

SOCIAL MEDIA IN TOURISM MARKETING: TOURISTS' DESTINATION SELECTION

Denis Chetcuti

A dissertation submitted to the Institute of Tourism Studies in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the bachelor's degree in International Hospitality Management (Hons.) Institute of Tourism Studies, Malta May 2022.

Declaration of Authenticity



Name & Surname: Denis Chetcuti

Programme: Bachelor's Degree in International Hospitality Management (Hons.)

Title of Research: Social media in tourism marketing: Tourists' destination selection

Declaration:

I hereby declare that this research study is based on the outcome of self-made research. I, as the authentic author, declare that this research study is my own composition, and has not been previously produced for any other qualification.

The research study was conducted under the supervision of Mr. Martin Debattista

20/05/2022

20/05/2022
Date


Signature

ABSTRACT

Internet access has resulted in the rapid development of social media, bringing together users from around the world. Everything from leisure to travel and tourism is impacted by social media. It was the purpose of this research to find out what role social media has had in influencing people's holiday destination choices and how they make those decisions. Using sub-goals to focus on how travel and decision-making were impacted during Covid - 19, social media marketing has become effective.

Research shows which social media platforms are used the most regularly. Where they acquire their inspirations for the next location. Travel plans are affected by social media. From where they get the information about their destination. Marketers acknowledge the importance of social media marketing. How social media is being used by marketers to attract customers before and during COVID-19 and the tactics used by marketers. As the value of reading reviews grows, examining facts before acting is crucial. The study found that participants were more confident in TripAdvisor and Booking.com than other sites. Despite the low average, social media messages influenced individuals' holiday plans. Most participants relied on social media, search engines, and family/friends for information. Covid-19 impacted some participants' local and foreign decision-making. These studies showed how social media and other variables impact vacation decisions. It allows marketers to develop and distribute content with a bigger audience to penetrate foreign markets and retain advertising amid the Covid-19 epidemic. "Social media marketing" includes sponsored ads and other paid promotions. Effective "boosted" posts. Too much information causes people to lose interest in a trip, according to interviews. Facebook tends to target an older demographic, whereas Instagram's following is younger. Hotel marketing materials must be informed and interesting to be successful. It lets marketers tell whatever story they want. The marketer may utilise social media to create useful content and advertise their product or service. A questionnaire was conducted with the local population via social media platforms and interviews were conducted with local marketers of five- star hotel and DMO.

Key Words: social media, Marketing, Tourisms, Destination, Decision-making.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my greatest gratitude for this thesis was made possible by my research tutor Mr. Martin Debattista and his direction, help and support were essential. It was a joy to learn from him. Thank you for all you have done for me, which has also helped me focus on my research and achieve my goal. Sincere thanks to my family for their unwavering support during the process of achieving this goal. Last but not least, I would like to thank everyone who contributed to my academic success and assisted me in completing my degree.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| ABSTRACT | 3 |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | 4 |
| List of Tables..... | 7 |
| List of Figures..... | 8 |
| Chapter- 1.0 Introduction..... | 1 |
| Chapter- 2.0 Literature Review | 3 |
| 2.1- Impact of Social Media platforms on Tourism | 3 |
| 2.2.1- Different social media and uses. | 4 |
| 2.2.2 - Influences on tourists’ content sharing..... | 5 |
| 2.2.3- Social media Statistics..... | 5 |
| 2.2.4- Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) on social media marketing..... | 6 |
| 2.3- Demographic of tourists using internet and social media..... | 6 |
| 2.4- Destination Marketing on social media and its influence on Tourists. | 7 |
| 2.4.1- Visual Destination Marketing | 8 |
| 2.4.2- Destination Marketing and DMO’s..... | 9 |
| 2.5- Effects of Covid-19 on Travel and Tourism how travel and decision making were influenced during covid - 19. | 9 |
| Chapter- 3.0 Methodology | 13 |
| 3.1- Summary..... | 13 |
| 3.2- The purpose and research approach..... | 13 |
| 3.3- Research Design | 13 |
| 3.4- Methods used | 14 |
| 3.5- Selection of Participants | 15 |
| Chapter- 4.0 Analysis and Discussion of the Results | 16 |
| 4.1- Tourists’ destination selection Questionnaire. | 16 |
| 4.2- Summary of Questionnaire results..... | 31 |
| 4.3- What role does visual marketing play in your social media strategy?..... | 32 |
| 4.4- How are you using social media to cater for potential visitors’ needs and interests? | 33 |
| 4.5- What are you doing to persuade viewers to select, view and share your content? | 34 |
| 4.6- What strategies do you find most effective to increase sales? | 35 |

| | |
|--|----|
| 4.7- Did your social media strategy change during the Covid-19 Pandemic? If yes, in what way? | 35 |
| 4.8- What is the biggest challenge that most social media practitioners have? | 37 |
| 4.9- What online platforms does the business mainly focus on in context of social media marketing? What type of content do you find most effective to increase exposure?..... | 38 |
| 4.10- Which platforms are you finding the most productive, either in return on investment (ROI) or in engagement? | 39 |
| 4.11- Are you refreshing your social media marketing strategies with a more modern concept? If yes how often? | 40 |
| Chapter- 5.0 Summary of the interviews | 41 |
| 5.1- Summary of interview with the marketing department of a destination marketing organization responsible for the local area..... | 41 |
| 5.2- Summary of interview with marketing department of a Five-star Hotel..... | 41 |
| 5.3- Summary of interview with Marketing department of DMO who takes care of foreign affairs. | 42 |
| 5.4- Similarities in the interview results and discussion of the results. | 43 |
| Chapter- 6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations | 45 |
| 6.1- Research Limitations..... | 46 |
| 6.2- Recommendations | 46 |
| Chapter- 7.0 References: | 48 |
| Chapter- 8.0 Appendix: | 57 |
| 8.1- Questionnaire screenshots: | 57 |
| 8.2- Consent Forms | 63 |
| 8.3- Interview Questions | 67 |

List of Tables

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Table 1: Pre- Covid-19 travel frequency representation..... | 17 |
| Table 2: Social Platforms representation. | 18 |
| Table 3: From where Tourists get inspiration representation..... | 19 |
| Table 4: Review of destination representation. | 20 |
| Table 5: Reliability of reviews of different website representation..... | 22 |
| Table 6: Representation of participants scale of how influenced they are with information provided on social media. | 22 |
| Table 7: Changes in participants itinerary because of social media representation. | 23 |
| Table 8: Where tourists do their research for their future location representation. | 24 |
| Table 9: Scale of Covid-19 effects on future trips..... | 25 |
| Table 10: To determine whether individuals are being impacted by Covid-19 | 26 |
| Table 11: individuals who went on a local vacation..... | 31 |

List of Figures

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Figure 1: The world's most used social platforms..... | 21 |
| Figure 2: Common words in responses to Question 14..... | 28 |
| Figure 3: Questions number 14 full answers..... | 29 |
| Figure 4: Questions number 14 full answers..... | 30 |
| Figure 5: Questions number 14 full answers..... | 31 |
| Figure 6: Questions number 14 full answers..... | 31 |

Chapter- 1.0 Introduction

Technology and tourism have come a long way and with the turn of the century they are more intertwined than ever before. The introduction of the internet has revolutionized a lot of different industries, especially the tourism industry. It has connected the world, it has brought globalization the trading and sharing of skills, ideas, cultural ways, data, and information countries together. Technology has created a new life one can call it a second life on the internet. Thanks to the internet, social media has exploded companies such as Facebook which has 2.9 billion users around the world (Kemp, 2022). With the help of modern devices such as mobile phones, desktop computers, laptops, smart watches, and tablets also having internet wherever one goes people became very dependent on such devices especially when it comes to deciding a destination to travel to. People now a days do not realize how influential social media has become in order to look up a destination. In this post-modern era when an individual decides to travel the first thing he would do is search for the destination on the internet.

Decision-making is a process that all travelers do and in all its phases, social media serves as a main source of information. The process involves the design, use, and evaluation of tourist goods, with information serving as a key component throughout (Briandana and Dwityas, 2022). Nowadays, the tourist industry relies on information and communication technology for promotional activities, sales, and customer connections, and one of the most prevalent methods to communicate is through social media. When a tourist is deciding on a place, the most crucial information comes from internet influence. The link involving travel and technology is deeper than before, with companies increasingly using social media to advertise their products and engage with customers in a more personal and intimate way. Because of the internet's pervasiveness in modern life, social media may be one of the most effective techniques for destination marketing and advertising. Social media has been demonstrated to be an effective tool for communication, quickly spreading over the region. Visitors are among the businesses that have reaped the most benefits from the internet, though as a result, social media has become an integral component of any local or national tourist promotion and planning. The study will look at the role and impact of various social media platforms when it comes to selecting a tourist location. This study will also investigate how social media has influenced decision making and the factors that influence how people choose their vacation destination. The study will

investigate what makes social media marketing so effective nowadays with sub-goals focusing on how travel and decision making were influenced during Covid - 19.

Chapter- 2.0 Literature Review

2.1- Impact of Social Media platforms on Tourism

The phrase "social media" can be defined as Internet-based channels that allow individuals to engage and selectively self-present in opportunistic ways, either in real-time or asynchronously. User-generated material and the sense of engagement with others are valuable to both large and limited audiences (Carr, and Hayes, 2015). Social media is internet-based and allows users to quickly exchange content such as personal information, documents, films, and images via electronic means. It may be characterized as a combination of connections, behaviors, feelings, attitudes, and interactions between customers and brands in which there is multidirectional communication and experience sharing using enhanced communication methods (Mróz-Gorgoń, and Peszko, 2016.). Today, the internet is used by 5 billion people worldwide, accounting for 63 % of the global total. Internet users are also increasing, with one of the most recent data suggesting that the world's online population increased by about 200 million in the year leading up to April 2022 (Datareportal, 2022). According to estimates, there will be 4.65 billion social media users worldwide in April 2022, accounting for 58.7% of the entire global population. Social media user counts have also increased in the recent year, with 326 million active users joining the platform since from period last year (Datareportal, 2022). What this means is social media has gained a lot of popularity in the last few years as it has integrated into our everyday life. It was found out that people spend an average of 2 hours and 27 minutes using social media every day. It provides the opportunity for its users to meet new people, upload pictures and videos, join groups and organizations, and create professional networks. People seek information about all sorts of things they evaluate and make a decision (Paul, Roy, and Mia, 2019).

According to Stackla, 86 % were enthusiastic in each place after viewing user-generated material about it. According to SocialToaster, 84% of millennials are likely to decide their own holiday depending on another's social post. Social advertising may be an efficient way to raise brand recognition and target a specific population that is likely to engage in your goods and services (Parks, 2020). It was also found out that, 49 % of Americans think Facebook is the social media network that most encourages them to travel. As per Smart Insights, 55 % of individuals enjoy social pages relating to upcoming vacations and one in every five tourists uses

social media to evaluate their vacation arrangements (Parks, 2020). TripAdvisor is now typically used to read comments regarding destinations and other products such as restaurants, hotels, attractions, museums, tours and work as a review and standards method for tourists. Thanks to this tourist can have some sort of expected experience with the help of pictures, sounds and videos shared through social media beforehand (Pabel and Prideaux, 2016).

2.2.1- Different social media and uses.

In a separate study it was identified, 36.5% of individuals use social media for ideas and inspiration for travelling, while 60% share images from their travels on social media each week over a million travel related searches are being done, so whether we are planning a trip or taking a holiday, travel and social media are inextricably linked (Temblador, 2022). How has this changed tourism? Social Media is being used to search, manage, distribute and categories travel stories. Travel bloggers use Blogger and Twitter, communicate through Facebook and TripAdvisor, Media sharing on YouTube, Pinterest, snapchat and TikTok. Most of the young generation tend to rely on social media when choosing a destination and it is also common that they are inspired by a post shared on social media by someone who travelled to a destination (Roth, E., 2022). Other social media which are popular are Foursquare, Trover, spotted by locals and Couchsurfing. These have various uses to maximize one's experience at a certain destination (Roth, E., 2022).

Social media is utilized in a variety of ways, both for leisure and for business. Social media may be utilized to improve the effectiveness of a company's present marketing strategy (Dallimore, 2011.). In recent years, social media has changed the way we communicate and interact with one another. Various social media sites drew people of all ages to participate. The constant evolution of mass communication has had an impact on how businesses connect with their consumers especially in the tourism industry (Yao, 2016,). Tourism businesses are using social media as a method to reach out to more clients. Tourism is becoming more popular as a result of social media. Tourism and hospitality social media have developed enormously in the recent decade as a result of technological advancements such as Web 2.0. Thanks to these platforms, the tourism businesses increase their rating and recognition among the tourism industry in order to attract mass travelers (Mkono, and Tribe, 2017.). These platforms include

social Media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Pinterest, and Reddit (Walsh, 2021).

2.2.2 - Influences on tourists' content sharing.

In a study done by Arica et al., according to the findings, environmental, relational, and security issues influenced travelers' willingness to share their vacation experiences on social media, however personal concerns did not. Awareness of environmental issues was the most effective strategy to reduce participant sharing. This implies that improving environmental elements will enhance the likelihood of tourism consumers sharing material. Smaller measures toward improving security and privacy concerns will also increase the likelihood of sharing material on social media (Arica et al., 2022). It was also found out that the motives of charity, personal satisfaction, and self-actualization had a beneficial influence on visitors' willingness to share their trip stories on social media. Personal fulfilment and self-actualization were the most significant driving elements. These findings indicate that sharing behaviors may not be observable when people do not believe social media content posting is valuable in terms of achieving their own objectives (Arica et al., 2022).

2.2.3- Social media and travel statistics.

Different social media have different effects on the decision-making process in a survey by WeSwap found out that 28% of Millennials prefer to use social media and is trusted more over other sources such as magazines, television, Google, and TripAdvisor reviews (Haines, 2022). In a NYU study it shows 59% of families use travel websites such as TripAdvisor and Expedia were resources they used for information or inspiration for choosing a destination and what to do, while 10% said Instagram, 74% said search engines, 51% said travel review websites, 30% said social media, 12% said travel agents, and 8% said blogs (NYU, 2019). Travelers in order to plan their leisure travel, 58.2 percent of travelers preferred to use any user-generated content, 32.5 percent preferred hotel reviews, 29.6 percent preferred travel reviews of destinations, 30.8 percent preferred reviews of restaurants or activities, 13.5 percent preferred travel itinerary or blogs, 33.3 percent preferred Facebook, and 26.3 percent preferred group discount websites.

2.2.4- Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) on social media marketing.

In regards of adapting to changes in digital communication and social media platforms, as well as the shift in tendencies toward individual tourism, the MTA views these changes as possibilities rather than challenges (Vladimirova, 2011). In this regard, MTA has developed additional efforts for participation in new media, web portals, and e-marketing, prompting the construction of a digital asset management system. MTA developed an online web content management system that includes a library of high-resolution pictures and videos of the Maltese Islands. These are accessible to the public and some were developed to assist future travelers, tour operators, and journalists to attract more tourists. Anyone can use the website to download whatever content they require, whether as a keepsake or for commercial purposes (Vladimirova, 2011).

2.3- Demographic of tourists using internet and social media.

In a study conducted by (Ansted and Anandkumar, 2016) it was found that tourists during the pre-trip preparation who are between 20 – 30 years old are the most likely to use social media websites such as photo and video sharing and social networking and the least likely to use review sites. People over the age of 40 are more likely to use review websites. During the trip 20 – 30 were more likely to use social media platforms and the 40 – 50 group were the least likely to use social media but were more likely to use review sites and in post trip younger people are more likely to use social media to share their travels and 30-50 were more likely to use review sites post trip. In a separate study that was conducted by (Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides, 2012) it was revealed that 78% of the participants after the trip used social media mainly to the purpose of sharing photos and experiences with family and friends. Before the travelling stage 45% of the participants used social media in order to search for ideas where to go for a holiday were as 42% used social media to look up attractions and activities that can be done at the destination. During the holiday 50% of the participants said they used social media to stay connected with their family and friends were as 30% used social media to look up holiday related information only 17% used social media during the holiday to post comments and reviews of their experience.

(Simms, U Gretzel - Enter 2013 Conference on Information and ..., 2013) Did a survey with a sample size of 2526 individuals and it was found that 57.4% of the participants have used online generated content such as social media websites for planning their latest trip. It was also

found that when travelling to an international destination there was a use of social media especially with Generation Y which was born in 1983 onwards were more likely to use social media from three different studies, we can see a pattern where social media has been a major influence when planning, during and after the trip was done. (Pabel, Prideaux, 2016) conducted a study to understand the use of social media in tourism pre planning information search and it was found that out of 986 participants 27% used social media specially to look up information regarding the destination. The top websites used out of those 27% were TripAdvisor with 73.5%, followed by Travel blogs with 45.5%, Facebook 42.2%, Twitter 4%, Flickr 3.3%, and other websites which added up to 6.2%. In the same study it was also found the top three most popular social media sites used were TripAdvisor with 49.1%, Travel blogs with a 29.9% and Facebook 16.5%.

2.4- Destination Marketing on social media and its influence on Tourists.

Destination marketing and management may be defined as a dynamic, visitor-centered strategy to a location's economic and cultural growth that balances and combines the interests of tourists, service providers, and the communities. Destination marketing is a marketing strategy used in the tourism industry that includes advertising a specific area and its benefits rather than a company's product or service. The primary goal of destination marketing is to raise client awareness and interest in the place prior they visit (Team, 2022). The development of marketing and destination management has tremendously aided the tourist industry's continued growth throughout the years. Population increase, economic wealth, corporate expansion, and age-related travel habits, as well as social elements such as culture, the internet, and social media, all assist the tourism sector shape and adapt in response to the demands and desires of today's travelers, who are spoiled for choice and made today's tourism marketing and highly competitive one (Wang, 2011.).

Now a days destination marketers have great tools, better than ever with the help of social media, it is a current way to reach out to customers. With all the user generated media it is becoming increasingly easy and quick to look up a destination and interact directly with various businesses to help the individual decide on a location and get the best possible outcome (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). With the help of social media marketers can influence the masses as the goal of destination marketing is to attract the attention of the customers to come to their

destination. In a study it was found that businesses will clearly sell their destination across many social media channels in order to obtain a cost advantage over conventional marketing and advertising techniques. This is done by sharing messages from other customers, promotional information, business activities shared online and by sharing comments and likes (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). A study by Fink et. Al (2018) was conducted to find out the long-term impact of social media marketing with celebrity endorsement and it was found that this approach has proven that it can be long lasting investment as much as four years which makes it an immensely powerful tool. This method can be applied to a destination in order to increase the purchasing intent of destinations (Fink et al., 2020.).

Destination marketing uses the emotions of potential customers because the strategy is based on selling the experience and makes them think of what it can be like if they decide to go and to boost the reputation and interest in the set destination (Team, 2022). It was found that social media has elevated the manner on how marketing of a destination is done it allows the tourist to communicate with not just the destination prior visits but also with other tourists who had visited the place beforehand thanks to this the tourist can acquire large amount of information and opinions regarding the place. Such information can be gathered by Posts, blogging, sharing of experiences, photos, and ideas (Kiráľová and Pavlíčka, 2015). The way to market has changed because of the internet. The tourism industry has changed to be both the information provider and the sales channel. By marketing images, videos, and other information portals of destinations through social media tourists from all over the world can examine them and be influenced to visit the destination (Kiráľová and Pavlíčka, 2015).

2.4.1- Visual Destination Marketing

There are many factors to consider when deciding where to go on vacation, and one of the most significant factors is the perception of a place by the public. This perception is known as the "tourist destination image" (TDI). The competitiveness of destination tourism is enhanced by a positive tourism image, which boosts visitor loyalty and satisfaction and supports the long-term growth of tourist destinations (Xiao, Fang, and Lin, 2020). It is becoming increasingly common for travellers to post their trip stories on social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter social networking sites (SNSs). Travel images have been uploaded by users to the network in the tens of millions. Consequently, scientists are increasingly focusing their attention

on SNS images to better comprehend TDI. SNS has more images of tourist sites than search engines, and these photos may be utilised to objectively portray their image (Zhang, 'et al.). Affective destination images and pleasant emotions are more likely to impact purchase decisions in advertisements. Images of locations have always been used to convey experiences and feelings and influence consumers in the tourist industry. A location's decision-making and behavioral processes are more intimately linked to its affective destination picture (Griffin 'et al.).

2.4.2- Destination Marketing and DMO's

With all these changes in marketing destinations Destination Management Organizations (DMO) had to change their strategies. The Destination Marketing Association International describes DMO as an entity that represents a specific location and assists in the development of communities with the help of travel and tourism policies and regulations (Pabel, and Prideaux, 2016). It is increasingly noticeable that DMO's need to incorporate social media in their marketing strategy. Such DMO are also responsible for advertising destinations, attracting new events, conventions, economic advantages of tourism to other countries (Pabel, and Prideaux, 2016). The introduction of social media has changed how tourists research and decide on destinations. For someone who has never visited the destination they would search on the internet for their main source of information through mass media platforms (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). At this stage, the tourist is being influenced by the Destination image provided. The Internet has made the destination image more dynamic given the option to review other users' opinions and content sharing (Hunter, 2016). By having online information influencing the destination image as a result DMO's can use the visitor's participation in the development of the destination image by delivering important and fair information in a way which is easily understood by the masses through proper marketing of the destination so DMO must encourage tourist to stay engaged with content creation particularly on social media (Molinillo et al., 2018).

2.5- Effects of Covid-19 on Travel and Tourism how travel and decision making were influenced during covid - 19.

The WHO designated Covid-19, a worldwide pandemic, in March 2020. Many countries responded by closing their airports and restricting travel as much as possible. This had drastic effects on the travel and tourism industry. International tourists had between 70-75% negative growth and there are 100 – 120 million direct tourism jobs at risk (Dong-Shang, C., 2021.).

Tourism has been one of the industries most impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic, with significant economic and social consequences. As per the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer (January 2021), foreign inbound tourism has dropped by 74% from about 1.5 billion in 2020 to 381 million in 2019, the lowest percentage ever recorded. Although all areas have been severely impacted, Asia and the Pacific have suffered more than any other, with an 84 % fall in foreign visitors, followed by the Middle East and Africa, with a 75 % decline. It is estimated that international tourist arrivals would take 2.5 to 4 years to recover to pre-crisis levels. Airlines' financial losses are anticipated to exceed USD 370 billion because of the drop in commercial flights, with Asia/Pacific accounting for 32% of the losses, followed by Europe (27%), and North America (24%) (CCSA, 2021). According to the ICAO projections (March 2021), worldwide passenger numbers in 2021 would be 44 to 56 percent lower than in 2019. This decrease in passenger would result in an additional USD 281 to 351 billion losses in gross passenger operation revenues for airlines.

According to the most recent available statistics, global inbound tourism more than doubled with +130%) in January 2022 relative to 2021. There are 18 million additional visitors reported globally during the first weeks of this year, which meets the overall rise for the entire year of 2021. While these numbers show the upward trend that began last year, the rate of recovery for January has been slowed by the appearance of the Omicron variety and the reinstatement of travel restrictions in certain areas. Despite a 71% drop in 2021, overseas visitors in January 2022 stayed 67% under pre-pandemic figures (UNWTO, 2022).

According to the National Statistics Office (NSO) in Malta inbound tourists in February 2020 was of 145,821 of which 143,353 came by Air transportation (NSO, 2022), this statistic is pre- covid as the first Covid-19 case in Malta was recorded on 7th March 2020 (Times of Malta, 2020). Comparing the inbound visitors' statistics of February 2021, it fell to 9,151 a drastic change from the previous year and later in February 2022 there is a recovery going up to 65,101 from 2021 to 2022 (NSO, 2022). During this time, new Covid-19-related restrictions were enforced in Malta, which had a direct impact on travel and tourism not just for residents but also for international visitors. Between March 8th and March 21st, 2020, a series of inbound flights were terminated, first from Milan and then throughout Italy. All passengers flying in from all

destinations were asked to stay in quarantine for 14 days upon arrival, and eventually all flights from/to all destinations were suspended (NSO, 2022).

This is an unprecedented moment where a virus has not just affected travel and tourism but all types of industries around the world (Dong-Shang, 2021.). Scholars believe that such an event was inevitable because adding the factors of globalization and the middle class travelling everywhere global tourism and population movement has resulted in further spreading of the virus (Wen, J., Kozak, M., Yang, S. and Liu, F., 2020). Following the decrease of Covid-19 in specific locations, tourism began to recover, with hotels, tourist destinations, restaurants, and transportation reopening. Nonetheless, a second wave has caused tourism activity to decline in several regions. (Collins-Kreiner, and Ram, 2020).

This threat to the tourism industry has altered all travel-related decisions in an instant. Comparing covid-19 pandemic with previous pandemics, the severity of this pandemic is much greater on most of the world's markets. Governments had to do lockdowns, quarantines, reduce inbound and outbound tourism and introduced that a vaccine is needed in order to travel. In different research it was found that local people of tourist destinations had mixed feelings and fear of the infection with lack of regard for the economic consequences of not having tourists. It was found that risk perceptions had some sort of an influence on the quality and safety of a place which resulted in a negative impact on tourists (Godovykh, M., Ridderstaat, J., Baker, C. and Fyall, A., 2021). Even though it has been said many times that the tourism industry is an exceptionally resilient one and it has the capacity to change, adjust and recover from catastrophize the problems that covid –19 has brought put the whole sector in a stress test (Vărzaru, A. A., Bocean, C. G., & Cazacu, M. (2021)). According to a study in South Korea the cancellation of tours, having facilities closing, access denied to tourism sites and the constant changes to air and sea itineraries were the most severe repercussions of Covid-19 in relation to local and other tourism destinations. Understandably the choice of travel during a pandemic is limited and hard but according to this study people's sensitivity towards the virus has decreased with time and the mass media has had a significant impact. It was found out that thanks to the advancements of vaccines and the spread of positive information by the media had increase the confidence of people to start travelling again. It also implies that appealing tourist places or items that appeal to visitors' inner requirements are essential to their success. Marketers must therefore

provide tailored or customized tourism products and services to gain visitors' interest (Wang, J., Choe, Y. and Song, H., 2021).

International tourism commenced its recuperation in January 2022, producing better results than in the previous year. In January 2021, global visitors more than doubled 130%, with a rise of 18 million (UNWTO, 2022). This is also the same growth as in the entire year of 2021 against 2020. Despite the positive findings, the Omicron variation as well as the reinstatement of travel restrictions in numerous places slowed the rate of recovery in January (UNWTO, 2022). According to research done by TripAdvisor 65% of leisure travelers did not travel at all internationally in 2020 but 47% of the global travelers said they would travel abroad in 2021. It was also found that 30% of all respondents said that they have no intention of traveling in 2021 (TripAdvisor, 2022). According to TripAdvisor, in 2021 between the months of January and April most hotel searches for trips were for domestic location whereas international trips were more sought after between the months of May – December. A report by Forbes said that Post – Pandemic indication show a “revenge spending” behavior is one of the factors that show that industry is recovering (Bird, 2022). In a similar survey by TravelPulse indicates that there is a Pent-up demand for travel because of stay-at-home orders (Janeen, 2022). It is interesting to notice in a Study done by TripAdvisor in 2021 said that the Covid-19 vaccines that the government are rolling out are having a direct influence on the rate of recovery of leisure travelling. The result was that around 77% of the participants said they are more willing to travel abroad if they took the vaccine and 86% for domestic travel. After receiving the vaccine, it was found out that 34% of the participants in the US are more confident in taking an overseas trip in 2021 (TripAdvisor, 2021).

Chapter- 3.0 Methodology

3.1- Summary

In this Chapter the research methods used and procedures in order to conduct this study are as follows. The data collection methods, the design and the analysis of the data are also explained in detail. In this research quantitative data was collected through online- based questionnaires, an interview with the marketing department of a 5-star hotel and interviews with Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) representatives. All data collected was analysed throughout. The results of the data are later explained.

3.2- The purpose and research approach

The purpose of this study is to identify how social media impacted the decision making of an individual when choosing a destination and what factors are important in making social media tourism marketing effective.

1. To identify the role and impact of various social media platforms when it comes to selecting a tourist location.
2. To identify how social media has influenced decision making and the factors that influence how people use social media to choose their vacation destination.
3. To investigate how social media marketing is being used to influence destination choice by hotels and DMO's
4. To understand how travel and decision making were influenced during Covid - 19.

3.3- Research Design

The data was collected through an online based questionnaire using a random sampling method. Some of the questions in the questionnaire were designed to collect data in order to identify which social media platforms were being used by the participants in order to research their next destination. What factors are important for the participants when choosing a destination such as online reviews and how important they are and how reliable these websites are. The data was collected through an interview with the marketing department of one five-star hotel and two interviews with two different people from MTA, one responsible for international digital marketing and the other local digital marketing. The questions were well thought out and

the aim of these questions was to collect data from the marketing departments of different businesses regarding the use of digital marketing such as social media marketing in order to attract and influence an individual in choosing a destination. An element of Covid-19 questions can be found in both the questionnaire and the interview questions. A summary of each interview is presented and comparison and discussion of the interviews with the literature review and the questionnaire results was done. Furthermore, this research will help the reader to have a better understanding of what the consumer uses.

This type of tool was chosen above other tools because it is a method which is fast, accurate and data is easier to collect for this type of research. The tool used to conduct the questionnaire is Microsoft Forms. It is a web-based form builder that allows people to create surveys, polls, and quizzes straight in their website. Users may design party invites and basic text-based surveys for offices, schools, and institutions. Users can select a template or create a new framework with their own options. It provides six response types, including multiple-choice, rating, written replies, and so on. Users can export data to Microsoft Excel. Microsoft Forms may be constructed straight in the browser. Microsoft Forms has an easy-to-use interface and may be used by amateurs. Microsoft Forms are available for free with a Microsoft 365 subscription. SurveyMonkey is available as free and premium.

Links of the questionnaire were shared in various places such as social media platforms on the survey information regarding the purpose of the research can be found so that participants knew for what reason they were filling the questionnaire. Simple English was used so that any person that does the questionnaires regardless of their education would be comfortable when filling the questionnaire.

3.4- Methods used

The survey consisted of 9 multiple-choice questions, 2 demographic questions, 2 open-ended questions and 3 rate questions. The aim was to conduct a survey of 150 individuals. The survey was created on Office Forms and distributed electronically via shares and emails. The data collected from the first three questions of the survey pertains to the demographic of the participants. The rest of the questions of the survey were designed to understand the influence of

various social media platforms when gathering information regarding a destination, the influence and reliability of various websites that provide information and review information of destinations, The influence of Covid-19 in decision making regarding vacation destination selection. The individuals are anyone who is from the young and older generations that use social media and other websites in their travel selection and who have travelled in the last few years. The interview consisted of 9 questions, and they were designed to be all open-ended to give the liberty of expression with no constraints to the interviewee and to gather as much information as possible regarding the subject.

3.5- Selection of Participants

The questionnaire was shared on social media platforms for anyone to fill in the criteria to fill it in such as young and older generations that use social media and other websites in their travel selection and who have travelled in the last few years would be enough as criteria to participate within a few weeks more responses were being done in order to maximise the number of participants. The questionnaire was not limited to local people, but also international people could complete the questionnaire. The total number of responses was 100 individuals. All the participants were told on the questionnaire description that the information provided by them was all confidential and anonymous. Three five-star hotels were contacted and two destination management organizations (DMO) via e-mail. Only one five-star hotel and one DMO accepted for the interview. The selection process of the hotels was done by researching the top 10 hotels in Malta recommended by TripAdvisor as for the DMO research was conducted on a search engine and contacted the relevant DMO's

Before collecting the data, participants who took part in the interviews agreed and signed a consent form in order to use the data provided for this research. The data collection period was around 40 days long. All survey responses were done online, and the interviews were done in person and the location according to where the interviewee wanted.

Chapter- 4.0 Analysis and Discussion of the Results

4.1- Tourists' destination selection Questionnaire.

The questionnaires were completed by N=100 participants in total. The questionnaire questions are available in the appendices. More than half (59) of the 100 replies were from women, whereas just (38%) of the comments came from men. One percent of the participants identified as non-binary, while two percent of the participants preferred not to disclose their gender at all. Referring to Questions: 1,2 and 3 these are all demographic in nature Gender, age, and degree of education.

The surveys were disseminated via a variety of online platforms, there may be a correlation between the age discrepancies and the distribution method used. In the study, 43% of participants were between the ages of 17 and 25, and 30% were between the ages of 26 and 35. The average age of the participants ranged from 36 to 45 years old, making up about 18% of the total. Participants aged 46 to 55 made up 5% of the sample, however there were none beyond the age of 65.

Referring to question 3 about their educational level, 2% went to elementary school, 6% went to secondary school, 11% acquired a Diploma MQF 4, and 28% obtained a Higher national diploma. With 39 percent of respondents, the most generic form of education was a bachelor's degree, followed by 13 percent who had a master's degree, and just 1 percent who had a Ph.D. According to the World Bank's database of economic growth collected from officially recognised sources, Malta's labour force with higher education (percentage of total workforce with higher education) was 86.46% in 2020. The World Bank acquired actual statistics, statistical data, estimates, and forecasts for Malta's working population with advanced education (% of total) in May 2022. (Economics, 2022).

Referring to question 4 17% of respondents said that they travelled less than once a year, 35% stated that they travelled at least once a year, and 31% stated that they travelled twice a year. The average number of trips per year was three for 10% of those who travelled, and four for 6% of those who travelled. Among those who responded, none travelled more than five times a year, and just one percent travelled more than five times a year overall.

| Travel Frequency | Number of responses | Percentage% |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Less than once a year | 17 | 17% |
| Once a year | 35 | 35% |
| Twice a year | 31 | 31% |
| Three times a year | 10 | 10% |
| Four times a year | 6 | 6% |
| Five times a year | 0 | 0% |
| More | 1 | 1% |

Table 1: Pre- Covid-19 travel frequency representation.

In Table 2 the most common response was Facebook with 78% of the respondents using it, Instagram with 76% usage, LinkedIn with 48%, only 9% use Snapchat, 5% use Twitter, YouTube with 57%, TikTok with 22%, and Pinterest with 24%. When comparing data acquired with data discovered by Datareportal in January 2022, one can observe the parallels of Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube being among the four most popular social networks in the globe.

| Social Media Platforms | Number of responses | Percentages% |
|------------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Facebook | 78 | 78% |
| Instagram | 76 | 76% |
| LinkedIn | 48 | 48% |
| Snapchat | 9 | 9% |
| Twitter | 5 | 5% |
| YouTube | 57 | 57% |
| TikTok | 22 | 22% |
| Pinterest | 24 | 24% |

Table 2: Social Platforms representation.

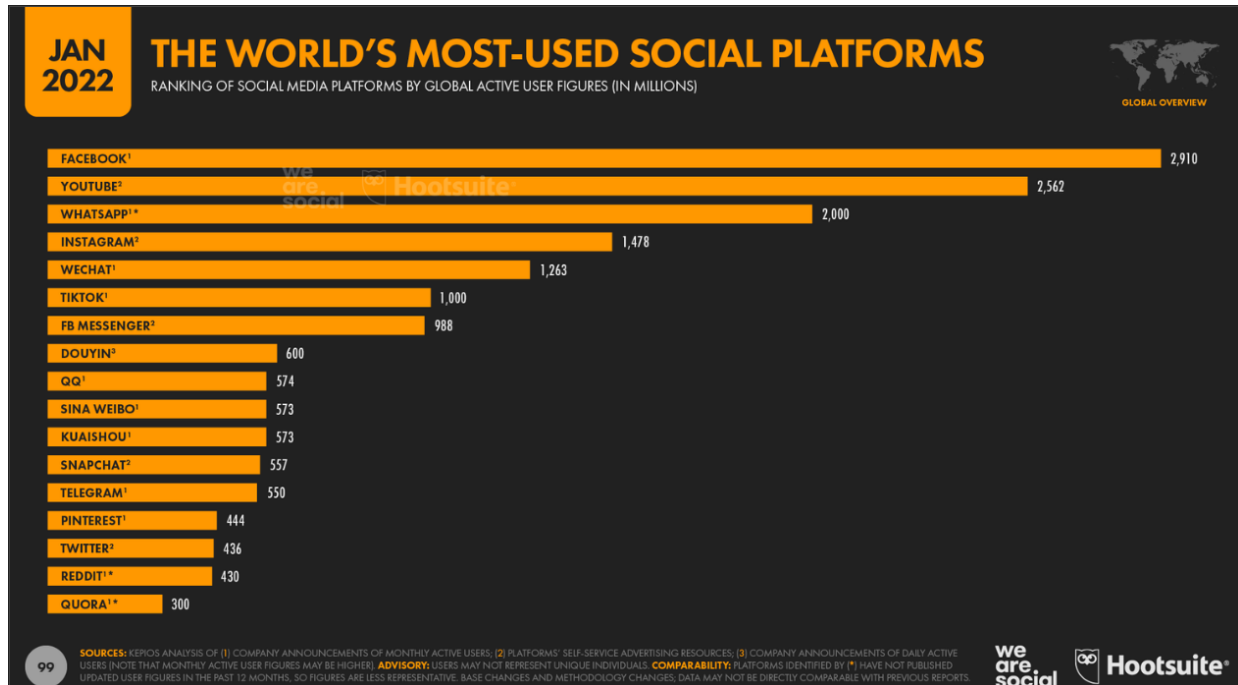


Figure 1: The world's most used social platforms source: (Datareportal – Kemp, 2022).

Referring to table 3, the purpose of this question was to elicit a concept and a knowledge of where people acquire their original ideas or inspiration. 67% stated that they are motivated by family and friends. It can be shown that word of mouth is a highly common approach for people to be inspired since they may acquire first-hand knowledge from someone who has already visited that location. travel agency pages, 18% said they get inspiration from influencer pages, 15% said they get inspiration from travel online advertisements, 40% said they get inspiration from seeing Instagram Hashtags, 17% said they get inspiration from travel blogs, books, and magazines, 26% said they get inspiration from YouTube videos, 16% said they get inspiration from Pinterest boards, the second most common was from Google search with 58% of people searching online and 20% said they get inspiration from Pinterest boards. Temblador conducted a survey in 2022 and discovered that 36.5% of people use social media to acquire travel ideas or inspiration, while 60% post travel-related content like photos and videos.

| From where they get inspiration | Number of Participants | Percentages% |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Family and friends | 67 | 67% |
| Travel agency page | 10 | 10% |
| Influencer page | 18 | 18% |
| Travel online advertisement | 16 | 16% |
| Instagram hashtags | 40 | 40% |
| Travel blogs, books, and magazines | 17 | 17% |
| YouTube videos | 26 | 26% |
| Pinterest boards | 16 | 16% |
| Google search | 58 | 58% |
| Other | 20 | 20% |

Table 3: From where Tourists get inspiration representation.

Referring to Table 4 the question asked was from a scale of 1- 10 (10 being the highest) how important are destination reviews for the participants and the average answer is 7.13 out of 10. As customers become increasingly resistant to traditional marketing methods, peer-to-peer online evaluations are becoming more essential. Infact the most common answer for this question was 8/10 which amount to 24% of the total responses. There are several studies that have shown reviews have become an important aspect for example it was found that when online reviews were negative individual had a sense of distrust towards the destination (Su et al., 2021). Another study indicates that the greater the quality of the information that the individual retrieves, the further they regard the service to be of excellent quality, which will also contribute to customer experience. The findings also show that trust influences two forms of behavior which are recommendation adoption and word-of-mouth (Filieri, Alguezaui, and McLeay, 2015). This indicates that people tend to read the reviews and if they had a pleasant experience, they would share it with others this also correlates with the results of table 6 as the most common way to get inspiration for their next destination people talk with friends and family.

| Review scale | Number of Participants | Percentage% |
|--------------|------------------------|-------------|
| 1 | 5 | 5% |
| 2 | 1 | 1% |
| 3 | 2 | 2% |
| 4 | 2 | 2% |
| 5 | 7 | 7% |
| 6 | 11 | 11% |
| 7 | 15 | 15% |
| 8 | 24 | 24% |
| 9 | 13 | 13% |
| 10 | 12 | 12% |

Table 4: Review of destination representation.

Peer-to-peer material on these websites is important since consumers are only looking for trustworthy and authentic information about their location. Referring to Table 5 79% of Facebook users said that the reviews are very reliable, 51.5% said that the reviews are somewhat reliable, 24.8% said that the reviews are neither reliable nor unreliable, 11.9% said that the reviews are somewhat unreliable, and only 3% said that the reviews are not reliable at all. One percent of Expedia users thought the reviews were extremely trustworthy, while another 40.6% thought they were somewhat reliable, another 34.7% thought they were neither reliable nor unreliable, and 9.9% thought they were completely unreliable. Most participants believe TripAdvisor reviews to be trustworthy, with 30.7% saying they're extremely reliable, 51.5% saying that they're a little dependable, and just 1 percent saying they're completely unreliable. According to Yelp, 49.5% of the reviews were neither trustworthy nor unreliable, 33.7% were somewhat reliable, and 5.9% were entirely unreliable. 24.8% of those polled said Booking.com was very dependable, 47.5% said it was moderately reliable, and just 1% said it was completely untrustworthy. For 50.5% of Kayak's users, reviews are neither trustworthy nor dependable; 5.9% feel they are absolutely unreliable. There were 18.8% of reviews that were highly trustworthy, 38.6% of reviews that were fairly reliable, and 3% of reviews that were not at all reputable for Airbnb. Reliability scores for the Google search engine range from very dependable

(19.8%) to somewhat reliable (41.6%) to completely unreliable (2%). 49.5 percent of reviews came from Hotels.com, which regarded them as neither reputable nor unreliable. Only 45.5% of customers at Cheaptickets.com agreed that the reviews were either credible or unreliable. Findings show that TripAdvisor and Booking.com are the most trusted sources of online reviews, with TripAdvisor having the highest percentage of participants who rated it as both "extremely reliable" and "somewhat reliable," while Booking.com had 24.8% of participants who rated it as "very reliable." When it comes to making travel arrangements, research shows that other people's recommendations have an impact, and most review readers think they're a great way to learn about holiday destinations and services and to avoid places they would not like (Gretzel, and Yoo, 2008). It is widely accepted among reviewers who read the content that reviews increase confidence and help reduce risk by making it easier to imagine what a destination is like before visiting. Decision in the end processes may be made more efficient by using reviews, which make it less likely that a decision would be regretted later. It is also possible to tell whether websites are known to the participant based on the proportion of "very reputable" ratings they received from Yelp and Kayak as well as hotels.com and cheaptickets.com.

| | Not reliable at all | Very unreliabl e | Somewhat unreliable | Neither reliable nor unreliable | Somewhat reliable | Very reliable |
|----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Facebook | 3% | 1% | 11.9% | 24.8% | 51.5% | 7.9% |
| Expedia | 2% | 2% | 9.9% | 34.7% | 40.6% | 10.9% |
| TripAdvisor | 1% | 0% | 2% | 14.9% | 51.5% | 30.7% |
| Yelp | 5.9% | 1% | 5.9% | 49.5% | 33.7% | 4% |
| Booking.com | 1% | 1% | 11.9% | 13.9% | 47.5% | 24.8% |
| Kayak | 5.9% | 2% | 8.9% | 50.5% | 29.7% | 3% |
| Airbnb | 3% | 1% | 6.9% | 31.7% | 38.6% | 18.8% |
| Google Search | 2% | 2% | 4% | 30.7% | 41.6% | 19.8% |
| Hotels.com | 5% | 3% | 5% | 49.7% | 33.7% | 4% |
| Cheaptickets.co m | 5% | 5% | 9.9% | 45.5% | 31.7% | 3% |

Table 5: Reliability of reviews of different website representation.

Referring to table 6, the average of 100 replies is 6.50 out of 10 points. The higher the number, the more affected you are. Twenty-four percent of those who took the test received an 8/10. This large sample size implies that individuals are influenced by the information they discover on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. A study by Scholfield found that 40% of UK residents aged 18 to 33 said they choose their next vacation based on how Instagramable it would be. This shows that the younger generation is influenced by the information provided and gives more importance to what they expect at the destination in order to look better on social media. When it comes to vacation destinations, it's all about how "Instagramable" they are. Only 48 percent of respondents were inspired to travel by material published by influencers or celebrities in a Stackla poll, whereas 86 percent of respondents were inspired to travel by content shared by family and friends (Noston, 2022).

| Review scale | Number of Participants | Percentage% |
|--------------|------------------------|-------------|
| 1 | 3 | 3% |
| 2 | 5 | 5% |
| 3 | 5 | 5% |
| 4 | 4 | 4% |
| 5 | 11 | 11% |
| 6 | 8 | 8% |
| 7 | 18 | 18% |
| 8 | 24 | 24% |
| 9 | 8 | 8% |
| 10 | 5 | 5% |

Table 6: Representation of participants scale of how influenced they are with information provided on social media.

Information on whether participants modified their travel plans because of social media posts may be found in Table 7. This information is essential since people prefer to study areas to visit before they go abroad and while they are there, which is why this knowledge is essential. If

these 100 participants' schedules were altered as a result of information they received on social media about a certain location, the results of this study will demonstrate how they were affected. 18% of those who took part in the survey either did not know or did not remember making any changes to their previous vacation because of social media. Most respondents (39%), or the vast majority of those who responded, did not modify their intentions. For 36% of the Participants, some of their initial intentions were amended as a result of the meeting. Because of information gained via social networking sites, 4% of participants had their plans significantly changed, and 3% had their plans entirely altered, according to the study.

| | Number of Participants | Percentages% |
|--|------------------------|--------------|
| I do not know; I do not recall | 18 | 18% |
| My initial itinerary was not altered | 39 | 39% |
| In the initial travel vacation itinerary, I made a few adjustments | 36 | 36% |
| The initial travel itinerary was significantly altered | 4 | 4% |
| My initial travel plan was totally altered | 3 | 3% |

Table 7: Changes in participants itinerary because of social media representation.

Table 8 questioned participants where they do their research for their destinations. This information is critical because it provides readers with an understanding of the methods used by participants to conduct research. Search engines including Google, Bing, Baidu, and Yahoo (Forsey, 2018) accounted for 77% of all participants in the study and were the most often used method of finding information. Social media is the second most preferred source of information for 68% of the participants. Families and friends are the primary source of information for 52% of individuals. TripAdvisor and Expedia accounted for 44% of the findings. National Geographic travel stories make up only 7% of all travel articles, whereas travel blogs like Jones around the globe make up 15%. The majority of the younger generation relies on the internet to get

information, except for family and friends, according to the findings of this study. There are also three additional popular methods: using social media, using search engines, and using travel-related social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. With the ability to see what other people think and share their own information, Hunter (2016) discovered that the Internet has given the destination a more dynamic image. DMOs may exploit the involvement of visitors in the construction of the destination image by presenting vital and fair information in a manner that the public can readily understand by having online information influence the destination image (Molinillo et al., 2018). Using various social media platforms may have varying impacts on the decision-making process. When it comes to information, 28% of Millennials trust social media more than other sources, including periodicals, television, Google, and TripAdvisor (Haines, 2022). 59% of families use travel websites like TripAdvisor and Expedia for information or inspiration when picking a destination and activities to do, according to an NYU study, while 10% use Instagram; 74% use search engines; 51% use travel review websites; 30% use social media; 14% use travel agents; 8% utilise blogs; (NYU, 2019).

| Different Sources of Information | Number of Participants | Percentage% |
|--|------------------------|-------------|
| Social media (Facebook, Instagram) | 68 | 68% |
| Travel blogs (Jones around the world, Expert Vagabond) | 15 | 15% |
| Search Engines (Google, Bing, Yahoo) | 77 | 77% |
| Social Travel website (TripAdvisor, Expedia) | 44 | 44% |
| Magazines (National Geographic) | 7 | 7% |
| Wikitravel articles | 0 | 0% |
| Family and Friends | 52 | 52% |

Table 8: Where tourists do their research for their future location representation.

Question 12 is about Covid-19. Because it has caused significant disruption to the tourist business over the previous two years, with travel limitations and all of the varied municipal restrictions in various locations, it is critical to acquire information about the situation on the ground. On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the greatest, the participants were asked how much they believe Covid-19 would have an impact on their future international travel. This question had an average score of 6.52/10, which is more than 50%. The most often given response was 7/10, with 24% of those who took part in the survey stating that Covid-19 would have an impact on their future travel plans in some way. "Low rating (1-4)" was selected by 11 percent of those who responded. What this demonstrates is that individuals continue to believe that Covid-19 will have an impact on their vacation plans in some way. It should also be considered that as time progresses, more limitations will be lifted by other nations and travel will become more convenient, therefore it is projected that this finding will be less when applied to future study. Using their study findings, González-Reverté et al. (2022) discovered that shifts in the way certain travelers travel might be interpreted as an adaptive and transient response to the impact danger of catching the disease.

| Rating Score | Number of Participants | Percentages% |
|--------------|------------------------|--------------|
| 1 | 5 | 5% |
| 2 | 2 | 2% |
| 3 | 3 | 3% |
| 4 | 6 | 6% |
| 5 | 11 | 11% |
| 6 | 10 | 10% |
| 7 | 24 | 24% |
| 8 | 16 | 16% |
| 9 | 7 | 7% |
| 10 | 8 | 8% |

Table 9: Scale of Covid-19 effects on future trips.

Table 10 is a straightforward yes/no question. The query was whether they had had a vacation or vacationed abroad since the onset of the Covid-19 epidemic. The findings reveal that most participants (60%) said that they had not been outside of the country since the pandemic began, while 40% stated that they had travelled outside of the country since the outbreak began.

| | Number of Participants | Percentages% |
|-----|------------------------|--------------|
| Yes | 40 | 40% |
| No | 60 | 60% |

Table 10: To determine whether individuals are being impacted by Covid-19

Answering "Yes" to the preceding question prompts the discussion to continue with "Open-Ended Question 14." The issue was whether or if their decisions were influenced or impacted by the circumstances of the countries, they visited during Covid-19, and if so, how. One person responded, "Not at all, it feels like Covid doesn't exist here" referring to the nation the participant was in. Another replied, *"Not really. I did not make any changes in relation to my visit except for following what the requirements are and obey them."* Another participant said, *"Not really I simply checked if there will be anything open for activities which there was, bars closed a bit earlier and the vaccine certificate was more enforced than it was locally but otherwise not much effect."* *"I was not comfortable going to certain areas heavily hit by Covid"* other participants said. As can be seen from the responses, the severity of the limitations imposed by the destination country is a major factor. In this example, a person proactively undertook research to limit the impacts of covid-19 before travelling by confirming ahead of time what was open and what was not. 57.5% of the participants reported being influenced in some form. As one person said, *"Yes, it did because we had a few trips planned and they had to be cancelled because of restriction in the amount of people in the group"* another stated, *"It influenced me since some of the countries which I wanted to visit had very serious restrictions."* *"Yes, since I made the decision to travel, I researched certain places and landmarks that were on social media, to get information about any restrictions/ documentation I needed. I also read comments to see what people that were also travelling had to say about the safety of the place"* one traveller said in an email. According to one comment, *"It was a bit of a hassle as I could not go in some places"* while another said, "It was very safe." Moreover, half of the participants

(55%) claimed that Covid-19 had an impact on their trips, while the other half (45%) said that they had no impact or were just mildly affected. Interesting to see that 12 respondents which sums up to 30%, mentioned restriction in their answer one could say that restriction was the main cause of disruptions in their travels.



Figure 2: Common words in responses to question 14

14. Since you travelled abroad during Covid-19 did the situation in the country influence or affect your decision-making where to visit? If yes how?

40 Responses

| ID ↑ | Name | Responses |
|------|-----------|---|
| 1 | anonymous | Yes it did because we had a few trips planned and they had to be cancelled because of restriction in the amount of people in the group. |
| 2 | anonymous | Not at all, it feels like Covid doesn't exist here |
| 3 | anonymous | I decided on the place depending on restrictions |
| 4 | anonymous | No |
| 5 | anonymous | I chose a destination which was much closer to my country in order to be able to go back home if a negative situation arises |
| 6 | anonymous | It influenced me since some of the countries which I wanted to visit had very serious restrictions |
| 7 | anonymous | Yes |
| 8 | anonymous | Since I made a decision to travel, I researched certain places and landmarks that were on social media, to get information about any restrictions/documentation i needed . I also read comments to see what people that were also traveling had to say about the safety of the place. |
| 9 | anonymous | Yes - paid attention to how infected the country was and what the restrictions were |
| 10 | anonymous | Not really. I did not make any changes in relation to my visit except for following what the requirements are and obey them |

Figure 3: Screenshot of question 14 and answers

| | | |
|----|-----------|--|
| 11 | anonymous | No, just happened to travel to places without many restrictions. |
| 12 | anonymous | I was not comfortable going to certain areas heavily hit by covid |
| 13 | anonymous | Yes and no, as I am a foreigner living in Malta. I will go and see my family anyway even when the situation is bad. But for a holiday I will check the restrictions and situation. |
| 14 | anonymous | ofc not darling |
| 15 | anonymous | Spain and asking about COVID restrictions |
| 16 | anonymous | no it did not effect me |
| 17 | anonymous | I made sure to avoid crowded places whereas before the pandemic I wouldn't care much for crowded places. |
| 18 | anonymous | I just the rates of covid infection and they were relatively low, especially since I had covid before I traveled so I wasn't worried |
| 19 | anonymous | Not really. It was Italy and at that point things were relatively normal. |
| 20 | anonymous | Yes, in case if it's necessary to have a pcr or antigen test, or either quarantine. As well regarding the Covid restrictions like schedules of restaurantes and bars.. |
| 21 | anonymous | no it did not |
| 22 | anonymous | it was abit of a hassle as i could not go in some places |

Figure 4: Screenshot of question 14 and answers

| | | |
|----|-----------|---|
| 23 | anonymous | Yes, we chose the safest country to travel to during the pandemic |
| 24 | anonymous | yes it did because the country I visited had a health measure to limit people in some tourist areas like the zoo. |
| 25 | anonymous | no it did not effect me that much |
| 26 | anonymous | yes! i travelled to paris last week as it is pretty safe currently |
| 27 | anonymous | no |
| 28 | anonymous | Yes, I would avoid destinations where quarantine is mandatory. |
| 29 | anonymous | Safety /...entering country processes |
| 30 | anonymous | No it didn't |
| 31 | anonymous | Not really I simply checked if there will be anything open for activities which there was, bars closed a bit earlier and the vaccine certificate was more enforced than it was locally but otherwise not much effect. |
| 32 | anonymous | Yes it did as more restrictions were made |
| 33 | anonymous | did not effect me that much |
| 34 | anonymous | there were a few restriction but it did not effect me that much maybe because the country was less strict. |
| 35 | anonymous | yes the PCR test was very expensive |

Figure 5: Screenshot of question 14 and answers

| | | |
|----|-----------|--|
| 34 | anonymous | there were a few restriction but it did not effect me that much maybe because the country was less strict. |
| 35 | anonymous | yes the PCR test was very expensive |
| 36 | anonymous | I went on an internship |
| 37 | anonymous | Yes, I have researched the restrictions and based my decision on where there are the least restrictions |
| 38 | anonymous | No |
| 39 | anonymous | I was doing a work trip but the situation did not effect me that much |
| 40 | anonymous | No |

Figure 6: Screenshot of question 14 and answers

Table 14 is a yes or no question, and it is a follow-up question for people who answered "NO" to the inquiry about travelling abroad since Covid-19 got underway. The issue in this instance is whether the tourist choose to go on a local vacation since they did not go on a foreign holiday during Covid-19. For this question, there were 60 replies, 20 of which said that they had had a local vacation, and 40 of which stated that they had not taken a local vacation at all.

| | Number of Participants | Percentages% |
|-----|------------------------|--------------|
| Yes | 20 | 20% |
| No | 60 | 60% |

Table 11: individuals who went on a local vacation.

The last question, number 16, was a continuation of question 15 for individuals who had replied "yes" to the prior question about whether they had had a local vacation. If the Covid-19 situation in their local area had an impact on or impacted their choice as to where to go, they were asked this question in response. After analyzing all of the responses, the most frequent response was "No," with 16 respondents stating that Covid-19 had no impact on their local vacation. Twenty percent of the responses indicated that they had chosen to stay at a hotel. There were four people who said that they had been impacted by Covid-19, and they stated that they were: "Yes, we mainly stayed in public spaces as opposed to restaurants/bars..." and that they were "Yes, because of the Restrictions."

4.2- Summary of Questionnaire results

Survey participants are mostly young, educated people who like travelling once or twice a year, according to the results of the surveys. They are all internet users, and they utilise a variety of social media platforms on a regular basis, according to the statistics. In order to find out more about a potential vacation spot, most people consult with close friends and family or look it up on the internet. As the importance of reading reviews rises, it is becoming more vital to examine information before acting on it. Participant confidence in social travel websites like TripAdvisor and Booking.com was shown in the research to be higher than other websites. Even though the average was not very high, participants were swayed by social media posts and

altered their initial holiday plans as a result. Social media, search engines, and family/friends were the primary sources of information for most participants. According to the collected data, Covid-19 had an impact on certain participants' decision-making, both domestically and internationally. These findings gave the researcher a glimpse into how people's holiday choices are influenced by social media and other factors.

4.3- What role does visual marketing play in your social media strategy?

The aim of this question is to understand how much importance they are giving to visual marketing as according to the literature found The Internet has made the destination image more dynamic given the option to review other users' opinions and content sharing (Hunter, 2016). According to research on consumer behaviour, people get their knowledge from a variety of sources, both local and global, while making travel plans. Research has shown that the most significant information to users in the initial stages of planning a vacation is information that describes the experiences that may be had at a place via the use of words and visuals (Lončarić, Bašan and Marković, 2013). Interviewee 1 described visual marketing as an imperative role. Their main aim is to catch the eye of the tourists, they also redesign the main website to make it more visually appealing and less text heavy. *“So, visual marketing plays an imperative role, our main aim is to catch the eye of the tourists”. “So, our aim is to provide the users with an idea of what Malta has to offer so as to encourage them as much as possible to visit.”*

Interviewee 2 said that visual marketing is very important. She also said that unless you don't have effective visuals the strategy in terms of promotion is not effective. She believes it needs to be a mix of static images and videos. *“Visual marketing is very very important in terms of social media because unless you have effective visual your strategy in terms of promotion is not that effective if it is only words that you are pushing out there if it's only a message it is not effective if its only visual it is not that effective either it needs to be a balance between the two. But the visual has to be very effective, very clean, sharp and I believe it needs to be a mix of static imagery and visuals.”*

Interviewee 3 said that when it comes to visual marketing, they try to convey the sensations that they are trying to get the visitors triggered to choose their destination as opposed

to competitors. So, for the most part, the visuals themselves must look authentic. They do not have to look acted out or fake and colorful to be eye catching. By showing enough details about the background of the location for the visit there to also start painting a good picture in their mind of what the destination might look like. From the data provided, all three interviewees agree that visual marketing is an essential part of digital marketing in order to attract visitors.

4.4- How are you using social media to cater for potential visitors' needs and interests?

Interviewee 1 said that *"in terms of social media, I am more in charge of creating sponsored ads campaigns on Facebook and Instagram"*. The aim to target potential specific users is that they cannot do a one for all approach, but it needs to be targeted at a specific group of people and by doing so it will help you generate a good return on investment (ROI).

Interviewee 2 had a similar answer depending on the promotion they base their target audience this means they select specific group of people as well. *"So, we do work with social media platforms we normally base a whole plan depending on the promotion we are pushing out and that is where the strategy falls into place to have the particular social media platforms you want to use."*

Interviewee 3 For the visitor's needs, usually they tend to go for the aspect of showing either the different activities that they may be doing in Malta or different gastronomy they have a very gastronomy in Malta and fresh Mediterranean diet. *"So basically, we try and paint a full picture of the diverse products on offer. So usually in our campaigns, they are geographically targeted, and segment driven."* According to literature the major goal, according to most DMO marketers, is to provide visitors with a true sense of what the place is like (Ružić and Biloš, 2010).

The results from Question 11 of the survey show that 68% of respondents use social media to research their destination, which is in line with what was indicated in Interview 1 and 2 by running Facebook and Instagram ads campaigns or more specific promotion in order to attract visitors.

4.5- What are you doing to persuade viewers to select, view and share your content?

The aim of this question is to understand what the marketing team of the hotel and the DMO are doing to get their content shared. Interviewee 2 said *“I believe that even though the main aim is to promote your services it must be engaging and interesting, so it is not only an advertisement you are pushing out there. The visual needs to be story we are basing a lot our promotion on telling a story, basing it on local flares, flavors and traditions combined with what we offer.”* “Creating engagement exercises such as contests but doing them in a fun and elegant way” as said in literatures Destination marketing uses the emotions of potential customers because the strategy is based on selling the experience and makes them think of what it can be like if they decide to go and to boost the reputation and interest in the set destination (Team, 2022).

Interviewee 1 said *“We tend to target by age as well. So, let's for example, certain ads for instance, on Facebook, obviously, we're going to target people who are older whereas on Instagram younger people, the demographics and we tend to try to experiment in terms of how much we're going to spend for each and every market”* and *“The difference between digital and traditional marketing is the digital now we have the option to cater it to create ads, which are specific for tourists.”* According to respondent 1, they target by age, which is why they utilise numerous social media platforms to appeal to and persuade certain people. According to the questionnaire, the majority of respondents were young, although 27% were above the age of 36, and 78% use Facebook and 77% use Instagram that is why interviewee 1 said *“For instance, a party advert would likely yield a negative ROI among elder demographics, so it is imperative to target wisely”*.

Interviewee 3 said they try to get the message across to all types of visitors from larger European countries and they also cater for north America and Asia. He said that one of the messages that they try to send is that there is so much to do on the island, and you can go from point A to B across the island within 45 minutes as he said it *“So it's already a diverse product or others for instance, in the morning you could be in Golden Bay, spending the afternoon swimming and sunbathing. And in the evening, you could be having a very nice lunch dinner in violet are in one of the very good restaurants and there are no available there.”*

4.6- What strategies do you find most effective to increase sales?

Interviewee 1 said *“In our case, Malta is our product. When we run campaigns online, we make sure to track everything using Google Analytics, GTM, etc. These tools allow us to determine which buttons are being clicked the most, which offers are performing best, pages etc. We also do ab testing when running sponsored ads with different images/ videos.”*

Interviewee 2 said social media marketing is a mix of several techniques including paid advertising and boosted posts, amongst others. In order to be successful, promoted posts must be accompanied by articles that relate to or at least provide a preview of the topic. A survey indicated that at least 43% of consumers judged their travel decisions based on what they saw on social media and as said by the interviewee *"Boosted posts are incredibly effective"*.

Interviewee 3 said *“Whenever we have a campaign, or even on our website, we try and have a good call to action. With the advent of our new website, as well, we now have the facility for booking your trips via the widget we installed from Skyscanner. Okay, so even us as visit Malta, we are constantly trying to increase sales. In terms of the overall strategy. Again, we target the right audience. So, for example, we're constantly checking out the industry and what's going on and what's happening. So even during the time of the air, we know who to target, be it for example, young couples, or young groups or be it the slightly older families, maybe with two young children or even like the pensioners.”* All interviewees, hotel and DMO try to select their best segment of the market to attract it does not matter if they are local or foreign and they all use tools such as Google analytics to help them see their performances.

4.7- Did your social media strategy change during the Covid-19 Pandemic? If yes, in what way?

Because of Covid-19 it is clear that the tourism industry got heavily hit. This had drastic effects on the travel and tourism industry. International tourists had between 70-75% negative growth and there are 100 – 120 million direct tourism jobs at risk (Dong-Shang, C., 2021.). During this time, new Covid-19-related restrictions were enforced in Malta, which had a direct impact on travel and tourism not just for residents but also for international visitors all passengers flying in from all destinations were asked to stay in quarantine for 14 days upon arrival, and eventually all flights from/to all destinations were suspended (NSO, 2022).

Interviewee 1 said that *“Since the airport and posts closed, we had to shift our strategy to an awareness one. Building awareness among the users to show them that Malta exists. When we started easing restrictions again, we started converting our campaigns to traffic ones, trying to push potential Travellers to book tickets and visit our islands.”*

Interviewee 2 said that *“social media was considered as a supporting system rather than a main lead to generate traffic. However, because covid-19 hit and obvious the property and services were limited if not closed at a certain time social media was more focused more and everything was being diverted to social media than digital marketing. Where we could properly track because nothing else was happening. Return in terms of engagement. Return in terms of interest and return in even revenue so we could understand how important than an again social media at this point and in fact post covid our main focus in terms of budget being spent are mainly on digital media and main highlight on social's.”* According to literature a Forbes' research showed one of the signs that business is rebounding from the pandemic is a "revenge spending" tendency (Bird, 2022). Tourism began its recovery in January 2022, with much better results than in the previous year. The number of visitors from throughout the world increased by 18 million in January 2021, a 130% increase (UNWTO, 2022). As many as 77% of those surveyed stated they would be more likely to go overseas or domestically if they had had the vaccination (TripAdvisor, 2021).

Interviewee 3 said *“Yes, it's changed a lot. Because at the start of the COVID pandemic, we talked about the shift from conversion campaign into an awareness campaign. So okay, we're happy to say that we never stopped our marketing activities, never. Even during COVID, like from day zero, where we went into a partial lockdown here in Malta. We never stopped our campaigns never. So, we kept going on with an awareness campaign. So that we keep more of them top of the mind for whenever they may come in hand for when we reopen. We did a very good job as well with our overseas offices and representatives. We have four overseas offices in the four main markets, so it's in UK, Italy, Germany, France. And then we have two separate offices in Switzerland and Austria. We have our representatives. So, we did a good exercise where we regrouped, and we checked all the assets we had in terms of videos and photos. We started planning campaigns where we could keep our potential visitors interested. The first thing we did was we went live with gastronomy campaign. Where We Were inviting*

guests, potential guests to try out Maltese recipes. We also had hosted a while back, general Cataldo from Jamie Oliver's room. We also shared recipes, where he was also trying Maltese recipes, but with a different spin with some Italian influences as well." All three teams have changed their method of marketing during covid-19 like for example the five-star hotel recognised the importance of social media marketing shifting it from a supporting to the key role and DMO changing from a conversion campaign to an awareness one. It is interesting to see that they all changed to their respective needs depending on the situation.

4.8- What is the biggest challenge that most social media practitioners have?

Interviewee 1 said when it comes to them, *"I believe it is measuring ROI. Well, we are talking about selling Malta. As a DMO we link to various third parties and therefore it is very difficult to measure how many users converted. From our end, we can tell how many users were redirected to the website, or how many users clicked a button, a specific offer etc. But once they go off our website, we must ask third parties to provide us with the data, which is at times very difficult to obtain."*

Interviewee 2 on the other hand said *"at least in our case, is how to kind of not make it too busy there is a word eliminate noise. The noise in the sense of on social you have a lot that is going on now in a particular case like this one where a hotel has empile services and amenities that are being promoted can create a disruption between one promotion and another when it's on the same business page."* There is a lot of competition, and They believe that is a major challenge as well. One must invest even though it is much more cost-effective to promote digital marketing, especially social media. Trends change constantly, so you must be aware of what is going on around you and what you can do to capitalize on it and turn it into a promotion for a certain service.

Interviewee 3 said *"Whenever I'm planning a campaign, they show enough details and information for visitors about the destination without it seeming too busy. Without, you know, giving them too much information, and they start forgetting what they're trying to understand about the destination."* Finding out what is going on in the business is a problem since you must be on top of everything. In addition, one must take more notes from the industry

here than our rivals do. As a result, during the shoulder months, they look at what Greece and Cyprus are doing with Croatia and the South of France, while in the off-season, they look at what big metropolitan destinations are doing. Interviewees 2 and 3 had similar challenges as they both mention not making the information provided not too busy/noisy. They both find it challenging since they must be at the top of their game and they both mention competitors but interviewee 2 is referring to the local one and interviewee 3 internationally.

4.9- What online platforms does the business mainly focus on in context of social media marketing? What type of content do you find most effective to increase exposure?

Interviewee 1 said *“From our end, I mainly use Facebook and Instagram. I think Videos perform better for awareness campaigns, whereas images perform better for traffic campaigns with CTA’s.”*

Interviewee 2 said *“In terms of what online platforms to use in our case, for example the most effective local market is Facebook because Facebook here on the island is still number one. You don’t put it on Facebook or Instagram you are going to reach a certain amount of people and certain amount of age group, but you will not reach the full spectrum. But Instagram is very effective, and we do push on it, and it is on the increase so those are the main two.”*

Interviewee 3 said *“In terms of the platforms, it's a good mix of both Facebook and Instagram, for the most part, you know, usually Facebook, it's better for the older generations. Let's say 40 Plus ages, and Instagram is better for the 40 minus let's say. In terms of effectiveness, it depends on the targeting. So, if you're doing a paid campaign, it's solely a matter of your targeting score, reaction and who you're targeting. And if the message you're trying to convey to those targets is what they're trying to look for. What content is most effective for parents in the eye? We're constantly looking for new mediums for new photos for new images and videos. By comparing the data all 3 marketers use similar social media platforms interviewee 2 also mentioned they use LinkedIn for business and corporate. They use these platforms because they are the most popular on the island this can also be confirmed from the data*

collected from the questionnaires 68% of the participants use Facebook or Instagram to gather information also 78% use Facebook daily, 76% use Instagram, 46% use LinkedIn.

4.10- Which platforms are you finding the most productive, either in return on investment (ROI) or in engagement?

Interviewee 1 said *“In terms of increasing ROI, we use Facebook and Instagram to redirect traffic to the VisitMalta website. We also collaborate with several influencers and journalists, to further increase our brand exposure. Campaigns are also launched with various OTAs (Online Travel Agency) such as Expedia etc. We also have several partnerships, such as the one with Manchester United, who even promote VisitMalta through their own social media platforms.”*

Interviewee 2 said *“It is definitely Facebook and Instagram. Twitter here in Malta doesn't really work it did never pick up. We do have a Twitter account and we do post randomly but we don't get much of a return because obviously as we said we main push the services rather than the actual hotel as a product because the hotel is a brand, and it is supported with the brand marketing. Other thing that is very important interns of social media marketing is collaborating with effective influencers because I wanted to mention it earlier and partner up with other platforms example, we find a food blog that is very effective on Instagram we collaborated with these kinds of pages before so we partner up to promote something in a particular outlet or a service so that is definitely very important in the social media strategy.”*

Interviewee 3 said *“So, on that aspect, Facebook is easier. Because on Facebook, it's easier to get conversions. As you know, it's a bit more old school as opposed to Instagram, Instagram, on the other hand, it's, it's nicer visually. So, you use a good mix between both” and “we do tend to target the same people. For example, the younger demographics, we still target them on Facebook.”*

They clearly utilise Facebook and Instagram, which is in line with the survey's findings that 68% of respondents use social media to study a trip, of which 78% use Facebook and 77% use Instagram. In addition, 74% of respondents are under the age of 35. This technique has shown to be a long-lasting investment for as much as four years, according to research by Fink et

al. (2018) that used influencers or famous individuals to find out the long-term effect of social media marketing with celebrity endorsement as both interviewees 1 and 2 mentioned that they work with influencers or collaborating with some group or page such as Manchester United or the food blog in order to increase their exposure.

4.11- Are you refreshing your social media marketing strategies with a more modern concept? If yes how often?

Interviewee 1 said *“We try to keep up to date with technology as much as possible. We are quite a young team, so that obviously helps. From my end, I love reading a lot on digital marketing, watching YouTube videos etc.- that is how I keep learning at the end of the day.”*

Interviewee 2 said that they strive to stay aware of developments, events, and trends by doing in-depth research. W. To be honest, when they first began using social media, a post was basically simply a phrase. There's a lot of work to be done since they included interactive videos for customers as well. As they previously said, the most essential thing is that one stays on top of the newest trends and does not lose out on business because someone else will.

Interviewee 3 said they always keep tabs on what is going on and what is hot. It is a lot of work to take care of themselves. In other words, anytime they run a campaign, such as with Expedia or Skyscanner, they assist them in promoting their products on their various social media sites. It is all about collaboration and learning from other people and organisations, so if they see someone doing something good on their Facebook page, or Instagram page, or YouTube channel, they try to host them, because they are always cooperating and sharing their knowledge with others, and that is how they come up with fresh content on a regular basis.

All three interviewees try to keep up with the changing technologies and it is very important. As interviewee 2 said there would be another business who would do it and take your work.

Chapter- 5.0 Summary of the interviews

5.1- Summary of interview with the marketing department of a destination marketing organization responsible for the local area.

Visit Malta's primary goal is to attract tourists to the Maltese Islands so that they may plan a vacation there. They just revamped the site to make it less text-heavy and more visually appealing. It is critical to focus on a narrow subset of customers when developing a campaign. An advertisement for a party, for example, would certainly have a negative return on investment among the elderly. Measurement of ROI, in their opinion, is the best way to increase ROI. Since the airport and posts were shut down, they had to change our approach to one of awareness. Increasing user awareness of Malta's existence. In order to encourage more visitors to come to our islands, they began changing the campaigns to traffic-oriented ones. As a DMO, they have a lot of third-party links, so it is tough to tell how many people really made a purchase. They mostly utilise Facebook and Instagram to drive traffic to the VisitMalta website from their side. In addition, they work with a variety of media and influencers to spread the word about the company. Various OTAs, like Expedia, are also used to launch campaigns. They make every effort to stay abreast of technological advancements.

5.2- Summary of interview with marketing department of a Five-star Hotel.

The importance of visual marketing in social media cannot be overstated. Without excellent visuals, the promotion plan will be ineffective. If only words are used to send out a message, this will not be successful. If only visuals are used this will not be effective either. They believe part of promotion is about creating stories, which they do via the use of local cuisines and traditions blended with what they have to offer. Using the service to develop entertainment and engaging in activities, such as competitions. It is a combination of a few things, including social media postings, that have been enhanced. It used to be that social media was only employed as a support system, rather than a primary source of visitor generation. Their primary focus going forward will be on digital media, with a particular emphasis on social media.

As far as they are concerned, the greatest problem is figuring out how to keep it from becoming too hectic. Because Facebook is still the most popular social media platform on the island, it serves as an excellent example of a successful local marketing strategy. Facebook is not the best way to have their message out to many people. Instagram, on the other hand, is quite effective, and as a result, they are seeing a surge in its use. It is essential to keep up with the newest trends and follow what is popular. Co-operation with successful influencers and the use of other social media channels like Facebook and Instagram are essential. Another important aspect of social media marketing is collaborating with effective partnering with other platforms, such as Instagram, to promote something in a specific outlet or a service, so that is definitely very important in the strategy overall.

5.3- Summary of interview with Marketing department of DMO who takes care of foreign affairs.

The goal of Malta Tourism is to serve both those who have already decided to visit Malta and those who are still deciding. For those who have already made the decision to visit Malta and have already supplied the required information. There is a lot of usage of social media in general. For both sponsored and organic pieces, journalists and social media are being employed. It is their goal to convey to tourists from all over the world that Malta is a must-see destination, particularly for those travelling from other European nations as well as North America and Asia. They also be reopening in Australia this summer since their service measures have been eased.

There are a lot of activities to do in Malta and the Maltese islands, and they are all within a short distance of one other. MTA's marketing approach is regionally and demographically tailored. Unless it is a low-level awareness campaign, 90% of their efforts will contain a solid call to action. As campaigns, they do their best to generate a lot of traffic to their website. Despite this, they switched from a conversion effort to an awareness campaign during the COVID outbreak. Regrouping and checking all their assets were a useful exercise. As a result, they began developing campaigns aimed at retaining visitors' attention. They launched a culinary campaign as their first step. When it comes to marketing to younger generations, how can you divide down a location into smaller demographic groups? Short trips, history, culture, and cuisine may be more appealing to the more mature traveller. Whereas if they are younger, one

could be more interested in a more active vacation. It is a nice combination of Facebook and Instagram in terms of platforms. All that matters is the colour of the photos themselves since they are so vibrant. Showing a picture of, say, the Blue Lagoon, a beautiful beach, or the skyline of Valletta is about as good as it gets.

Checking out the current trends, they are always aware of what is going on around them. MTA wants tourists to book flights and stay in our hotels. They also included a widget from Skyscanner to their new website, so tourists can use it to plan their vacations. Every day, they keep a close eye on the industry and what is occurring. The older families with two small children or even the retirees are easy targets for them since they know who to target even while the air is still blowing. The sniper method is what they normally go with. For instance, they are interested in properties located within a 100-kilometer radius of the airport. So, if people reside near to the airport, they have decent airline connections to Malta. It is how they capitalised and they also launched in their four primary areas. They have a Maltese language campaign in the UK, Germany, and Italy where they are tutoring people some of the most common Maltese phrases, and they chose them specifically for those markets.

5.4- Similarities in the interview results and discussion of the results.

- Representative of DMO which took care of local tourism market is referred to as Interviewee 1
- Representative of the Five-star hotel is referred to as interviewee 2
- Representative of DMO taking care of foreign affairs is referred to as interviewee 3
- They collaborate with influencers, celebrities, or groups like Manchester United or a food blog to increase their exposure.
- All 3 marketers utilise Facebook and Instagram.
- Interviewees 2 and 3 had similar difficulty in keeping the material supplied simple.
- Covid-19 has modified marketing strategies for all three teams.
- Each interviewee, hotel, and DMO tries to target the best market niche for new clients.
- All three participants believe that visual marketing is critical to attracting visitors.

Data from the interview has shown that the way one markets a destination, being a hotel or a country, is constantly changing. To answer what makes social media so effective from the data collected one can see that social media has a lot of different uses. It lets the marketer create and share content to larger audience to be able to access markets in other countries and to keep advertising even during Covid-19 pandemic. Data have shown how "social media marketing" encompasses a wide range of techniques, including paid advertisements and other forms of paid promotion. Posts that have been "boosted" are very effective. From the interviews it was also found if too much information is provided to the individual, they will lose interest and stop learning about the destination. From the data collected it showed how social media such as Facebook is used, they tend to target the older demographic, but on Instagram, the audience is mostly younger. In order to effectively market the hotel's services, promotional materials must not only be informative but also entertaining. It provides the marketer with the freedom to tell any tale they choose. The marketer may use social media to develop meaningful content and promote their product or service in accordance with the demands of the customer.

Chapter- 6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter will conclude the study with the key research findings in relation to the research title social media in tourism marketing: Tourists' destination selection, aims and research questions, as well as the value and contribution. It will also give recommendations and propose opportunities for future research.

Research questions

- How has social media impacted the decision making of an individual when choosing a destination?
- What are the factors in making social media marketing effective?

Sub- topics

- what role social media platforms had when choosing a destination, how it has influenced decision making when choosing a destination.
- How Covid-19 has influenced decision making.

The study aimed to investigate how social media impacted decision making of an individual when choosing a destination, what factors make social media marketing effective with sub-topics about the role of social media in destination selection and the influence of Covid- 19 and the results indicate the following

- Most popular social media usage.
- From where they get inspiration.
- The effects of social media on travel plans.
- From where they get the information.
- How Covid-19 changed where and how individuals take a vacation.
- Marketers acknowledge the importance of social media marketing.
- How marketers use social media to attract individuals before and during Covid-19.
- The strategies marketers use

The decision making of an individual when choosing a destination is influenced by tailored experience for specific segments on social media, Participants value destination reviews. Participants would rather use the internet to research for their next destination. Covid- 19 has put limitations on both the travellers and Marketers, and it also affected their decision- making.

This research will contribute to the current literature about the influence of social media in the decision- making of individuals when choosing a destination, the effects of Covid- 19 on tourism industry, how it influenced individuals and how social media marketing is influencing destinations.

6.1- Research Limitations.

While doing the research the constraints that the researcher has experienced were the lack of willingness from businesses to do an interview with the marketing team or getting a reply very late into the research. Another constraint that he faced during the interviews was issues with the recording device, which was solved and fixed in no time and continued with the interviews. Other constraint that was faced regarding the questions of the questionnaire where several changes were made but eventually, got the definitive version during the data collection responses were slow but with more sharing on different platforms more responses were gathered.

6.2- Recommendations

Regarding social media marketing the author would recommend that

- Business such as hotels and DMO would investigate other social media platforms not just Facebook and Instagram even though they are the most popular examples of such social medias are TikTok which is extremely popular with the young demographic, Snapchat is another platform which is widely used globally and has great potential to promote fun exciting things on it.
- As a recommendation for future studies regarding social media marketing, I would suggest focusing as well on other niches of the tourism industry such as scuba diving businesses, Agri-tourism, Archi tourism, gastronomy tourism and gambling tourism.

- Research as well would be different as the Covid-19 situation would be more at ease with less restriction everywhere, showing how the industry has recovered from this situation.
- Also expanding the study in quantitative and qualitative terms is necessary.
- There ought to be further investigation on the role of social media in destination selection, which might be useful in the development of information strategies through social media.

Chapter- 7.0 References:

Anonymous2012, Sep 20. TripAdvisor Survey Reveals Three Quarters of U.S. Travelers Sharing Trip Experiences on Social Networks: 42 Percent Use social media for Travel Planning; 40 Percent for Travel Inspiration. *PR Newswire*. [online] Available at: <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/tripadvisor-survey-reveals-three-quarters-of-us-travelers-sharing-trip-experiences-on-social-networks-170469406.html> (Accessed: 9th April 2022).

Ansted, I.J. and Anandkumar, S.V., 2016. Demographic Influences on Social Media Use Across Tourist Lifecycle Phases. *Johar*, **11**(2), pp. 49-73. [online] Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ansted-Joseph/publication/341510404_DEMOGRAPHIC_INFLUENCES_ON_SOCIAL_MEDIA_USE_A_CROSS_TOURIST_LIFECYCLE_PHASES/links/5ec5186da6fdcc90d6860067/DEMOGRAPHIC-INFLUENCES-ON-SOCIAL-MEDIA-USE-ACROSS-TOURIST-LIFECYCLE-PHASES.pdf (Accessed: 31st March 2022).

Arica, R., Cobanoglu, C., Cakir, O., Corbaci, A., Hsu, M.J. and Della Corte, V., 2022. Travel experience sharing on social media: effects of the importance attached to content sharing and what factors inhibit and facilitate it. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* Vol. 34 No. 4, pp. 1566-1586. [online] Available at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/IJCHM-01-2021-0046/full/html> (Accessed: 1st April 2022).

Bird, J., 2020. *Could 'Revenge Spending' Help Retail Recover from Coronavirus?* [online] Forbes. [online] Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jonbird1/2020/03/15/could-revenge-spending-help-retail-recover-from-coronavirus/?sh=58c32c8c6f7c> (Accessed: 14th February 2022).

BPM, I., 2022. 5 trends reshaping the future of travel amidst Covid-19. [online] Available at: <https://www.infosysbpm.com/blogs/sourcing-procurement/5-trends-reshaping-the-future-of-travel-amidst-covid-19.html> (Accessed: 14 February 2022).

Carr, C.T. and Hayes, R.A., 2015. Social media: Defining, developing, and divining. *Atlantic journal of communication*, **23**(1), pp.46-65. [online] Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15456870.2015.972282> (Accessed: 15th February 2022).

CCSA, 2021. *How COVID-19 is changing the world: a statistical perspective Volume III*. [online] Unstats.un.org. Available at: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/documents/covid19-report-ccsa_vol3.pdf (Accessed 19th April 2022).

Chaffey, D., 2022. *Global social media statistics research summary 2022*. [online] Smart Insights. Available at <https://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/>. (Accessed 7th February 2022).

Collins-Kreiner, N. and Ram, Y., 2020. National tourism strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Annals of Tourism Research*. [online] Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7572067/> (Accessed on: 7th February 2022).

Dong-Shang, C., 2021. Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism Industry: Applying TRIZ and DEMATEL to Construct a Decision-Making Model. *Sustainability*, **13**(14), pp. 7610. [online] Available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/13/14/7610> (Accessed on: 7th February 2022).

Dwityas, N.A. and Briandana, R., 2017. Social media in travel decision making process. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 7(7), pp.193-201. [online] Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Rizki-Briandana/publication/322749479_Social_Media_in_Travel_Decision_Making_Process/links/5a6d1877458515d40757109e/Social-Media-in-Travel-Decision-Making-Process.pdf (Accessed on: 9th February 2022).

Echtner, C.M. and Ritchie, J.B., 1991. The meaning and measurement of destination image. *Journal of tourism studies*, 2(2), pp.2-12. [online] Available at: https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/24746223/jcudev_012855-with-cover-page-v2.pdf?Expires=1653741193&Signature=FG7Po9FXO95e6PsZ0sqhIhXf1ScdHrHbH4JOk3XReOiWRMouNtm4FdmQrFUiyvXlQ~~LucD~GZ0iywwGkAd~OYw6Dw5A73f~-Sq1V5tFvtUL1ZVJTCl7jz~9jf8R2YdFkUH60lLobaY9mJrWg~YQi1CkOuMfPuJyorNqat6mWMQUuZi5SGbX069IGlfz4Uf1McrLa8qhBosrslyWVAxQa7QoFmhO~KQ2nmTS2UPf4Ni-s-J-zn3EHacqCBLt7zNPC0XSiCsIZahZF78bqKZ2hDVbKXghYorND97p0sSZrUUpzM3ujJqoQB0Ut6Ps8ucgUUI~JgH9MxM0tjwnKjPUog_&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA (Accessed on: 10th February 2022).

Economics, T., 2022. *Malta - Labor Force with Advanced Education (% Of Total) - 2022 Data 2023 Forecast 2000-2020 Historical*. [online] Tradingeconomics.com. Available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/malta/labor-force-with-advanced-education-percent-of-total-wb-data.html> (Accessed 4 May 2022).

Filieri, R., Alguezaui, S. and McLeay, F., 2015. Why do travelers trust TripAdvisor? Antecedents of trust towards consumer-generated media and its influence on recommendation adoption and word of mouth. *Tourism management*, 51, pp.174-185. [online] Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0261517715001028> (Accessed on: 15th March 2022).

Fink, M., Koller, M., Gartner, J., Floh, A. and Harms, R., 2020. Effective entrepreneurial marketing on Facebook—A longitudinal study. *Journal of business research*, 113, pp.149-157. [online] Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296318304788> (Accessed on 15th March 2022).

Fotis, J.N., Buhalis, D. and Rossides, N., 2012. *Social media use and impact during the holiday travel planning process* (pp. 13-24). Springer-Verlag. [online] Available at: <http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/19262/> (Accessed on 16th March 2022).

Godovykh, M., Ridderstaat, J., Baker, C. and Fyall, A., 2021. COVID-19 and Tourism: Analyzing the Effects of COVID-19 Statistics and Media Coverage on Attitudes toward Tourism. *Forecasting*, 3(4), pp. 870. [online] Available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2571-9394/3/4/53> (Accessed on: 17th March 2022).

González-Reverté, F., Gomis-López, J.M. and Díaz-Luque, P., 2022. Reset or temporary break? Attitudinal change, risk perception and future travel intention in tourists experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Tourism Futures*. [online] Available at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JTF-03-2021-0079/full/html> (Accessed on: 17th March 2022).

Gretzel, U. and Yoo, K.H., 2008. Use and impact of online travel reviews. *Information and communication technologies in tourism 2008*, pp.35-46. [online] Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kyung-Hyan->

[Yoo/publication/221357282_Use_and_Impact_of_Online_Travel_Reviews/links/0912f5115141b2ab20000000/Use-and-Impact-of-Online-Travel-Reviews.pdf](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0912f5115141b2ab20000000/Use-and-Impact-of-Online-Travel-Reviews.pdf) (Accessed on 1st April 2022).

Griffin, T., Giberson, J., Lee, S.H.M., Guttentag, D., Kandaurova, M., Sergueeva, K. and Dimanche, F., 2017. Virtual reality and implications for destination marketing. [online] Available at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2103&context=ttra> (Accessed on: 2nd April 2022).

Haines, G., 2022. *A third of millennials say posting pictures on social media is as important as the holiday itself*. [online] The Telegraph. [online] Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/news/millennials-social-media-holidays/> (Accessed 14 February 2022).

Himangshu Shakor, P., Debashish, R. and Raju, M., 2022. *Influence of social media on Tourists' Destination Selection Decision*. [online] Research Gate. [online] Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337857139_Influence_of_Social_Media_on_Tourists'_Destination_Selection_Decision (Accessed 8 February 2022).

Janeen, C., 2022. *Survey Shows Pent-Up Demand for Travel Continues to Build Among Americans*. [online] TravelPulse. [online] Available at: <https://www.travelpulse.com/news/features/survey-shows-pent-up-demand-for-travel-continues-to-build-among-americans.html> (Accessed 14 February 2022).

Kemp, S., 2022. *The Latest Facebook Stats: Everything You Need to Know — DataReportal — Global Digital Insights*. [online] DataReportal — Global Digital Insights. Available at: [https://datareportal.com/essential-facebook-stats#:~:text=Here's%20what%20the%20latest%20data,%3A%202.912%20billion%20\(January%202022\)&text=Number%20of%20people%20who%20use,%3A%201.929%20billion%20\(January%202022\)&text=Share%20of%20Facebook's%20monthly%20active,%3A%2066%25%20\(January%202022\)](https://datareportal.com/essential-facebook-stats#:~:text=Here's%20what%20the%20latest%20data,%3A%202.912%20billion%20(January%202022)&text=Number%20of%20people%20who%20use,%3A%201.929%20billion%20(January%202022)&text=Share%20of%20Facebook's%20monthly%20active,%3A%2066%25%20(January%202022)) (Accessed 4 April 2022).

Kiráľová, A. and Pavlíčka, A., 2015. Development of social media strategies in tourism destinations. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 175, pp.358-366. Available at: <https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S1877042815012719?token=66A579ACF3FFE2F76AADA>

[4242CDEBD635F4B16E2BA52CCE2658C0E10655541E4114727A0C0326DA57205BE54DC041B1A&originRegion=eu-west-1&originCreation=20220528123056](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/4242CDEBD635F4B16E2BA52CCE2658C0E10655541E4114727A0C0326DA57205BE54DC041B1A&originRegion=eu-west-1&originCreation=20220528123056) (Accessed on: 7th April 2022).

Lončarić, D., Bašan, L. and Marković, M.G., 2013. Importance of DMO websites in tourist destination selection. In *23rd CROMAR Congress: Marketing in a Dynamic environment—Academic and Practical Insights* (pp. 373-386). [online] Available at:

[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dina-](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dina-Loncaric/publication/262565804_IMPORTANCE_OF_DMO_WEBSITES_IN_TOURIST_DESTINATION_SELECTION/links/02e7e5381cc44e1328000000/IMPORTANCE-OF-DMO-WEBSITES-IN-TOURIST-DESTINATION-SELECTION.pdf)

[Loncaric/publication/262565804_IMPORTANCE_OF_DMO_WEBSITES_IN_TOURIST_DESTINATION_SELECTION/links/02e7e5381cc44e1328000000/IMPORTANCE-OF-DMO-WEBSITES-IN-TOURIST-DESTINATION-SELECTION.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dina-Loncaric/publication/262565804_IMPORTANCE_OF_DMO_WEBSITES_IN_TOURIST_DESTINATION_SELECTION/links/02e7e5381cc44e1328000000/IMPORTANCE-OF-DMO-WEBSITES-IN-TOURIST-DESTINATION-SELECTION.pdf) (Accessed on 12th April 2022).

Mkono, M. and Tribe, J., 2017. Beyond reviewing: Uncovering the multiple roles of tourism social media users. *Journal of travel research*, 56(3), pp.287-298. [online] Available at: <https://ray.yorks.ac.uk/id/eprint/4684/1/BEYOND%20REVIEWING%20final%20for%20Surrey%20online%20JTR.pdf>. (Accessed on: 21st April 2022).

Molinillo, S., Liébana-Cabanillas, F., Anaya-Sánchez, R. and Buhalis, D., 2018. DMO online platforms: Image and intention to visit. *Tourism management*, 65, pp.116-130. [online] Available at: <http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/30651/3/DMO%20online%20platforms-%20image%20and%20intention%20to%20visit.pdf> (Accessed on 13th April 2022).

Mróz-Gorgoń, B. and Peszko, K., 2016. Marketing analysis of social media—definition considerations. *European Journal of Service Management*, 20, pp.33-40. [online] Available at: <https://wnus.edu.pl/ejsm/file/article/view/3502.pdf> (Accessed on 13th April 2022).

Nosto. 2022. *Bridging the Gap: Consumer & Marketing Perspectives on Content in the Digital Age* - Nosto. [online] Available at: <https://www.nosto.com/resources/report-consumer-marketing-perspectives-on-content-in-the-digital-age/> (Accessed 4 May 2022).

NSO, 2022. *Inbound Tourism*. [online] Nso.gov.mt. Available at: https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/View_by_Unit/Unit_C3/Tourism_Statistics/Pages/Inbound-Tourism.aspx (Accessed 19 April 2022).

Pabel, A. and Prideaux, B., 2016. Social media use in pre-trip planning by tourists visiting a small regional leisure destination. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 22(4), pp.335-348. [online] Available

at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anja-Pabel/publication/287122529_Social_media_use_in_pre-trip_planning_by_tourists_visiting_a_small_regional_leisure_destination/links/5a10ca77a6fdccc2d7999c3a/Social-media-use-in-pre-trip-planning-by-tourists-visiting-a-small-regional-leisure-destination.pdf (Accessed 11 February 2022).

Parks, J., 2020. *Unforgettable social media Traveling Statistics*. [online] Columbus Digital Marketing Agency - Voted Top 1% in U.S. [Media Captain]. [online] Available at: <https://www.themediacaptain.com/unforgettable-social-media-traveling-statistics/> (Accessed 22 April 2022).

Paul, H., Roy, D. and Mia, R., 2019. Influence of social media on Tourists' Destination Selection Decision. *Sch. Bull*, 5, pp.658-664. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337857139_Influence_of_Social_Media_on_Tourists'_Destination_Selection_Decision (Accessed 11 February 2022).

Roth, E., 2022. *The 7 Best Social Media Apps for Travelers*. [online] MUO. Available at: <https://www.makeuseof.com/tag/6-best-social-media-apps-travelers/> (Accessed 7 February 2022).

Ružić, D. and Biloš, A., 2010. SOCIAL MEDIA IN DESTINATION MARKETING ORGANISATIONS (DMOs). *Tourism & Hospitality Management*. [online] Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281436591_Social_Media_In_Destination_Marketing_Organisations_DMOs (Accessed 11 February 2022).

Simms, A. and Gretzel, U., 2013. Planning a vacation using social media: Influences of demographic, psychographic, and trip-related characteristics. In *ENTER 2013 Conference on Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism* (Vol. 4). [online] Available at: <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.659.843&rep=rep1&type=pdf> (Accessed 14 February 2022).

sps.nyu.edu. 2019. *NYU School of Professional Studies Jonathan M. Tisch Center of Hospitality and the Family Travel Association Publish 2019 Family Travel Survey, Which Reveals That Affordability Continues to be a Cause of Diminished Family Travel*. [online] Available at: <https://www.sps.nyu.edu/homepage/communications/press-releases/2019/nyusps-tisch-center-of-hospitality-family-travel-association-2019-family-travel-survey.html> (Accessed 14 February 2022).

Su, L., Yang, Q., Swanson, S.R. and Chen, N.C., 2021. The impact of online reviews on destination trust and travel intention: The moderating role of online review trustworthiness. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, p.13567667211063207. [online] Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Su-Lujun/publication/357114100_The_impact_of_online_reviews_on_destination_trust_and_travel_intention_The_moderating_role_of_online_review_trustworthiness/links/61e79649dafcdb25fd36b459/The-impact-of-online-reviews-on-destination-trust-and-travel-intention-The-moderating-role-of-online-review-trustworthiness.pdf (Accessed 19 February 2022).

Team, W., 2022. *What is Destination Marketing? | WTM Global Hub*. [online] WTM Global Hub. [online] Available at: <https://hub.wtm.com/blog/travelindustry/what-is-destination-marketing/> (Accessed 10 February 2022).

Temblador, A., 2022. *How the Decade's Rise of social media Changed Travel*. [online] TravelPulse. Available at: <https://www.travelpulse.com/news/features/how-the-decades-rise-of-social-media-changed-travel.html> (Accessed 7 February 2022).

Times of Malta, 2020. *Malta's first coronavirus cases are girl and parents*. 7th March [online] Times of Malta. Available at: <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/first-coronavirus-case-reported-in-malta.776288> [Accessed 19 April 2022].

TripAdvisor, 2022. [online] Available at: https://www.tripadvisor.com/InfoCenter-a_ctr.2021TravelTrends (Accessed 14 February 2022).

UNWTO, 2022. *Tourism Enjoys Strong Start to 2022 while Facing New Uncertainties*. [online] Unwto.org. Available at: <https://www.unwto.org/news/tourism-enjoys-strong-start-to-2022-while-facing-new-uncertainties> (Accessed 19 April 2022).

UNWTO, 2022. *World Tourist Barometer*. [online] Webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com. Available at: https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2022-03/UNWTO_Barom22_02_March_excerpt-1.pdf?U1d1hw2v5Ga4TSml0KQRNbFKpr6mNygA (Accessed 21 April 2022).

Varzaru, A.A., Bocean, C.G. and Cazacu, M., 2021. Rethinking Tourism Industry in Pandemic COVID-19 Period. *Sustainability*, **13**(12), pp. 6956. [online] Available at:

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2545193972/fulltextPDF/1A5798866FD94D6APQ/7?accountid=190493> (Accessed on 21st April 2022).

Vladimirova, M., 2011. The brand image of Malta as a tourism destination: a case study in public relations and corporate communication practice. *VISTAS: Education, Economy, and Community*, 1(2), pp.44-61. [online] Available at: http://repository.uwl.ac.uk/id/eprint/3147/1/vistas_vol1_issue2_The%20brand%20image%20of%20Malta%20as%20a%20tourism%20destination.pdf (Accessed on: 22nd April 2022).

Walsh, S., 2021. *The Top 10 Social Media Sites & Platforms 2021*. [online] Search Engine Journal. [online] Available at: <https://www.searchenginejournal.com/social-media/biggest-social-media-sites/#close> (Accessed 18 April 2022).

Wang, J., Choe, Y. and Song, H., 2021. Korean Domestic Tourists' Decision-Making Process under Threat of COVID-19. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(20), pp. 10835. [online] Available at: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2584378271/fulltextPDF/761C139EF7384621PQ/3?accountid=190493> (Accessed on 23rd April 2022).

Wang, Y., 2011. Destination marketing and management: scope, definition, and structures. *Destination marketing and management: Theories and applications*, pp.1-20. [online] Available at: https://books.google.com.mt/books?hl=en&lr=&id=wfkDgc4KnOMC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=Wang,+Y.,+2011.+Destination+marketing+and+management:+scope,+definition,+and+structures.+Destination+marketing+and+management:+Theories+and+applications,+pp.1-20.&ots=qySjOfONYf&sig=Nq9uz8HuYY0XJ8cj-wfgpM8jxyY&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false (Accessed on: 25th April 2022).

Wen, J., Kozak, M., Yang, S. and Liu, F., 2020. COVID-19: potential effects on Chinese citizens' lifestyle and travel. *Tourism Review*. Available at: <https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/215920/1/215920.pdf> (Accessed on 12th April 2022).

Werenowska, A. and Rzepka, M., 2020. The role of social media in generation Y travel decision-making process (case study in Poland). *Information*, 11(8), p.396. Available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2078-2489/11/8/396/html> (Accessed on: 14th April 2022).

Hunter, W.C., 2016. The social construction of tourism online destination image: A comparative semiotic analysis of the visual representation of Seoul. *Tourism management*, 54, pp.221-229. [online] Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0261517715300479> (Accessed 11 April 2022).

Xiao, X., Fang, C. and Lin, H., 2020. Characterizing tourism destination image using photos' visual content. *ISPRS International Journal of Geo-Information*, 9(12), p.730. [online] Available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2220-9964/9/12/730> (Accessed on: 22nd March 2022).

Yao, L. 2016, *Position the Brand: Identify the Role of social media for Public Accounting Firms*, Liberty University. [online] Available at: <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1407&context=masters> (Accessed 09 April 2022).

Zhang, F., Zhou, B., Liu, L., Liu, Y., Fung, H.H., Lin, H. and Ratti, C., 2018. Measuring human perceptions of a large-scale urban region using machine learning. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 180, pp.148-160. [online] Available at: http://bzhou.ie.cuhk.edu.hk/publication/landscape_urbanplanning.pdf (Accessed 09 April 2022).

1. Age *

- ☐ 17-25
- ☐ 26-35
- ☐ 36-45
- ☐ 46-55
- ☐ 56-64
- ☐ 65+

2. Gender *

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Prefer not to say

8.1-

Chapter- 8.0 Appendix:

One can find screenshots of the questionnaire questions that all of the participants have filled in online via the link. Additionally, one can find the questions that have been used for the interviews as well as the consent forms that have been signed by the interviewees.

Questionnaire screenshots:

3. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed? *

- ☐ Primary School
- ☐ Secondary School
- ☐ Diploma (MQF level 4)
- ☐ Higher National Diploma (MQF level 5)
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree
- ☐ Master's Degree
- ☐ Ph.D. or Higher
- ☐ Prefer not to say

4. How often did you travel pre Covid-19 Pandemic? *

- ☐ Less than once a year
- ☐ Once a year
- ☐ Twice a year
- ☐ Three times a year
- ☐ Four times a year
- ☐ Five times a year
- ☐ More

5. Which social media do you actively use right now? (Select all that apply) *

☐ Facebook

☐ Instagram

☐ LinkedIn

☐ Snapchat

☐ Twitter

☐ YouTube

☐ TikTok

☐ Pinterest

6. From where do you get inspiration for your next travel plans? (Select all that apply) *

☐ Family/ Friends

☐ Travel Agency page

☐ Influencer page

☐ Travel Online Advertisement

☐ Instagram Hashtags

☐ Travel Blogs, Books, and Magazines.

☐ YouTube Videos

☐ Pinterest boards

☐ Google search

☐ Other

7. From a Scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest) how important are destination reviews for you? *

Not important at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very important

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

8. From the following websites how reliable do you think their destination reviews are? *

| | Not reliable at all | Very unreliable | Somewhat unreliable | Neither reliable nor unreliable | Somewhat reliable | Very reliable |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Facebook | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Expedia | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| TripAdvisor | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Yelp | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Booking.com | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Kayak | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Airbnb | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Google search | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Hotels.com | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Cheaptickets.com | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

9. On a scale of 1 to 10, (10 being highly influenced), how influenced are you to travel to places based only on information that you have seen on a social media website? *

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | |
| Not influenced at all | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Highly influenced |

10. From your last trip did you make any changes in travel plans due to social media content *

- ☐ I do not know; I do not recall
- ☐ My initial itinerary was not altered
- ☐ In the initial vacation itinerary, I made a few adjustments
- ☐ The initial travel itinerary was significantly altered.
- ☐ My initial travel plan was totally altered.

11. When researching a destination from where do you gather most of the information? *

- ☐ Social media (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube)
- ☐ Travel blogs (Jones around the world, Expert Vagabond)
- ☐ Search Engines (Google, Bing)
- ☐ Social Travel websites (TripAdvisor, Expedia)
- ☐ Magazines (National Geographic)
- ☐ Wikitravel articles
- ☐ Family and Friends

12. Since Covid-19 started it has changed how we travel around the world. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being highest) how much do you think Covid-19 will affect your future trips abroad? *

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | |
| Not affected at all | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Highly affected |

13. Have you travelled abroad for a vacation since the outbreak of Covid-19 Pandemic? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

14. Since you travelled abroad during Covid-19 did the situation in the country influence or affect your decision-making where to visit? If yes how? *

Enter your answer

15. Since you did not travel abroad during Covid-19 did you opt to take a vacation locally? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

16. Since you did your vacation locally during Covid-19 did the situation in the country influence or affect your decision-making where to visit? If yes how? *

Enter your answer

8.2- Consent Forms

Dissertation Consent Form

ITS INSTITUTE OF
TOURISM STUDIES
IN ACADEMIC AFFILIATION WITH THE
EMIRATES ACADEMY OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT

Title of Research: Social media in tourism marketing: **tourists' destination selection**

Researcher: Denis Chetcuti - 0288095M

Degree: Bachelor's in international hospitality management

Dear Sir / Madam,

I, Denis Chetcuti, a student at the Institute of Tourism Studies am currently in the final year of my Bachelor's in international hospitality management. I am carrying out research on Social media in tourism marketing: **tourists' destination selection**.

I would like to explore your views on this matter by asking you some questions. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information so you can decide whether to participate in this study. Any questions you may have will be answered by the researcher.

There are no known risks related with this research project other than possible discomfort with the following:

- You will be asked to be honest when answering questions.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be stored securely and will be made available only to those individuals conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study. Your identity will not be revealed in any publications that result from this study.

Institute of Tourism Studies

Page 1 of 2

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the questionnaire and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above-mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

Priscilla Civielli

Participant's Name



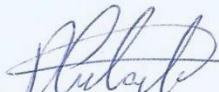
Participant's Signature

8/04/2022

Date

Denis Chelanti

Researcher's Name



Researcher's Signature

8/04/2022

Date

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the questionnaire and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above-mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

Jeffrey Owen
Participant's Name

[Signature]
Participant's Signature

08/04/2022
Date

Penis Chetwiti
Researcher's Name

[Signature]
Researcher's Signature

8/04/2022
Date

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the questionnaire and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above-mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

Melanie Laure
Participant's Name

[Signature]
Participant's Signature

07/04/22
Date

Denis Chetcuti
Researcher's Name

[Signature]
Researcher's Signature

07/04/22
Date

8.3- Interview Questions

How does social media Impact the decision making of an individual when choosing a destination? What are the most important factors in making social media marketing effective?

1. What role does visual marketing play in your social media strategy?
2. How are you using social media to cater for potential visitors' needs and interests?
3. What are you doing to persuade viewers to select, view and share your content?
4. What strategies do you find most effective to increase sales?
5. Did your social media strategy change during the Covid-19 Pandemic? If yes, in what way?
6. What is the biggest challenge that most social media practitioners have?
7. What online platforms does the business mainly focus on in context of social media marketing? What type of content do you find most effective to increase exposure?
8. Which platforms are you finding the most productive, either in return on investment (ROI) or in engagement?
9. Are you refreshing your social media marketing strategies with a more modern concept? If yes how often?