

EMOTIONS DURING SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE ACROSS TRAVEL STAGES: DREAMING, EXPERIENCING, AND SHARING

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between social media use and the emotions associated with planning and sharing trips on social media, focusing on the dreaming, experiencing, and sharing stages. Social media platforms based on Web 2.0 technology have revolutionized the way tourists plan and experience their trips and have significantly influenced their decision-making processes. This study aims to fill a gap in understanding potential travellers' attitudes towards social media content at these stages. Using a structured questionnaire, data was collected from 168 social media users, who have travelled in the past year, and was analysed with PLS-SEM. The results show that the Dreaming and Experiencing phases significantly influence users' emotions, while the Sharing phase shows no significant influence. These results highlight the importance of engaging users emotionally in the Dreaming and Experiencing phases and suggest that companies should use immersive storytelling, experiential marketing, and personalized experiences. Despite the non-significant effect of the Sharing phase, optimizing this phase remains crucial for seamless transitions and higher user satisfaction. This study highlights the central role of emotion in user perception and behaviour and recommends that companies prioritize emotionally engaging initiatives to drive positive user experiences.

KEYWORDS: social media, emotions, planning phase, dreaming phase, sharing phase, travel stages

1. INTRODUCTION

Social networks are based on the technological foundations of Web 2.0 and enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). These platforms have become an integral part of all stages of the tourism decision-making process and are seen by tourists as essential to the tourism industry (Sigala et al., 2012). The development of technology has revolutionized the way tourists plan and experience their trips (Buhalis and Amaranggana, 2013). According to Kim and Tussyadiah (2013), tourists rely on social networks to get support from their social circle while travelling. Visual content such as photos and videos play an increasingly important role in influencing travel decisions (Prasetya, Jaya and Thio, 2021). Social media plays a crucial role in shaping travellers' decision-making processes through various user-generated content (UGC) (Rathore, 2020), which serves as an important source of information (Boley et al., 2018). The abundance of UGC greatly facilitates the evaluation of services during travel planning (Savolanien, 2014).

Travel reviews play an important role in informing tourists about destinations and their offerings, with identification and internalization being crucial factors that encourage the sharing of travel experiences on social media, mediated by perceived enjoyment (Kang and Schuett, 2013). In addition, online suggestions and comments from other users enhance brand image and significantly influence purchase intent and destination image (Ye et al., 2011).

Although travellers actively engage with influencers and destination marketing organizations (DMOs) on social media, destination choice is not solely based on influencer content (Caruana and Caruana, 2022). Therefore, there is a gap in understanding potential travellers' attitudes towards posts or reviews on social media. The present study aims to address this gap by examining the determinants of the dreaming phase, the experiencing phase, and the sharing phase on social media, as well as their relationship with the emotions associated with social media use. The theoretical significance lies in exploring the specific factors that influence destination choice and associated emotions. By examining how the phases of dreaming, experiencing, and sharing on social media influence users' emotions, this study provides insights into the underlying emotions that drive travellers' decision-making processes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The literature on destination or travel planning processes usually follows the general consumer decision-making model (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Several researchers have proposed alternative stages in the travel process. Fotis et al. (2011) described four steps, distinguishing between the pre-trip phase and the post-trip destination choice phase. Fotis (2015) later adapted a cyclical model that begins with the dream phase, in which travellers share their experiences and ideas on social media and with friends and family. This phase ends shortly before a new vacation decision and marks the beginning of the pre-travel phase. In the post-trip phase, travellers return home and share their experiences. Tong (2018) expanded Fotis' (2015) model to include five phases that are particularly relevant for social media research, as social media is used in every phase. Based on the research of Cox et al. (2009), who presented a model of the travel planning process that includes three phases, pre-trip, during-trip, and post-trip, this paper analyses three stages: dreaming, experiencing, and sharing. The stage of dreaming precedes the trip, during which travellers actively or passively seek inspiration for their next trip. According to Prasetya et al. (2021), the stage of planning follows destination selection and involves information gathering. The booking stage is used for making reservations for tickets, accommodations, and dining options. The experiencing stage encompasses the actual journey and the experiences encountered, where travellers may seek additional information about activities, restaurants, and stay connected with loved ones during their trip. The sharing stage is after the trip, where travellers share their experiences and destination-related information. These stages, dreaming, experiencing, and sharing (Prasetya et al., 2021), were selected to capture the emotional journey travellers undergo during the three main stages of the travel process, providing a fresh view of the travel experience from initial inspiration to post-trip reflection.

There is a significant body of research focusing on the usage of social media for travel stages. The studies, however, employ varying methodologies, sometimes hindering the full recognition of participants' emotional experiences (Nawijn et al., 2013). Notably, Nawijn's (2010) study analysing the evolution of tourists' emotions over time highlighted a prevalence of positive emotions among participants, consistent with previous research findings. Emotions undergo changes throughout different phases of a vacation, influenced by environmental stimuli, as well as the individual's motivations for visiting specific destinations, which are intertwined with

personal and interpersonal factors. Consequently, depicting the entire emotional journey shaping tourist behaviour during vacations proves challenging. While some studies have explored the role of emotions in leisure enjoyment and tourism services (Bigné, Andreu, & Gnoth, 2005), as well as the factors affecting tourists' emotional responses to destinations (Hosany, 2012), limited attention has been given to investigating emotions according to the usage of social media in the travel stages.

It is assumed that users are more likely to engage with social media if they have a positive attitude towards these platforms in all travel stages. Users' attitudes can be influenced by various factors, such as the value they see in using social media or the emotions they experience when using these media. Sparks (2007) explains the influence of desires on behavioural intention and argues that attitudes and subjective behavioural norms together with individual desires determine users' behavioural intention. Behavioural intention refers to the planning of a specific behaviour based on autonomous motivation. The more positive a user's attitude and desire for certain behaviours, the stronger their behavioural intention. Dai et al. (2021) point out that users' attitude positively influences their travel intention. An important factor for users when using social media is the satisfaction they experience, which is perceived as added value for them. Users feel relaxed and satisfied when they use social media, which has a positive effect on their mood and therefore increases the likelihood of continued use. Emotions can be positive (e.g. joy, satisfaction or relaxation) or negative (e.g. dissatisfaction, anger or boredom) (Gursoy et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2020). Gursoy et al. (2019) conclude that consumers who have positive emotions towards AI devices are more willing to accept AI devices as service providers. In addition, Vitezić and Perić (2021) point out that positive emotions have a very strong positive influence on the willingness to use AI devices. It is therefore suggested:

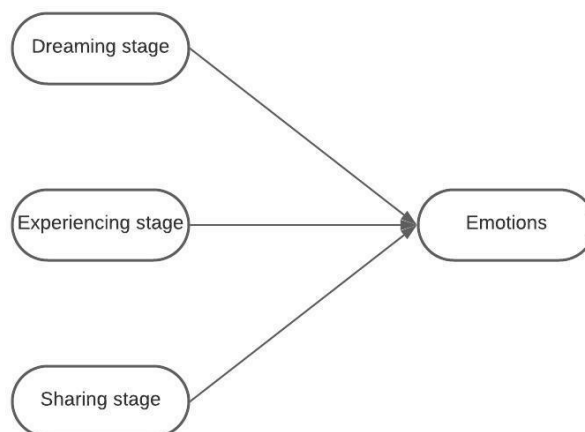
H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the dreaming stage on social media and emotions

H2: There is a statistically significant relationship between the experiencing stage on social media and emotions

H3: There is a statistically significant relationship between the sharing stage on social media and emotions.

To complement these hypotheses, a conceptual model is proposed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The conceptual model



3. METHODOLOGY

Primary research was conducted online between May and June 2023 with a purposive sample. The research population comprised members of social media with at least one active account and who had travelled at least once in the last year. Thus, 168 valid responses were collected. A structured questionnaire based on previous literature was utilized. The questionnaire consists of two parts, which were adapted according to the requirements of the study and rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 was “strongly disagree” and 5, “strongly agree”. The three stages of travel included four items each from Prasetya et al. (2021), while the construct of Emotions with four items was adapted from Vitezić and Perić (2021). The last part of the questionnaire deals with socio-demographic data such as gender, education level, employment status, and monthly income.

Among the respondents, 65% were female and 35% were male. Most of the respondents were aged 25-35, and were full-time workers with a monthly income up to 800 euros.

4. FINDINGS

The study examined the three primary hypotheses using a two-step analytical approach. Firstly, reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity of the measurement scales were assessed. Secondly, the evaluation of the research model involved testing the hypotheses, using a bootstrapping procedure with a sample of 5000 subsamples. The data collected were analysed using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach to analysing structural equations (SEM), with a formative measurement model. PLS-SEM has no problems with identifying relations between individual theoretical constructs in small samples (<250) and has no special requirements tied to the distribution of manifest variables because it is a non-parameter method.

4.1. MEASUREMENT MODEL RESULTS

The analysis of convergent validity is assessed by factor loadings and average variance extracted. Internal consistency is measured by composite reliability and Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, while discriminant validity, by the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) (Henseler et al., 2016).

Table 1: Outer model evaluation

Code of constructs/variables	Outer loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Dreaming stage		0.888	0.892	0.748
DREAM1	0.842			
DREAM2	0.883			
DREAM3	0.895			
DREAM4	0.838			
Experiencing stage		0.771	0.785	0.596
EXPER1	0.784			
EXPER2	0.871			
EXPER3	0.735			
EXPER4	0.687			
Sharing stage		0.847	0.857	0.695

SHARE1	0.658			
SHARE2	0.892			
SHARE3	0.909			
SHARE4	0.851			
Emotions		0.935	0.936	0.838
EMOT1	0.911			
EMOT2	0.910			
EMOT3	0.908			
EMOT4	0.931			

The values presented in Table 1 indicate satisfactory levels of all metric attributes (Hair et al., 2019). The outer loadings are all above 0.6. Composite reliability (CR) values indicate good reliability of the reflective constructs, because are all greater than the threshold of 0.7 (Sarstedt et al., 2014). The Cronbach's alpha values surpass 0.7 and therefore internal consistency is satisfactory. The average variance extracted (AVE) surpasses the recommended minimum value of 0.5.

Table 2 presents the assessment of discriminant validity using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT).

Table 2. Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio

	Dreaming stage	Emotion	Experience stage	Sharing stage
Dreaming stage				
Emotion	0.456			
Experience stage	0.659	0.532		
Sharing stage	0.410	0.408	0.705	

The Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) ranges from 0.410 to 0.705; therefore, the model has achieved discriminant validity. These findings affirm that the study's measurement model has adequate convergent and discriminant validity.

4.2. TESTING HYPOTHESES

Table 3 presents the findings of the study model, featuring the estimated path coefficients, standard deviations, t-values, effect sizes (f^2), p-values, and confident intervals.

Table 3. Structural model assessment

		β	SD	t-value	Effect size	p-value	Supported
H1	Dreaming stage → Emotions	0.235	0.081	2.868	0.051	0.004	✓
H2	Experiencing stage → Emotions	0.246	0.104	2.335	0.043	0.020	✓
H3	Sharing stage → Emotions	0.153	0.079	1.891	0.021	0.059	x

The results of the structural model show that the construct Dreaming stage ($\beta=0.235$; $p<0.05$) has a significant and positive effect on Emotions. Therefore, H1 is supported.

The construct Experiencing stage ($\beta=0.246$; $p<0.05$) has a significant and positive effect on Emotions, confirming hypothesis H2.

The construct Sharing stage ($\beta=0.153$; $p>0.05$) has a non-significant effect on Emotions; thus, H3 is not supported.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates that the Dreaming stage, Experiencing stage, and Sharing stage explain 26.2% of the variable Emotions.

The PLSpredict was conducted to test the predictive relevance (Q^2_{predict}) of the research model. The Q^2 values indicate that the model's predictive relevance is acceptable, where the value for Emotion is 0.221, thus greater than 0.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The study underscores the significance of the Dreaming and Experiencing stages in influencing users' emotions within the use of social media for travel stages. These findings suggest that businesses and organizations should prioritize initiatives that cater to these stages to positively influence user emotions. Strategies such as immersive storytelling, experiential marketing, and personalized experiences can be employed to engage users during the dreaming and experiencing phases, thus fostering positive emotional responses. Similar to Prasetya et al. (2021) and Čuić Tanković & Vidović (2023), Instagram can influence the travel process by inspiring and providing entertaining travel-related content. According to Chung and Koo (2015), information reliability has a significant effect on pleasure.

Moreover, while the Sharing stage did not show a significant effect on emotions in the study, it still holds importance in the overall user journey. Businesses and organizations operating in the relevant domain should not overlook this stage but rather focus on optimizing it to ensure seamless transitions from experiencing to sharing. This may involve enhancing user interface design, simplifying sharing processes, and incentivizing user-generated content creation to facilitate smoother transitions and enhance overall user satisfaction.

Additionally, the study emphasizes the pivotal role of emotions in shaping user perceptions and behaviours. Businesses and organizations should prioritize initiatives that aim to evoke positive emotions among users throughout their interactions with the platform. This could involve incorporating elements of delight, surprise, and joy into the user experience, leveraging gamification techniques, and fostering a sense of belonging and community among users. Developers and marketers should collaborate to create user-centric experiences that align with the key findings of the study. By focusing on enhancing user emotions, optimizing the sharing stage, and prioritizing initiatives that cater to the dreaming and experiencing phases, businesses can cultivate more engaging and satisfying user experiences, ultimately driving adoption and usage of their platforms.

It is important, however, to acknowledge the limitations of the study, such as its focus on specific constructs and the potential gap between intention and actual behaviour. A notable limitation is the small sample size, which could limit the generalizability of the results. A larger sample would provide more robust data, allowing for greater confidence in the results and their transferability to a wider population. In addition, the study was based on a purposive sample, which may lead to bias due to the non-random selection of participants. This sampling method may result in a sample that is not representative of the wider user population and may skew the results. Future research should aim to address these limitations by exploring a broader range of

factors and incorporating measures of real-world behaviour. Additionally, conducting cross-platform comparisons and employing mixed-methods approaches can provide further insights into users' decision-making processes and behaviours in technology adoption contexts.

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