

The Influence of Virtual Acculturation on Travel Destination Choice

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ABSTRACT

Individuals are more interconnected than ever before in today's globalized society, and information flows considerably quicker. People from all around the world may engage with one another via social media, increasing exposure to diverse cultures. The intercultural exposure through social media may lead to acculturation of some features of the other cultures, also referred to as “virtual acculturation”. Further, social media has shown to guide consumer behavior and has a major impact on the tourism industry. Tourists frequently rely on travel information that can be quickly acquired from numerous sources such as the internet and social media. Thus, social media has become an integral part of the tourism sector. This research aims to investigate the impact of virtual acculturation on travel destination choice and includes the variables online friendship orientation and online cultural identity to get a better understanding of the process of virtual acculturation. Furthermore, this research explores the influence of perceived cultural distance on the relationship of virtual acculturation and travel destination choice. The research was conducted with a self-administered online survey which resulted in 95 respondents. The research concluded that online cultural identity towards other cultures has a positive influence on virtual acculturation and that virtual acculturation has a positive influence on travel destination choice.

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Keywords

Virtual Acculturation, Social Media, Travel Destination Choice, Friendship Orientation, Cultural Identity, Perceived Cultural Distance

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent advancements in technology and the internet have had major implications on people's everyday lives. The internet links individuals from all over the world, allowing them to communicate with one another and spread their ideas (Kapoor et al., 2018). The development of web 2.0 allowed for the creation of social media which are according to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) online applications that allow the "creation and exchange of user generated content". In 2020, over 3.9 billion individuals used social media globally which is expected to increase to over 5.42 billion social media users by 2025 (Statista, 2022). Previous study has revealed that social media use is primarily driven by communication and contact with other people (Muhammad et al., 2017). Since social media facilitates remote intercultural contact and information sharing, it can promote social learning, networking, and building connections (Rolls, Hansen, Jackson, & Elliott, 2016) as well as provide a medium for cultural transmission and acculturation (Ferguson and Bornstein, 2012).

Acculturation is the adaptation of elements of a foreign culture as a result of interaction with another culture (Berry, 1992). Acculturation research in the past was primarily focused on migrant and sojourner adaptation to a host country's culture (e.g., Berry et al., 2006; Ward and Ranadeuba, 1999; Wong and Musa, 2014; Yen et al., 2018). Previous research on the acculturation of migrants and sojourners to host countries has found that using a host country's media facilitates acculturation and the use of home country's media slows acculturation (e.g., Kim, 1988; Jeffres, 2000). Because it is significantly tied to an individual's language abilities, communication behavior, and opportunities for social engagement, social media use is seen to be an important aspect in the acculturation process (Yang et al., 2004). Previous research defined acculturative contact as direct and prolonged interaction following exposure to a foreign culture (e.g. Cheung-Blunden and Juang, 2008; Ferguson and Bornstein, 2012). Recent discoveries showed that individuals may acquire practices, attitudes, and identities from countries in which they have never lived. Ward et al. (2001) expanded this notion further, arguing that acculturation might occur prior to an actual visit to a foreign community due to "virtual" cross-cultural contact and distant cultural learning. Li et al. (2019) refer to this phenomenon as "virtual acculturation".

Social media, initially a platform for people to connect and communicate, has developed into a massive source of information which has shown to have an impact on decision-making (Maghrebi et al., 2016). As a result, it has had a significant influence on a number of industries, including tourism. Because of its ongoing expansion and diversity, the tourism sector has become one of the fastest-growing businesses on a worldwide scale. In 1990, there were around 440 million international arrivals per year; by 2017, that figure has climbed to 1.3 billion, having tripled in growth in the previous 30 years (Roser, 2017). In 2019, the direct contribution of travel and tourism to global GDP was estimated to be roughly 9.6 trillion US dollars (WTTC, 2022). Travelers may share their experiences on social media, which may present a valuable source of information for travel related decisions (Ayeh et al., 2013). The information acquired from social media may aid travelers in their destination choice (Nyman et al., 2018). While travelers used to depend on tourism infrastructure to traverse foreign surroundings (Berno and Ward, 2005), they may now attain a faster cultural learning and adaptability by following others' digital footprints of "seeing" and "experiencing" the host culture even before

arriving at the travel destination (Kim and Fesenmaier, 2017; Wang et al., 2012). Previous studies discovered that social media influences social media users' acculturation (e.g., DeAndrea et al., 2012; Ye, 2006). Furthermore, virtual communities have been found to affect consumer behavior (Fotis et al., 2011), and social media plays an essential part in defining traveler preferences and choices (Tham et al., 2020). Although face-to-face intercultural contact and its potential to influence visitors have been studied (e.g., Fan et al., 2017), virtual intercultural contacts via social media and their effect on tourists' travel destination choices have largely gone unstudied in the past (e.g., Fan et al., 2017; Kim and Fesenmaier, 2017). To investigate previous statement, this research will explore whether:

1. online friendship orientation has an influence virtual acculturation
2. online cultural identity has an impact on virtual acculturation
3. virtual acculturation influences travel destination choice
4. Perceived cultural distance has a moderating effect on the relationship between virtual acculturation and travel destination choice

The following research question is formulated to study the research aim:

How does virtual acculturation through social media influence travel destination choice?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Media

Social media is a set of apps that function on the internet Web 2.0 and allow for the creation and sharing of content between users and application providers (Colomo-Palacios et al., 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Web 2.0, according to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), allows all platform users to continually update information in a collaborative way, rather than being developed and published by a single individual, as was the case with Web 1.0. Individuals and companies may thus connect, build, and sustain social and business relationships by exchanging ideas and opinions through a range of online communication channels, including interpersonal communication, content communities, and multimedia platforms (Alalwan et al. 2017; Alryalat et al. 2017; Ellison and Boyd 2013; Ellison et al. 2007; Filieri et al. 2015). The presence of social media is growing in many countries and has become a major source of knowledge, allowing people from all over the world to exchange and spread information about any product or service (Palacios-Marqués, Soto-Acosta & Merigó, 2015; Pietro, Virgilio, & Pantano 2012).

In the tourism industry, the role of social media is increasingly gaining significance as it is an information intensive industry which relies heavily on communication (Kim et al., 2017). Because tourism-related products and services tend to be expensive, visitors frequently acquire and study a large amount of information before planning or deciding on a travel destination (Kim et al., 2017). Opinions and suggestions expressed on social media by other tourists who have prior experience with the destination have been discovered to be not only the most favored but also the most influential resource for future travelers (Pan et al., 2007). In the past, travelers relied heavily on tourism infrastructure such as information centers, concierges, hotel help

desks, and guidebooks to navigate foreign locations (Berno and Ward, 2005). Presently, social media facilitates faster cultural learning and adaptability by allowing users to observe and experience the host culture of the travel destination before the travel by following in the digital footsteps of others (Kim and Fesenmaier, 2017; Wang et al., 2012). As a result, social media offers one of the best opportunities for any tourist site to raise awareness among both prospective and targeted consumers (Berhanu & Raj, 2020).

2.2 Virtual Acculturation

Acculturation is the process of encountering and adapting to a new cultural context, which includes changes in an individual's attitudes, actions, and thought patterns (Tsai et al., 2002). The theory of acculturation was initially introduced by anthropologists Redfield et al. (1936) and has since gained popularity in the social and behavioral sciences, with researchers investigating the acculturating stresses, processes, and adaptational outcomes that result from intercultural encounter (Berry and Sabatier, 2011; Makarova and Birman, 2015). Initially, acculturation was thought to be a one-dimensional framework focused solely on newcomers, and it was postulated that migrants experienced a shift from leaving their own cultural heritage to adopting the dominant culture of the foreign surroundings (Schwartz, et al., 2010). However, the one-dimensional theory failed to account for an individual's ability to retain diverse identities, making it inadequate for today's changing circumstances (Sheikh and Anderson, 2018). In recent years, the bi-dimensional acculturation framework developed by Berry and colleagues has been widely regarded as an important addition to acculturation research (Yu, et al., 2019). According to Berry (1974, 1980), the acculturation process is supported by two distinct aspects or acculturation attitudes: the newcomer's desire to retain their own culture and their desire to accept the dominant culture's values. These factors combine to generate four acculturation strategies: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization (Berry, 2005). According to Berry (2005) the abandoning of one's native cultural values and entire absorption of the prevailing culture is referred to as assimilation. Integration is the adoption of certain cultural values of the dominant culture while preserving some values of their home culture. Separation is the complete retention of one's own culture's principles while rejecting those associated with the dominant culture. The avoidance of both cultural standards leads in alienation from both one's own culture and the prevailing culture, which is described as marginalization. According to Oberg (1960), cross-cultural travelers may experience "culture shock" in the absence of familiar social and environmental cues and in intercultural encounters which may lead to them experiencing negative emotions such as irritation, anxiety, anger, and confusion. Ward et al. (2001) refined this concept with the ABC model of culture shock. Chukhlomin (2010, 2016) extended Ward et al.'s (2001) ABC model of culture shock to include virtual culture shock. Chukhlomin (2010, 2016) defines virtual culture shock as a circumstance in which a non-native learner ("virtual sojourner") is unexpectedly exposed to a completely foreign virtual context and is fully overwhelmed by it, based on Ward's (2001) ABC model of culture shock. Acculturative contact, as previously stated, is described by traditional acculturation theory as direct and persistent contacts following exposure to a foreign culture. This premise has lately been challenged by mounting empirical evidence of "remote" acculturation, which indicates that individuals may and do absorb practices, beliefs, and identities of foreign cultures in which they have never resided (e.g., Cheung-Blunden and Juang, 2008; Ferguson and Bornstein, 2012).

Because acculturation attitudes have been found to impact how individuals acculturate (Berry et al., 1989), it may be more likely to occur in some people, such as cosmopolitans. Cosmopolitanism was once informally defined as people who migrate across the world, it is now used to refer to a specific set of attitudes, ideas, and characteristics, most notably "an ethos of cultural openness" (Kurasawa, 2004). Cosmopolitans are eager to interact with people from other cultures and to immerse themselves in them.

3. RESEARCH MODEL DEVELOPMENT AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

3.1 Online Friendship Orientation and Virtual Acculturation

According to Muhammad et al. (2017) individual's usage of social media is primarily motivated by social factors, particularly social interaction. Previous research discovered that engaging with the host culture through social media resulted in individuals acculturating to the host culture (Park et al., 2014). This is supported by Arends-Toth and van de Vijver (2006) who stated that the adaptation to a host culture is highly reliant on social interaction with individuals from the host culture. Past research has shown that friendship orientation plays a great role in the acculturation of individuals (Askegaard et al., 2005; Kizgin et al., 2018; Penaloza, 1994). However, prior research was primarily focused on the influence of immigrant's use of host culture media on the immigrant's acculturation to the host culture (e.g., Park et al., 2014; Lee and Tse, 1994). Previous research has included friendship orientation in the online domain (Kizgin et al., 2021). However, the impact of online friendship orientation on virtual acculturation has received little attention. This study proposes that online friendship orientation has an impact on virtual acculturation. To gain a better understanding thereof, online friendship orientation will be measured towards the "heritage culture" and towards "other cultures". "Heritage culture", or "HC", in this study refers to the culture that the individual identifies predominantly with. "Other cultures", or "OC", refers to the other cultures which an individual does not predominantly identify with. This study argues that a person who has regular and frequent interaction with people from other cultures rather than those from their heritage culture may adapt features of the other cultures and vice versa. Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Online Friendship Orientation towards heritage culture has a negative influence on Virtual Acculturation.

H2: Online Friendship Orientation towards other cultures has a positive influence on Virtual Acculturation.

3.2 Online Cultural Identity and Virtual Acculturation

Cultural identity is "an individual's sense of self derived from formal or informal membership in groups that transmit and inculcate knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, traditions, and ways of life" (Jameson, 2007). Social identification theories assume that cultural identity is a component of self-concept, that it entails consciousness of group membership, and that it has evaluative and affective importance (Berno and Ward, 2005). This means that an individual's thoughts and behaviors mirror that of the group or structure which they feel belonging to (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986). An individual who is exposed to a new culture may choose to keep their native culture or to accept the ideals of the prevailing culture

(Berry, 1974, 1980). The stronger the cultural identity, meaning the sense of belonging to a certain group, the less a person may feel inclined to learn more about other cultures or adopt elements of other cultures. Attitude towards acculturation plays a significant role in how an individual responds when exposed to other cultures on social media (Berry, 2005). Research focused on online cultural identity in the context of virtual acculturation has gone largely unstudied. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the influence of online cultural identity on virtual acculturation. In doing so, this paper will explore the difference in identification with the heritage culture versus other cultures and how it impacts virtual acculturation outcomes. The following hypotheses were developed to investigate this:

H3: Online Cultural Identity towards heritage culture has a negative influence on Virtual Acculturation.

H4: Online Cultural Identity towards other cultures has a positive influence on Virtual Acculturation.

3.3 Virtual Acculturation and Travel Destination Choice

Social media facilitates remote intercultural contact (Rolls, Hansen, Jackson, & Elliott, 2016) and thus enables users to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. According to research, increasing intercultural interaction results in more favorable intergroup perception and relationships, as well as less conflict and prejudice among group members, at least under certain situations (Amir, 1969). According to Fan et al. (2017), intercultural exchanges can alter a tourist's attitude, conduct, and long-term assessment of the place. Cohen (1972) discovered that different vacation activities and location preferences are chosen by tourists based on their acquaintance with the host culture. There has been prior research on acculturation in the tourism context (e.g., Rasmi et al., 2022). However, there has been limited research on virtual acculturation through social media (Li et al., 2019). Filimonau & Perez (2018) stated that destination choice is one of the most important factors in visitors' travel decisions. Nevertheless, there is limited research exploring the effect of virtual acculturation on travel destination choice (Li et al., 2019). Thus, this research aims to investigate whether there is a positive relationship between virtual acculturation and choice of travel destination. Hence, the following hypotheses was formulated:

H5: Virtual Acculturation has a positive influence on Travel Destination Choice.

3.4 The Moderating Role of Perceived Cultural Distance

Cultural distance describes the contrasts in values, attitudes, and behavior between two countries (Kogut and Singh, 1988; Solberg, 2008). Culture can determine how people choose, interpret, process, and use information (Triandis 1994). Cultural distance in tourism research refers to the degree to which the culture of the origin location differs from that of the host location (Goeldner and Ritchie 2008). According to Cohen (1972), the variations in cultural features of visitors and hosts are the most essential factors to compare in tourism research. In acculturation research perceived cultural distance is viewed as a significant contributor as the perceived cultural difference between home and host cultures is said to influence acculturation attitudes and results (Berry, 1992; Searle & Ward, 1990). As this research aims to explore the influence that virtual acculturation has on the choice of travel destination, other factors should be considered

which may explain the choice of travel destination. Prior research concluded that a larger perceived cultural difference results in more difficulty in acculturation (e.g., Redmond and Bunyi, 1993). According to these findings, respondents are more likely to pick a travel destination with a lower perceived cultural distance because they are more likely to acculturate to a culture that is regarded to be more similar to their own. Thus, it will be investigated whether the perceived cultural difference has a negative effect on the relationship between virtual acculturation and choice of travel destination.

H6: Perceived Cultural Distance has a negative effect on the relationship between Virtual Acculturation and Travel Destination.

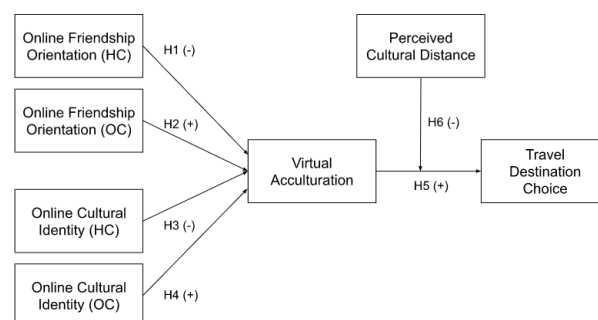


Figure 1 Conceptual Model

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Population and Sampling

This quantitative research was conducted with the use of a self-administered online survey consisting of 45 items. The survey aimed to collect data on university students that use social media and took around 10 minutes to complete. University students were chosen as the sample which allows to draw conclusions on the target population of social media users. Respondents were targeted using non-probability convenience sampling combined with snowball sampling.

4.2 Survey Instrument and Measures

The survey was divided into seven sections. The first page informed the respondents of the anonymity and confidentiality of the survey as well as reminded the respondents of their rights to leave the survey at any time. The second section contained six questions on the socio-demographic information of the participants. The first section was also designed to screen out participants that are not university students and those that don't use social media. The following sections of the survey were dedicated to the variables of the conceptual model. The third section contains 8 items on Virtual Acculturation. Originally used to measure cosmopolitanism, the items were adapted to measure virtual acculturation as no virtual acculturation scale has been previously developed. Adapted from (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007), the items are scored on a 7-point Likert scale (1= "strongly disagree" to 7= "strongly agree"). The variable Travel Destination Choice has 12 items, adapted from (Tešin et al., 2022) and is measured in section four of the survey. The items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1= "strongly disagree" to 5= "strongly agree"). The fifth section contains in total 8 items on Online Friendship Orientation. Online Friendship Orientation was measured with the 4-item scale from Xu et al. (2003) which was adjusted to be bi-dimensional to contain four questions regarding heritage culture orientation (HC) and four questions

regarding orientation to other cultures (OC). The items were scored on a 7-point Likert scale (1= “strongly disagree” to 7= “strongly agree”). The following section was devoted to the items for Online Cultural Identity. Six items for Online Cultural Identity were adapted from the Asian American Multidimensional Acculturation Scale (AAMAS) from Gim Chung et al. (2004). Cultural Identity was divided to measure the online cultural identity towards the heritage culture and other cultures. The items were scored on a 6-point Likert scale (1= “not very much” to 6= “very much”). The seventh and last section aimed to measure Perceived Cultural Distance which is adapted from (Gimpel et al., 2016), consists of five items that are scored on a 7-point Likert scale (1= “strongly disagree” to 7= “strongly agree”)

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The data was gathered by distributing the link to group chats and publishing the link on social media. Further, the data was collected by asking students on campus to complete the survey via a QR code. The data collection started in June and took approximately one week. The statistical software SPSS (version 27) was used to analyze the data. First, the data was cleaned by removing the screened-out respondents from the data set. Then, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (see Table 2) was performed, which was followed by a reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha (see Table 2). The conceptual model in Figure 1 was investigated using a Correlation Analysis (see Table 3) and Multiple Regression Analysis (see Table 4). The demographic profile and the descriptive statistics can be seen in Table 1 and Table 3 respectively.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Demographic Profiles

Of the 95 respondents, 38 (40%) were female, 54 (56.8%) male, and one respondent (1.1%) indicated “other” as well as two (2.1%) that preferred not to say (see Figure 2). 4 respondents (4.2%) indicated that they are from Africa, 31 or 32.6% are from Asia, 58 or 61.1% are from Europe, one is from North America and one from South America and each makes up 1.1% of the total sample. 13 or 32.7% of the respondents are under the age of 19, 76 respondents are between the ages of 20 to 25 and make up the biggest percentage with 80%. Five respondents are between the ages of 26 to 29 with a percentage

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variable	Value	Count	%
Sex	Male	38	40
	Female	54	56
	Other	1	1.1
continent	Prefer not to say	2	2.1
	Africa	4	4.2
	Asia	31	32.6
	Europe	58	61.1
	North America	1	1.1
	South America	1	1.1
Age	< 19	13	13.7
	20 - 25	76	80
	26 - 29	5	5.3
	30 - 35	1	1.1
Time spent on social media	few times a week	1	1.1
	less than 3 hours a day	43	45.3
	less than an hour a day	9	9.5
	more than 3 hours a day	42	44.2

of 5.3% and one respondent is between 30 and 35 years old and makes up 1.1% of all respondents. Only one respondent (1.1%) said to use social media a few times a week, nine respondents (9.5%) said to use social media less than an hour a day, 43 respondents (45.3%) use social media less than three hours a day and 42 respondents (44.2%) use social media more than three hours a day.

5.2 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to investigate the strength of influence of the items on the variable and thus which factors are measured by the items (see Table 4). According to Guadagnoli and Velicer (1988), factor loadings above 0.4 are considered stable and factor loadings below 0.3 are advised to be suppressed (Field, 2013). Following this advice, item 9 of Travel Destination Choice with a factor loading of -.147 was suppressed as well as item 6 of Online Cultural Identity towards heritage culture and other cultures with a factor loading of -.207 and -.176 respectively. The KMO and Bartlett test showed middling to meritorious results with the lowest score being .712 and the highest being .864 (see Table 2). All scores are acceptable as they are above 0.5 (Kaiser, 1974). Following the Exploratory Factor Analysis, the items' reliability was explored with the use of Cronbach's Alpha (see Table 2). According to Pallant (2001), a Cronbach's Alpha above 0.6 is acceptable. All scores range between .804 and .909 and hence are very reliable (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). Therefore, no further items had to be removed. Finally, to measure the validity of the constructs, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was computed. The AVE score must exceed 0.5 to be accepted (Hair et al., 2010). All scores except for the AVE of Travel Destination were accepted (>0.5) which may suggest that the validity of the construct is not optimal.

5.3 Correlation Analysis

The Correlation Analysis (see Table 3) shows a significant, positive correlation between Virtual Acculturation and Travel Destination Choice ($r = .326$). Moreover, Online Friendship Orientation (OC) ($r = .259$) and Online Cultural Identity (OC) ($r = .390$) show a significant, positive correlation to Virtual Acculturation. Perceived Cultural Distance and Travel Destination Choice show a significant, positive correlation ($r = .274$). These results hint that there is a correlation between the constructs, however, the correlations are relatively weak.

5.4 Hypotheses Testing

Multiple Regression Analysis was used to examine the conceptual model's hypotheses (see Table 4). The research found that four of the six hypotheses are non-significant. The regression analysis revealed a positive but not statistically significant influence of Online Friendship Orientation (HC) on Virtual Acculturation ($\beta = .138$, $p = \text{n.s.}$). Further, Online Friendship Orientation (HC) was found to have a positive but non-significant impact on Virtual Acculturation ($\beta = .174$, $p = \text{n.s.}$). Thus, H1 and H2 are not supported. Online Cultural Identity (HC) has a slightly negative influence on Virtual Acculturation as predicted in the hypothesis, however, it is statistically non-significant ($\beta = -.022$, $p = \text{n.s.}$). H3 is

Table 2 Factor Loadings

Construct	Items	Factor Loading	α	AVE
Virtual Acculturation	VA1	.856	.909	.624
	VA2	.806		
	VA3	.860		
	VA4	.770		
	VA5	.860		
	VA6	.812		
	VA7	.789		
	VA8	.502		
Travel Destination Choice	TDC1	.578	.874	.453
	TDC2	.690		
	TDC3	.730		
	TDC4	.668		
	TDC5	.722		
	TDC6	.703		
	TDC7	.738		
	TDC8	.702		
	TDC10	.680		
	TDC11	.603		
	TDC12	.560		
Online Friendship Orientation (HC)	FOH1	.825	.784	.615
	FOH2	.837		
	FOH3	.785		
	FOH4	.679		
Online Friendship Orientation (OC)	FOO1	.842	.813	.642
	FOO2	.862		
	FOO3	.734		
	FOO4	.760		
Online Cultural Identity (HC)	CIH1	.789	.822	.593
	CIH2	.829		
	CIH3	.774		
	CIH4	.795		
	CIH5	.653		
Online Cultural Identity (OC)	CIO1	.802	.804	.572
	CIO2	.772		
	CIO3	.748		
	CIO4	.740		
	CIO5	.715		
Perceived Cultural Distance	PCD1	.890	.895	.708
	PCD2	.908		
	PCD3	.754		
	PCD4	.830		
	PCD5	.815		

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlation (n=95)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Virtual Acculturation	5.04	1.20	-						
2. Travel Destination Choice	3.55	.76	.326**	-					
3. Online Friendship Orientation (HC)	4.36	1.26	.013	.169	-				
4. Online Friendship Orientation (OC)	3.75	1.26	.259*	.135	-.472**	-			
5. Online Cultural Identity (HC)	3.76	1.01	.080	.234*	.443**	-.055**	-		
6. Online Cultural Identity (OC)	3.82	.90	.390**	.343**	-.100	.453**	.156	-	
7. Perceived Cultural Distance	4.00	1.37	.153	.274**	.154	.138**	.203*	.207*	-

*Note Variable 1, 3, 4, and 7 were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, variable 5 and 6 on a 6-point Likert scale, and variable 2 on a 5-point Likert scale

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 Multiple Regression Analysis Results

H#	Variable	Coefficient	t	p	Result
Virtual Acculturation					
H1	Online Friendship Orientation (HC)	.138	1.113	.268	Not supported
H2	Online Friendship Orientation (OC)	.174	1.414	.161	Not supported
H3	Online Cultural Identity (HC)	-.022	-.201	.841	Not supported
H4	Online Cultural Identity (OC)	.328	2.983	.004	Supported
Travel Destination Choice					
H5	Virtual Acculturation	.331	3.341	.001	Supported
H6	Perceived Cultural Distance	.033	.416	.678	Not supported

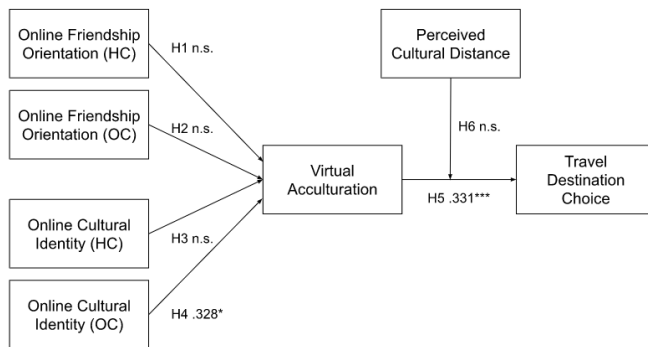


Figure 2 Conceptual model with regression results

therefore rejected. The Adjusted R Square equals .136 which means that the model is explained by 13.6% (see Appendix 5). Online Cultural Identity (OC) has a significant positive influence on Virtual Acculturation ($\beta = .328$, $p = .004$). These findings support H4. The analysis showed a significant positive influence of Virtual Acculturation on Travel Destination Choice ($\beta = .331$, $p = .001$). The Adjusted R Square of this model is .089, meaning that the model is only explained by 8.9%. Hence, the findings provide support for H5. H6 is not supported as there is no significant effect of Perceived Cultural Distance on the relationship between Virtual Acculturation and Travel Destination Choice ($\beta = .033$, $p = .678$).

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Impact of Online Friendship Orientation (HC) on Virtual Acculturation

Contrary to expectations, the Multiple Regression Analysis revealed a non-significant, slightly positive impact of Online Friendship Orientation towards heritage culture on Virtual Acculturation. The relationship of online friendship orientation and virtual acculturation has not been investigated before. However, prior research on the acculturation of migrants and sojourners to a host culture discovered that the consumption of host culture media promotes acculturation, and the use of home country media reduces acculturation outcomes (e.g., Kim, 1988; Jeffres, 2000). Thus, it was postulated that individuals that primarily interact with friends from their heritage culture on social media will exhibit less virtual acculturation. Past research on friendship orientation in the context of acculturation has been largely applied to immigrants or ethnic minorities and hence on ethnic and national friendship orientation (e.g., Hässler et al., 2018; Kizgin et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2004). This study, on the other hand, investigates friendship orientation toward heritage culture and other cultures, which is a separate context of analysis and may explain the discrepancies in findings. In addition, earlier studies on the impact of friendship orientation on acculturation

were largely focused on the physical realm. This study investigates friendship orientation on social media, which may differ significantly from real life friendships in terms of quality and quantity of contact. According to (Hässler et al., 2018), these factors can have a big impact on acculturation outcomes which may further explain the inconsistency with earlier research results.

6.2 Impact of Online Friendship Orientation (OC) on Virtual Acculturation

As prior research concluded that social interaction with individuals from the host culture is strongly related to adaptation to the host culture (Arends-Toth and van de Vijver, 2006), it was postulated that having online friendships with people from other cultures would indicate a higher level of virtual acculturation. Moreover, Kizgin et al. (2021) discovered that there is a significant positive influence of friendship orientation in the online environment on Acculturation in the physical realm. In contrast to these findings, the regression analysis of this study revealed that, while there is a slightly positive relationship, Online Friendship Orientation towards other cultures has no significant impact on Virtual Acculturation. The usage of different variables may explain the variation in outcome. While the research of Kizgin et al. (2021) focuses on physical acculturation, this study focuses on virtual acculturation through social media. Moreover, previous studies on the acculturation outcomes of friendship orientation focused mostly on migrants and ethnic minorities, meaning that the studies comparing ethnic and host culture friendship orientation. In contrast to these studies, this research attempts to investigate whether friendships with “other cultures” influence virtual acculturation. Hence the discrepancies in findings may be further explained by the differences in context.

6.3 Impact of Online Cultural Identity (HC) on Virtual Acculturation

H3 proposed that Online Cultural Identity towards heritage culture has a negative influence on Virtual Acculturation. The regression analysis showed a slightly negative but insignificant relationship. A strong attachment to and pride in one's own culture may impact one's propensity to accept aspects of another culture (Berry, 2005). However, acculturation is a bi-dimensional phenomenon, implying that individuals can retain a variety of identities (Berry et al., 1989). As a result, respondents can identify with their own heritage culture and adapt elements of other cultures which may explain the inconclusive result. Prior studies mainly investigated the relationship between ethnic and national identity in the context of migrants and minorities. They discovered that a strong ethnic identity negatively affected acculturation to the dominant culture

(e.g., Valentine, 2001). In contrast, this research investigates cultural identity in the online context and examines the difference between other cultures and heritage culture which may result in different outcomes. Furthermore, it is possible that an individual's online cultural identity may not correspond to their real-life cultural identity.

6.4 Impact of Online Cultural Identity (OC) on Virtual Acculturation

H4 was supported, as the regression analysis showed a significant positive influence of Online Cultural Identity towards other cultures on Virtual Acculturation. Thus, it concludes that the more individuals identify with other cultures on social media, the more they are likely to acculturate to other cultures through social media. This result is consistent with other research showing that a person's attitude toward acculturation influences how they react when exposed to different cultures on social media (Berry, 2005). According to prior studies, utilizing social media to communicate with the host culture is positively linked to sociocultural acculturation, whereas communicating with one's own culture is positively linked to maintaining one's ethnic identity (Moon and Park, 2007). As a result, this study may infer that the prior findings apply to the online setting as well.

6.5 Impact of Virtual Acculturation on Travel Destination Choice

The regression analysis concluded that there is a significant impact of Virtual Acculturation on Travel Destination Choice. Hence, hypothesis five found support. This conclusion is consistent with Li et al. (2019)'s argument that the ubiquity of social media has enhanced people's "virtual" exposure to a physically distant culture, resulting in social- and cultural learning and consequently acculturation. In contrast to Li et al. (2019), this research focused solely on the impact of virtual acculturation prior to travel and thus further confirmed the importance of virtual acculturation on the travel destination choice.

6.6 Moderating effect of Perceived Cultural Distance

Hypothesis six was not supported, meaning that there is no moderating effect of Perceived Cultural Distance on the relationship between Virtual Acculturation and Travel Destination Choice. Perceived cultural distance has been studied extensively in the past. Many studies suggested that perceived cultural distance has a negative influence on travel destination choice. According to Jackson (2000), Ng et al. (2007, 2009) and Yang and Wong (2012), cultural distance has a negative impact on travelers' destination choice, leading them to choose locations that are similar to their own cultures. According to Byrne (1971), this phenomenon is explained by the idea that perceived similarity increases one's propensity to identify with others. However, several studies have discovered a connection between different travel preferences in collectivist and individualistic nations (Jackson, 2001). The results indicated that whereas people from highly collectivistic countries tended to pick dissimilar destinations, people from highly individualistic countries tended to prefer similar ones. Therefore, the result of the analysis is contradicting to previous findings. One probable explanation is that perceived cultural distance has not been investigated in the context of virtual acculturation. As a result, the context differs, resulting in differing conclusions.

6.7 Theoretical Contributions

This study adds to virtual acculturation and tourism literature. It contributes to existing acculturation research by extending and building on the concept of virtual acculturation. A novel conceptual model for virtual acculturation was presented to investigate this. This study builds on prior findings by investigating cultural identity, friendship orientation and acculturation outside of the migrant or sojourner setting and by applying it to the wider interplay of cultures as well as to the online environment and tourism context.

6.8 Practical Implications

Social media represents a huge source of data for individuals searching for travel destinations. Not only does it provide visual information such as images and videos, but it also enables social media users to see other users' opinions on destinations, hotels, restaurants, travel guides, etc. Thus, social media represents not only a valuable source for its users but also for businesses and organizations looking to market their product or service. With the contributions of this research, marketers know that social media users who identify with other cultures and consequently like to interact with or view content from other cultures are likely to show signs of virtual acculturation to other cultures. This study proposes that this is positively linked to choosing a destination through social media. Thus, marketers may target these individuals since they are likely to seek for destinations via social media.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to fill the research gaps in the virtual acculturation literature by investigating further constructs in relation to social media and tourism. The impact of Online Friendship Orientation and Online Cultural Identity on Virtual Acculturation was explored. The effect of Virtual Acculturation on Travel Destination Choice, as well as the moderating effect of Perceived Cultural Distance, were also investigated. The study was conducted to investigate the research question:

How does virtual acculturation through social media influence travel destination choice?

To investigate the research question, six hypotheses were tested. The quantitative analysis confirmed that there is a positive influence of online cultural identity towards other cultures on virtual acculturation, meaning that identifying with other cultures on social media likely leads to higher virtual acculturation outcomes. The Multiple Regression Analysis further showed that virtual acculturation has a positive impact on travel destination choice, meaning that the more an individual is acculturated to other cultures on social media, the more they are likely to choose their travel destination on social media. This research proposes that identifying highly with one's heritage culture has no influence on virtual acculturation outcomes. The analysis showed that online friendships with people from the heritage culture and other cultures have no significant influence on virtual acculturation and that the perceived cultural distance between cultures has no effect on the relationship between virtual acculturation and travel destination choice. Thus, this study concludes that identification with other cultures positively influences virtual acculturation, which has a positive impact on travel destination choice.

7.1 Limitations

Although this study gives insights into virtual acculturation and tourism literature, there are some limitations worth mentioning. The first one concerns the distinction between “other cultures” and “heritage culture”. Although the words were defined for the respondents, the ambiguous concept of “other cultures” left opportunity for interpretation on the part of the respondents. Hence, the answer of the respondent differs depending on what the respondent defines as “other culture”. This is highly reliant on factors such as the respondents’ cultural background, the degree of exposure to other cultures, etc. and will vary with each respondent. Moreover, the impact of online friendship orientation and online cultural identity on virtual acculturation may be clearer with the inclusion of the construct Virtual Enculturation. The inclusion of Virtual Enculturation may better explain the influence that the tendencies towards heritage- or other cultures have on acculturation outcomes. In addition, due to time restrictions the number of participants according to the survey items was low. This leads to another limitation. A non-probability, convenience and snowball sampling method was applied to collect data. As a result, the sample may not be entirely representative of the target population.

7.2 Future Research

Since the use of “other cultures” may lead to subjective and non-comparable results, further research could explore the model while comparing respondents’ country of origin and a selected travel destination. This may lead to more comprehensive results and would make the answers more comparable. Further, the construct Virtual Enculturation could be added to the conceptual framework that was proposed in this research. As the results for e.g., Online Friendship Orientation are inconclusive, adding a variable such as Virtual Enculturation may improve understanding of the influence on virtual acculturation. As mentioned in the limitations, further research could investigate the proposed conceptual model in a longitudinal study with a larger sample size. Because most hypotheses were rejected, contrary to expectations, but certain relationships suggested a positive or negative influence, a bigger sample size could better reveal the impact of the variables on one another.

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10. APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Survey

Appendix 2: Demographic information of respondents

Appendix 3: Factor Analysis

Appendix 4: Cronbach's Alpha

Appendix 5: Multiple Regression Analysis

Appendix 1: Survey

Abschnitt 1 von 7

The influence of virtual acculturation
through social media on travel destination
choice - Survey

You are being invited to participate in a research study titled "The Influence of Virtual Acculturation through Social Media on Travel Destination Choice". This study is conducted by Leonie Huggle from the Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences at the University of Twente.

The purpose of this research study is to investigate how acculturation through social media influences the choice of travel destination and will take you approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. You are free to omit any question. To the best of our ability your answers in this study will remain confidential. We will minimise any risks by making the survey anonymous and safeguarding the information with the highest degree of confidentiality.

For further information, contact me via:

Leonie Huggle, l.l.huggle@student.utwente.nl

Demographic Information



Beschreibung (optional)

Sex *

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other

Which continent are you from? *



- ☐ North America
- ☐ South America
- ☐ Europe
- ☐ Asia
- ☐ Africa
- ☐ Australia

Are you a university student? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Do you use social media? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, how much time do you spend on average on social media? Please select, which of the following statements describes you best. *

☐ more than 3 hours a day

☐ less than 3 hours a day

☐ less than an hour a day

☐ few times a week

☐ Once every few weeks

☐ None of the above

Age *

☐ < 19

☐ 20 - 25

☐ 26 - 29

☐ 30 - 35

☐ 36 - 39

☐ > 40

Are you a university student? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Do you use social media? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

< > ...

Acculturation is the process of adapting elements of a foreign culture. Virtual acculturation refers to the process of adapting elements of a foreign culture through the contact with other cultures online (e.g. on social media). Social media are multimedia platforms which allow its users to interact with one another through sharing and creating content. These include e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, TikTok, Twitter, Reddit, etc. The variable is measured on a scale, ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree.

1. I am interested in learning more about people from other cultures on social media. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ strongly agree

2. I like to learn about other ways of life on social media. *

strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

3. I enjoy being with people from other cultures on social media to learn about their unique views and approaches. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ strongly agree

4. I enjoy exchanging ideas with people from other cultures on social media. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ strongly agree

5. I like to observe people from other cultures on social media to see what I can learn from them. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ strongly agree

6. I find people from other cultures on social media stimulating. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ strongly agree

7. Coming into contact with people from other cultures on social media has greatly benefited me. ★

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ strongly agree

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

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

Nach Abschnitt 3 Weiter zum nächsten Abschnitt

Abschnitt 4 von 7

Choice of Travel Destination

The variable Travel Destination Choice intends to measure how an individual chooses their travel destination. The items will be measured on a scale from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree.

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

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

2. Seeing a post of a specific destination on social media makes me want to visit the place. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

3. Social media is a good source of inspiration when choosing a travel destination. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

4. I would try a new travel destination if my friends spoke positively about it on social media. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

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

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

6. I find new travel destinations via social media. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

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

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

8. Influencers'/travel bloggers posts on social media motivate me to visit a certain destination. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

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

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

10. Social media is one of the primary sources of travel information. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

11. I plan a trip with the information I found on social media. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

12. The use of influencers increases trust in a destination. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

Nach Abschnitt 4 Weiter zum nächsten Abschnitt

Abschnitt 5 von 7

Friendship Orientation

Friendship orientation describes the behaviour and preferences of an individual towards their friends. Friendship orientation is split into heritage culture and other cultures. Heritage culture refers to the culture to which the respondent relates and identifies predominantly to. Other cultures refers to the other cultures (not the heritage culture) which the respondent comes in contact with over social media. The items range on a scale from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree.

Heritage culture

Heritage culture refers to the culture to which the respondent relates and identifies predominantly to.

1. Most of my friends on social media are from my heritage culture. *

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2. Most of my close friends on social media are from my heritage culture. ★

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

3. I see more commonalities between me and my friends from my heritage culture rather than friends from other cultures on social media. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

4. I prefer to interact with people from my heritage culture rather than friends from other cultures on social media. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

Other cultures

Other cultures refers to the other cultures (not the heritage culture) which the respondent comes in contact with over social media.

1. Most of my friends on social media are from other cultures. *

[illegible]

2. Most of my close friends on social media are from other cultures. *

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

3. I see more commonalities between me and my friends from other cultures rather than friends from my heritage culture on social media. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

4. I prefer to interact with people from other cultures rather than friends from my heritage culture on social media. *

[illegible]

Nach Abschnitt 5 Weiter zum nächsten Abschnitt

Abschnitt 6 von 7

Cultural Identity

The term cultural identity refers to an individual's sense of self derived from formal or informal membership in groups that transmit and inculcate knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, traditions, and ways of life. The items will range on a scale from 1= not very much to 6= very much.

Heritage culture

Heritage culture refers to the culture to which the respondent relates and identifies predominantly to.

1. How much do you feel you have in common with people from your heritage culture on social media? *

1 2 3 4 5 6

not very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ very much

2. How much do you identify with your heritage culture on social media? *

1 2 3 4 5 6

not very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ very much

3. How much do you interact and associate with people from your heritage culture on social media?

1 2 3 4 5 6

not very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ very much

4. How much would you like to interact and associate with people from your heritage culture on social media? *

1 2 3 4 5 6

not very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ very much

5. How proud are you to be part of your heritage culture on social media? *

1 2 3 4 5 6

not very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ very much

6. How negative do you feel about people from your heritage culture on social media? *

1 2 3 4 5 6

not very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ very much

Other cultures

Other cultures refers to the other cultures (not the heritage culture) which the respondent comes in contact with over social media.

1. How much do you feel you have in common with people from other cultures on social media? *

1 2 3 4 5 6

not very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ very much

2. How much do you identify with other cultures on social media? *

[illegible]

3. How much do you interact and associate with people from other cultures on social media? *

1 2 3 4 5 6

not very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ very much

4. How much would you like to interact and associate with people from other cultures on social media? ★

1 2 3 4 5 6

not very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ very much

5. How proud are you to be part of other cultures on social media? *

1 2 3 4 5 6

not very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ very much

6. How negative do you feel about people from other cultures on social media? *

1 2 3 4 5 6

not very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ very much

Perceived Cultural Distance

Perceived Cultural Distance intends to measure the distance between the respondents heritage culture and the culture of the travel destinations. The items will range on a scale from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree.

In order to answer the following questions, please think of how you perceive most destinations on social media before you travel to the destination.

When I choose a travel destination through social media, I often decide on a destination where ...

Beschreibung (optional)

... the race or ethnicity seem very different from my heritage culture *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

... the nationality seems very different from my heritage culture *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

... the language seems very different from my heritage culture *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

... the customs and culture seem very different from my heritage culture *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

... the religious beliefs seem very different from my heritage culture *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your time and help is much appreciated.

Beschreibung (optional)

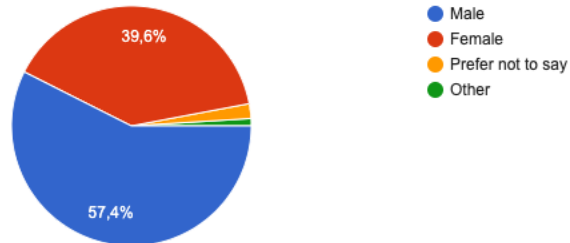
Appendix 2: Demographic Information of respondents

Demographic Information

Sex

101 Antworten

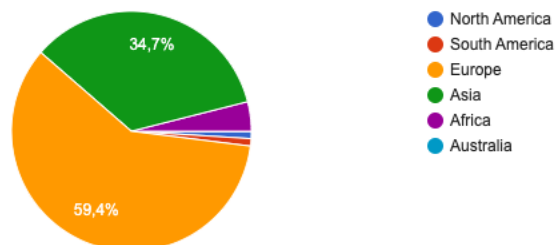
 Kopieren



Which continent are you from?

101 Antworten

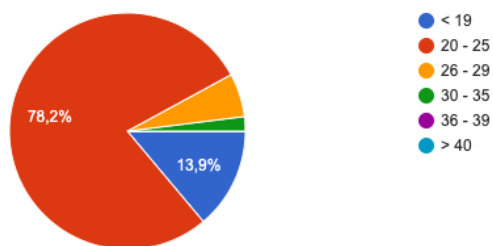
 Kopieren



Age

101 Antworten

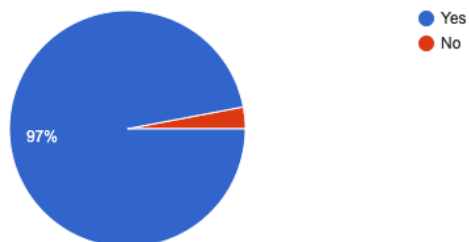
 Kopieren



Are you a university student?

101 Antworten

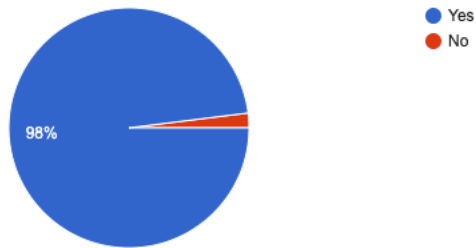
 Kopieren



Do you use social media?

101 Antworten

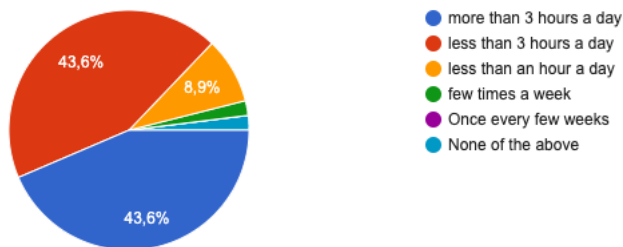
[Kopieren](#)



If yes, how much time do you spend on average on social media? Please select, which of the following statements describes you best.

101 Antworten

[Kopieren](#)



Appendix 3: Factor Analysis

Appendix 3.1.1: Virtual Acculturation component matrix

Component Matrix ^a	
	Component 1
1. I am interested in learning more about people from other cultures on social media.	.856
2. I like to learn about other ways of life on social media.	.806
3. I enjoy being with people from other cultures on social media to learn about their unique views and approaches.	.860
4. I enjoy exchanging ideas with people from other cultures on social media.	.770
5. I like to observe people from other cultures on social media to see what I can learn from them.	.860
6. I find people from other cultures on social media stimulating.	.812
7. Coming into contact with people from other cultures on social media has greatly benefited me.	.789
8. When it comes to trying new things on social media, I am very open.	.502

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

Appendix 3.1.2: Virtual Acculturation KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.864
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	484.544
	df	28
	Sig.	<.001

Appendix 3.2.1: Travel Destination Choice component matrix (with variable 9)

Component Matrix ^a	
	Component 1
1. Seeing travel-related posts on social media makes me want to travel.	.576
2. Seeing a post of a specific destination on social media makes me want to visit the place.	.686
3. Social media is a good source of inspiration when choosing a travel destination.	.728
4. I would try a new travel destination if my friends spoke positively about it on social media.	.664
5. Seeing travel experiences on social media can shape my opinion about travel brands (i.e. hotels, restaurants, services etc.) and destinations.	.714
6. I find new travel destinations via social media.	.704
7. I would try a new travel destination if my friends posted on social media that they have been there.	.737
8. Influencers' /travel bloggers posts on social media motivate me to visit a certain destination.	.702
9. I would avoid a particular destination if my friends kept posting on social media about it.	-.147
10. Social media is one of the primary sources of travel information.	.687
11. I plan a trip with the information I found on social media.	.614
12. The use of influencers increases trust in a destination.	.562
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	
a. 1 components extracted.	

Appendix 3.2.2: Travel Destination Choice (with variable 9) KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.781
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	499.632
	df	66
	Sig.	<.001

Appendix 3.2.3: Travel Destination Choice component matrix (without variable 9)

Component Matrix ^a	
	Component
	1
1. Seeing travel-related posts on social media makes me want to travel.	.578
2. Seeing a post of a specific destination on social media makes me want to visit the place.	.690
3. Social media is a good source of inspiration when choosing a travel destination.	.730
4. I would try a new travel destination if my friends spoke positively about it on social media.	.668
5. Seeing travel experiences on social media can shape my opinion about travel brands (i.e. hotels, restaurants, services etc.) and destinations.	.722
6. I find new travel destinations via social media.	.703
7. I would try a new travel destination if my friends posted on social media that they have been there.	.738
8. Influencers' /travel bloggers posts on social media motivate me to visit a certain destination.	.702
10. Social media is one of the primary sources of travel information.	.680
11. I plan a trip with the information I found on social media.	.603
12. The use of influencers increases trust in a destination.	.560
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	
a. 1 components extracted.	

Appendix 3.2.4: Travel Destination Choice (without variable 9) KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO and Bartlett's Test			
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.			.790
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	473.104	
	df	55	
	Sig.	<.001	

Appendix 3.3.1: Online Friendship Orientation (HC) component matrix

Component Matrix ^a	
	Component
	1
1. Most of my friends on social media are from my heritage culture.	.825
2. Most of my close friends on social media are from my heritage culture.	.837
3. I see more commonalities between me and my friends from my heritage culture rather than friends from other cultures on social media.	.785
4. I prefer to interact with people from my heritage culture rather than friends from other cultures on social media.	.679
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	
a. 1 components extracted.	

Appendix 3.3.2: Online Friendship Orientation (HC) KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO and Bartlett's Test			
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.			.712
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	120.990	
	df	6	
	Sig.	<.001	

Appendix 3.4.1: Online Friendship Orientation (OC) component matrix

Component Matrix ^a	
	Component 1
1. Most of my friends on social media are from other cultures.	.842
2. Most of my close friends on social media are from other cultures.	.862
3. I see more commonalities between me and my friends from other cultures rather than friends from my heritage culture on social media.	.734
4. I prefer to interact with people from other cultures rather than friends from my heritage culture on social media.	.760
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	
a. 1 components extracted.	

Appendix 3.4.2: Online Friendship Orientation (OC) KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO and Bartlett's Test			
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.			.777
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	127.090	
	df	6	
	Sig.	<.001	

Appendix 3.5.1: Online Cultural Identity (HC) (with variable 6) component matrix

Component Matrix ^a		
	Component 1	Component 2
1. How much do you feel you have in common with people from your heritage culture on social media?	.782	.119
2. How much do you identify with your heritage culture on social media?	.831	-.019
3. How much do you interact and associate with people from your heritage culture on social media?	.778	-.127
4. How much would you like to interact and associate with people from your heritage culture on social media?	.799	-.059
5. How proud are you to be part of your heritage culture on social media?	.638	.407
6. How negative do you feel about people from your heritage culture on social media?	-.207	.927
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		
a. 2 components extracted.		

Appendix 3.5.2: Online Cultural Identity (HC) (with variable 6) KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO and Bartlett's Test			
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.			.762
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	174.317	
	df	15	
	Sig.	<.001	

Appendix 3.5.3: Online Cultural Identity (HC) (without variable 6) component matrix

Component Matrix ^a	
	Component
	1
1. How much do you feel you have in common with people from your heritage culture on social media?	.789
2. How much do you identify with your heritage culture on social media?	.829
3. How much do you interact and associate with people from your heritage culture on social media?	.774
4. How much would you like to interact and associate with people from your heritage culture on social media?	.795
5. How proud are you to be part of your heritage culture on social media?	.653
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	
a. 1 components extracted.	

Appendix 3.5.4: Online Cultural Identity (HC) (without variable 6) KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO and Bartlett's Test			
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.			.788
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	165.732	
	df	10	
	Sig.	<.001	

Appendix 3.6.1: Online Cultural Identity (OC) (with variable 6) component matrix

Component Matrix ^a		
	Component	
	1	2
1. How much do you feel you have in common with people from other cultures on social media?	.810	-.202
2. How much do you identify with other cultures on social media?	.774	-.105
3. How much do you interact and associate with people from other cultures on social media?	.742	.150
4. How much would you like to interact and associate with people from other cultures on social media?	.732	.230
5. How proud are you to be part of other cultures on social media?	.710	.184
6. How negative do you feel about people from other cultures on social media?	-.176	.941
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		
a. 2 components extracted.		

Appendix 3.6.2: Online Cultural Identity (OC) (with variable 6) KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.806
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	147.343
	df	15
	Sig.	<.001

Appendix 3.6.1: Online Cultural Identity (OC) (without variable 6) component matrix

Component Matrix ^a	
	Component 1
1. How much do you feel you have in common with people from other cultures on social media?	.802
2. How much do you identify with other cultures on social media?	.772
3. How much do you interact and associate with people from other cultures on social media?	.748
4. How much would you like to interact and associate with people from other cultures on social media?	.740
5. How proud are you to be part of other cultures on social media?	.715
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	
a. 1 components extracted.	

Appendix 3.6.2: Online Cultural Identity (OC) (without variable 6) KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.814
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	142.032
	df	10
	Sig.	<.001

Appendix 3.7.1: Perceived Cultural Distance component matrix

Component Matrix ^a	
	Component 1
... the race or ethnicity seem very different from my heritage culture	.890
... the nationality seems very different from my heritage culture	.908
... the language seems very different from my heritage culture	.754
... the customs and culture seem very different from my heritage culture	.830
... the religious beliefs seem very different from my heritage culture	.815
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	
a. 1 components extracted.	

Appendix 3.7.2: Perceived Cultural Distance KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO and Bartlett's Test			
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.			.852
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	286.995	
	df	10	
	Sig.	<.001	

Appendix 4: Cronbach's Alpha

Appendix 4.1: Virtual Acculturation

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.909	8

Appendix 4.2.1: Travel Destination Choice (with variable 9)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.858	12

Appendix 4.2.2: Travel Destination Choice (without variable 9)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.874	11

Appendix 4.3: Online Friendship Orientation (HC)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.784	4

Appendix 4.4: Online Friendship Orientation (OC)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.813	4

Appendix 4.5.1: Online Cultural Identity (HC) (with variable 6)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.767	6

Appendix 4.5.2: Online Cultural Identity (HC) (without variable 6)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.822	5

Appendix 4.6.1: Online Cultural Identity (OC) (with variable 6)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.739	6

Appendix 4.6.2: Online Cultural Identity (OC) (without variable 6)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.804	5

Appendix 4.7: Perceived Cultural Distance

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.895	5

Appendix 5: Multiple Regression Analysis

Appendix 5.1.1: Multiple Regression Analysis of Virtual Acculturation with Online Friendship Orientation (HC&OC) and Online Cultural Identity (HC&OC)

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-1.390E-16	.095		.000	1.000
	FA_FO_HC	.138	.124	.138	1.113	.268
	FA_FO_OC	.174	.123	.174	1.414	.161
	FA_CL_HC	-.022	.110	-.022	-.201	.841
	FA_CL_OC	.328	.110	.328	2.983	.004

a. Dependent Variable: FA_VA

Appendix 5.1.2: Adjusted R Square

Model Summary ^b				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.416 ^a	.173	.136	.92937514

a. Predictors: (Constant), FA_CL_OC (-var6), FA_FO_HC, FA_CL_HC (-var6), FA_FO_OC

b. Dependent Variable: FA_VA

Appendix 5.2.1: Multiple Regression Analysis of Travel Destination Choice with Virtual Acculturation and Perceived Cultural Distance

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.005	.099		-.051	.960
	FA_VA	.331	.099	.331	3.341	.001
	FA_VA*PCD	.033	.080	.041	.416	.678

a. Dependent Variable: FA_TDC

Appendix 5.2.2: Adjusted R Square

Model Summary ^b				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.329 ^a	.108	.089	.95452621

a. Predictors: (Constant), FA_VA*PCD, FA_VA

b. Dependent Variable: FA_TDC