**Uses and Gratifications of Social Media Platforms in Tourism: A Q Methodology Study**

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**Abstract**

This research aims to combat the consequences of COVID on destinations that rely heavily on tourism for an active economy. Now, more than ever, tourism destinations are needing to compete not only with other destinations but against fears of traveling after COVID. This need for innovation presents a problem to be solved in the tourism industry. However, the opportunity presented through increasing social media usage presents a solution. Using a uses and gratifications framework, this study conducted a Q methodology study to discover the most efficient ways to reach publics through social media. Kade software was used to analyze the data. This software found two factors: one that used social media to gather information and one that used social media for entertainment. From this analysis, researchers were able to identify two types of social media users and what kind of social media content would be most effective to reach them. These findings can be used to create an effective social media campaign for a tourism business that aims to increase tourism to the destination.

*Keywords: Tourism, travel, social media, Q methodology*

**Contents**

**Introduction** …………………………………………………………………………………...**5**

**Literature Review** …………………………………………………………………………….**12**

 ***Social Media***……………………………………………………………………………**13**

 ***Tourism***…………………………………………………………………………………**18**

 ***Research Questions***…………………………………………………………………**26-27**

**Methodology**…………………………………………………………………………………..**27**

 ***Participants***…………………………………………………………………………….**27**

 ***Apparatus***………………………………………………………………………………**28**

 ***Procedure***………………………………………………………………………………**29**

**Results**………………………………………………………………………………………….**31**

 ***Factor Interpretations***………………………………………………………………….**32**

**Discussion and Conclusion** ……………………………………………………………………**38**

**References**……………………………………………………………………………………...**41**

**Appendix**……………………………………………………………………………………….**45**

 **Q Methodology Form** …………………………………………………………………**44**

 **Q Methodology Results** ……………………………………………………………….**48**

 **Timeline** ………………………………………………………………………………..**48**

 **Project Deliverables** …………………………………………………………………...**50**

**Biography of the Author**………………………………………………………………………**56**

**List of Figures**

**Figure 1:** Composite Q Sort for Factor 1………………………………………………………

**Figure 2:** Composite Q Sort for Factor 2……………………………………………………….

**Uses and Gratification of Social Media Platforms in Tourism: A Q Methodology Study**

Digital media, once an entertaining and novel idea, is now deeply ingrained into the life of consumers across the globe. Where one may have been easily fascinated by an interactive display ad during its advent, brands are now having to use more and more innovative digital messaging to connect with their consumers. Though far from new, social media is taking over the world of brand messaging (Thevenot, 2007). People are no longer satisfied with simply viewing creative digital advertising, “people are directly engaged and become ‘the media’ themselves” (Thevenot, 2007). Social media, as a form of digital media, addresses this need of many audiences to be able to engage with the content. More specifically, social networking sites “managed to connect hypertext technology to the Internet, forming a new type of networked communication” (Dijck, 2013). This hypertext technology, like links to other social media accounts, blogs, and videos (Djick, 2013), can be used in social media to reinforce the networks created through the platform by encouraging incoming and outgoing traffic to specific accounts and sites. Engaging social media, like hyperlinks or competitions that audience members can participate in, strengthen the existing bonds between current customers and the brand and presents the opportunity to form new relationships. This kind of content on social media platforms breaks down barriers of physical space by enabling people to find and engage with media, news, photos, videos and people from millions of miles away within seconds.

Facebook garnered interest by beginning with the exclusivity of users, welcoming only Harvard students but eventually opening its doors of connectivity to all over the age of 13 (Sheffield, 2011). This platform was one of the first, after Myspace (Sheffield, 2011), to build off the relationships that were created through phone conversations but without the inconvenience of timing or waiting. Users no longer had to wait as they did on the phone or through email, they could quickly connect with friends to stay in touch at their own pace (Sheffield, 2011). Then YouTube was “founded in 2005 and became the world’s most popular online video community” (Sheffield, 2011). People could now see long-form videos on a platform that provided professionally created content and encouraged user-generated content (Sheffield, 2011). This gave users to ability to view long video content as opposed to the photos and shorter videos shared on Facebook. Twitter “offered different options such as microblogging” (Sheffield, 2011). Today, new social media like TikTok take off successfully because they cater to their audience and promote short videos only up to three minutes in length, removing any wait time that was present in past social media, whereas others like Clubhouse do not catch on so quickly because they present another obstacle, such as a lack of visuals (Djick, 2013). However novel and unknown a social media platform may be, it’s crucial that marketers jump on the opportunity to learn about them and use them for organizations as “social media will help strengthen the brand experience which will support brand building” (Sheffield, 2011).

New platforms that break down boundaries can be especially useful in terms of tourism. Through visual-focused platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, users can see all the grandeur and beauty of a waterfall in Venezuela without getting up from their couch in Belgium. As social media sites become more a part of consumers’ daily lives, 84% of adults ages 18-29 and 81% of adults ages 30-49 spend time on social media platforms (Auxier & Anderson, 2022), it, in turn, begins to affect businesses (Edosomwan et. al., 2011). When considering the digital marketing possibilities of visual platforms, the same data reveals that in 2021 “81% of Americans use YouTube,” followed not so closely by Facebook at 69% and Instagram and Pinterest at 40% and 31% respectively. (Auxier & Anderson, 2022). As platforms with the ability to break down physical barriers, this data shows the potential YouTube and these other platforms provide in terms of connecting with audiences and engaging with massive amounts of consumers in efficient ways.

When considering the connectivity of social media and how it allows users to emulate the experiences of traveling without leaving home, its effects on the tourism industry have been studied extensively. A lack of barriers when tourists are researching, and planning destinations is similar to a child in an ice cream shop; “travelers are spoiled by a myriad of places to visit that provide similar features and benefits” (Pike et al., 2019). In the context of how brands can remain relevant in such a competitive market, “social media specifically has opened new ways for [brands] to engage with travelers” (Pike et al., 2019).

The problem this research faces is multifaceted. Compounding the increase in social media use as shown through the Pew Research study (Auxier & Anderson, 2022) and the competitive nature of the tourism industry is the economic landscape that many countries face due to the decline in traveling from COVID-19 (Khan, 2020; La Croix, 2020; Cabezas, 2004). During the height of the pandemic, “tourism was reduced by as much as 99%” in destinations like Hawaii (La Croix, 2020). However, revitalizing this issue is easier said than done. According to Wu and Lau in a recent study conducted in 2022, the Protection Motivation Theory may account for the lack of tourists after a life-altering event like a worldwide pandemic (Wu & Lau, 2022). This theory is based on an “assessment of the situational threat through its perceived severity and vulnerability, measures of which are based on personal judgment and perceived probability of the threat realization” (Wu & Lau, 2022). It operates under the context of the “individual’s capabilities to cope with the threats through response efficacy and self-efficacy, both refer to the competence to take things under control, to think about and to dissolve threats in a rational manner” (Wu & Lau, 2022). They state that “protective behaviors ensue from a situational threat such as a health crisis, along with coping appraisals of such a threat…and these negative emotions influence their travel propensity” (Wu & Lau, 2022). Using theory, the researchers “link emotions and travel propensity in the context of the pandemic” (Wu & Lau, 2022). These negative emotions experienced by many regarding travel present just one more hurdle that tourism marketers have to face and that a solution to the problem of increasing tourism will need to address.

 Examining these three situational factors, increasing social media use, the need for innovation in the tourism marketing industry, and negative feelings regarding traveling during and after COVID-19 present both a problem and a possible solution. Destinations are combated with an increasingly competitive market compounded with negative emotions towards traveling as shown through previous studies mentioned. This is dangerous as tourism in some destinations, such as Hawai’i (La Croix, 2020) has a great effect on the economy of the destination by “providing employment, tax revenues and development incentives to growing numbers of regional and local economies (Angeloni, 2013). In the case of Hawai’i, the state relies on tourism for “25% of their output, or about $2 billion per month” (La Croix, 2020). In other places such as Italy and France, tourism accounts for as much as 12.29% and 7.34% respectively of the total gross domestic product (GDP) of the entire country (OECD, 2022).

The solution may lie in the potential of strategic social media use of brands to encourage and elicit a specific desired behavior, traveling to their destination. The uses and gratifications theory assumes that “the audience is active and mass media use is goal-directed” (Katz et. al, 1973). Building off Katz et al.’s framework, the information needs of audience members that come with tourism, whether it be persuasive information as Wu and Lau (2022) suggested or cutting-edge technology to gather the attention of and entertain the viewers as Pike et al. (2019) suggested is necessary, can be studied and used to create a solution, a social media campaign aiming to increase tourism rates to a specific destination. Past studies examine the media effects on tourists, specifically “media-induced tourism, which involves visits to places associated with films, television programs, and literature” (Iwashita, 2003). Researchers in this study found that while an explicit advertisement for travel destinations “played an important role in influencing the tourist decision-making process, there are other non-touristic-directed information sources that could play an important part in the reason for travel, such as news reports and pop culture” (Iwashita, 2003). The study examined how media coverage in a more traditional sense could encourage travel there and, through the social construction theory, they found that “media-induced tourism draws attention to the ‘subjective, socio-cultural and symbolic nature of tourist destination and to mediating influences” (Sheffield, 2003; Waysdorf, 2021). The research conducted in this study will examine the potential of social media to eliminate barriers in order to create a social media campaign that entices the public with the right visually innovative social media content on the platforms that they are most inclined to receive the information.

 The tourism industry may seem fun and light-hearted, but if its problems of negative related emotions (Wu & Lau, 2022) are left unaddressed there can be very serious economic consequences, like the ones outlined in La Croix’s (2020) study of Hawai’i. In addition to Hawai’i’s large tourism industry, in countries like Pakistan, “tourism provides a little around 2 million jobs” (Khan, 2020). Again, in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, “tourism is the primary economic development strategy” (Cabezas, 2004). While there are sure to be extraneous factors that contribute to tourism levels in a country and its overall economies such as “political occurrences and biological and psychological impulses” (Sheffield, 2003), the economic factors that have been examined, like the number of jobs it provides (La Croix, 2020) and the percentage of total GDP the industry makes up per country (OECD, 2022), show the large impact tourism has in the monetary success of destinations. Ensuring the stabilization of the economy during a time when so many have attitudes toward traveling that are harmful to the industry (Wu & Lau, 2022) and in turn, the economies themselves is crucial. Because countries could not promote travel for so long, the situation has gone from a potential problem if not addressed to a real issue of “tourism crisis and loss of international standing” (Avraham, 2017). A study by Avraham addressed the need for media action when in a crisis, but only examined traditional media coverage such as “news reports and press interviews” (Avraham, 2017). Though results showed that usage of defined media strategies could “greatly lessen negative reporting or erase harmful negative images that could damage the country’s image internationally” (Avraham, 2017), leaving out social media presents a large gap that this research will seek to make great strides towards addressing.

 As mentioned previously, social media can be beneficial when attempting to improve business (Pike et al., 2019) for a myriad of reasons. To begin, “over half the world’s population now uses the internet” (Pike et al., 2019) so the potential audience reach of people who have the ability to use social media is vast. Additionally, social media is extremely influential “in travel planning as an information source for potential travelers” (Pike et al., 2019). A study regarding the uses and gratifications of social media in vacation planning sought to identify “attributes of social media that are salient to consumers during international travel planning” and found that social media presents an opportunity for destination stakeholders to “engage with consumers in order to influence their perceptions of a destination brand equity for long term success” (Pike et al., 2019). Understanding the outcome of Pike et al.’s study that shows social media as a valid source of tourism promotion can provide a solid framework to put it into action by creating a social media campaign that aims to strategically address the individual uses and gratifications of different platforms to provide the public with the information they are looking for in the platform they are searching.

 The purpose of this research will be to create a cohesive, strategic social media campaign spanning several platforms. The research will use the Q methodology to investigate the current uses and gratifications of social media platforms from participants of diverse backgrounds. The unique nature of the Q methodology will allow for valuable data regarding viewpoints and opinions to be gathered (Cross, 2005). Similar to a Likert scale in a survey, Q methodology “is a means of extracting subjective opinion” wherein the “‘sample’ is the set of statements regarding the research topic and the participants are the experimental condition” (Cross, 2005). More specifically, it is a “self-directed ranking of statements on a continuum ranging from ‘very unlike me’ or ‘extremely disagree’ to ‘very like me’ or ‘extremely agree’” (Cross, 2005). Similar to Pike et al.’s (2019) study that examined the uses and gratifications of social media in regard to tourism, this research will aim to understand the individual uses and gratifications of each platform but take it an additional step further to create an effective social media campaign based off of the data gathered from this study. By understanding the uses audience members have for different platforms, “diversion, personal relationship, personal identity, and surveillance” (Katz et al., 1973), a social media campaign will be created that can put the most compelling information in front of the audience member when and where they are looking for it, in a manner of which they are accepting.

 This research is timely as it addresses a relevant environmental factor, COVID-19, that is at the forefront of many peoples’ minds and seeks to provide a solution to a problem with serious consequences. By building off the findings of related past studies, filling their gaps, and gathering new information through data collected in this research, this study aims to provide a practical solution for a tourism business or organization that can combat the situational factors of negative emotions and the pandemic to make a real change and impact businesses.

**Literature Review**

 The tourism industry is crucial for the economy of several countries. Beyond the trendiest restaurants and popular photo opportunities, it brings in attention and revenue yearly that supports the residents and businesses. Unfortunately, during 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism industry was put on hold and severely damaged. Stay-at-home orders prevented the travel and tourism that countries relied on for financial support. Now, while restrictions are loosening, the industry is gearing up to spring back into action. However, attempts to revitalize the industry have not been as successful as they need to be to completely return to a post-pandemic landscape. A new approach needs to be taken to save the declining state of countries around the world.

Social media, with its massive audience and widespread reach, has greatly impacted multiple areas of society. Platforms have transformed from a way to share personal information with friends and stay in contact with family in farther corners to a marketing industry used to effectively boost businesses and promote brands. This relatively new area of study is one of great interest to many researchers, likely due to its multifaceted nature. Social media’s marketing strategies can be of use to solve the problem of revitalizing the tourism industry. Due to the timely nature of this topic, relatively little research has been done regarding how to begin boosting tourism in a post-pandemic environment. Looking at social media marketing as it relates to travel and tourism would help the field grow in its understanding of the capabilities of social media and solve an important social issue.

When examining social media, researchers in the public relations field generally look at how practitioners can utilize it as a marketing platform. Studies conducted generally consist of surveys that look at the public opinion of different platforms and tactics along with user perceptions and behaviors. Studies on tourism examined the recent, stifling effects of COVID-19, environmental issues, and marketing. There was a gap in the COVID-19-related research regarding the tourism industry coming out of the pandemic. Most research studied how it has been negatively affected by the virus. This reveals a need for more updated research examining how tourism can make a comeback. Overall, much of the research reveals useful and relevant information for this study, but it also presents a gap that this study seeks to begin to fill.

**Social Media**

Social media has garnered much attention over the years as it has grown from an entertainment source to a legitimate news outlet and effective marketing platform. Research largely focuses on the users and behaviors of social media, for example how many users for each platform, demographics of the users, the growth rate occurring yearly, and their behaviors, how long are they on, what apps do they use, when do they get on, what makes them click a link. Much of the research concludes that social media is an ever-growing and changing field with several practical uses for businesses that requires specific strategies to fully utilize the benefits of each platform.

***Definition***

 Social media, as described by Edosomwam et al. in his study, is any “form of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content” (2011). This definition helps to validate forms of media that some are unsure if qualify as social media and, in turn, what this research and the eventual project should focus on. Additionally, the research defines networking as “the exchange of information of services among individuals, groups, or institutions; specifically the cultivation of a productive relationship for employment of business” (Edosomwan et al., 2011). The boom of social networking sites in the 2000s “transformed the interaction of individuals and organizations who share common interests” (Edosomwan et al. 2011).

***Uses and Gratifications***

The theoretical framework for this research can be based off the primary research conducted and the theory founded by Katz et al. in his creation of media uses and gratifications (Katz et al., 1973). Essentially, this theory states that consumers use media to fulfill or gratify a need, and these uses and gratifications are different for different mediums (Katz et al., 1973). The primary research conducted by Katz et al. found five general uses of media, “Information and Education, Entertainment, personal identity, integration and social interaction, and escapism” (1973). Peters et al.’s conducted research that found internet users are motivated by process, entertainment, information, and socialization factors (2007). Peters et al. researched relevant press articles and internet advertising message service providers to gain a better understanding of the medium” (2007). After six months of this the researchers conducted interviews with college students because of their high data service usage (Peters et al., 2007). As helpful as this study and its use of the uses and gratifications theoretical framework, using a quantitative research method, such as Q methodology would strengthen the argument. The research conducted in this research aims to fill this gap by testing a similar theory with a quantitative method like Q methodology.

**Uses and Gratification of Social Media.** Social media is such a powerful tool largely because of the level to which it is integrated into the lives of the public. The Pew Research Center conducted a studying “to better understand Americans’ use of social media, online platforms, and messaging apps” (Auxier & Anderson, 2022). They surveyed roughly 1500 adults in 2021 via phone and found that 84% of adults ages 18-29 and 81% of adults ages 30-49 spend time on social media platforms (Auxier & Anderson, 2022). Essentially, all publics in the age group of 18-49 willingly spend time at the very least viewing branded messaging on one or more social media. This type of extensive reach is one of social media’s strongest attributes. The study also examined which platforms the respondents used and found that the reigning platforms were YouTube at 81% of adults, Facebook at 69%, and Instagram at 40%. Basic data like this helps to set the stage for various social media projects as it reveals the overall platform with the most active users.

 In addition to social media’s far-reaching and diverse audience, users’ behaviors indicate that there is an upwards trend in the time spent on the different platforms. According to Forbes, in 2020, “Americans spent more than an average 1,300 hours on social media, due in part to the pandemic” (Suciu, 2021). They also divided research up by different platforms and found that “Americans spent an average of 58 minutes a day on Facebook, Instagram was the second most used service and most popular among Gen-Z users who spent 53 minutes per day” (Suciu, 2021).

 Social media is not a novel idea to many companies and organizations who use it for business purposes. However, research is constantly being conducted over how to better understand the uses and gratifications of users and improve social media business practices. One study examined the benefits of digital marketing and social media. This study used a survey as their research method and studied the results of marketing managers (Tiago & Verissimo, n.d.). the researchers noted that “a significant portion of the associated research is focused more on the customer than the firm. To redress this shortcoming, the study adopted the perspective of the firm to facilitate an understanding of digital marketing and social media usage, benefits, and inhibitors” (Tiago & Verissimo, n.d.). Their findings revealed that firms face internal and external pressures to adopt a digital presence on social media platforms and demonstrated how some firms accomplish relationship-based interactions with their customers to improve digital marketing engagement” (Tiago & Verissimo, n.d.). This research fills a gap in the current research and validates the necessity of social media when considering business improvements.

***Social Media Marketing Strategies***

As more research uses the social media uses and behaviors information to highlight the importance of social media as a marketing tool, more studies develop that examine how to strategically utilize different social media tools to make the most out of each platform. Social media marketing strategies have become a popular topic of interest as they gain credibility in the field. Many studies on this topic are case studies that examine a particular situation utilizing one or more social media tactics.

One study examined social media strategies within the equine business. The objective of the research was to “assess the utilization of social media by equine professionals in the marketing of their profession” (Cavider et. al, 2017). This study distributed surveys with the primary recipients being horse professionals to obtain information regarding their “use and preference of social media within the equine industry” (Cavider, 2017). Unsurprisingly but still reassuringly, the researchers found that 84% of the participants used social media to promote their equine businesses, and 93% “agreed that social media has a positive influence” (Cavider, 2017). Additionally, age plays a small role in this study because results indicated that even professionals with “traditional barriers to social media users perceive social media as beneficial” (Cavider, 2017). While this information may seem obvious, studies proving the effectiveness of social media marketing strategies are beneficial to build from and necessary to move forward in the field.

Blogs and vlogs are other forms of social media marketing strategies that can be used to build relationships between corporations and their audiences. A study by Thevenot defined blogs as “a combination of a person’s personal life and the particular subject they would like to provide comments or information on” (Thevenot, 2007). This creation of a brand personality gives corporations an edge in attracting, building relationships with, and persuading audience members. The research identifies individuals, collaborative, and corporate blogs (Thevenot, 2007). Most relevant to this research, corporate blogs have the ability to “open discussions for the company to learn from and improve on by listening” (Thevenot, 2007). However, collaborative blogs also provide an opportunity to build a community within the tourism industry and they encourage working with opinion leaders and other industry leaders.

One specific strategy that was a hot topic in research was opinion leaders. One study examined the Chinese luxury fashion opinion leader, Gogoboi. The study asked questions regarding how social media opinion leaders shaped consumer behaviors. Specifically, they wanted to look at how and in which direction opinion leaders could influence consumers (Shaozhi, 2020). For methodology, the study "developed an original research model and implemented an empirical study” to better understand how they could reach a target audience through social media (Shaozhi, 2020). The results showed that social media opinion leaders “influence consumer behaviors towards endorsed brands or products through para-social relationships and source credibility” (Shaozhi, 2020). This study provides a good framework for understanding the kinds of social media strategic research that has been done and the tactics that have been proven successful.

 Another relevant subtopic in the overarching theme of social media strategies is how to use them outside of business ventures. Relevant to this topic, one study examined how to use the knowledge sharing and diffusion of ideas from social media to provide accessibility for disabled citizens (Zehra et. al., 2016). The researchers used a “mixed method to gain reflections of disabled people of tourism services and social media tools for equality of life standards” and participants consisted of people who were physically disabled (Zehra et. al., 2016). They did a questionnaire including “demographics, work status, hours spent using social media, frequency of traveling and holiday planning to reveal the support of technology in travel and tourism activities” (Zehra et. al., 2016). Additionally, researchers analyzed and implemented a web usability and accessibility checklist to set the standard of websites (Zehra et. al., 2016). The results of the study revealed that 58% “follow travel agencies websites and Facebook pages and a majority are active users of social media but they do not have enough knowledge and information using for tourism services” (Zehra et. al., 2016). This research aligns closely with the purpose of this study and reveals a beneficial framework, albeit for a more niche audience, to build from.

**Tourism**

Recent literature on the tourism industry has focused largely on the effects of COVID-19. Most research focuses on the damage done to the economy and communities. Many focus on case studies of specific countries and cities that are struggling. However, there has been little to no research done regarding how countries can climb out of the pit the pandemic left them in. Research like this study regarding how companies and countries can forward in a post-pandemic world would break into a new frontier of research and be timely in manner. While doom and gloom have dominated the past two years of the tourism industry, loosening guidelines and

***COVID-19***

 The pandemic, as the instrument of destruction for countries’ economies across the globe, has been the primary focus of much tourism-related research. One example of the lengths destinations are going to to increase tourism is the Hawai’ian government’s reconsideration of COVID guidelines. Hawai’i government officials are implementing looser Covid guidelines that will still aim to keep residents safe but will also encourage the influx of tourists (La Croix, 2020). Actions like “opening borders but implementing quarantine period and erasing stay-at-home orders once community transmission became low, zero to six cases a day” were their efforts to increase tourism (La Croix, 2020).

One study was conducted to discover in more detail the poverty that has risen from COVID-19 primarily in Nepal, Ghana, Myanmar, and Uganda (Nordås, 2020). These effects are ones of reduced tourist activities which the economies of these countries greatly depend on, and “remittances from migrants to family in their home country. The research asked questions like “how long the pandemic and its efforts to limit contagion would last” (Nordås, 2020). The purpose was to examine the state of many countries from the perspective of poverty and consider how to reduce poverty caused by COVID-19 through increased tourism. The findings indicated that “traffic would pick up…and reach former highs in 2022…but mandatory quarantine both upon entry and upon return would be a sharp dampener on tourism even if other restrictions are lifted” (Nordås, 2020). Additionally, the researchers concluded that because “the recession in the world economy is the result of a pandemic and measures to limit it, traditional stimulation measures will have little effect” (Nordås, 2020). This insight provides validation that research regarding new ways of stimulating tourism and in turn boosting the economy is necessary.

 Another study examined the impacts of COVID-19 on the marine areas of Laikipia and the Galapagos Islands. East Africa and Galapagos Archipelago are biodiversity conservation areas where tourism is one way to address community development aspirations in a way that is compatible with conservation objectives (Meredith et. al., 2020). They aimed to discover “engineered livelihood transitions” that would be eco-friendly and utilize the efforts of tourism and tourists. The research is “based on over 15 years of direct engagement with communities in Laikipia and over 10 years of engagement in the Galapagos” (Meredith et. al., 2020) and the methodology consisted of “assessments of COVID-19 impact drawn from government reports, local agency reports, media coverage, and interviews with key informants in affected communities” (Meredith et. al., 2020). The summary reveals that tourism revenue has succeeded in…opening new opportunities for communities (Meredith et. al., 2020) and emphasizes the importance of the industry and why studies need to focus on improving it with the loosening of restrictions.

 Some countries, like Pakistan, are already feeling the effects of growing costs from loosening pandemic restrictions but a remaining diminished tourism industry to bring in revenue. One study examines the country’s revival plan for its tourism sector. The researchers utilized focus groups conducted in the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) and included government officials, an expert from private and development sectors (Khan, 2020). The results of the study concluded that controlled tourism practices should be implemented as case studies before being opened to public use to ensure quality due to a sense of residential fear at tourists bringing in the virus, and a “digital infrastructure should be prioritized to ensure the free and quick flow of information and reduction of information costs” (Khan. 2020). Additionally, the group noted that “Pakistan needs more ideas, as tourism is more about narratives” (Khan, 2020). This study provides insights into the concerns and needs of countries attempting to come back after the pandemic. In this specific case, using social media to boost tourism would align with the country’s needs for narrative ideas, as social media creates personal narratives with followers.

 On a smaller, but still related, scale, countries are not the only entity in the tourism industry wondering how to combat the globally freezing pandemic. Travel influencers also faced concerns when COVID-19 prevented them from working. This research was a case study of how one travel influencer, Mary Teles, coped during the pandemic and kept her digital enterprise alive (Pinho et. al., 2021). This research sought to examine how Teles’s travel promotion overcame the “most severe economic recession of the global economy” (Pinho et. al., 2021). This case was important because it allowed the discussion of the marketing concept of positioning as a theoretical concept in the context of social media (Pinho et. al., 2021). It essentially used a content analysis when describing and commentating on the experience of Teles on travel marketing in the pandemic. The researchers found that “peer-to-peer collaboration and the sharing economy favored the interaction among users on virtual networks and platforms which promoted trust among consumers” (Pinho et. al., 2021). Additionally, “empowered prosumers used their social media to share…and potentially influence future consumers, reinforcing the value of e-WOM” (Pinho et. al., 2021). This study showed the influence and resilience of digital marketing, particularly social media, and why it is valuable and worthwhile to invest in. It provided a fail-safe discussion of ways to overcome the pandemic and useful insights this study can build from when considering promoting travel and tourism.

***Travel Attitudes and behaviors***

One study used Social Exchange Theory to examine “how and to what extent popular cultural forms of the media have an effect on international tourism and to identify what roles they play in influencing overseas tourists’ behaviors” (Iwashita, 2003). The researchers used a questionnaire to gather qualitative data surrounding the attitudes of residents toward tourism in cities (Đurkin Badurina et al., 2022). Upon analysis, the researchers identified three distinct groups of residents: skeptics, neutrals, and believers (Durkin Badurina et al., 2022). The researchers found that “in cases where an urban destination is not (yet) exposed to over-tourism, perceived positive tourism impacts play a more important role than the negative tourism impacts, as potential key opinion-changers in terms of future support for tourism development” (Đurkin Badurina et al., 2022). This study largely researched college students who may not have the most information in regards to tourism and its fiscal effects on a residential area. Examining a wider array of people would improve the results of this study and others like it.

 Another problem for tourism is understanding the perceptions of the local citizens in the area. A study examining tourism in urban destinations aimed to understand “the complex and heterogeneous nature of residents’ perception and attitudes towards tourism in cities” (Durkin et. al., 2022). This study was conducted in Croatia and utilized a self-administered questionnaire (Durkin et. al., 2022). The participants were asked to “rank their level of agreement with the statement ‘tourism generates more benefits than costs for residents’ and placed respondents into three corresponding groups: skeptics, neutrals, and believers” (Durkin et. al., 2022). The results of the study indicated that in “cases where an urban destination is not exposed to over-tourism, the perceived positive impacts of over-tourism play a more important role than perceived negative impacts” (Durkin et. al., 2022). After discovering their findings, the researchers suggested that the “involvement of resident participation in tourism planning and development” would improve the city’s tourism industry (Durkin et. al., 2022). This study gathered relevant information regarding resident perceptions, which as possible target audiences must be considered, and provided insights on how to form successful tourism endeavors.

***Digital Marketing and Tourism***

 As social media is seen as a more and more reliable marketing source, more industries and companies are trying new strategies to break barriers and gain customer relations through the different platforms. Many marine coastal sites rely heavily on tourism to bring in revenue monthly.

One study recognized the various steps that a tourist takes when considering entering different ports and examined the effectiveness of tourist port websites. The researchers’ methodology was a content analysis of various port websites and an “original evaluation tool to measure the quality of tourist ports websites” (Benevolo & Spinelli, 2018). Understanding that tourists ports, in nature, need to appeal to a wide and diverse audience, the researchers looked to websites as adaptable ways to reach a wide target audience. The questions they asked examined the “quantity and value of the information provided on a site” (Durkin et. al., 2022). Additionally, a pilot study was conducted using the original tool created to evaluate tourist ports websites in Northern Sardinia (Durkin et. al., 2022). The findings of this research imply that more strategy and effort should be given to digital marketing in tourist ports due to their important nature and their less than satisfactory current state. This study’s examination of effective tourism digital marketing makes a strong case for the necessity of stronger digital marketing and validates further studies in this field.

 Similarly, another study examined the use of social media in marine tourism (Li, 2020). Li acknowledges the maturing mobile marketing field and studies the way marine tourism has moved towards intelligence and informatization. The study utilizes content analysis to examine the way marine tourism has developed alongside and in conjunction with mobile marketing. The study examines the growth of both fields and, “through the integration of information technology, aims to make marine tourism more intelligent” (Li, 2020). The findings of the research indicate that “continuous improvement and upgrading will be required of marine tourism development based on mobile marketing mode” (Li, 2020). This study’s insights on the reliance of marine tourism on social media and mobile marketing are in support of the necessity of this research.

 Another study conducted research that evaluated the performance of various tourism marketing strategies in the context of Nigeria and its surrounding areas in Cross River State (Ajake, 2016). This study is relevant because of its special focus on effective communication strategies in the tourism industry. The researchers gather data through “participatory appraisal methods, questionnaire survey, and direct field observation” (Ajake, 2016). This variety of methods increases results validity. Study participants consisted of “55 staff of tourism administrators and 160 tourists who were found at the time of this study” (Ajake, 2016). Regarding awareness, the results indicated that 60% of study respondents indicated that they found the promotional tourism information within Nigeria, and 40% heard about it in their home countries (Ajake, 2016). A large majority of tourists participated in sightseeing, sports-related visits, leisure and recreation, visits to traditional rulers, and cultural festivals (Ajake, 2016). These results indicate a difference between the effectiveness of tourism marketing communication methods based on the pre-existing opinion of tourists and tourist administrators (Ajake, 2016). The study recommends that it is essential to pursue all aspects of development in peripheral areas to improve destination and attraction sites (Ajake, 2016). This would in turn encourage tourists from other parts of the world to visit. This study is closely related to the topics and questions that this study seeks to pursue. The methodology and groundwork completed by the researchers provide a framework for this study.

**Conclusion**

This prior literature has created a sufficient knowledge base of social media and tourism. The researchers have made great contributions to the field of social media marketing through the statistics on uses and behaviors. This information is critical to know to begin a study based on social media and change frequently. Having up-to-date literature that outlines the newest data is a large contribution to this field of study. Additionally, the outlined literature provides significant information regarding the effectiveness of social media marketing strategies in case studies. These are useful when considering which may be effective in this project, however, the specificity of a case study makes it difficult to draw too many assumptions. Lastly, the literature contributed greatly to a general understanding of the current state of the tourism industry. Several articles discuss the state of varying countries’ tourism sectors and how they have been affected by COVID-19.

The strength of this literature is the detail regarding social media that it can provide. Information about what strategies have been effective for past campaigns can be helpful resources to reference when conducting a similar project. Another strength is the amount of information provided about tourism and marketing. Much of the literature involves studies where researchers examine some relationship between marketing, whether digital or not and tourism. The presence of this relationship in the literature is beneficial when considering a new aspect of this relationship.

The weakness of the literature is the lack of relevancy. Very little research has been done that aims to examine specifically increasing tourism through social media. There is significant research regarding the topics and themes that it will cover but not to the degree of specificity that would be useful. It will be difficult to create this study without a similar study that could function as a guide.

The most recent literature has a gap when considering post-pandemic situations. Very few studies focus on how to operate now that restrictions are loosening, and vaccines are widespread. Although there is sufficient information on how to combat the effects of stay-at-home orders and social distancing, there is a significant lack of research examining how to grow in a post-pandemic environment. This type of time-relevancy is a strong point of this research.

The next steps are to create a strategic and effective methodology for this study based on the strong collection of proven effective tactics outlined in the literature, creating a timeline for the study that would quickly address the post-pandemic environment and fill that gap in the literature, and create a study that examines the specific relationship between using social media to increase tourism to create an outline for further research in this new topic.

After reviewing past literature on the topic, the following research questions can be created for this study:

 *RQ1: Do people use social media to plan vacations?*

 *RQ2: Which platforms are used for information gathering needs?*

*RQ3: How can the different uses and gratifications of social media platforms be used to make the most effective social media campaign to increase tourism?*

**Methodology**

**Participants**

For this study, 9 people in the Oklahoma area were selected to participate. Though a smaller sample size than other research, this is the ideal number for this specific methodology (ten Klooster et al., 2008). These participants were women between the ages of 20 and 23. Ethnicity and religion were not a factor when gathering participants. Restrictions on the participants included age due to the relatively novel nature of social media. Participants were required to be at least somewhat familiar with social media networks. There was also a geographic restriction. All participants were from the Norman and Oklahoma City areas. The sampling process used was convenience sampling. This research was conducted in person, so gathering participants from the surrounding area of where the research was conducted was important.

A systematic Q sort was used to gather data in this research. It is a unique research method in that “the statements are the sample, and the participants are the variables” (Moore, 2022). In this way, the participants are not assigned to conditions, rather they “sort stimuli that represent possible views on the issue in question by their level of agreement with said statements” and reveal their personal position on the issue (Finchilescu, & Muthal, 2019). For this study, participants were assigned to either high social media use or low social media use. IRB approval was obtained before researchers began recruiting participants. Participants were personally asked to participate in this study and all participants volunteered to participate.

**Apparatus**

This study consisted of conducting a systematic Q sort to discover people’s uses and gratifications for different social media platforms. The materials used for this study were the printed-out statements for the Q sort, the Q array printed out to gather participants’ rankings of the statements, and a pencil for the participant to write in their answers. The variables used in this study were the participants. In this study, each participant and their unique ranking of the statements was its own variable whereas the statements crafted were the samples. Extraneous variables were environmental differences in where the participants completed the sort. There was little consistency in location for the study, so some participants may have felt different pressure from the place and time constraints. This study used a 2 (active social media users and passive social media users) x 5 (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest) within-group design wherein each statement was ranked by every participant and six groups had four statements and four had three, for a total of 36 statements. The independent variables were the participants, and the dependent variables were the various rankings of the statements regarding their social media uses.

The primary outcome measures were the rankings showing uses of different social media platforms. The research first and foremost sought to examine the different uses and gratifications for social media. Secondary outcome measures were the amount of time they spend on different social media. Understanding their behaviors with social media was secondary to understanding their uses and gratifications for each platform.

For this study, instruments used were the physical materials for a Q sort, and the analysis software, Kade found via <https://www.ou.edu/ouit/software1>. All data gathered was imported into this software and the qualitative factor analysis test was run here. A Q sort’s reliability can be “assessed similar to a survey” (Moore, 2022). Overall, the reliability of the method, as explained Nahm’s study, was found to have “a high level of reliability and construct validity” (Nahm et al., 2002). Once the factor analysis was complete, researchers were able to uncover “composite coefficients for each factor type” (Moore, 2022). Q sorts are extremely valid due to the reverse nature of the participants being the variables. The test “provided stimuli, but participants provide answers” (Moore, 2022). As stated by Brown, when conducting a Q sort, “issues of validity fade since there is no external criterion by which to appraise a person’s own perspective” (Brown, 1993).

The participants were given clear instructions on how to complete the Q sort and occasionally asked to repeat steps when they went array from the instructions. Covariates may have been the participants’ honesty in their answers. They may have wanted to come across to researchers in a specific light, and change altered their answers accordingly. Additionally, the generalizability is important to note regarding Q sorts. According to Ho, “Q-methodology helps reveal the general viewpoint of people who think similarly, but the variation in viewpoints is highly dependent upon participant sampling” (2017). The researcher was trained to collect data through a seminar over the Q methodology prior to distributing the sort. In the training seminar, the researcher was able to run an unrelated pilot test and understand the full process before beginning this research. One researcher assessed the data and back translation was not conducted.

**Procedure**

Q methodology is “a hybrid of quantitative and qualitative procedures” (Stenner & Stainton Rogers, 2004). This method “examines patterns of beliefs, attitudes, values, opinions, instead of fact” (Moore, 2022), which makes it an incredibly useful tool for public relations research. This research was a structured Q methodology. The researcher crafted 25 statements that presented specific narratives regarding social media use and gratification. For example, “I use Instagram for travel tips” or “I follow travel vloggers on YouTube.” These statements are then assigned a number to be used during the participant-ranking section of the procedure.

Participants were given instructions on how to complete the sorting. They were first instructed to look over the questions thoroughly for at least three minutes and then place them in categories of agree, neutral, or disagree. Then, they ranked them in order from the statement they most strongly agreed with, down to the one they least agreed with. The values ranged from -4 to +4 with a neutral section in the center represented by zero. They then wrote the statements corresponding numbers in the factor array. In addition to the sorting, there were open-ended questions for the participant to answer, for example, “Why did you choose the statement you most agree with?”, “In general, what is the main reason you use social media?”, and “What is your favorite social media platform and why?” There were also demographic questions for the participant to answer. When conducting the sort, participants were in a private environment to prevent rushing and inaccurate data collection. Participants were provided the statements printed on paper, a sheet to fill out their ranking of the questions, and a pencil to complete the sort. There was no psychological assessment conducted prior to administering the sort. All participants signed a consent form prior to taking part in the study.

***Data Diagnostics***

Once all data was gathered from the participants, it was inputted into the Q Method Software site for quantitative analysis. Once the data went through the software, similar answers from participants were grouped into Q types. Using the Pearson Product Moment Coefficient Correlations, the researcher was able to see the degree of similarity or dissimilarity in the unique answers from participants. Answers considered similar were within a range from +1 to -1. Any loading exceeding +.5 or -.5 was considered significant (Brown, 1993). The factor scores were the scores each participant assigned different statements. The loadings were the correlations between the factor scores of each participant that either grouped them into the same Q type or separated them into different types. Secondly, during the analysis, a Varimax rotation of factors was conducted. This rotation was “necessary to create realistic loadings” (Moore, 2022) and to help illustrate important data in the results. To address our primary research question, the factor analysis revealed the different uses and gratification of different social media platforms for the different Q types. The researcher was able to examine the defining statements of each Q type and distinguish attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs for each Q type. To address our second research question, the researcher was able to also examine participants’ open-ended question answers regarding social media behavior like the amount of time they spent on it and how many platforms they actively participate on. The recommendations of a knowledgeable and experienced statistician were not considered.

**Results**

To assess the varying uses and gratifications of different social media platforms, specifically in the context of vacation planning, this Q sort was administered to nine participants over the course of five days, April 7 through April 11. Each participant’s ranking became a variable for the study and was eventually loaded into a group, or factor, of like variables, or rankings. The sorts for each group were then averaged to create a composite sort that represented the whole factor. Of the nine participants, all nine (100%) who began the sort finished it in one sitting and were not subject to any time restraints or limitations. Data from two participants were removed as they ended up alone in factors by themselves with low-reliability scores (0.8).

**Factor Interpretations**

***Factor 1 – Social media is a learning resource***

Participants in this group eagerly relied on social media as a reliable source on which they could seek out new information. This factor believed that there is a wealth of knowledge available on social media sites and frequently took advantage of that through social media sites.

This factor (n=3) had a composite reliability of .92 and accounted for 22% of the variance. This group was all Caucasian (n=3) and females ages 21-22 (n=3). They were additionally primarily Christian (n=2). The majority of this group does follow travel vloggers on YouTube (2, z = 1.01). YouTube is an important resource to this group when searching for information as they rely on it to learn about topics they are interested in (4, z=1.39). Additionally, they strongly disagree that Instagram is not a valid source of information (-4, z = -2.15), indicating their trust in the platform, and listed it as their primary social media in the following open-ended questions of the study. They not only believe social media can provide reliable information, but they seek it out by following travel vloggers on YouTube (9, z=1.01). This factor was also distinguished by its disagreement that they expect Pinterest to be entertaining (-2, z = -1.09)

 This group has traveled a significant amount and thinks it is a valuable experience. All respondents confirmed they had traveled internationally more than once and one stated, “it is eye-opening, it changes you as a person…meeting foreign people is an invaluable experience.” Another participant perpetuated their feelings towards social media for planning and stated, “YouTube is super helpful in getting a visual representation” and “Pinterest is used more for information.” One aspect of this group was their expectations for entertainment on different platforms. One participant in factor one stated, “I don’t think Pinterest is used for entertainment.” Based on their defining statements and comments, participants in this factor use social media platforms like search engines where they go to them with an informational purpose and expect to be informed on the platform they search for the information.

 Statements that ranked more positively for Factor one than Factor three were: **1)** I use YouTube to learn about certain topics I am interested in, **2)** I follow travel vloggers on YouTube, and **3)** I use Instagram to learn about certain topics. Statements ranked more negative for this factor than the other were: **1)** I do not think Instagram is a valid source of information, **2)** I do not find travel/tourism videos on YouTube helpful when planning vacations, and **3)** I frequently follow the links in bios on Instagram accounts. For the full factor array, see Figure 1 – Composite Q Sort for Factor 1.



***Factor 2 – Social media is entertainment***

Factor 2 saw social media as a means of entertainment. Unlike Factor 1, this group used the majority of social media platforms for entertainment purposes and did not use any platform to learn. They were not untrusting of the information on social media, they simply had different uses of the platforms than Factor 1. Factor 2 (n=4) had a composite reliability of .91 and accounted for 23% of the variance. Factor 2 consisted of all Caucasian females, ages 21 – 23 (n=4).

Factor 2 overall believes that content on social media should be entertaining as shown through their composite sort. One distinguishing statement of this factor is they expect content on my Instagram feed to be entertaining (4, z = 2.39). When considering the uses of platforms, this group adamantly would not use most social media platforms for planning purposes, specifically looking at Twitter and Facebook (-4; -1.45, -3; -1.24). Other distinguishing statements of this factor were that they did not feel strongly about using Twitter to learn and they do not use Pinterest frequently (0; -0.13, 0; -0.19).

This factor believed that social media was more for entertainment purposes than informational uses and when it came to finding quality information, one participant stated that they “find more travel inspiration on website searches than social media.” This is in contrast to Factor 1 which essentially used social media as search engines. They also uniformly agreed that “Twitter and Facebook are [their] least used platforms.” Similar to Factor 1, however, they also had all traveled internationally. However, where Factor 1 quoted travel as a passion, much of Factor 2 traveled for educational purposes like study abroad trips. In these cases, much of the trip is planned out for the students participating and less planning is required of the traveler.

Statements that ranked higher for Factor 2 were **1)** I expect content on my Instagram to be entertaining, **2)** I expect YouTube videos to be entertaining, and **3)** I frequently follow the link in bios on Instagram accounts. The statements that ranked lower for this factor were **1)** If I wanted to know the best spots to visit in a new city, I would go to YouTube to find that information, **2)** I would use Facebook to help me plan a vacation, and **3)** I would use Twitter to look for information about travel and vacations. For the full factor array, see Figure 2 – Composite Sort for Factor 2 below.



***Inferential Statistical Results***

As the purpose of this study was to form a hypothesis rather than prove one, no hypothesis tests were performed.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The study conducted involved Q methodology regarding the uses and gratifications of social media platforms for vacation planning. Based on the findings discussed in the results, two major groups of social media users were discovered: those who use it to learn and those who use it as entertainment. The results produced two-factor interpretations based on the factor analysis that was conducted via the Kade software. The defining statements of the social media as a learning resource and social media as an entertainment resource were “I do not think Instagram is a valid information source” ranked at a value of -4 indicating strong disagreement with the statement and “I expect content on Instagram to be entertaining” ranked at a value of 4 indicating strong agreement with the statement respectively. These two statements each encompassed the basic beliefs and actions of the two different groups, indicating that in the study conducted, the sample, representing the larger population the research findings will be applied to in the creation of the social media campaign, can be divided into the two previously mentioned groups.

 Additionally, a key finding from the Q sort was that, although there are similarities in the uses and gratifications of the platforms across the two factors, different platforms do have different uses and gratifications. For Factor 1, social media is a learning resource, YouTube was viewed as an important resource when searing for information (n=3). However, in Factor 2, members agreed that YouTube videos should be entertaining and disagreed that they would visit YouTube to find information about touring a new city. Additionally, neither of these groups had strong opinions about their use of Facebook, indicating a lower use of the platform across the board. This interpretation of the use of different platforms will be useful when considering a social media campaign. For example, knowing that Facebook is used less than other platforms will allow for a better allocation of resources and not wasting excess time and money on Facebook posts that will not have as strong of an effect on the target audience. A Factor 1 member stated that “Pinterest is not used for entertainment” indicated content created for that platform should be visually appealing but have an informational purpose.

 Lastly, one key finding was the use of websites in vacation planning. One Factor 2 member stated that they “find more travel inspiration on website searcher than social media.” This is useful because it reveals where they are currently searching. Using this finding that Factor 2 members do not expect informational content on their social media feed, in contrast to Factor 1 members who almost use social media as a search engine, the campaign can create posts that present entertaining content like viewers are expecting while planting the idea of travel in their minds in a way they are receptive to, such as through entertainment. This may result in more traffic to the social media platform where more information or access to information will be located, therefore encouraging the idea of travel.

 These findings helped to answer the preliminary research questions of the different uses people have for different social media platforms and what social media people use for planning. Some variables that may have affected these results were the sample pool. The participants were all younger people who rely largely on their parents to plan vacations. Gathering a larger sample size would help to provide answers from people who more frequently plan vacations. One strength of this study was the findings regarding the uses for the platforms mentioned, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter. There was significant data found regarding the uses of these platforms that would help create a strategic and effective social media campaign. A weakness was the small sample size examined. Additionally, more social media could have been examined, like TikTok as many participants noted that they often saw tourism-related content on that platform.

 The findings from this study were largely in line with the findings of prior literature regarding this topic. They are in line with Katz et. al.’s research over uses and gratifications in media which states that “diversion, personal relationships, personal identity, and surveillance” are media gratifications (1973). In this research, entertainment would represent Katz’s diversion and information would represent surveillance. Additionally, a study by Pike et. al. examining the uses and gratifications of social media platforms in international planning also found similar results in that people use social media for entertainment and informational needs, among other findings (Pike et. al., 2019).

Though this research is in line with prior research, it is still significant and fills various gaps in research. For example, Katz’s research was conducted before the advent of social media and so does not explicitly examine the uses of the platforms, which have various intricacies due to their niche nature. Additionally, although Pike et. al.’s study looks at a similar problem as this research, it does not utilize Q methodology and thus the data relays different information. This study is able to gather the qualitative data of the varying viewpoints and then quantify it as opposed to Pike’s study which used a survey among other methods (Pike et. al., 2019). The unique nature of Q methodology presents a benefit to this study as it allows for and even emphasizes the qualitative nature of one’s perspective, which when examining uses and gratifications is exactly the desired outcome.

 A limitation of this study was the participant size. A precursory group of nine participants were examined and participated in this study, resulting in the two factor groupings. More participants would result in more factors representing different viewpoints and more diverse and helpful data. Additionally, not including TikTok prevented gathering data regarding the very popular platform. Its absence in the study was noted by several participants, which infers that valuable data could be gathered by including it.

 In summary, the study conducted revealed two factors, one that emphasized social media for entertainment and one that emphasized social media for information. Knowing these two uses and how they vary among platforms will be significant when creating a social media campaign in that it reveals what kind of content people are receptive to receiving and consuming on which platforms. This will correspond with an effective social media campaign that achieves its set objectives.

 The potential next steps would be to reconsider the statements to ensure that they all effectively answer the research questions. Additionally, statements regarding TikTok should be included. Additionally, a larger and more targeted sample size should be identified and recruited to participate. This would gather data from a more relevant and reliable sample population.

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**Appendix**

**Q Methodology Form**

Instagram

1. I use Instagram to learn about certain topics I am interested in.
2. I expect content on my Instagram feed to be entertaining.
3. I frequently follow the links in bios on Instagram accounts.
4. I would use Instagram to help me plan a vacation.
5. I do not think Instagram is a valid source of information.

YouTube

1. I use YouTube to learn about certain topics I am interested in.
2. I expect YouTube to be entertaining.
3. I do not find travel/tourism videos on YouTube helpful when planning vacations.
4. I follow travel vloggers on YouTubers.
5. If I wanted to know the best spots to visit in a new city, I would go to YouTube to find that information.

Pinterest

1. I use Pinterest to learn about certain topics I am interested in.
2. I expect to be entertained on Pinterest
3. I often follow the websites linked in pins.
4. When I am looking for travel inspiration or tips, I think of Pinterest as a resource.
5. I do not frequently get on Pinterest.

Facebook

1. I use Facebook to learn about certain topics I am interested in.
2. I follow businesses on Facebook.
3. I expect to be entertained when I get on Facebook.
4. I would use Facebook to help me plan a vacation.
5. I do not use Facebook frequently.

Twitter

1. I use Twitter to learn about certain topics I am interested in.
2. I follow travel influencers on Twitter.
3. I use Twitter to follow businesses.
4. I expect to be entertained when I get on Twitter
5. I would use Twitter to look for information about travel and vacations

**Open-ended Questions**

You will now be asked some questions that correspond to the statements you MOST AGREED with and those you MOST DISAGREED with. You will also be asked some open-ended and demographic questions.

**a) Why did you choose the statements you most agreed with?**

**b) Why did you choose the statements you most disagreed with?**

**c) What social media platforms do you use when planning vacations?**

**d) Where do you find information about travel and tourism?**

**e) Have you traveled internationally? If so why?**

**Please answer the following demographic questions.**

**a) What is your gender?**

1. **Male**
2. **Female**
3. **Other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**b) What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**c) What is your ethnicity?**

1. **American Indian or Alaska Native**
2. **Asian**
3. **Black or African American**
4. **Caucasian**
5. **Hispanic, Latino, Spanish**
6. **Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander**
7. **Other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**d) What is your political affiliation?**

1. **Democrat**
2. **Independent**
3. **Republican**
4. **4. Other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**e) What is your religion?**

1. **Christian**
2. **Muslim**
3. **Catholic**
4. **Buddhist**
5. **Atheist**
6. **Agnostic**
7. **Jewish**
8. **Mormon**
9. **Non-religious**
10. **Other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**f) What is your marital status?**

1. **Married**
2. **Widowed**
3. **Divorced**
4. **Separated**
5. **Single**

**6. Other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**g) How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**h) What was your yearly income before taxes in 2021?**

1. **Less than $10,000**
2. **$10,000 to $19,999**
3. **$20,000 to $29,999**
4. **$30,000 to $39,999**
5. **$40,000 to $49,999**
6. **$50,000 to $59,999**
7. **$60,000 to $69,999**
8. **$70,000 to $79,999**
9. **$80,000 to $89,999**
10. **$90,000 to $99,999**
11. **$100,000 to $149,999**
12. **$150,000 or more**

**I) What is your education level?**

1. **Less than high school degree**
2. **High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)**
3. **Some college but no degree**
4. **Associate degree (2-year)**
5. **Bachelor's degree (4-year)**
6. **Master's degree**
7. **Doctoral degree**
8. **Professional degree (JD, MD)**

**J) What state do you currently live in? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Q Methodology Results**

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**Timeline**

|  |
| --- |
| **THESIS/PROJECT TIMELINE****JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION****TIMELINE REPORT****\*\*Please note that this is a sample and you can customize it to fit your timeline and expected date of graduation.** |
| **Student Name:\_Rachel Orland\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_****Work Phone:\_\_(405)441-3819\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Cell:\_(405)441-3819\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Home:\_(405)799-7008\_\_\_\_\_\_****Email:\_\_Rachel.r.orland-1@ou.edu\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_****Thesis Proposal Timeline** |
| **Chair: \_\_Dr. Jensen Moore\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_****Committee Members: 1. \_\_\_Unknown\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ email:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Phone:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_****Committee Members: 2. \_\_\_\_\_Unknown\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ email:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Phone:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_****Working Title:\_ Uses and Gratification of Social Media** **Platforms in Tourism: A Q Methodology Study\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_****Date Signaling Start of Proposal Writing Process: \_01/14\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_****Projected Proposal Defense Date: \_12/16\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_****Comments on current progress/status: I am currently working on forming a committee and I expect to finish by 05/27.** |
|  |
| **Month** | **Activity** | **Status** |
| **SEPTEMBER** |
| 1st – 31st | Gather data for literature review* Target 10 to 20 articles/week
 | **Not started** |
| 15th – 31st | Begin reviewing literature and taking notes* Begin categorization of literature and create outline
* Begin documenting specific questions, ideas, facts
 | **Not started** |
| **OCTOBER** |
| 1ST – 16TH | Complete review of literature and begin compiling literature review | **Not started** |
| 5th – 16th | Schedule meeting with committee chair and members in Norman | **Not started** |
| 16th – 31th | Complete literature review and formulate research questions* Determine methodology
* Begin composing draft proposal

Meet with committee members to discuss proposal | **Not started** |
| **NOVEMBER** |
| 1st – 7th | Complete first draft of proposal* Submit draft proposal to committee for feedback
 | **Not started** |
| 8th – 21st | Continue to refine and finalize proposal* Receive feedback from committee members
 | **Not Started** |
| 21st – 30st | Break |  |
| **DECEMBER** |
| 1st – 7th | Finalize proposal | **Not started** |
| 7th | Submit finalized proposal to committee | **Not started** |
| 7th – 18th | Await signoff from committee on final proposal* Make any necessary changes if needed
 | **Not started** |
| 31st | Schedule and defend proposal on or before the 31st | **Not started** |

**Project Deliverables**

***Description***

The advent of social media was around the 1980’s when “the internet’s growth enabled the introduction of online communication services such as CompuServe, America Online, and prodigy” (*The evolution of social media,* 2021). It allows people to connect with friends and take part in conversations with brands. The interactivity aspects of social media have recently played a large role in digital marketing as brands invent more innovative ways to converse with their consumers. Merriam-Webster defines social media as “forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users can create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)” (*The evolution of social media*, 2021). The goal of social media is to help break down barriers and bring people together and provide its users a creative outlet to freely market their own products and services. It is available in multiple countries although some, such as North Korea and Russia have stricter policies on what their citizens may use. There are also translation features that allow users to read captions in their native language. Currently, 4.48 billion people use social media worldwide (*Social Media Statistics Details*, n.d.).

***Reason for Choice/Benefit***

Social media, without adding in sponsored content or paid posts, is free media and encourages audience engagement. It is easy for brands to start an account and begin taking advantage of an online presence. However, there is also sufficient strategy needed to create a campaign that reaches its full potential. Countless brands have utilized social media campaigns in the past that have been widely successful and even gone viral. This was also chosen because it is an area of interest for the researcher and an area that requires constant research as it is fast-paced and ever-changing.

Nearly all of the target demographic of this campaign, anywhere from 18-year-old to 40-year-olds, are active on social media and engage daily with content put out by brands on different platforms. Creating a social media campaign for a tourism company would be an easy and efficient way to reach a wide audience and get their message on the right platforms.

Many social media users have different uses and gratifications for social media platforms. A comprehensive social media campaign will be able to address all of these with content tailored individually to the platform to put information that the user wants to see in front of them. In the context of tourism, it will put convincing promotional material in front of users to combat negative emotions towards traveling and persuade audience members to travel to a specific destination.

***Executive Summary***

This project will create a social media campaign across various social media platforms for a tourism company in attempt to increase acceptance and action in traveling internationally after COVID-19. It will be created by one student researcher for varying platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok, and others. It will begin in the Fall of 2022.

The basis for the campaign will be to adapt to the current uses and gratifications of different audiences to create tailored content for different social media platforms in an attempt to persuade viewers to travel or affect their acceptance of traveling. While many are excited to travel with the decrease in cases, there are still many who are concerned. This campaign will address concerns and create a desire for international travel.

A Q methodology study was conducted to better understand the uses and gratifications of different social media platforms. This gathered qualitative and quantitative information regarding the topic and provide and useful mix of information. Statements ranked in the study asked about specific behaviors of the participants on different social media platforms and expectations of content and had them rank the statements from most agree to least agree. This provided a thorough understanding of the sample’s uses and gratifications of the social media platforms mentioned. There were also open-ended questions at the end that asked for elaboration on answers and demographic information. From this data, a comprehensive campaign will be created that will consist of a mix of specific promotional posts and evergreen content that can be reused in the coming years.

The sample size was small and so only two different factor groupings were found in the study: those who viewed social media as an informational resource and those who viewed it as entertainment. This revealed what platforms certain audiences would go to search for information regarding vacation planning along with what platforms they would not expect to find valid information. From this data, the researcher would recommend that a target audience be narrowed so as to be able to identify which factors’ rankings will be focused on for the creation of a campaign. For example, factor two in this study only saw Instagram as entertainment and did not think it contained valid information. This factor could either be removed as a target audience or could serve as a guiding group to create a campaign that would reach their more elusive eyes. They were indifferent to YouTube and Twitter so these platforms could be a way to get entertaining information in front of them in a manner they are receptive to.

***Project Description***

This project will be a comprehensive social media campaign for a tourism company that seeks to increase acceptance and action regarding international tourism. It will span across several platforms and address a wide target audience. It will be based off data gathered by the research conducted.

Campaign objectives

* Awareness
	+ The campaign will seek to address the awareness of audience members regarding international travel and the chosen tourism company. This objective will be judged by social media metrics such as reach, click-through rates of links to company website pages, and engagement.
* Acceptance
	+ The campaign will also seek to improve the acceptance of audience members of international traveling after COVID-19 and improve opinions regarding international destinations. This will be evaluated by social media sentiments and qualitative social media data such as comments and direct messages regarding more information. Asking for more information will show that not only has the awareness objective been met by viewers seeing the information, but the acceptance objective has been met through their interest in the information and desire for more information.
* Action
	+ The campaign will ultimately seek to increase action regarding travel and tourism. This will be evaluated through the conversion rates of online social media users to products and services of the company. It will depend on the chosen company but if the researcher partner with a hotel, this would look like increased room bookings, or if it is an international event it would be increased attendance.

Potential benefits

* Layout
	+ The company partnered with for this campaign would be able to reimplement and reuse this campaign for future use. Original posts create could be posted once and used as template or even reposted in hopes of reaching a new audience. This would provide the company with an easy-to-implement campaign to increase awareness, acceptance, and action.
* Credibility
	+ The data gathered from the Q methodology research will reveal which platforms users find credible and place informative content on these to earn the audience’s trust and acceptance. Understanding the audience’s opinion of different platforms is crucial to creating an effective campaign.

**Biography of the Author**

 Rachel Orland is a senior undergraduate student graduating with her Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and Mass Communication with a focus in Public Relations in the spring of 2022. She is also an accelerated master’s student who expects to graduate with her Master’s in Strategic Communication in the spring of 2023. She is currently working as a fellow for Saxum, a public relations firm in OKC. She also does freelance social media work for small tourism companies. After graduating with her master’s degree, she hopes to work in entertainment public relations. She would like to work internationally to help form cross-continental relationships and learn more about international cultures.