

# The Power of Emotions on Social Media: Understanding the Influence on Tourists' Decision-Making During the Pre-Trip Phase.

## introduction & theoretical background.

In today's competitive market, it is not enough to only rely on the unique attributes or functional benefits of the product or service. Emotions have a considerable impact on individual's behaviours and subsequent actions and play therefore an essential role in contemporary marketing practices (Bagozzi, 1999; Consoli, 2010).

### PSYCHOEVOLUTIONARY THEORY OF EMOTIONS

There is a limited number of eight primary emotions, which may vary in their degree of arousal. All other emotions perceived by human beings are derivative states, i.e. mixtures or combinations of the basic emotions (Plutchik, 1980, 2003).

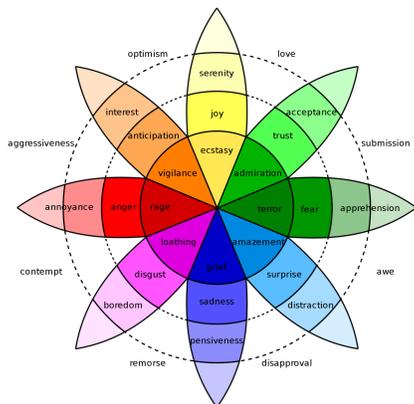


Figure 1: Structural Model of Emotions by Plutchik (2003)

### EMOTIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN TOURISM

Tourism-related products and services are experience goods that are mostly intangible and thus difficult to evaluate before consumption. Tourism is all about delivering positive experiences to travellers and thus marketing in tourism means selling the advantages and attributes of the vacation (Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

Travellers view social media as a valuable communication tool that helps them gathering information, sharing their experience, and evaluating destinations and service providers during all stages of travel: before, during and after the trip (Cheung et al., 2021).

## research design.

*"To what extent do emotions influence the decision-making process of a potential tourist during the pre-trip phase on social media?"*

A quantitative approach (online self-reporting questionnaire) was selected to examine if emotions communicated on social media nudge tourists to a certain behaviour.

The 2 (caption: present - absent) x 1 (picture: always present) experimental research design captured emotional reactions toward a social media post by a total of 387 participants, who either saw it with or without a caption. To ensure consistency, the same picture was used for both test groups.

## results.

There was no statistically significant difference between the two test groups when considering emotional attachment and intention to visit. Moreover, perceived emotions alone do not have a direct influence on the booking decision. However, if users felt an emotional attachment to the destination, the probability of a future visit increased significantly. Additionally, some emotions responsible for emotional (de-)attachment could be defined when analysing the collected data.

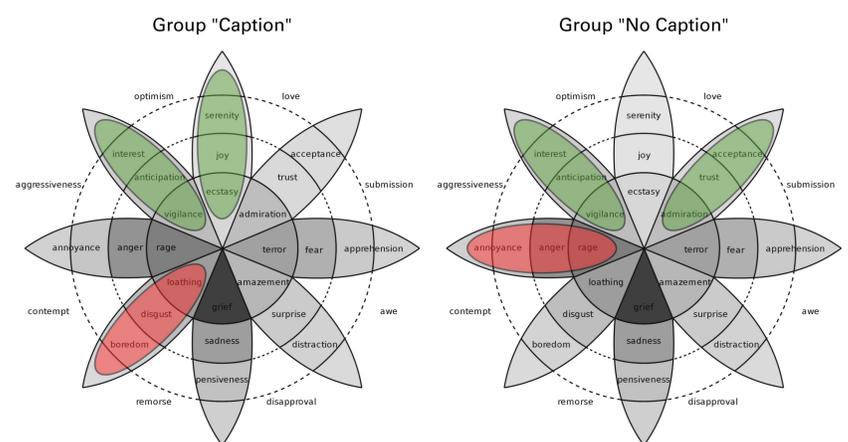


Figure 2: Triggers of Emotional (De-)Attachment (Plutchik, 2003)

### IMPLICATIONS

Emotional attachment through social media is an essential key exchange feature in tourism. When tourism marketing managers want to increase bookings over social media, an indirect nudge via emotional attachment is an effective way to increase the likelihood of a visit in the future. This is best executed via **storytelling** (Santos et al., 2022), where emotions from the categories "Joy", "Anticipation" and "Trust" were proven to be successful in emotionally tying social media users to a holiday destination.

### LIMITATIONS

- Language of emotions is highly subjective; same trigger might elicit different emotions in human beings (Bagozzi, 1999).
- Self-reporting questionnaires cannot capture full emotional arousal.
- Only limited generalisation of results due to small sample size in relation to total social media users worldwide.

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