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# Digital Destination Matching: Practices, Priorities and Predictions

**Mary-Ann Cooper [1], Raquel Camprubí [2], Erdogan Koc [3] and Ralf Buckley [4,*]**

1 Instituto Profesional de la Fundacion Duoc UC de la Pontificia Universidad Católica, Viña del Mar 2520000, Chile; maryanncooperv@gmail.com
2 Faculty of Tourism, University of Girona, 17005 Girona, Spain; raquel.camprubi@udg.edu
3 Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences, Bahcesehir University, 34000 Istanbul, Turkey; erdogankoc@yahoo.com
4 International Chair in Ecotourism Research (Emeritus), Griffith University, Gold Coast 4222, Australia
* Correspondence: r.buckley@griffith.edu.au; Tel.: +61-417-711-502

**Abstract:** Over the past three years, travel agents, enterprises and destinations have switched almost entirely from traditional to digital marketing methods, relying strongly on search engines and social media. They consider these methods as faster, more flexible, financially more efficient, and with wider reach. Most importantly, they provide customer data and feedback, with precise targeting of different messages to different market sectors, with rapid measures of success. This, however, leads to fragmentation of information reaching tourists, which itself affects destination image. This seems unavoidable with continuing competition between platforms; hence, the agents, enterprises and destinations need multichannel marketing. In addition, since most search engines and social media are international, cultural context is a critical component of communications, in style and content as well as language. This may now include multiple sensory detectors and sources, including visual, sound, and haptic. As tourists increasingly garner information independently, travel agents have greater incentives to seek exclusive control over sales of specific products.

**Keywords:** search-engine; social-media; segmentation; culture; psychophysiology



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## 1. Introduction

The analysis of destination matching, as the interaction between destination marketing and destination choice [1,2], can potentially provide new insights into tourism research, including aspects related to sustainability. Here, we offer a set of five short commentaries on current practices, future predictions, and research priorities. Each one builds on the concept of destination matching to commence construction of new bodies of tourism theory. The first interviews travel agents to determine their current practices in relation to digital destination marketing and matching, especially their use of social media and search engines. It shows how destination marketing messages have become more fluid, adaptive, competitive, targeted and segmented.

The second considers how this increased fragmentation of information dissemination, from multiple sources and through multiple channels, influences the formation of destination images. The third places this within a cultural context, addressing cultural differences and patterns in tourism destination demand and decision-making, in the context of international destination matching. The fourth considers what business strategies may be available to agents who no longer control access to information about tourism products, enterprises and destinations, but can gain exclusive rights over sales transactions. The fifth examines opportunities to use physiological detection devices to complement psychological scales, in assessing tourist interest and reaction so as to create destination matches.

## 2. Digital Marketing by Travel Agents

A central premise of the destination-matching framework [1,2] is that tourists now use search engines and social media to identify destinations, enterprises and products to plan their purchases; therefore, tourism destinations and enterprises necessarily use the same search engines and social media platforms to pitch propositions directly to individual purchasers. In this section, that premise is subject to empirical test, through interviews with individual travel agents. The agents concerned are based in Chile, where destination choice, marketing and matching have been analyzed recently [2]. They included female and male agents from large, small, old and new agencies, with websites in Chile, Spain and USA.

Agents were interviewed in person, by phone, or online, depending on COVID-19 restrictions, during July and August 2021. Interviews were conducted in Spanish or English at interviewee preference. Agents were asked: (a) how have travel agents in general been affected by the growth in digital marketing; (b) how has your own business as a travel agent been affected by tourism marketing from enterprises and destinations directly to tourists, specifically through social media and search engines; (c) how have you as a travel agent used social media and search engines in marketing your business as a whole, and particular tourism products and destinations; and (d) how have your overall strategies changed in the light of digital marketing and the pandemic? Interviews were recorded with permission, transcribed and translated, and analysed using directed-content qualitative approaches. Theoretical saturation was reached rapidly, and the principal findings were robust and straightforward. Seven principal themes are summarised below.

First, digital marketing has largely or completely taken over from print marketing, mainly because it is quicker and more flexible. "There has been a drastic change, no more flyers or brochures, people won't even accept them now." "We still have a newsletter which is sent to high-end clients", but "social media has a great impact", "it shows how everything changes in real time," "it has made everything more fluid," "it keeps people constantly alert," and "it allows us to respond quickly to changes." "Years ago, to change brand image took a lot of time and resources, but now it is very quick." "Three years ago, we still published newspaper ads, and sometimes we could compare our ads against our competitors and they were almost the same, but we could not change them. Digital marketing allows us to react, to change, to differentiate our value proposition."

Second, digital marketing is more tightly targeted and efficient. "The good thing about search engine marketing (SEM) and social media is that we reach our target directly and do not waste resources." "Digital marketing allows us to deliver the right message to the right target." Digital marketing also saves time on routine tasks. "We have digitalized the booking system, medical forms, etc." Social media also provide customer data. "We can now obtain a lot of data from our consumers." "There's much more information on our targets now." "Social media and SEM deliver deep insights into traveller profiles." "We get deeper knowledge of our clients, because if not, we do not sell." "Digital marketing has more tools to learn about targets' interests." "Digital marketing provides better understanding."

Third, for the tourist, social media provides customer-to-customer references. "Social media allows users to see experiences from other users, attracting them to buy." "Social media has become the way to share experiences." "The big revelation is on sharing." "Users can experience through what they see." "Digital marketing creates sensations for people that have a desire to travel." Agents and enterprises can capitalise on this. "We use real people, not models, we work with empathy." "During lockdown, we invited our followers to travel through their senses, by posting videos of a chef teaching users to cook typical food from a certain destination. We didn't stop during quarantine, we posted something 4 times a week."

Fourth, digital tools are only a first step, and need to lead to an actual person. Chatbots are not very effective. "Social media incorporates collaboration with clients. I think this explains why chat boxes do not work. People want to know that there is a person at the back of each touch point. I don't think online travel agents (OTAs) are able to deliver this." "Travel agencies retain strength because we have visible people to back up the digital marketing strategies." "We use digital tools to create personal encounters." "Clients call, looking for a travel therapist or travel consultant, where conversation is essential."

Fifth, competition has increased with greater transparency of information. "The whole industry has become more competitive." Competition has become harder." "It's more competitive." "Agencies with no understanding are having a hard time." "Users can now compare price/quality ratio, but also get a deeper insight into the product, for example its sustainability." "Digital marketing is easily measured and very effective in sales."

Sixth, different tools are needed for different tasks. Instagram® has the greatest reach. "Instagram® reaches a much wider audience than the newsletter." "Some products get better reception on Instagram®." "Instagram® allows rapid changes, adapting strategies over time, improving through trial and error." "Instagram® works in terms of age group connection, along with WhatsApp®." "We use Instagram® to reach clients quickly." "We thought Facebook® and Twitter® would be enough, but Facebook® did not work for us ... Twitter® works for sending out information on sustainability, but not for selling or presenting tourism products."

Seventh, some tourists already have preferred destinations, enterprises and products. "We have loyal customers who want nature photography tours, they look for different destinations but the same activity, a niche market. They like photographic tours and workshops and anything related to natural landscapes." "It's more about tourism products than destinations: for example, secluded luxury hotels such as Vira Vira from &Beyond." "Our tourists are very aspirational, they want experience and culture, exotic destinations, and they also give travel experiences as gifts." "People are desperate to travel, and they have information on new destinations."

In summary, these travel agent interviews indicate tourism marketing now commences almost entirely through digital means, owing to reach, efficiency, and targeting; but that initial digital connections need human backup to provide personalised advice and close sales. Travel agents note increased competition in consequence, but appreciate increased flexibility in marketing, increased access to detailed customer data, and improved opportunity to present different pitches to different market sectors. The switch from past print advertising to current digital marketing has changed destination branding from monolithic and fixed, to subdivided and fluid.

## 3. Information Fragmentation

Information sources influence individuals' gaze, thoughts, and perceptions; and hence, perceived destination image, a key tool in travel decision-making. This is well recognized by tourist destination representatives, who use multiple marketing approaches to communicate, generate awareness, and convince tourists about the benefits of travel to particular places. Over the past two decades, however, communication channels have undergone an unprecedented evolution, with irreversible changes in the way people communicate, and consequently in how tourism destinations are promoted. These changes include both sources and flows of information. Virtual communication channels such as websites, search engines, blogs, and social networks, have increased information complexity, affecting the image formation agents identified three decades ago [3]. Traditional communication tools, such as brochures, travel magazines, guidebooks, and television advertising, coexist with new communication tools, led by social networks such as Instagram®, Twitter® and Youtube®.

This provides tourists with immediate access to a large quantity of travel information. Tourists can consult a wide range of information sources, directly from mobile devices. Social media platforms are gateways to online social interaction and eWOM, electronic word-of-mouth. Peer-to-peer information is considered more credible than paid advertising contents [4], and information sources that provide access to first-hand user reviews attract more attention. This gives tourism destination marketers a doorway for direct access to their intended audience, not available through traditional advertising tools.

A critical side effect, however, is greatly increased complexity of information systems and fragmentation of information flows. This lack of coherence and coordination can influence individual cognitive evaluations of perceived destination image, with potential negative outcomes [5]. To minimize these negative effects, destinations adopt four main strategies, all of them relying on an understanding of market segmentation. These are: (a) domination and instrumentalization of information sources; (b) eWOM management; (c) storytelling management; and (d) personalization.

Information sources such as movies, influencers, and bloggers, which do not fit neatly into any of the three categories of induced, autonomous or organic sources [3,6], have become major sources of information about tourism destinations. None of these exist specifically to promote tourism destinations, and none are direct word-of-mouth in the traditional sense. All of them, however, can reach and influence individuals. In addition, all of them can be persuaded to promote particular destinations, typically through material rewards and sponsorship deals. Therefore, destination marketing organisations now put considerable effort into such measures. Effectively, these efforts have replaced press trips, as means to boost destination brand recognition and credibility.

Many destinations now have dedicated Film Commission Offices, whose goal is to attract cinematographic productions that will market the destination through film sets, celebrity actors, production processes, and direct advertising. Cities such as Paris, Barcelona, Rome and New York, for example, have intentionally attracted prestigious filmmakers such as Woody Allen, aiming to boost city image. Once films are successful, destinations can use them to create tourist products or communication strategies. New Zealand, for example, launched the campaign "100% Middle-Earth, 100% Pure New Zealand", based on the Lord of the Rings film trilogy. The campaign aimed to show how easy it is for people to visit New Zealand, experience the landscapes of Middle-Earth, meet local people, and take part in unique activities.

Destinations also aim to manage eWOM, to highlight positive experiences and minimize negative posts. For example, they organize tourist photography contests on Instagram® or Facebook®, to convert tourists to destination ambassadors. Mexico, for example, invited visitors to post pictures on Instagram®, under the hashtag #MyPicOfMexico2018. The Catalonia Tourism Board in Spain organized a tour around principal tourist sites in Catalonia, encouraging people to make Instagram® posts of the most representative pictures of their holidays in Catalonia during summer 2012. The most popular pictures were collected, and an exhibition called #cataloniaexperience was organized in Barcelona.

Destinations have recognised that selfies are a significant component of eWOM, helping to create and disseminate destination image. Some destinations have designed strategically selected "selfie spaces", aiming to influence the production and distribution of travel selfies by their visitors, so as to reflect a desired destination image. Visit London, for example, promotes the "top 11 selfie spots in London" on its official website, including samples and a short explanation of each. Similarly, Amsterdam and New York have placed giant sculptures of their slogans in the middle of the city, to encourage visitors to take pictures and upload them in the social networks. New Zealand, in contrast, ran a campaign to discourage tourists from all taking photos and selfies at the same influencer-advertised locations [7].

Storytelling has also emerged as a key strategy to promote specific destination information. Storytelling is a technique for communicating brand by mythologising tangible experiences [8]. Short videos posted on platforms such as Instagram®, Snapchat®, and TikTok® circulate curiosities, legends, or travel tips about destinations, attracting audience attention. Las Vegas, for example, created the campaign "Only Vegas Moments" to reinforce the city's identity as the USA's premier provider of "adult freedoms". The campaign used storytelling principles to create four digital short films. Stories can also be circulated through audio podcasts, distributed via platforms such as Apple® Podcasts, Sybel® or Spotify®. Stories need not be accurate. Glen Innes in Australia, and Zhangjiajie in China, for example, use completely fictitious stories to engage and attract visitors [9].

Finally, tourists have come to expect highly personalized travel experiences, and this includes personalization of information seeking processes, to reduce fragmentation of information. One approach is through implementation of website chatbots, to improve humanization of search experiences. As noted in the previous section, these have not yet replaced direct human communications, but they play an intermediate role in a multi-channel, multi-step destination matching process.

Despite the efforts made by tourism destinations to manage and control them, information sources are ultimately selected by individual tourists, who navigate between idealistic, realistic, vague, and inaccurate information provided in travel guides, websites, blogs, social networks, and personal recommendations. Effectively, they have to assemble the pieces of a puzzle, to generate a complete picture of the destination. Quantities and types of information affect the "pixels" of the mental image formed. Information sources with higher credibility, such as WOM from friends and relatives, are more influential. If information sources are vague or limited in scope, tourists may acquire a stereotyped image of the destination, creating unmet expectations and an unsatisfying experience.

When tourists use search engines to acquire destination information, deliberate searches encode information more strongly in short-term memory, than untargeted surfing [10]. Search engines use complex algorithms to push information to users, depending on their profiles, networks, and recent searches, and on paid sponsorship arrangements with businesses and organizations, including tourism destinations. Tourists may not pay as much attention to information reaching them passively in this way, however, as to information they have sought actively themselves. Paid arrangements are now a commonplace component of digital marketing strategies, but it remains uncertain how much interest they generate.

In summary, destinations need to develop omnichannel marketing strategies, coordinating content, messages, and information displayed, and matching them to defined audience segments. The complexity of information sources and channels increases the complexity in managing information so as to reduce fragmentation.

## 4. Cultural Context

As tourism destinations and enterprises expand and target their digital offerings to different market subsectors, they must also adapt them to the different cultural contexts in each target market. Tourists from different countries of origin have different norms and expectations for digital advertising. These include aspects such as: colour palette, screen layout, overlays between images and written information, music and sound, and language, lexicon, accent, and phraseology for spoken components. More fundamentally, tourists from different countries of origin have different destination demands and desires, and all aspects of destination branding, marketing and matching must reflect and adapt to these differences.

Tourists' destination choices and expectations are congruent with their own self-images [11], which are shaped by cultural characteristics [12]. Destination matching efforts therefore require an understanding of cultural implications [13,14], both at the macro level of destinations, and the micro level of enterprises. Tourism and hospitality activities are international [15,16], and involve frequent social interactions with tourists [17–19]. Therefore, the design and implementation of destination matching activities must take intercultural differences into account.

Specific cultural characteristics, such as individualism, long-term orientation, and indulgence, are especially influential in this regard [20]. Tourists from high power-distance cultures are more likely to prefer tourism destinations, products, and services that enhance their credibility of belonging to a superior social class, higher prestige, and wealth [21]. Tourists from high-power distance cultures thus place much greater importance on tangible elements of a destination or tourism establishment, since the grandeur of tangible objects conveys a message about status, through association with luxury, exclusivity, and elitism.

Tourists from high power-distance cultures spend more on shopping [22]; and tourists are more likely to buy souvenirs when there is a large cultural distance between countries of origin and destination [22]. Tourists from culturally distant origins, such as Chinese tourists visiting the US, are more likely to shop for souvenirs or gifts [23]; whereas those from similar cultures, such as Canadian tourists visiting the US, are more likely to shop for more daily use items such as groceries, foods, and clothes [24]. Tourists from collectivist cultures are more likely to shop for gifts [25], since they have more occasions for gift giving, larger gift budgets, and greater pressure to reciprocate when they receive gifts themselves. Tourists from high power-distance cultures prefer activities such as hunting, fishing, rafting, sailing, and wilderness hiking [26], whereas those from high uncertainty-avoidance cultures [22] prefer slower-paced or indoor activities such as visiting friends and relatives, attending staged events, and shopping [27]. Time orientations of tourists also influence holiday types and activities and destination choices. Tourists from past-oriented cultures prefer more hedonistic and indulgent holidays and destinations, whereas those from future-oriented cultures prefer self-fulfilment and knowledge enhancement [28,29].

Culture also influences attitudes and behaviours related to destination sustainability. Tourists, even package tourists, prefer sustainable destinations [30–32], but many destinations suffer sustainability problems [33–36]. Culture influences attitudes and behaviours towards sustainability. Tourism managers in high power-distance cultures pay less attention to corporate social responsibility [37], owing to their focus on material gains and economic success. The same applies for tourists from individualistic cultures, such as Poland [38].

Overall, therefore, cultural components are critical to analysis of destination marketing, matching and choice, and indeed, perhaps deserve universal recognition and inclusion throughout tourism research and analysis. Tourists and tourism stakeholders are all embedded in their own cultures, whether or not they recognise it; and differences between cultures exert powerful influences on their intentions, choices and behaviours.

## 5. Challenges from Digital Destination Matching

Assortative matching of tourists and tourism destinations may face a range of practical complexities, depending on scale and scope. These complexities create barriers to entirely automated algorithmic systems, retaining a role for human agents. The first is the disconnect between purchasable product, and marketable destination. The second is the question of scale: at smaller scales, the product is the destination. The third is that for some products at least, particular agents possess monopoly control over access. Tourists may gain information via parallel channels such as assortative matching algorithms, but if agents control all sales, that information flow does not undercut the agent business model.

Marketing success is measured mainly through sales. Intermediate measures such as recognition and attitude are also available, but sales are the goal. Tourism destination marketing, TDM, is thus unusual, in that the destination itself is not for sale: at least, not to individual tourists. TDM aims to persuade tourists to buy tourism products, from tourism enterprises, that travel to or operate at that destination. If local industry associations fund TDM via a fee or levy from enterprises, the link from sales to marketing budgets is still indirect. If TDM is funded by government tourism portfolios, using general revenue from taxation, the link is even more tenuous.

For most TDM, the destination includes numerous enterprises, and many of those enterprises operate at multiple destinations. Destination brands and enterprise brands therefore overlap, and may either cooperate or compete. Some destinations, however, operate as monopolies, owned or controlled by a single enterprise. Examples include: multi-activity destination resorts; resort-residential ski, golf, and marina developments; large self-contained cruise ships and tourist trains; and major fixed-site tourism infrastructure, such as large cableways or artificial surfing wave pools. Each of these may lease space to smaller enterprises; but the landowner, head lessor, or infrastructure owner controls the destination and its brand, and this is reflected in the conditions of subleases.

One interesting case is that of conservation reserves with a single tourism and hospitality operator. These include some public protected areas with whole-of-park or partial-monopoly visitor-management and hospitality concessions. They also include privately-owned reserves funded either in whole or in part through tourism operations. And they include communal and private reserves that lease tourism operating rights to a single lessor or head lessor. There are many examples of each, worldwide.

The unifying feature of all these “destination enterprises” is that to visit the destination at all, a tourist must purchase a product from a single controlling enterprise, generally before they commence travel. Subsidiary purchases may also be made on site, but generally there is no avoiding the controlling enterprise at the outset. It is this enterprise that conducts TDM, and the same enterprise that reaps the bulk of sales if that TDM is successful. Such arrangements thus provide testbeds to study tourism destination matching with a reduced set of variable parameters and linking mechanisms.

Some enterprises, multi-site as well as single-destination, devolve monopoly control of product sales to specific agents, with a commission fee structure. Examples include some wildlife lodges, heliski lodges, island resorts, and surf and dive charter boats. Tourists may also gain information via various parallel communication channels, including those driven by assortative matching algorithms. One of the weaknesses of aggregator models such as online travel agents, OTAs, is that their business depends on tourists using the OTA for booking as well as information. OTAs conceal the identity of individual products and enterprises, so as to encourage purchases via the OTA portal. Often, however, it is easy to discover the on-ground providers, using standard search engines. Many tourists then prefer to book directly with these providers rather than via the OTA, because discounts and refunds may be easier to obtain.

Where specific agents control sales, however, then parallel information flows enhance the agent’s business through free marketing, rather than undercutting it by competing for sales. The world’s largest heliski operator, for example, runs lodges at 14 sites in the Canadian Rockies, with a worldwide clientele. It does not accept direct bookings. Instead, it allocates sales quotas to exclusive agents who each control purchases from defined geographical areas. Demand for product commonly exceeds supply, and spaces sell out a year or more in advance. The agents also negotiate discounted air travel arrangements with particular international carriers, which benefits the clients and provides extra income for the agents. They maintain lists of past and potential clients, and actively aim to match tourists to specific destination sites.

Similar arrangements apply for some components of the surf tourism sector. Some countries provide exclusive rights of access to specific surf breaks, for guests at nearby purpose-built surf lodges. Some of these lodges use multiple marketing channels, but some devolve all sales via exclusive agent agreements in their principal client countries of origin. Tourists can find out about those lodges via many different sources and channels, but in order to visit they have to purchase product via the exclusive agents.

In the conservation tourism sector, some of the prime tourism destinations are lodges with exclusive access to private or communally owned reserves, or defined lease areas in public lands such as national parks or wildlife management areas. These destinations can provide particularly good wildlife viewing opportunities because of location, terrain, and detailed management history, which may include vegetation, wildlife, staff and clients, and local communities. Many of these lodges and reserves issue joint or separate management and marketing contracts to internationally known tourism enterprises, and those enterprises conduct TDM. These contracts may change year to year, e.g., if lodges decide to carry out their own marketing directly.

The use of exclusive sales agencies is widespread in other industry sectors, some reputable and others less so. Reputable examples include parts of the real estate and property sectors, and a number of luxury goods manufacturers. Some multi-level marketing associations and online sales systems, however, also rely on exclusive control of sales for particular products, and not all of these are reputable. In attempting to foreshadow the future roles of agents and algorithms in destination matching, we can predict that agents will increasingly seek greater control over sales, through exclusive sales and marketing agreements, rather than merely controlling information.

## 6. Opportunities for Psychophysiological Approaches

Historically, tourist perceptions and attitudes towards destinations have been assessed largely through self-reported psychological scales, of which there are now at least two dozen [14,39]. Potential new customers, however, are reluctant to commence an interaction by completing a psychological scale. Social media and search engines obtain this information indirectly, using search and purchase histories, social media group memberships, contact networks, and free online games and quizzes whose real purpose is to elicit psychological information.

New technological capabilities, including those revealed through patents [1], can now complement these techniques by tracking customer interests more closely, to provide realistic, unbiased, and precise data on perceptions, attitudes, and responses to destination stimuli [40–43]. Some of these are covert, using digital device cameras, microphones, and location indicators. Others are overt, and can only be used with research volunteers, but are valuable in testing and improving the indirect and covert measures. The former include eye tracking and facial emotion recognition. The latter include electroencephalography (EEG), skin conductivity or galvanic skin response (GSR), and heart rate. They also include more accurate eye tracking cameras, and facial emotion recognition via muscle sensing.

For example, whilst people generally pay strongest attention to visual cues [44,45], EEG and eye-tracking analyses found that in conflict-ridden destinations, risk-motivated tourists shift their attention to verbal cues [46]. The combination of EEG and eye tracking is also valuable in understanding tourists' perceptions, attitudes, and responses to service atmospherics [47]. Pupil dilation has long been used to measure emotional reactions, both positive and negative [43,48], and eye-tracking heatmaps and scan paths show distribution and sequences in visual attention [43]. Facial recognition devices measure facial muscle movements to identify basic emotions such as disgust, happiness, anger, sadness, pain, or indifference [49,50]. Emotion recognition algorithms can classify individual emotions from video of individuals passing surveillance cameras, though not always accurately. It seems likely that all these approaches will gain increasing use to achieve more detailed measurement of tourist responses to the various stimuli associated with specific destinations.

## 7. Conclusions

As each of these commentaries demonstrates, the concept of destination matching can trigger new conjectures relevant to tourism marketing; and these can point towards potential new research topics and directions, beyond the many already addressed within the fields of destination choice and marketing [1]. Analysing actual travel agent practices, we find that digital marketing through social media and search engines is a very widespread way to gain new customers, but that tourists also expect personal contacts, especially for repeat bookings. Shotgun-style destination marketing via print communications has been replaced almost entirely by much more efficient, adaptable, and targeted digital destination matching approaches.

The analysis of information fragmentation suggests that continuing competition between communication channels is likely, because of the scale of social media platforms and search engines. A trend away from specialized digital tourism channels and sources, and towards destination marketing, matching and choice as one component of generalized digital marketing, seems likely to continue. The skill of tourism enterprises and destinations in taking advantage of these major platforms, therefore, seems likely to become an ever-larger component of commercial success and survival. At the same time, travel agents may be forced to shift their business models from brokers of information, to brokers of sales. This model is already operational in some subsectors, especially for "destination enterprises".

The commentary on cultural context cautions that English-language digital platforms are by no means universal. Different countries have their own platforms, utilizing their own languages, some coupled with firewalls preventing access to international English language platforms. Expatriates from those countries, even if living in English-speaking countries, gravitate towards digital platforms in their own languages. These have their own culturally and politically shaped structures and contents. In addition, legal and technical frameworks in different countries dictate the degree to which different platforms track, manipulate, and capitalize on the interests, preferences and purchases of individual users. As noted in the commentary on psychophysiological approaches, one component of this is to use multimedia signals, including sound, images, and haptic measures, as well as written language.

From a research perspective, the initial premise for destination matching framework [1] was that the practical shift to generalized digital marketing through social media and search engines is already well underway and essentially irreversible, and therefore, that tourism research should reflect this. The commentaries here show firstly, that the shift has indeed already happened; and secondly, that this points to a need for future research on tourist responses and agent strategies for fragmented information within different cultural contexts. That is, we argue that the concept of destination matching can help to catalyse new lines of research in tourism psychology, communications, information management, and cross-cultural analysis.

From a tourism management perspective, the results and arguments presented here indicate a number of practical steps that tourism destinations, enterprises, and travel agents can take to improve future business and competitiveness. First, almost all destination marketing organisations, commercial tourism enterprises, and travel agencies must now become adept in search-engine and social-media marketing. This is much more dynamic, time-consuming, and expertise-intensive than historical hard-copy print advertising, but also much more targeted, adaptable, and efficient. The only exceptions are the few enterprises that rely on repeat bookings from an established clientele.

Second, given the rapidly evolving specialist expertise required, this creates opportunities for outsourcing to a new class of digital marketing consultants, not necessarily specialising only in tourism. Third, to counteract information fragmentation across multi-source, multi-channel digital marketing, tourism destinations can create coherent storylines as a new form of branding, and construct campaigns, competitions, and infrastructure to influence social-media influencers. Fourth, since digital marketing is almost all international, all messaging must consider intercultural communication opportunities and obstacles. This includes images, sound, and haptics, as well as written messages. Fifth, as travel agents lose their exclusive control over tourism information, they can compensate by gaining control over bookings and sales, at least for some types of enterprise and destination.

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