 Virtual acculturation and travel destination choice

Travel destination choice is defined as a complex decision-making process that involves the integration of travel planning and forecasting the meaningful insight of the destination (Ahn et al., 2013). According to the tourism consumption system (TCS) theory used by Woodside and Dubelaar (2002), the predictor of destination choice is identified as the thoughts, decisions, and behaviors of an individual before, during, and following the vacation. With choice set model formed by Crompton (1992),

travel destination choice is set to be influenced by the extent tourist know about the destination based on initial consideration, later consideration, action and interaction set. As the increase use of social media, it contributes the most information when tourist consider choosing a destination to travel. These information potentially transfer the essential aspect of host culture which indirectly encourage people to learn about the new culture (Berno and Ward, 2005). Based on difference between individual experience and cultural values, engagement of learning the new skills for host culture perception and adaption was exposure to related with their post-travel satisfaction (Li et al., 2019).

Therefore, we propose our next hypothesis:

H4. Virtual acculturation is positively related to travel destination choice.

3.6 Virtual acculturation and destination image

Destination image, is frequently described as impression and perception of a place created based on one's past experiences, Word-Of-Mouth, general feelings, advertisements and influence from friends and family (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Pan et al., 2021) The terminology of affective image derived from destination image model from previous studies explaining the tourist feelings and emotions toward certain destination (Chew & Jahari, 2014). Kim et al(2017) provided evidence that tourism information on social media relates to the perceived destination affective image. As the social media provide ease of accessing information about the destinations, it has taken important role on the occurrence of virtual cultural learning; once the information were being received and processed from individual in order to be engaged to learn about host cultures and expectations(Li et al., 2019). It is realized as a determinant in virtually acculturation process. Thus, The following hypothesis is formulated:

H5: Virtual acculturation is positively associated with destination image.

3.7 Destination image and travel destination choice

Various researches had found the generation of destination image composed of two facets, cognitive and affective images which provide deeper understanding of destination image (Baloglu and McCleary's, 1999). The model gave definition that cognitive image yields understanding of beliefs and knowledge of the destination whereas affective image yields feelings and emotions. Bonn et al. (2005) discovered the significant relationship between positive image in tourist's mind and their decision behaviour of selecting the destination choice. Hong et al. (2006) contributed an additional explanation that the tourist's image of the destination and their travel destination choice is positively and significantly related. Therefore, our final hypothesis is conducted following the previous researches:

H6. Destination image is positively associated with travel destination choice.

4. RESEARCH METHOD

4.1 Study Design

In order test the relationships, quantitative analysis was selected in this research. An online survey had been carried out by using data management software called Qualtrics XM. Besides questions about demographic characteristics, the survey consists of 48 statements in total. The survey begins with ten statements of social media usage, three statements of online knowledge contribution, 12 statements of sense of belonging, eight statements of virtual acculturation, four statements of destination

image and 11 statement of travel destination choice (Appendix A) . The ethical aspects in this survey has been approved by BMS ethical committee in University of the Twente (See Appendix B).

4.2 Sample and data collection

The original dataset consists of 133 individuals participating in this study by convenience sampling techniques; an online survey was distributed to international students on the campus of the University of the Twente as well as on online social networks. Convenience sampling techniques were selected due to their ease of survey distribution on campus and online, also less expensive. (Acharya et.al, 2013) Nevertheless, eight informed consents were either not received or received but submitted the blank surveys. Another eight participants have unfinished surveys due to possible unwillingness to continue or withdrawal. As the potential target group was outlined by answering, "Are you an international student in the Netherlands?", they are required to fill the country's current living if they are not studying within the Netherlands. The answers were compared with their nationality to ensure the representatives of international students. Twelve participants were indicated not belonging to the identity of international students. Thus, 28 participants were excluded for further analysis with the above-mentioned criteria, where the final sample has 105 international students which 43.8% are male and 52.4% female. The majority of participants are between ages of 19-25 (69.5%), followed by those aged 25-30 (21%) and the remaining were below the age of 19 except one participant is above 30 years old. The nationalities of international students were diversified with a majority of 50.5% being from China (n=53), then 15.2% were from Germany(n=16), where the rest nationalities are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Nationalities of the sample

Variable	Value	n	%
Nationality	Dutch	5	4.8
	German	16	15.2
	French	6	5.7
	Italian	8	7.6
	Chinese	53	50.5
	American	4	3.8
	Others	13	12.4

4.3 Survey measurement

The measurement items were adapted from existing and validated studies. The items selected for each construct are modified to match the context of social media in this research. For example, one item under the construct of sense of belonging was modified from 'I feel accepted by others' (Malone et al., 2012) to 'I feel accepted by others on social media'. Afterward, the items are revised to avoid confusion by similar context and terminologies. The survey began by asking about demographic variables of the identity of international students, gender, age, and nationality. In order to keep originality, the measurement scale for adapted items was kept the same. Thus, some constructs were measured differently, most of the variables were measured on a seven-point Likert scale from 1(strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), whereas the other two were measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Table 2 showed the summarized definition, scale of measurement, and reference of the construct in this research.

Table 2

Definitions, measurement scale and reference of the construct

Variables	Definitions	Measurements	References
Online knowledge contribution	The extent of users shares and transfer knowledge to another party on social media	Seven-point Likert scale	Kim et al. (2011)
Social media usage	The extent of users' emotion and social routines on social media	Five-point Likert scale	Lawdermilt (2020)
Sense of belonging	The extent of users feel they belong to the social media community	Seven-point Likert scale	Malone et al. (2012)
Virtual acculturation	The extent of users is willing to engage with different cultures on social media	Seven-point Likert scale	Cleveland and Laroche (2007)
Destination image	The extent of feelings and emotions from social media users towards a tourist destination	Seven-point Likert scale	Kim et al. (2017)
Travel destination choice	The extent of travel decision is influenced by social media	Five-point Likert scale	Tešin et al. (2022)

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The concept of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to test out internal consistency and latent validity of our construct by using software SPSS. The regression analysis was represented testing the hypothesized relationships in the proposed conceptual model.

5.1 Exploratory factor analysis

EFA was used in this study for assessing the result. For each construct, a principal component analysis with varimax rotation was performed. Due to different scale measured for each construct, the factor scores were adopted for further analysis to investigate the extents of factor predicting the travel destination choice and virtual acculturation (DiStefano et al., 2009).

Based on the Kaiser criterion, all the constructs met the requirements of KMO to be greater than 0.5 with a significant level of Bartlett's test of Sphericity lower than 0.001 (Napitupulu et al., 2017). It indicates the items within the same constructs substantially correlate with each other and are available (Appendix C). Additionally, all items have met their item loading above the significant level of 0.4 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2006)

except item 9 from construct travel destination choice (TDC9) with an item loading of 0.31. Therefore, item TDC9 was removed for further analysis since its significance was not shown in the same construct. The results from EFA displayed the items from the sense of belonging has two factors (Appendix D) where items SOB1-SOB6 under new name sense of belonging (acceptance) whereas SOB7-12 under new name sense of belonging(rejection).

All of the constructs showed average variance extracted (AVE) to be above the threshold of 0.5 (Hair et.al, 2010) which ranged from 0.52 to 0.843 (Table 3). The obtained item loadings and AVE implied the presence of convergent validity in the research model. In order to measure the reliability of the model, Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the internal consistency. With the Cronbach's coefficient α in all constructs greater than 0.7 (Allen et al., 2014), the reliability between items was ensured. In addition to the previously mentioned item TDC 9, the construct of travel destination choice got more reliable when this item was removed; Cronbach's alpha increased from 0.921 to 0.933.

Table 3

Factor loading

Construct	Item	Standard loading	AVE	Reliability (α)
Online knowledge contribution	OKC1	0.885	0.843	0.906
	OKC2	0.921		
	OKC3	0.947		
Social media usage	SMU1	0.762	0.611	0.928
	SMU2	0.848		

		SMU3	0.870		
		SMU4	0.788		
		SMU5	0.791		
		SMU6	0.819		
		SMU7	0.859		
		SMU8	0.626		
		SMU9	0.774		
		SMU10	0.639		
Sense of belonging (Acceptance)		SOB1	0.811	0.663	0.898
		SOB2	0.767		
		SOB3	0.831		
		SOB4	0.820		
		SOB5	0.829		
		SOB6	0.824		
Sense of belonging (Rejection, reserved items)		SOB7	0.631	0.520	0.810
		SOB8	0.766		
		SOB9	0.729		
		SOB10	0.738		
		SOB11	0.825		
		SOB12	0.617		
Virtual acculturation		VA1	0.802	0.698	0.938
		VA2	0.876		
		VA3	0.868		
		VA4	0.872		
		VA5	0.898		
		VA6	0.846		
		VA7	0.824		
		VA8	0.680		
Destination Image		DI1	0.873	0.798	0.914
		DI2	0.894		
		DI3	0.892		
		DI4	0.913		
Travel choice	Destination	TDC1	0.805	0.625	0.933
		TDC2	0.830		
		TDC3	0.787		
		TDC4	0.740		
		TDC5	0.793		
		TDC6	0.827		
		TDC7	0.774		
		TDC8	0.768		
		TDC10	0.807		
		TDC11	0.771		

5.2 Correlation

The previous section provided the result of exploratory factor analysis showing the reliability and validity of the construct. It is also inevitable to check the relationships between constructs like correlation. Pearson's correlation coefficient was measured to state the existence of correlation and its strength (Schober, 2018). The result (Table 4) revealed that online knowledge contribution and virtual acculturation do not correlate with each other ($r=0.169$, $p=0.085$) as the significance level is above $\alpha=0.05$. In addition, the correlation score between the rejection factor from the sense of belonging and virtual acculturation is only 0.02, with a significant level of 0.84. There is no correlation between these two variables again.

On the other hand, the acceptance factor from the sense of belonging correlates with virtual acculturation ($r=0.387$, $p<0.001$). Social media usage positively and moderately correlates with virtual acculturation with a significance level below 0.001. The correlation between virtual acculturation is positively and significant with destination image ($r=0.576$, $p<0.001$) as well as travel destination choice ($r=0.683$, $p<0.001$). It also showed that the correlation between destination image and travel destination choice is positive and significant ($r=0.521$, $p<0.001$).

Table 4

Correlation matrix of all factors

		Correlations						
		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Social media usage (1)	Pearson Correlation	--						
Online knowledge contribution (2)	Pearson Correlation	.519**	--					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001						
Sense of belonging (acceptance) (3)	Pearson Correlation	.682**	.396**	--				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001					
Sense of belonging (rejection) (4)	Pearson Correlation	.132	-.223*	.000	--			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.181	.022	1.000				
Virtual acculturation (5)	Pearson Correlation	.440**	.169	.387**	.020	--		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.085	<.001	.840			
Destination image (6)	Pearson Correlation	.421**	.029	.361**	.125	.576**	--	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.771	<.001	.205	<.001		
Travel destination choice (7)	Pearson Correlation	.364**	.102	.347**	.000	.683**	.521**	--
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.298	<.001	.999	<.001	<.001	

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

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5

Hypotheses testing of relationships on virtual acculturation

	Coefficient (β)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Result
H1: Social media usage → Virtual acculturation	0.397	2.905**	0.005	Accepted
H2: Online knowledge contribution → Virtual acculturation	-0.114	-1.034	0.304	Rejected
H3: Sense of belonging (Acceptance) → Virtual acculturation	0.162	1.327	0.187	Rejected
H7: Sense of belonging (Rejection) → Virtual acculturation	-0.058	-0.604	0.547	Rejected

Note. *: $p < 0.05$, **: $p < 0.01$, ***: $p < 0.001$

5.3.2 Multiple linear regression on travel destination choice

When inspecting summarized results in Table 6 and Figure 2, the path between virtual acculturation with travel destination choice was positive and significant ($\beta=0.572$, $p<0.001$) supporting H4 is accepted. At the same time, the destination image also has a significant and positive relationship with travel destination

5.3 Structural Model and hypothesis testing

In order to test out the hypotheses, a multi-linear regression analysis was conducted focusing on the explained variance of the dependent variable, coefficient (β), and significance level (*t*-value). Two multi-linear regressions were conducted; firstly testing the hypotheses of social media usage, online knowledge contribution and two variables of sense of belonging on dependent variable of virtual acculturation; secondly, the hypotheses of virtual acculturation and destination image on dependent variable of travel destination choice were analyzed.

5.3.1 Multiple linear regression on virtual acculturation

When inspecting summarized results in Table 5 and Figure 2, the analysis has shown social media usage has a positive and significant relationship with virtual acculturation ($\beta =0.397$, $p=0.005$) supporting H1. There is neither a positive nor significant relationship between online knowledge contribution and virtual acculturation ($\beta=-0.114$, $p=0.304$), implying H2 is rejected. Sense of belonging was divided into two factors, and the relationship between both factors with virtual acculturation was not significant ($\beta=0.162$, $p=0.187$, $\beta=-0.058$, $p=0.547$). Thus, both H3 and H7 were rejected. The explained variance of this multiple linear regression model was identified to be 0.217, suggesting the overall relationship between variables is weak.

choice ($\beta=0.191$, $p=0.029$), although the slope is relatively steady, H6 is still accepted. The result showed the path between virtual acculturation and destination image support H5 is acceptable ($\beta=0.576$, $p<0.001$). The explained variance of multiple linear regression model between virtual acculturation and destination image on travel destination choice is 0.491. The explained variance of regression model between virtual

acculturation and travel destination choice is 0.332 (Appendix E).

Table 6

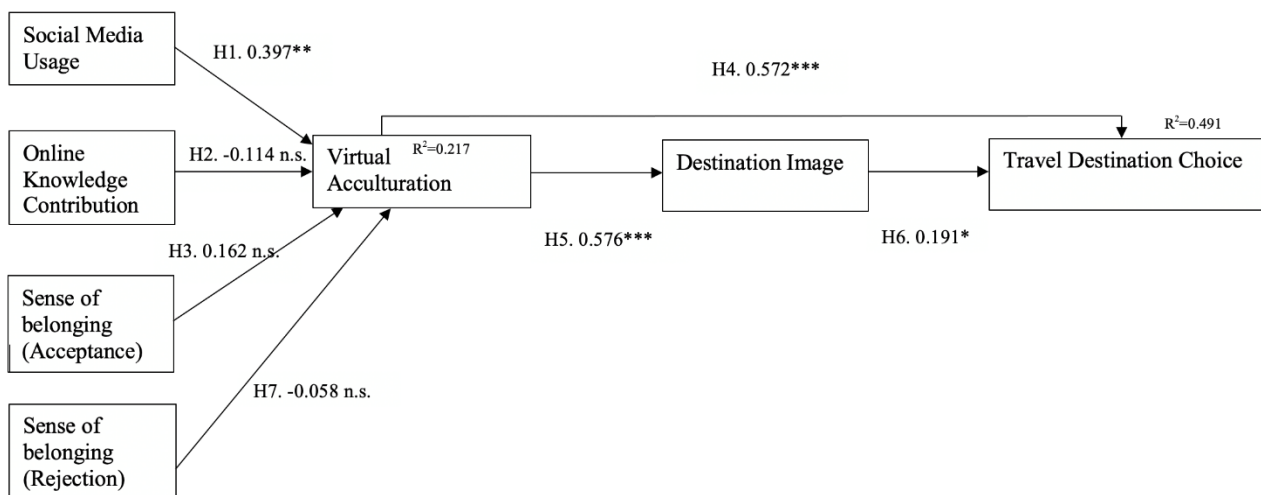
Hypotheses testing of relationships on travel destination choice

		Coefficient(β)	t	p	Result
H4:	Virtual acculturation → Travel destination choice	0.572	6.619***	0.001	Accepted
H5:	Virtual acculturation → Destination image	0.576	7.159***	0.001	Accepted
H6:	Destination image → Travel destination choice	0.191	2.213*	0.029	Accepted

Note. *: $p < 0.05$, **: $p < 0.01$, ***: $p < 0.001$

Figure 2

Result of hypotheses on conceptual model



6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Key findings

In order to examine the presence of virtual acculturation based on social media has influence on the travel destination choice among international students, several findings were drawn from the analysis. To begin with the first multiple linear regression model of social media variables on virtual acculturation, the low explained variance indicating the virtual acculturation would not be predicted accurately by using social media usage, online knowledge contribution and sense of belonging. Furthermore, it was found that social media usage positive and significantly influence the virtual acculturation (H1). This implies the more frequent international students use social media and have positive feeling towards it, they are more acculturated and engaging to know or adapt to another culture. On the other hand, the online knowledge contribution and sense of belonging, displayed either negative or positive but all in-significant relationships with virtual acculturation (H2, H3, H7). These relationships indicate that the degree of international students

post or share on social media is not directly related to their engagement of knowing or adopting other culture. Same applies with sense of belonging, this construct was divided into two variables of social acceptance and rejection on social media in this study. Both variables did not have influence on the virtual acculturation of the international students.

In spite of that, the explained variance of the regression model between destination image, virtual acculturation on travel destination choice was higher interpreting the travel destination choice in this research is being predicted more accurately. The virtual acculturation is positively and significantly related to travel destination choice as well as destination image. It suggests that when international students were willing to engage or adapt another cultures on the basis of social media, they are likely to form a destination image and choose the travel destination (H4, H5). Additionally, the destination image was found to have a positive and direct influence on the travel destination choice (H6) with explained variance that suggesting travel destination choice was not predicted very accurately.

6.2 Social media usage, online knowledge contribution and sense of belonging on virtual acculturation

The result of this research has shown social media usage is the only relevant variable on the influence towards virtual acculturation. This finding has aligned with existing literature stating that high frequency of using Facebook and Twitter of Chinese students carry out better acculturation into American society (Yang, 2018). This study contributed addition to that the fact that social media usage not only influence the local acculturation when the international students studying in another culture, virtual acculturation is also carried. Specifically, as international students use more social media as daily routine and occasionally read about the other cultures, such virtual learning contributes to their acculturation without physical contact. Eventually, online knowledge contribution does not contribute to international student's acculturation into certain host culture virtually from social media. The negative and not significant relationship indicating regardless the degree of content or knowledge shared on social media, the presence of virtual acculturation was not displayed. This argued that the international students could be passive receivers who only acquire information on social media or content creators who regularly post their knowledge, their engagement and learning about host culture not necessarily indicate adaption. Same applies with sense of belonging, as the variable was divided into two categories of feeling socially accepted by virtual community and socially rejected. Both of them showed in-significant relationship with virtual acculturation which implies an international students could be virtually acculturating into the host culture and not essentially require inclusion into the virtual community on social media.

6.3 Virtual acculturation and destination image on travel destination choice

The findings in this study determined the positive and significant relationship between destination image and travel destination choice. The confirmed the findings from previous literatures regardless having prior knowledge or image of the travel destination in mind, people will adopt the image perceived from social media and this effect is more noticeable when they have never physically been to the destination (Pan et al, 2021). Our study confirmed that the destination image formed by international students by using social media has contributes to their positive feelings and emotions towards their destination. As a result, they are more likely to choose it as a destination for travelling. In addition, virtual acculturation is positive and significantly relate to travel destination choice among with destination image. As virtual acculturation is being measured on the basis the willingness of engaging into other cultures on social media, the international students are likely to choose the destination of travelling with high motivation in such engagement. It also associate with findings from Li et al. (2019) that social media was used in order to provide a platform for people enlighten themselves about the host cultures with virtual learning acting at the same time. When aligning with our findings, the presence of virtual acculturation from learning engagement has contributed to shape international students' expectations of destinations and likely to choose certain destination to travel.

6.4 Virtual acculturation on destination image

The current study indicated the positive and significant relationship with virtual acculturation and destination image. This implies when international students were more acculturated

into other cultures on social media, they will form positive image of destination which meet their expectation. It satisfied the statement from Li et al.(2019) that all kind of information received from social media plays a considerable role in acculturation of the destination. The result of our study provides additional evidence that the virtual acculturating process when gathering information and learning other cultures stimulates the formation of positive feelings and emotions towards the specific travel destination.

7. IMPLICATION FOR PRACTICE

The present study has focused on formation of virtual acculturation from social media influencing on travel destination choice. As the terminology of "virtual acculturation" is still not mature in the research field, the findings of current study gave further research about it based on the context of tourism. The foundation of the positive relationship between social media usage with virtual acculturation favored with existing literature. Additionally, the formation of destination image based on virtual acculturation was analyzed in current study which could lead to further analysis. This paper is focusing on the travel destination choice which is under the context of tourism. It contributes to ease of understanding the factors that drives to choosing travel destination. Tourism agencies and marketers could adapt the findings and promote better approaches in consumer attraction by using social media.

8. LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The results of this study require to take limitations into consideration. To begin with, current study focus on the target group of international students. However, approximately 50% of the sample collected are Chinese students who study abroad. It indicates most of the findings in this research is more applicable to Chinese students. Thus, it has lead the limitation that the variation in participants is low.

Secondly, the number of participants with corresponding items is low. We have 48 items in the survey but only 105 valid data were collected from participants due to time restriction of one week and half. If the sample size is too small and insufficient for its number of items, the evidence might be not enough to explain the outcomes and estimations with accurate precision (Martínez-Mesa et al., 2014). With the corresponding low explained variance among the our regression model, the addition or revision of the items are required to achieve the minimum of 0.6 (Hair et al., 2014). Thus, if this research could be conducted again, the number of the sample size is expected to higher as well as more variations among these participants.

9. CONCLUSION

The research conducted in this study attempt to give further contribution on the concept of 'virtual acculturation' on tourism context based on the research question *"To what extent does virtual acculturation through social media influence travel destination choice among international students?"*

To sum the results from this study, social media usage is positive related to virtual acculturation whereas online knowledge contribution and sense of belonging did not show significant relationship with virtual acculturation. The virtual acculturation was measured under culture learning process and cosmopolitanism via social media. The current study gave insights that when international students were more acculturated into the other cultures virtually, it reveals their preference on the destination choice. In particular, the formation of a destination image closely contributes to both virtual acculturation and travel destination choice.

However, the result of this study needed to be further elaborated to large sample and variations of international students to make sure the accuracy of the estimations and analysis conducted.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Here I would like to acknowledge and express sincere thanks to my supervisor Dr. H. Kizgin for her supports, feedbacks and enlightenment throughout my journey of writing thesis. Furthermore, I would like to thank all of the students who participated in my survey. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends who helped me out of the hard time I have been through.

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12. APPENDIX

Appendix A: Survey questions

Online knowledge contribution

OKC 1 – I contribute my knowledge often to others on social media

OKC 2 – I post my knowledge often on social media

OKC 3 – I share my knowledge often on social media

Social Media Usage

SMU 1 – I feel disconnected from friends when I have not used social media

SMU2 – I would like it if everyone used social media to communicate

SMU3 – I would be disappointed if I could not use social media at all

SMU4 – I get upset when I can't use social media

SMU5 – I prefer to communicate with others mainly through social media

SMU6 – Social media plays an important role in my social relationships

SMU7 – I enjoy checking my social media account(s)

SMU8 – I don't like to use social media

SMU9 – Using social media is part of my everyday routine

SMU10 – I respond to content that others share using social media

Sense of belonging

SoB 1 – When I am with other people on social media, I feel included

SoB 2 – I have close bonds with family and friends on social media

SoB 3 – I feel accepted by others on social media

SoB 4 - I have a sense of belonging to social media

SoB 5 - When I am using social media, I have a place at the table with others online

SoB 6 - I feel connected with people on social media

SoB 7 - When I am using social media, I feel like an outsider

SoB 8 - When I am using social media, I feel people do not care about me

SoB 9 - Because I do not belong, I feel distant while using social media.

SoB 10 - When I am using social media, I feel isolated

SoB 11 - When I am with other people on social media, I feel like a stranger

SoB 12 - When I am using social media, friends and family do not involve me in their plans.

Virtual acculturation

VA1 - I am interested in learning more about people who live in other countries on social media

VA2 - I like to learn about other ways of life on social media

VA3 - I enjoy being with people from other culture on social media to learn about their unique views and approaches.

VA4 - I enjoy exchanging ideas with people from other culture or countries on social media.

VA5 - I like to observe people of other cultures on social media, to see what I can learn from them.

VA6 - I find people from other cultures on social media stimulating

VA7 - Coming into contact with people of other culture on social media has greatly benefited me.

VA8 - When it comes to trying new things on social media, I am very open.

Destination Image

This section is asking for your perception of a travel destination. Please think of one travel destination you wished to travel for a long time. Please circle the numbers below to show your closest feeling towards this destination.

DI 1 - Distressing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Relaxing
DI 2 - Unpleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Pleasant
DI 3 - Boring	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Exciting
DI 4 - Sleepy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Lively

Travel destination choice

TDC 1 - Seeing travel-related posts on social media makes me want to travel

TDC 2 - Seeing a posts of a specific destination on social media makes me want to visit the place

TDC 3 - Social media is a good source of inspiration when choosing a travel destination

TDC 4 - I would try a new travel destination if my friends raved about it on social media.

TDC 5 - Seeing travel experiences on social media can shape my opinion about travel brands (i.e. hotels, restaurants, services etc.) and destinations

TDC 6 - I find new travel destination via social media.

TDC 7 - I would try a new travel destination if my friends posted on social media that they have been there

TDC 8 - Influencers' / travel bloggers posted on social media motivated me to visit a certain destination

TDC 9 - I would avoid a particular destination if my friends kept posting on social media about it

TDC 10- I plan a trip with the information I found on social media

TDC 11 - The use of influencers on social media increase trust in a destination

APPENIX B: Screenshot of ethical approval

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

FACULTY BMS

220969 REQUEST FOR ETHICAL REVIEW

Request nr: 220969
Researcher: Shan, Y.
Supervisor: Rogetzer, P.B.
Reviewer: Bruinsma, G.W.J.
Status: Approved by commission
Version: 2

1. START

A. TITLE AND CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

1. What is the title of the research project? (max. 100 characters)

The Role of Virtual Acculturation via Social Media on Travel
Destination Choice

2. In which context will you conduct this research?

Bachelor's Thesis

3. Date of the application

08-06-2022

5. Is this research project closely connected to a research project previously assessed by the BMS Ethics Committee?

No/Unknown

B. CONTACT INFORMATION

6. Contact information for the lead researcher

6a. Initials:

Y.

APPENDIX C: KMO and Bartlett's test for all factors

Social media usage

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.918
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	679.185
	df	45
	Sig.	<.001

Online knowledge contribution

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.719
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	216.357
	df	3
	Sig.	<.001

Sense of belonging

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.801
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	603.422
	df	66
	Sig.	<.001

Virtual acculturation

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.912
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	659.982
	df	28
	Sig.	<.001

Destination image

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.839
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	288.533
	df	6
	Sig.	<.001

Travel destination choice

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.884
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	799.402
	df	55
	Sig.	<.001

Appendix D: Factor loading matrix of variable: sense of belonging

Component Matrix^a

	Component	
	1	2
SOB1– When I am with other people on social media, I feel included	.763	–.275
SOB2 –I have close bonds with family and friends on social media	.734	–.225
SOB3 –I feel accepted by others on social media	.790	–.259
SOB4 –I have a sense of belonging to social media	.765	–.297
SOB5– When I am using social media, I have a place at the table with others online	.807	–.205
SOB6 –I feel connected with people on social media	.807	–.190
SOB7 –When I am using social media, I feel like an outsider	.113	.630
SOB8– When I am using social media, I feel people do not care about me	.320	.699
SOB9 –Because I do not belong, I feel distant while using social media.	.383	.636
SOB10– When I am using social media, I feel isolated	.397	.641
SOB11– When I am with other people on social media, I feel like a stranger	.272	.779
SOB12 –When I am using social media, friends and family do not involve me in their plans.	.207	.581

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 2 components extracted.

APPENDIX E: Multiple linear regression results

Social media usage, online knowledge contribution, sense of belonging on virtual acculturation

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.466 ^a	.217	.186	.90243013

a. Predictors: (Constant), Factor 2 for SOB, Factor 1 for SOB, Factor 1 for OKC, Factor 1 for SMU

ANOVA ^a					
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
1	Regression	22.562	4	5.640	6.926
	Residual	81.438	100	.814	
	Total	104.000	104		

a. Dependent Variable: Factor 1 for VA

b. Predictors: (Constant), Factor 2 for SOB, Factor 1 for SOB, Factor 1 for OKC, Factor 1 for SMU

Coefficients ^a							
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
1	(Constant)	–9.462E–17	.088	.000	1.000		
	Factor 1 for SMU	.397	.137	2.905	.005	.420	2.381
	Factor 1 for OKC	–.114	.110	–1.034	.304	.644	1.554
	Factor 1 for SOB	.162	.122	1.327	.187	.526	1.900
	Factor 2 for SOB	–.058	.096	–.058	.604	.856	1.168

a. Dependent Variable: Factor 1 for VA

Destination image and virtual acculturation on travel destination choice

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.700 ^a	.491	.481	.72070289

a. Predictors: (Constant), Factor 1 for VA, Factor 1 for DI

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	51.020	2	25.510	49.113	<.001 ^b
	Residual	52.980	102	.519		
	Total	104.000	104			

a. Dependent Variable: Factor 1 for TDC with Item 9 moved
b. Predictors: (Constant), Factor 1 for VA, Factor 1 for DI

Coefficients ^a								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-8.439E-17	.070		.000	1.000		
	Factor 1 for DI	.191	.086	.191	2.213	.029	.668	1.498
	Factor 1 for VA	.572	.086	.572	6.619	<.001	.668	1.498

a. Dependent Variable: Factor 1 for TDC with item 9 moved

Virtual acculturation on destination image

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.576 ^a	.332	.326	.82109983

a. Predictors: (Constant), Factor 1 for VA

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	34.557	1	34.557	51.256	<.001 ^b
	Residual	69.443	103	.674		
	Total	104.000	104			

a. Dependent Variable: Factor 1 for DI

b. Predictors: (Constant), Factor 1 for VA

Coefficients ^a								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.445E-16	.080		.000	1.000		
	Factor 1 for VA	.576	.081	.576	7.159	<.001	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: Factor 1 for DI