Exploring pre-travel online destination experiences on destination websites: Design, dimensions, and measurement

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Publication 1:

Köchling, Anne (2020). 'Dream now, travel later': pre-travel online destination experiences on destination websites. *Journal of Qualitative Research in Tourism, 1*(1), 51–72 doi.org/10.4337/jqrt.2020.01.03

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Publication 3:

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Anne Köchling: Conceptualisation, formal analysis, investigation, data curation, writing – original draft, visualisation, project administration; Martin Lohmann: Conceptualisation, supervision, writing – review & editing

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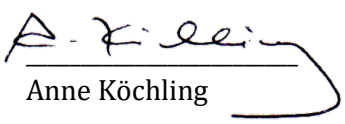
Confirmation of authors



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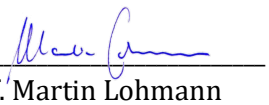

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AFF:	Affective experience dimension
ANCOVA:	Analysis of covariance
ANOVA:	Analysis of variance
AVE:	Average variance extracted
BEH:	Behavioural experience dimension
CA:	Cronbach's alpha
CCA:	Confirmatory composite analysis
CI:	Confidence interval
CR:	Composite reliability
d. f.:	Degrees of freedom
DMO:	Destination marketing/management organisation
e.g.:	exempli gratia (for example)
et al.:	et alii (and others)
etc.:	et cetera (and the other things)
EM:	Experiential marketing
FUR:	Forschungsgemeinschaft Urlaub und Reisen e.V.
HTMT:	Heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations
ICT:	Information and communication technologies
i.e.:	id est (that is)
INT:	Intellectual experience dimension
KMO:	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure
LB:	Lower bound
M:	Mean
Max:	Maximum
Min:	Minimum
$M_{Diff:}$	Mean Difference
n.a.:	not applicable
ODE:	Online destination experience
ODBE:	Online destination brand experience
ODW:	Official destination website
PCA:	Principal component analysis
RQ:	Research question
RI:	Reunion Island
RTA:	Retrospective think-aloud
SD:	Standard deviation
SE:	Standard error
SEN:	Sensory experience dimension
Sig.:	Significance
SOC:	Social experience dimension
SOR:	Stimulus organism response
UB:	Upper bound
WQ:	Website quality

VI Summary

Destination websites, which are maintained by destination marketing/management organisations (DMOs), are a key source of information for tourists in the pre-trip phase. DMOs are increasingly applying experiential marketing on their websites to support positive pre-travel online destination experiences (ODEs) and make the vision of the holiday as vivid as possible. Thereby they aim to *turn virtual visitors into physical visitors*. However, research into technology-driven travel experiences is still in its infancy. In particular, a theoretical understanding of the nature of ODEs arising from destination websites is still lacking. Closing this knowledge gap is of great interest from a theoretical perspective; furthermore, it is of central importance for strategic marketing-controlling of destinations. Therefore, this dissertation is dedicated to an extensive investigation of ODEs on destination websites in the pre-travel phase. The aims were to analyse the *influences of experiential design* on ODEs, explore the *ODE dimensions*, and develop and validate a *measurement tool for assessing the ODE values* of destination websites.

In the first qualitative multi-method study (eye-tracking, retrospective think-aloud protocols, semi-structured interviews, and video observations), the objective was to gain an in-depth understanding of the ODE facets in the travel inspiration phase. It was found that the experience dimensions adopted in previous research regarding the product-brand context (sensory, affective, intellectual, social, and behavioural dimensions) also occurred in the ODE context but exhibited some particularities, such as a *future-oriented affective component* (affective forecasting). Moreover, a supplementary *spatio-temporal experience dimension* was identified.

An online field experiment was subsequently conducted and aimed at assessing the effects of applying experiential marketing on destination websites on ODEs in the travel inspiration phase. Based on the findings of Study 1, an initial attempt at developing an ODE measurement instrument was made and the ODE dimensionality tested. The results showed the theoretically relevant experience dimensions to be less differentiated compared to the product-brand context; instead, they merged into a *holistic ODE encompassing several experience facets*. Furthermore, it was shown that the application of *experiential design enhanced ODEs*; however, considering the subjectivity of experiences, *the effect was rather small*. Accordingly, complex multi-media elements do not automatically increase the experiential effect.

In the third study, a quasi-online field experiment was conducted, simulating the travel information phase (higher involvement than Study 2) to re-assess the ODE dimensions and

develop and validate a measurement instrument. The results showed the overall ODE to be reflected by two interrelated dimensions that aligned with the dual process theory: *hedonic and utilitarian experiences*. The facets identified in the first study were largely reflected in these two overarching components. Moreover, a *reliable, valid, and parsimonious second-order measure for assessing ODEs* was proposed.

Overall, the results yielded by this dissertation enhance the scientific understanding of the technology-empowered tourist experience in the currently under-researched pre-travel experience phase. In addition, by proposing a new scale for the measurement of ODEs, this dissertation provides useful methodological advancements that can pave the way for further research in this field. The results will also be of great practical value for DMOs, as they yield a tool for controlling the experiential outcomes of websites as a base for strategic marketing decisions.

1 Introduction

'Dream now, travel later' was the slogan of destination marketing campaigns worldwide during the first COVID-19–induced lockdown, accompanied by special features (e.g. emotional videos) on their online communication channels (see e.g. Schweiz Tourismus, 2020). Hence, the pandemic proved to be a catalyst for attempts to design virtual travel experiences on the supply side. Moreover, the usage of online media and the relevance of contactless virtual experiences have been growing on the demand side (Bae & Chang, 2021). However, even prior to the pandemic, the importance of online media for the tourist experience was on the rise (Neuhofer et al., 2014; Stankov & Gretzel, 2020). Destination marketing/management organisations (DMOs) apply experiential marketing (Schmitt, 1999) on their central online communication tool (Jeong et al., 2012) – their website – to inspire guests to travel to the tourist destination. When COVID-19 engendered severe travel restrictions, the DMOs' objective expanded from inspiration to maintaining the potential guests' interest in the destination while mitigating risk perceptions via the generation of affective forecasts of the trip (Karl et al., 2021).

Despite these efforts on the part of tourism practitioners, few scientific studies are available on how users of destination websites experience destinations in the pre-travel phase. Overall, scant research is available on the anticipatory phase of the tourist experience. However, deep theoretical insights into the dimensions of such pre-travel online destination experiences (ODEs) and a resulting possibility for assessing their value are central to making practitioners' efforts tangible and supporting marketing effectiveness. Furthermore, there is scarce empirical evidence on the impact of experiential marketing on ODEs. Without a clear understanding of the central components of meaningful ODEs, marketing efforts continue to be based on trial-and-error approaches rather than strategic and persuasive experience design and robust evaluation.

Previous initial approaches to measuring ODEs (Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo Martínez, 2019; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, Campo, & Molinillo, 2020; Khan & Fatma, 2021) adapted the dimensions and measurement tool developed for product brands in the consumer goods industry (Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt, 1999). Owing the special characteristics of tourist destinations (Eisenstein, 2014, 2018) and the particular context of the virtual environment, this unaltered adaptation does not adequately represent the ODE construct, and a more context-specific approach is required.

Accordingly, the first aim of this dissertation is to expand the theoretical understanding of the ODE construct as well as the associated mental processes and dimensions. Based on this knowledge, a valid, reliable, and application-oriented measurement instrument will be developed to evaluate ODEs on destination websites in the pre-travel phase. Moreover, this dissertation will analyse the impact of experiential marketing on ODEs (i.e. the options to design ODEs) with regard to the manifold personal and situational factors influencing the experience. Thus, this dissertation contributes significantly to the theoretical and methodological knowledge in tourism experience research while simultaneously providing a practical added value for the marketing-controlling of DMOs.

In the second chapter of this dissertation, the theoretical background of the topic and the state of the existing research are summarised. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the conceptual framework and the research questions posed in this dissertation.

In the third chapter, the empirical studies undertaken in the course of this PhD project are presented. The three studies were conducted consecutively and built on each other. In the first qualitative, exploratory study, the focus was on gaining an in-depth understanding of the nature of the ODE construct. In the second, experimental study, the effects of experiential website design were tested based on a preliminary measurement instrument for ODEs. In the third quasi-experimental study, a final evaluation of the ODE dimensionality was undertaken, and an ODE measurement instrument was developed and validated.

The conclusion is presented in the fourth chapter, which discusses the overarching findings of the aforementioned three studies and elaborates on the theoretical, methodological, and managerial contributions of this dissertation. Finally, critical reflections and prospects for future research are presented.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Perspectives on tourism experiences and delimitation of the research subject

Tourism experiences have garnered research interest for quite a long time (for early works see e.g. Aho, 2001; Arnould & Price, 1993; Jackson et al., 1996; Uriely, 2005). However, the research interest in the topic has increased since the late 1990s, triggered by the *experience economy* proclaimed by Pine and Gilmore (1998). The authors stated that, as a consequence of prosperity and the concomitant satisfaction of basic needs, experiences had become the central motive for consumption. Accordingly, suppliers could gain competitive advantage by *staging* consumer experiences. Hence, the topic also moved into the focus of tourism research presenting numerous findings, perspectives and definitions to date (see e.g. Cutler & Carmichael, 2010; Eilzer et al., 2021; Frochot & Batat, 2013; Gallarza & Diego Velasco de, 2018; Scott et al., 2010; Seeler et al., 2018; Sharpley, 2022; Sotiriadis & Gursoy, 2016; Sundbo & Dixit, 2020; Sundbo & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2008; Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013; Tung & Ritchie, 2011). As a starting point to gradually approach the specific perspective on tourism experiences in this dissertation, the general experience definition by Sundbo and Sørensen (2013) is helpful:

> An experience is something that happens in peoples` minds, it is determined by external stimuli and elaborated via the mental awareness that people have from earlier motivational experiences, mental needs and personal strategies. Experience can be released by stimuli that affect the senses. (p. 2)

In accordance with the interdisciplinary character of tourism research, three different perspectives on experiences were identified by Sundbo and Dixit (2020): economic, psychological, and sociological perspectives. The economic perspective is closely linked to Pine and Gilmore's concept of the experience economy and focuses, for instance, on experience-induced economic growth opportunities or the delineation of economic sectors with particular relevance given to experiences (Sundbo & Dixit, 2020). The psychological perspective concerns the mental processes of experiences (Jantzen, 2013) and the associated experience characteristics, such as flow experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This perspective, which is still under-researched in tourism, also establishes a connection to the senses (Agapito, 2020; Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013). The aforementioned definition reflects this perspective. The sociological perspective draws attention towards the social impacts on consumption behaviour (Schulze, 2005). Sundbo and Dixit (2020) assigned the approach of experiential marketing to this perspective.

Experiential marketing is based on the dual process theory and claims that consumers do not make their purchasing decisions purely on the basis of rational, utilitarian criteria; rather, hedonic and experiential consumption values also play a pivotal role (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Accordingly, experiential marketing aims at generating holistic – rational and emotional – customer experiences (Schmitt, 1999). From this perspective, customer experiences in tourism are characterised as *multidimensional*, yet *perceived holistically* and *co-created* by environmental factors and factors internal to the individual (Agapito, 2022). Moreover, it is emphasised that tourist experiences occur *in each phase of the customer journey* (i.e. before, during, and after the trip; Aho, 2001). From a psychological perspective, these tourist experience phases can be referred to as *expectations, events, and memories* (Larsen, 2007). Despite the subjectivity of the experience, providers have chances to *design experiences* (Agapito, 2022). Thus, experiential marketing can deliver propositions with a high chance of becoming relevant, positive tourist experiences (Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

Nearly 20 years ago, Uriely (2005) noted that the boundaries between everyday life and tourist experiences are blurring due to media usage; however, to date, attempts to grasp the tourist experience have focused on the phase during the stay (i.e. the on-site experience; see e.g. Barnes et al., 2014; Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015; Coelho et al., 2018; Hosany et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2012; Kim, 2014; Kumar & Kaushik, 2018; Moscardo, 2017; Oh et al., 2007; Rather, 2020; Tasci & Milman, 2017; Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Nevertheless, the increasing importance of information and communication technologies (ICT) in tourism is undisputed (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Navío-Marco et al., 2018; Neuhofer et al., 2015). ICT has facilitated the interaction between consumers and suppliers in various ways, supporting the co-creation of the tourist experience in all phases of the customer journey (Neuhofer & Buhalis, 2012; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). For example, 'surfing the internet for travel information is a vital part of the tourism experience today' (Sundbo & Dixit, 2020, p. 18). Accordingly, the experience phases before and after the trip have become more relevant, resulting in a new branch of research concerned with the influence of ICT on the tourist experience. Neuhofer et al. (2014) introduced a tourism experience hierarchy in terms of technology integration and the respective increase of co-creation of experiences. At the highest level of their hierarchy, the technology *empowers* the experience and is an integral part of it; hence, without the technology, there would be no experience. Virtual experiences function according to the same mechanisms as physical experiences, but not all senses can be engaged in virtual space (i.e. sight and hearing are the senses engaged; Sundbo & Dixit, 2020).

Destination websites are a central virtual information source for tourists, with a high potential to empower tourist experiences. DMOs, as part of their task of marketing the entire destination, provide official websites to positively influence the image of the destination and, ultimately, the intention to visit. Unlike commercial travel websites, destination websites are mostly state-funded and not geared towards direct bookings. Thus, the information on destination websites is supposed to be perceived as particularly trustworthy (Choi et al., 2016; Novabos et al., 2015). Moreover, the relevance of this information source is verified by the user numbers. For instance, in Germany, more than a quarter of holidaymakers use destination websites for inspiration or information before travelling, making them the most used information source out of the 25 sources that were tested by Forschungsgemeinschaft Urlaub und Reisen e.V. (FUR, 2020). Furthermore, as an induced information source (Gartner, 1994; Llodrà-Riera et al., 2015), websites offer DMOs several options for designing the consumption environment, in contrast to social media platforms. Accordingly, DMOs apply experiential design elements to their websites in various ways to generate positive pre-travel experiences (Ketter, 2018; Nelson, 2014). Therefore, this research focuses on this particular source of information as an essential environmental driver of tourist experiences (Chen et al., 2018) in the pre-travel phase.

To sum up, this dissertation is concerned with *pre-travel ODEs on destination websites defined as destination website users` internal and subjective responses to the destination as presented*.

Based on this understanding, ODEs exclusively include website users' thoughts and feelings about the *destination* and the *expected travel experience*. In contrast to this and in line with Zhang et al. (2018), user reactions about website quality aspects, such as perceived ease of use or usefulness, are not considered as part of the ODE. Hence, in a broader sense, ODEs can be classified as the *product-oriented component of the overall user experience* 'where experience substantially presupposes interaction with an IT system, device or product interface' (Jensen, 2013, p. 202).

2.2 Designing pre-travel ODEs on destination websites

The aim of experiential marketing is to appeal to the customers' senses and emotions, in addition to presenting rational arguments, thus supporting holistic customer experiences (Le et al., 2020; Schmitt, 1999). Marketing stimuli that appeal to the senses and evoke emotions are supposed to induce high-elaboration imagery processing (Le et al., 2019) and enable tourists to form a consumption vision (Walters et al., 2012) or affective forecast of the future holiday (Karl et al., 2021; Wilson & Gilbert, 2005). In the context of destination

websites, affective forecasts can be further linked to telepresence, a concept defined as 'the experience of presence in an environment by means of a communication medium' (Steuer, 1992, p. 76). Moreover, a high level of imagery-elaboration is a pathway to flow experiences (Jeon et al., 2018) and, ultimately, to influence tourist behaviour (Le et al., 2019).

Scientific studies on the effects of experiential website design and content on experiential user outcomes are extremely limited. Gretzel and Fesenmaier (2003) underlined that *sensory information* is the key to consumers' construction of online experiences. Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, and Campo Martínez (2019) and Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, and Campo (2020) found that *visual stimuli (video and image galleries)* are important for a positive sensory experience but have to be supplemented by *content (text) that creates curiosity* in order to provoke behavioural intentions. Lee et al. (2010) and Lee and Gretzel (2012) found that *sensory descriptions of destinations* as well as the *presence of pictures* on destination websites have a positive effect on mental imagery and persuasion. Björk (2010) analysed website features that stimulate emotional response on tour operator websites and identified *information content and structure* as well as *pictures* as the most effective features. Furthermore, *vividness of information* (multisensory information), *entertaining website features* (e.g. video clips, games, and testimonials), and *interactivity* have been shown to be antecedents of telepresence (Choi et al., 2016; Shih, 1998).

In addition to these experience-oriented design aspects, general *destination characteristics* (assets, amenities, and accessibility; Lohmann & Beer, 2013) form the pivotal basis of the destination websites' potential to evoke positive ODEs. Moreover, previous studies have shown that the *website quality* and the corresponding individual perception of general *website quality aspects* (e.g. aesthetics, usability, and ease of use) influence the product-related experience; in this case, that refers to the ODE (Jiménez-Barreto & Campo-Martínez, 2018; Zhang et al., 2018).

Besides these findings on the impact of stimulus-related elements on experiential outcomes, ODEs and the behavioural responses to them are influenced by further *environmental factors* and *personal factors*. With regard to environmental factors, beyond the general website characteristics, exposure characteristics (Voorveld et al., 2009) – such as the time of browsing the website or the device used – may play a role in the generation of experiential value. Moreover, situative aspects – such as the weather, temporary travel restrictions (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic restrictions), and risk perceptions (Köchling et al., 2022) – can influence perceptions and ODEs. In general, online search behaviour in the holiday context is influenced by personal propositions – such as the composition of the travel group, prior destination visits, and the degree of novelty associated with the

destination (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Lehto et al., 2006) – or individual needs and expectations with regard to the information sources (Korneliussen, 2018; Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998). Additionally, according to the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), the processing of an advertising message is highly dependent on a person's motivation. When motivation is high, the information is processed via the *central route* in the context of a critical, cognitive examination of the facts presented. When motivation is low, the message is processed via the *peripheral route*; consequently, it is oriented towards more superficial information stimuli and lacks critical reflection. Accordingly, motivation affects the level of involvement, and both psychological states are closely linked to tourists' experience value (Prebensen et al., 2013). Furthermore, it has been shown that travel motives (i.e. the fit of motives to the destination characteristics presented) influence future-oriented imagery processing (Le et al., 2019) and prior knowledge impacts tourists' imagination (Le et al., 2021).

Upon considering the opportunities offered by experiential website design on the one hand and the multiple factors additionally influencing the experience on the other hand, assessing the effects of experiential marketing on the ODE becomes all the more crucial. A precise understanding of the nature of ODEs and a suitable measurement tool are required for this.

2.3 Dimensions and measurement of pre-travel ODEs on destination websites

Currently, no commonly accepted standards or techniques to assess the success of destination websites exist. The majority of website evaluation approaches in tourism focus on the aspects of *website quality* and *satisfaction with the technology* based on evaluations of website characteristics (Chung et al., 2015; Huang, 2005; Ip et al., 2011; Law et al., 2010; Novabos et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2012). Furthermore, some authors have proven the positive impact of destination website usage on the *destination image, attitude towards the destination, and intention to visit the destination* (Jeong et al., 2012; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, Campo, & Molinillo, 2020; Molinillo et al., 2018; Tigre Moura et al., 2015).

However, research on the assessment of the *experiential outcome regarding the destination presented* (i.e. ODEs) is limited, despite the high relevance of experiential value creation in the travel-decision process being undisputed (Lohmann & Kuhn, 2021; Oh et al., 2007). Knowing the dimensions of ODEs is a prerequisite for the development of an appropriate measurement tool.

In his key work on experiential marketing, Schmitt (1999) differentiated between five experience dimensions (i.e. strategic experiential modules) in the product-brand context:

- sense: appealing to the senses
- feel: inner feelings and emotions
- think: appealing to the intellect with the objective of creating cognitive, problem-solving experiences
- act: affecting bodily experiences, lifestyles, and interactions
- relate: appealing to the individuals` desire for self-improvement

Based on these dimensions, Brakus et al. (2009) developed a measurement instrument for the assessment of brand experiences comprising four dimensions; these were sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural brand experiences. Initial attempts to assess ODEs simply adapted the dimensions and the scale from the product-brand context (Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo, 2020; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo Martínez, 2019; Khan & Fatma, 2021). However, this approach must be questioned in view of the complexities of the product *tourist destination* due to its service bundle character and associated high subjective purchase risks (Eisenstein, 2014) that generally cause difficulties in brand management (Eisenstein, 2018, 2022; Tasci, 2011). The specifics of the virtual consumption environment have been neglected as well; an initial qualitative study revealed that, in the context of destination websites, *social experiences* (i.e. related to communicative aspects) also appear (Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al., 2019). Furthermore, Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, Campo, and Molinillo (2020) suggested further research on the ODE construct.

2.4 Conceptual framework and research questions

Based on the literature review, the conceptual framework of this dissertation and the identified research gaps are summarised in a stimulus-organism-response (SOR) model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Figure 1). The SOR model is particularly suitable for demonstrating the overall research framework, as the focus of the investigation lies in the analysis of psychological processes occurring between marketing stimuli and behaviour.

By analysing the internal, mental processes of consumers exposed to experiential marketing on destination websites, this dissertation is positioned at the intersection of the psychological and sociological perspectives to tourism experiences. Moreover, it addresses the *experience phase before the trip* when the orientation and anticipation of the trip are core aspects of the tourist experience. By zooming in on the particular contact situation with *destination websites as marketing stimuli*, ODEs can be further categorised as technology-empowered tourist experiences (Neuhofer et al., 2014). The information on the destination website is internally processed by the website user (organism). ODE values greatly depend

on *personal and environmental factors*, which act as the filters of consumer perception. Furthermore, the *perceived website quality* will have a notable impact on the ODE. Depending on the ODE value, the *attitude towards the website*, the *attitude towards the destination*, and the *willingness to visit* are expected to change (response).

While these general SOR relationships can be inferred from the existing literature (see 2.1–2.3), there is a need for research to better *understand the nature and process of ODEs*. The previously practised assumption that ODEs function like product-brand experiences seems inappropriate. Based on the experiential marketing theory, it is suggested that the experiential website design will impact the ODE value. Yet, little is currently known about the strength of this impact. In consideration of the subjectivity of experiences, this research aims at estimating the *effect of experiential marketing* on the ODE value. Moreover, it intends to understand the *dimensions of ODEs* and develop a context-specific *measurement instrument* for assessing ODE values.

In sum, this dissertation is intended to answer the following research questions (RQs):

- RQ1: How big is the impact of experiential website design on pre-travel ODEs?
- RQ2: How (on which dimensions) do the users of destination websites experience tourist destinations in the pre-travel phase?
- RQ3: How can we measure the values of pre-travel ODEs?

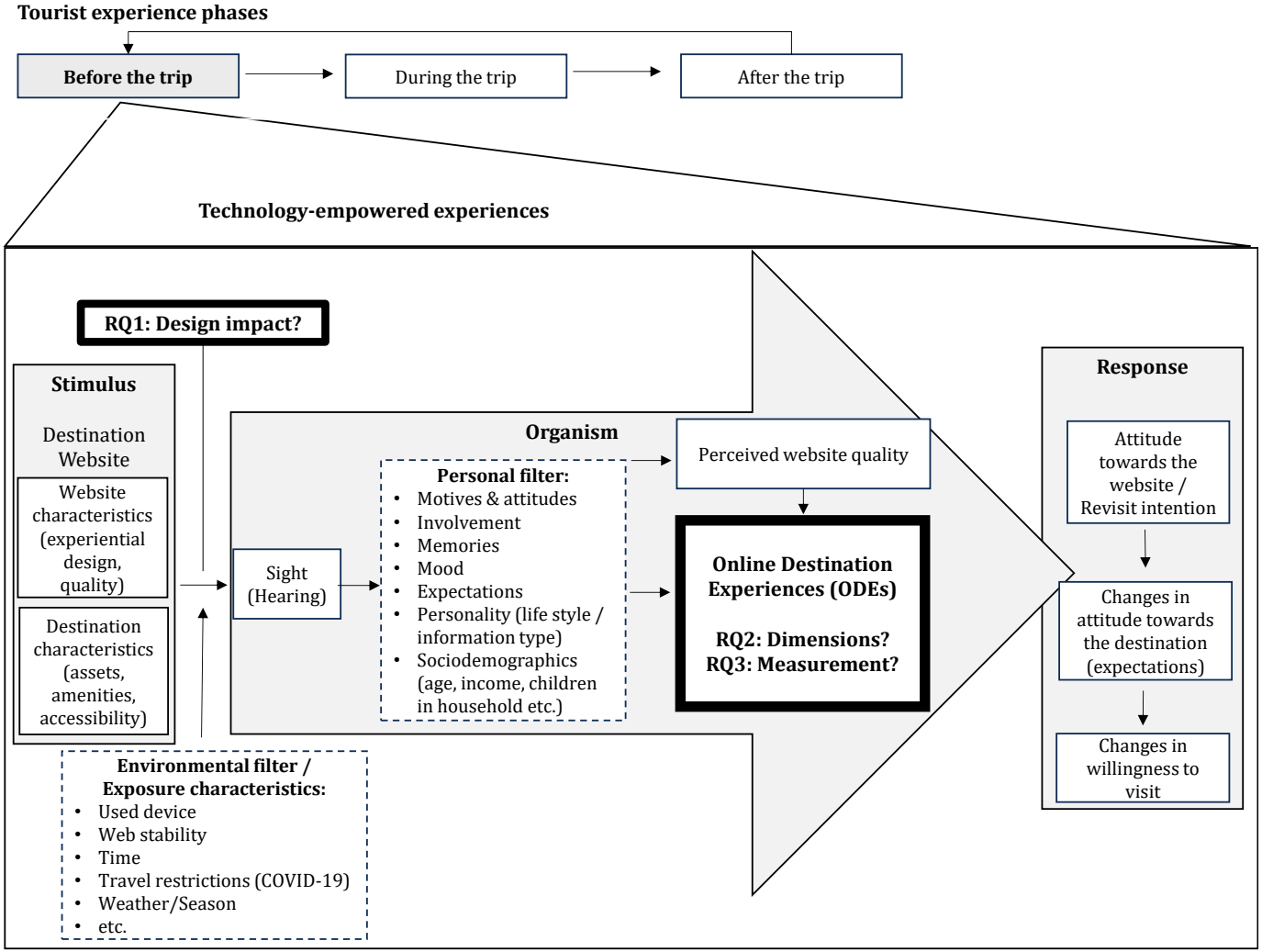

Figure 1: The conceptual framework of the dissertation and research questions

3 *Empirical part of the dissertation*

The following three sub-chapters present the publications yielded by this dissertation to answer the aforementioned research questions. The three studies built on one another, and a mixed-methods approach was followed to obtain a comprehensive picture of the impact of experiential website design (RQ1), the ODE dimensionality (RQ2), and measurement (RQ3). Table 1 presents an overview of the methodological approaches and aims of the studies.

Table 1: Methodological approaches and aims of the three studies

Publication	**Methodological approach**	**Aims of the study (RQs)**
1	Qualitative, interpretive approach (combination of real-time observations through eye-tracking, retrospective think-aloud protocols, and qualitative interviews)	- Understanding ODE dimensions (RQ2) - Verifying the expected influencing factors (Figure 1), particularly with regard to experiential website design (RQ1)
2	Quantitative, experimental approach (online field experiment)	- Analysing the effects of experiential website design (RQ1) - Testing a measurement instrument (RQ3) and assessing ODE dimensionality (RQ2)
3	Quantitative, quasi-experimental approach (online field experiment)	- Re-evaluating ODE dimensionality (RQ2) - Further developing and validating the ODE measurement instrument (RQ3)

3.1 Study 1: 'Dream now, travel later': pre-travel online destination experiences on destination websites.

Published research article: Köchling, Anne (2020). 'Dream now, travel later': pre-travel online destination experiences on destination websites. *Journal of Qualitative Research in Tourism, 1*(1), 51–72 doi.org/10.4337/jqrt.2020.01.03

Abstract

Destination marketing organisations (DMOs) seek to provide positive pre-travel online destination experiences (ODEs) to attract tourists. Thereby, DMOs understand official destination websites (ODWs) as central sources of information influencing tourists' travel decisions. Although experiential marketing theory postulates that customers are reached through sensory, affective, intellectual, behavioural or social experiences, this theory has rarely been applied to analysing tourist experiences on ODWs. Past research and theories remain similar to models from product brands, yet fail to acknowledge the peculiarities of destination experiences. This research explores how users of ODWs experience unfamiliar tourist destinations in the pre-travel phase. To gain a deeper understanding of the nature of ODEs on ODWs, a qualitative multi-method study was conducted involving eye-tracking, retrospective think-aloud protocols, semi-structured interviews and video observations with 15 German millennials selected via purposeful sampling. Data was analysed in a qualitative directed content analysis following an abductive approach. Findings expand on previous theory by adding a spatio-temporal experience dimension. In the pre-travel phase, potential tourists explore the spatio-temporal accessibility of expected experiences and the experience density in the destination. Furthermore, this research provides new insights into the different dimensions of ODEs and proposes an advanced conceptual framework.

3.1.1 Introduction

Tourist experiences take place in three phases: before, during and after a trip. This research focuses on the pre-travel phase when tourists explore whether the anticipated experiences fit with their travel desires and needs (Larsen, 2007; Seeler et al., 2018; Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Volo, 2010). In this phase of inspiration and orientation, 'distant', often technology-mediated tourist experiences occur (Sundbo & Dixit, 2020, p. 18; Sundbo & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2008). Official destination websites (ODWs) provided by destination marketing organisations (DMOs) are central sources of information in the pre-travel phase (Jeon et al., 2018), particularly among millennials (e.g. in Germany: FUR, 2020). DMOs seek to provide positive online destination experiences (ODEs) on their websites to attract tourists for

future trips and increase destination competitiveness (Kozak & Baloglu, 2011; World Tourism Organisation, 2019). In light of the global travel restrictions related to COVID-19, DMOs have the challenge to reach new customers in source markets close by and to establish or maintain emotional links to would-be tourists. Apparently, ODEs become more relevant. Several DMOs have launched campaigns aiming to stimulate consumers' desire to visit after the pandemic with slogans like 'dream now, travel later' (see e.g. Schweiz Tourismus, 2020).

However, up to now little is known about the mental process of experiencing tourism destinations on ODWs. Scholars in the realm of consumer goods branding have proposed that customers are reached through five experience dimensions: sensory, affective, intellectual, behavioural and social (Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt, 1999). While the notion of experiential marketing has long been present in both tourism academia (see e.g. Frochot & Batat, 2013; Volo, 2010) and industry (Gretzel et al., 2006), conceptualisations and theoretical examinations of multi-dimensional experiential marketing remain limited in tourism and in the destination context (Ketter, 2018). Contact points between the potential guest and the tourist destination in the pre-travel phase are of particular interest to destination managers as mental and emotional perceptions of the expected on-site experience play an important role in tourists' destination choices (Lohmann, 2008; Tung & Ritchie, 2011). In this way, the internet is particularly well suited to satisfying not only functional, but also hedonic, aesthetic, innovative and social needs during the information-gathering process (Gretzel, 2009; Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998) and facilitate positive pre-trip experiences (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Navío-Marco et al., 2018). Initial research initiatives to transfer the experiential marketing approach to ODEs were largely quantitative and analysed the concept broadly rather than in depth. Yet there are unique aspects of experiencing tourist destinations on ODWs that require a more nuanced approach and qualitative exploration.

Taking a qualitative multi-method approach, this research addresses the theoretical gap related to ODEs on ODWs in the pre-travel phase. It contributes to understandings of the nature and dimensions of experiencing an unfamiliar tourist destination on an ODW. Moreover, it improves knowledge of the perception of ODWs and as such delivers insightful information for DMOs. The perspective of German millennials is taken as an example.

3.1.2 Literature review

3.1.2.1 Experiential marketing: from product brands to tourist destinations

In the context of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), Schmitt (1999) proposed that experiential value is created through both the consumption of products or events and their marketing. Hence, advocates of experiential marketing postulate that the marketing manager can design experiences to a certain degree (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). In contrast to traditional marketing, experiential marketing focuses on holistic consumer experiences, recognises both rational and affective drivers of consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Le et al., 2019) and uses marketing channels that can deliver emotions and complex messages (Schmitt, 1999). Schmitt's (1999) strategic experiential modules of marketing focused on the multi-dimensionality of customer experiences. He proposed that customers could be attracted on five experience dimensions: sensing, feeling, thinking, acting and relating. Brakus et al. (2009) later developed a four-dimensional scale (sensory, affective, behavioural and intellectual) to measure these widely adopted experiential marketing modules (Bleier et al., 2019; Yoon & Youn, 2016).

The examination of tourist experiences from multi-disciplinary perspectives has been central in tourism research since the early 2000s (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010; Godovykh & Tasci, 2020; Prebensen et al., 2018; Sundbo & Dixit, 2020). Tourist experiences are generally conceptualised as subjective, multi-dimensional evaluations of tourist encounters before, during and after a trip (Larsen, 2007; Seeler et al., 2018; Tung & Ritchie, 2011) 'reflecting in active or passive state of mind' (Chen et al., 2018, p. 14). In the pre-travel phase, the goal of experiential marketing should be 'to create, offer and communicate "anticipated experiences" that individuals would classify as among those they would seek' (Volo, 2010, p. 120). Nonetheless, the subjectivity of tourist experiences, that is, the individual perception of events based on personal and situational aspects (Jantzen, 2013; Karayilan & Cetin, 2016; Knobloch et al., 2017), and the corresponding co-creation of experiences (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) limit marketers' opportunities to truly design tourist experiences (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017). Hence, experiential marketing can only set frames with a high probability of becoming relevant personal tourist experiences. This requires an understanding of the experience processes and dimensions from a tourist perspective (Knobloch et al., 2017; Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Volo, 2010). Nevertheless, adaptations and enhancements of the multi-dimensional customer experience model from product brands to the destination context are still scarce.

Barnes et al. (2014) were the first to apply Brakus et al.'s (2009) brand experience scale to the 'close' (Sundbo & Dixit, 2020, p. 18; Sundbo & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2008) destination

experience context, that is, during the trip. Furthermore, Kumar and Kaushik (2018) applied Brakus et al.'s (2009) approach in this phase and found that sensory and affective experiences had the largest influence on destination brand identification, trust and loyalty. The central roles of the senses in tourist experiences and multi-sensory experiential marketing have also been confirmed in several studies (Agapito, 2020). Moreover, Rather (2020) made use of the experiential marketing approach and empirically evidenced that customer engagement has a positive effect on consumer experiences and identification in a tourist destination in India. Yet some authors still doubt that the adopted scale is applicable for tourists in the destination context (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020).

3.1.2.2 Technology-mediated tourist experiences: pre-travel ODEs on ODWs

ODWs are designed to promote a country, region or city as a tourist destination and serve as the central communication tool for DMOs (Jeon et al., 2018). Previous research has shown that ODWs can influence consumer behaviour in the decision-making and image-building process as 'overt induced' (that is, controlled by destinations) sources of information (Gartner, 1994, p. 197; Jeong et al., 2012; Molinillo et al., 2018). As ODW content is created by public organisations, trust in the provided information is higher than for other online sources (Choi et al., 2016; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, Campo, & Molinillo, 2020). In Germany, for instance, roughly one in four holidaymakers (consciously) uses ODWs for inspiration or information prior to a holiday (FUR 2020). Millennials – that is, the generation born between 1977 and 1995 (Benckendorff & Moscardo, 2010) – are the most frequent users of ODWs in Germany (FUR 2020). Furthermore, millennials generally travel more than any other generation and, as digital natives, tend to be tech-savvy (Ketter, 2021). Despite the fact that they use the internet more than previous generations, members of this generation are said to be mistrustful of mass media (Huang & Petric, 2010) and difficult to reach with internet advertising (Tanyel et al., 2013).

Only a few tourism researchers have applied the experiential marketing approach to the online context or analysed subjective, internal and multi-dimensional responses to ODWs, that is, the ODE. Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, and Campo Martínez (2019) were the first to apply selected experience dimensions (sensory and intellectual) from Barnes et al.'s (2014) scale to the context of ODWs. Taking a quantitative approach, they measured the online destination brand experience (ODBE) and its effects and found that, for unfamiliar destinations, sensory experiences were more important than intellectual experiences, especially among millennials. Besides, they confirmed that the ODBE dimensions could appear sequentially, that is, that the sensory experience conditions the intellectual experience. However, through the adaptation of the brand experience scale from other

industries, the complexities of tourist destinations (World Tourism Organisation, 2019) were overlooked (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). These complexities impede professional destination branding (Eisenstein, 2018; Tasci, 2011). Some authors have also shown that typical brand elements from other industries, such as logos, play only a negligible role in the context of tourism destinations (Beritelli & Laesser, 2018; Kladou et al., 2017). As such, a simple transfer of branding approaches from other industries to the destination context appears to be insufficient.

In subsequent studies, Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al. (2019) and Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, Campo, and Molinillo (2020) aimed to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of ODBEs by including qualitative approaches in their analyses. Taking a rather broad approach, they explored the elements of a positive ODBE on different destination platforms (website, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter) and used static images of these platforms as stimuli. First, the authors confirmed Brakus et al.'s (2009) brand experience dimensions. They defined sensory ODBEs as evoked by stimuli appealing to the senses, affective ODBEs as stimuli-induced emotions and feelings, intellectual ODBEs as cognitive stimulation of the intellect by awakening interest or curiosity, and behavioural ODBEs as concrete thoughts about and activation of motivations towards the physical destination experience on-site. Furthermore, they expanded Brakus et al.'s (2009) brand experience dimensions by social ODBEs, referring to communicative aspects of the ODBE and interactive ODBEs for social media channels, referring to the perceived ability of users to change, create, or interact with the content on the platform (Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al., 2019). The interactive dimension reflects the concept of experience co-creation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), suggesting that experiences are enhanced if tourists become part of the experience creation. Information and communication technologies can involve tourists, among others, through interactive website elements, and facilitate the co-creation of richer, more personalised and even completely new tourism experiences (Neuhofer et al., 2014). Besides, Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al. (2019) found that familiarity with the destination as well as the destination scale (city or country) influence the ODBE.

Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, Campo, and Molinillo (2020) further confirm the applicability of Brakus et al.'s (2009) four experience dimensions. Their findings also revealed that an extension of the social dimension was needed to address the idiosyncrasies of social media platforms, particularly Facebook. However, their research focused on analysing correlations with another construct: destination brand credibility. Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, and Campo (2020) also developed a new scale to measure destination brand authenticity.

They found that destination brand authenticity was another outcome of a positive ODBE, which had direct and indirect effects on behavioural intentions towards the destination.

Gretzel and Fesenmaier (2003) pointed to the central role of sensory information in consumers' construction of experiences in the online context. Moreover, potential tourists' desires, needs and previous experiences guide how advertising stimuli are perceived (Agapito et al., 2013; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017; Kroeber-Riel & Gröppel-Klein, 2013). Accordingly, ODEs evoked by ODWs, including the behavioural responses to them, will be influenced by both personal (e.g. motivation, mood, demographics) and environmental factors (e.g. website usability, device used). In addition, familiarity with the tourist destination or website explored influences how users process and evaluate information (Choe et al., 2014).

3.1.2.3 Constructs related to ODEs in the ODW context

Some authors have applied other theories from cognitive psychology regarding hedonic or experiential responses to ODWs. Lee and Gretzel (2012) and Lee et al. (2010) demonstrated the importance of sensory and intellectual stimulation in the persuasiveness of ODWs and mental imagery. Mental imagery refers to the process – not the structure – by which sensory information is represented in working memory (MacInnis & Price, 1987). Experiential marketing stimuli are designed to evoke a high level of imagery elaboration, which can enable tourists to develop a concrete travel vision and immerse themselves in fantasies and dreams (Le et al., 2019). Choi et al. (2007) analysed the utilitarian and hedonic aspects of ODWs and their effect on users` perceived online immersion, or telepresence (Shih, 1998). Zhang et al. (2018) introduced a model of the experience value co-creation process on official ODWs and social media, which identified emotional and behavioural components. In their model, the cognitive platform experience focuses on user experience with the technology (aesthetics, usefulness, ease of use, trust and interactivity), while the emotional experience is operationalised as the expectation of pleasure and excitement when travelling to the destination. In their experimental study, the authors also found that the cognitive platform experiences have an effect on affective and conative reactions.

3.1.2.4 Research approach and objective

The review of the literature revealed that most studies of ODEs adopted a quantitative, confirmatory approach, used established scales from other industries and applied exclusively self-report methods. These approaches limit researchers' abilities to investigate important emotional reactions (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020; Li et al., 2016; Scuttari & Pechlaner, 2017). Previous studies have also not sufficiently acknowledged the complexity

of ODEs on ODWs and concentrated on positive emotional responses while neglecting potential negative effects. Thus, research on this topic is still in its infancy and there is a need for inquiries that go beyond previous approaches which aimed for breadth rather than depth of knowledge to ODEs on ODWs. Therefore, this research explores the following question from a German demand-side perspective and takes millennials as an example: How do users of ODWs experience unfamiliar tourist destinations in the pre-travel phase?

Cognitive psychology focuses on the research of the perception of tourist experiences and thus on the processes that take place in the tourists' minds (Jantzen, 2013; Sundbo & Dixit, 2020). In this regard, the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) model claims that various environmental aspects can act as stimulus (S) that influences an individual's internal state (O), leading to the individual's behavioural response (R; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The SOR model has been proven to be a suitable framework to explain tourist experiences (Kim et al., 2020; Le et al., 2020) and online user behaviour (Zhai et al., 2019) and is used in this research to advance the conceptual framework of ODEs on ODWs. In contrast to the predominating positivist and/or single-method research on this topic, an explorative, qualitative multi-method approach was applied.

3.1.3 Methods

Participants were selected using purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990), a sampling method in which information-rich cases are selected based on a set of criteria. As German millennials have demonstrated a higher than average use of ODWs in the pre-travel phase compared to the overall German population (FUR 2020), membership of this generation (aged beetween 25 and 42 years) was set as the first criterion in participant selection. Prior experiences with ODWs and high affinity for travel were further selection criteria. A call for participation was first made to members of the author's home university (staff and enrolled students). Additional participants were recruited using snowball sampling (Patton 1990). Theoretical saturation was reached after 15 participants. A minimum of 12 participants was set beforehand based on findings on the necessary number of interviews for reaching saturation in studies with relatively homogenous groups (Guest et al., 2006). Three runs with no new themes were defined as a stopping criterion (Francis et al., 2010).

During the data collection process, participants were shown a selection of ODWs. To simulate the travel inspiration and early information phase, participants had no previous experiences with these destinations and their respective ODWs. Website selection was guided by critical case sampling (Patton 1990) based on the results of quantitative studies

about the use of ODWs in the pre-travel phase. Types of holiday travel with a high usage of ODWs were identified (e.g. adventure travel; FUR, 2018a) and destinations promoting those types of holidays were selected. Additionally, destinations with a high probability of being unfamiliar to the subjects were chosen based on the travel behaviour of German millennials in the past (FUR, 2017, 2018b, 2019). Moreover, destinations of different scales (that is, country, region, island and city) were selected in order to learn about possible impacts on the ODEs. Finally, a range of ODWs of destinations fulfilling these criteria were evaluated by three independent web usability or experience experts from the tourism field to choose the most critical cases (best practices; Patton 1990). Evaluation criteria included the emotionality and overall quality of the websites. A focus on extremely positive cases was desired as it was expected that these would reveal more facets of ODEs and the presumed influential factor of a negative technology experience (Zhang et al., 2018) should be kept at a minimum. From the six best ODWs according to the experts' evaluations, three were assigned to each participant depending on their previous travel experiences, which they had reported during the recruiting process. The selected ODWs and the number of participants exposed to each website are shown in Table 2. The order of the websites shown was randomised.

Table 2: Selected ODWs and number of participants exposed (Study 1)

Destination	**ODW URL**	**Number of participants exposed**
Bern (Switzerland)	www.bern.com/de	6
British Columbia (Canada)	www.hellobc.de	8
Graubünden (Switzerland)	www.graubuenden.ch/de	5
La Reúnion (France)	www.insel-la-reunion.com	12
Rovaniemi (Finland)	www.visitrovaniemi.fi/de/	11
Slovenia	www.slovenia.info/de	3

Data collection took place in a computer laboratory from mid December 2019 through mid February 2020. A multi-method approach comprising a questionnaire, eye-tracking, retrospective think-aloud (RTA) protocols, semi-structured interviews and video observation was applied to gain a holistic understanding of ODEs on ODWs. The sequential multi-method approach is visualised in Figure 2.

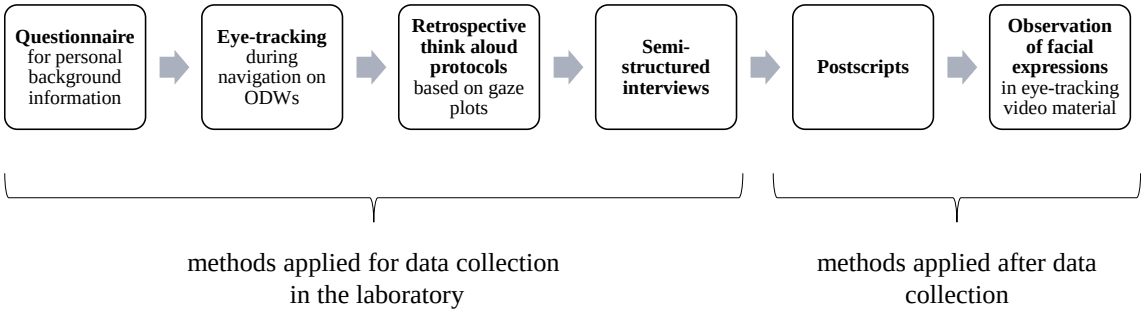

Figure 2: Sequence of Applied Methods (Study 1)

Participants were informed that the study was about their feelings, thoughts and expectations about a travel destination that were triggered by ODWs. First, they were asked to complete a short questionnaire which included items measuring their socio-demographic information (e.g. age, sex, family status), travel behaviour (frequency of travel and preferred holiday types) and an estimation of their current mood based on a five-point rating scale.

An explorative eye-tracking study was initiated in a second research phase. Participants were invited to freely explore the ascribed ODWs one at a time. They were asked to imagine that they were seeking inspiration for their next holiday trip and to explore what the holiday experience in each destination would be like. To make the website experience as realistic as possible, no time limit was set. Participants stayed on the three websites for between 15 and 60 minutes in total. While participants explored the websites, their eye movements were tracked using the Tobii X2-30 eye tracker (rate: 30 Hz) with a webcam, resulting in gaze plots and videos of participants' faces during navigation.

Upon website exploration, the gaze plots were analysed and commented on with each participant. Video and audio records were made of these RTA protocols (Guan et al., 2006). The RTA was further extended to semi-structured qualitative interviews in which each participant's thoughts on ODWs based on their previous real-life experiences were explored (e.g. expectations of content, past experiences). After data collection, notes on important observations (postscripts) were made by the researcher. Video material from eye-tracking was used as additional observational material to ensure that affective reactions that were not self-reported were also captured. Verbatim transcripts of the RTA protocols and semi-structured interviews were gradually made during data collection.

MAXQDA 2018 software was used for qualitative directed content analysis (Mayring 2000). An abductive approach was followed, meaning that to further develop existing theories, inductively discovered aspects from the data were connected to existing theoretical ideas

(Gehman et al., 2018). Based on recent works on the ODBE (Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo, 2020; Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al., 2019), the sensory, affective, intellectual, behavioural, social and interactive dimensions were used as a basis for coding data. The coding of the verbal material was supplemented by coding the video material from eye-tracking with regard to observable facial expressions.

Data material and codes were reviewed and refined in several rounds, comparing this study's findings with previous literature. To validate findings, participants' verbal descriptions were compared with the actual gaze plots and facial expressions. Intermediate results were discussed with other experts on the research team. Overall, the multi-method approach and the use of distinct ODWs of different destination scales delivered information-rich verbal and observational material.

3.1.4 Findings and discussion

3.1.4.1 Sample description

The questionnaire that participants completed in the first step of data collection provided information about their socio-demographic characteristics, travel behaviour and mood. The sample of 15 German millennials can be described as follows:

- Age: 25 to 38 years old (M = 29.5; SD = 4.33)
- Sex: 8 male, 7 female
- Family status: 6 single, 6 partnered, 3 married
- Children: 3 with 1–3 young children in the household, 12 without children
- Educational level: 5 high school graduates (Abitur), 9 university degrees, 1 PhD
- Travel behaviour: 1 to 6 holiday trips per year (M = 2.9; SD = 1.34)

Participants' interest in holiday types varied, and all participants reported that they were in a good or very good mood on the day of the interview.

3.1.4.2 ODEs on ODWs in the pre-travel phase

Findings of this research show that the sensory, affective, intellectual, social and behavioural dimensions are central to ODEs. This is in agreement with previous research (Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo, 2020; Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al., 2019). The comparison of verbal and video material showed that self-reported emotions were consistent with observed facial expressions. However, some additional affective reactions beyond self-reported emotions were identified through video material. The data also

allowed for in-depth specifications of positive and negative ODEs. Moreover, findings of this research demonstrate a previously unexplored dimension: the *spatio-temporal ODE dimension*. Tourist experiences are already linked to tourist movements in space and time in the pre-travel phase. At this stage, tourists develop expectations for the spatio-temporal experience they will have at a travel destination. Consistent with Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al. (2019), *interactive* experiences (that is, the perceived ability of users to change, create or interact with the content on a platform) were not found for ODWs. Although participants frequently mentioned aspects of interactivity, these comments were linked to the technology or usability experience (e.g. comments on filter functions). Participants did not expect an interactive exchange with the DMO or other users, nor was such an experience important for their destination experience.

Furthermore, it was found that the perception of the ODE unfolds successively. The ODE process starts by recording the stimulus (that is, the ODW) via the senses, followed by an activation (attention) leading to affective and cognitive information processing and finally behavioural intentions. This is in line with consumer behaviour and previous research (Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo Martínez, 2019; Kroeber-Riel & Gröppel-Klein, 2013). With the dual process model in mind (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), affective ODEs can result both from affective (spontaneous emotional reactions) and cognitive information processing (affective forecasting; Wilson/Gilbert 2005), while intellectual, spatio-temporal and social experiences are based solely on cognitive information processing. These dimensions can appear either together or individually. Previous research has proposed that cognitive reactions to ODWs (platform experiences) have an effect on affective (emotions) and conative (behavioural intentions) reactions (Zhang et al., 2018). After all, existing theories in cognitive psychology are inconsistent with regard to the sequence of affective and cognitive information processing (Jantzen, 2013; Scuttari & Pechlaner, 2017). Neither sequence could be supported in this research.

3.1.4.3 Sensory ODEs

Based on the number of total codes per dimension, the findings of this research support the outstanding role of the sensory dimension found in previous research (Agapito et al., 2013; Agapito, 2020; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo Martínez, 2019). All participants commented on visual sensations, and all but one of the participants found some pictures on the websites 'appealing', 'beautiful' or 'cool'. For example, one participant said, 'Beautiful! So that was my first thought. Beautiful landscapes' (BL191219). Another frequently-mentioned visual sensation was that the destination looked 'impressive', 'fascinating' or 'special'.

Although participants mainly reported positive visual aspects, a few negative visual reactions were expressed as well. For instance, three participants said that the selected pictures looked unreal. Although previous research indicates that users' trust in ODWs is greater than in other sources (Choi et al., 2016; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, Campo, & Molinillo, 2020), the majority of participants expressed sceptical attitudes towards ODWs or at least towards some of the visual content embedded in the websites. This observation fits with millennials' general scepticism towards internet advertising (Tanyel et al., 2013). At the same time, approximately half of participants stated that ODWs were more objective than other sources.

The following quote reflects the impact that scepticism towards ODWs can have on a sensory experience:

> So, I took a little look at the pictures. Well, it doesn't look bad. But, for example, with pictures like this or where you see the skyline and it's just completely saturated with colour, you can see that it probably won't look like that in real life. (HW200211)

Sound was included in some of the videos embedded in the websites, leading to some auditory sense reactions as well. Participants' reactions to auditory stimuli were mostly negative. Three participants were scared by sounds that appeared without warning and disliked that they had no control over the sound of the video. Additionally, some participants commented on further sensory bodily reactions. For example, pictures of tropical landscapes triggered thoughts about the temperature of the destination.
The described sensory experiences led to further affective and cognitive information processing and, consequently, additional ODE dimensions.

3.1.4.4 Affective ODEs

Affective ODEs describe stimulus-induced emotions and feelings with reference to the destination. All but one participant reported on and demonstrated emotions and feelings during website navigation. Thereby this research is in agreement with previous studies (Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al., 2019). However, the number of affective reactions varied significantly between participants. While most affective reactions occurred spontaneously during navigation, some participants also reflected on future-oriented feelings they expected to have during their visit to the destination. Such affective forecasts play a pivotal role in decision-making (Wilson & Gilbert, 2005).

'Happiness' and 'fun' were the most common spontaneous affective reactions among participants during navigation. For instance, one individual commented on the video on the

British Columbia ODW's homepage showing a polar bear and skiers on a downhill run: 'Yes, I got stuck with the pictures right away [laughs]. Actually, because I found the polar bear so cool [laughs]. And I'm a skier, and I thought that was really cool, too' (AM200109). Another participant was amused by the text on the Rovaniemi website, stating: 'And here, "the party goes on forever", right, I thought that was very funny' (BL191219). Other positive feelings included 'wanderlust', 'impressed' or 'surprised'. Feelings of being 'impressed' and 'surprised' were also frequently observed in participants' facial expressions during the video analysis. With regard to future-oriented affective reactions, some participants expressed expectations of feeling relaxed or safe during the trip.

While most affective reactions were positive, some negative emotions and feelings occurred during navigation as well. Some participants were disappointed by the information provided. For example, one participant who was looking for information on the history of La Réunion was reminded of previous disappointing travel experiences in Asia:

> …that's when I was a bit disappointed. Because that's when I looked for the history and then: coffee and cane sugar. And there I have a bit of an inner dislike. Because in Asia, it was always such a rip-off, when you look at something like that. It was all about selling. So, I didn't want to look at it. (JH200214)

Furthermore, some users felt irritation in response to the website content during navigation. Some participants also reported viewing content that deterred them. Feelings of shock or fear were mainly caused by content about the volcano on La Réunion, but also by pictures provoking fear of heights.

3.1.4.5 Intellectual ODEs

All participants commented on intellectual experiences mainly guided by personal motivations and travel interests. For instance, one participant reported on his interest in the northern lights in Rovaniemi, stating:

> Yeah, then I saw the northern lights. Which of course suited me as I am planning a trip to the northern lights, but in Norway anyway. In any case, this has very much awakened my interest again. At first, I read very intensively and was only fixated on the northern lights. (TK 200215)

Other content prompted the opposite reaction, a lack of interest.

Many participants also reported on aspects that engendered curiosity. One participant even entered a flow state, as this quote exemplifies:

> Because on the site I somehow always discovered something where I thought: okay, click on that or look again here, maybe you can look again. The thing actually became more and more interesting. I had the feeling that you can discover something here, right? Well, that triggered a little bit of an urge to explore, or this Wikipedia phenomenon that you often have, when you read an article and then there are 12 links in it and you click first on one, then the next, and suddenly three hours are gone. (ND200203)

This finding is in line with past research that proposed that intellectual ODEs arouse interest or curiosity with regard to the destination (Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al., 2019).

Three participants reported opposite reactions, explicitly stating that they did not want to explore too much before the trip in order to limit their expectations. One participant said: 'I'm not interested in videos. Well, I would like to see pictures, but not so much information at once. … Because I like to be surprised. So, if I know that it fits roughly, then I don't look much further' (LD200211).

The desire to be surprised on-site can be related to tourists' novelty-seeking behaviour (Lee & Crompton, 1992), which is particularly pronounced among millennials (Cavagnaro et al., 2018)). Participants also mentioned that they wanted to limit the amount of information obtained before the trip to reduce the risk of disappointment. These statements are consistent with the idea that satisfaction in the context of holidays is a result of comparing the perceived quality of holidays with one's expectations (Oliver, 1980).

3.1.4.6 Spatio-temporal ODEs

Findings reveal one supplementary, destination-specific experience dimension: the spatio-temporal ODE. Participants' thoughts while navigating ODWs in the pre-travel phase reflected geographic aspects linked to the destination. All but one participant commented on their reflections regarding the accessibility of the destination or certain attractions at the destination. With regard to spatial accessibility (distance), one participant commented: 'And Finland is not so far away from here. Well, also not close, but … if you fly then maybe not so far. If you go by car, it's a long ride' (LR200217). In the pre-travel phase, the perception of geographic distance from a tourist's home to their destination can be perceived as a barrier to the experience, a phenomenon known as the principle of distance decay (McKercher, 2008). Another participant reported thinking about the temporal accessibility of experiencing the northern lights: 'And I find the northern lights in general super interesting, and I would like to see them, too. So, I took a closer look at it, when exactly that is' (AM200109).

Furthermore, reflections on the distribution of attractions at the destination and options for combining these experiences (experience density) were common. For example, one participant stated:

> So, it's hard to judge at first glance: how far apart is everything now? Do I have to decide now whether I want to go there, or can I look at the lakes or the sea and the mountains at the same time? (CL191219)

Tourists are looking for a diverse array of experiences during their holidays, which is reinforced by the fact that members of the same travel group might have different needs. Therefore, tourists prefer areas with multiple attractions and thus seek options for inter- or intra-destination movements (Caldeira & Kastenholz, 2015; Hunt & Crompton, 2008).

3.1.4.7 Social ODEs

Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al. (2019) referred to the social dimension in their ODBE approach with regard to communication experiences on social media channels. A more destination-specific perspective emerged from the data related to the social ODE dimension in particular.

Many participants mentioned thoughts related to on-site destination experiences which are co-created by encounters with the destination's inhabitants, other tourists and travel companions (Pearce, 2010). This shows that such reflections already start in the pre-travel phase. For instance, with regard to the destination's residents, one participant explained that he prefers pictures with real-life situations and people:

> When you look at an old town or something like that, you just get a feeling for it, because that's what people are like. The people who live there are also part of the whole experience and not only the houses standing there. (AM200109)

Participants with children especially reflected on what the experience of visiting the destination together with their families would be like.

Tourists can have multiple positive and negative perspectives on other tourists (Pearce, 2010). However, remarkably, nine participants in this study commented on situations where they had negative thoughts about crowded places with regard to encounters with other tourists. For example, one participant commented on the Christmas village in Rovaniemi:

> It even said how many people were there – 500,000 people a year or something like that. …they come there to experience this Santa Claus, this Santa's house, this village.

> So, it's always gonna be bustling there. It's a little more like a Disneyland production to me. (CR200217)

This negative view might be related to the fact that the selected destinations predominantly focused on nature-oriented holidays. Previous research has shown that satisfaction in wilderness and natural settings declines with the number of visitors present (Pearce 2010). Moreover, Jacobsen et al. (2019) found that younger tourists were particularly intolerant of crowding. Another reason might be the high number of media reports on the topic of overtourism in recent years (Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2020), which may have sensitised participants to this topic.

Five participants reflected on the individuality of the on-site destination experience and its related potential to distinguish them from others. One participant said: 'I'm just someone who likes to drive to places where not everybody has been, and I would have felt more like I had a more interesting and exclusive holiday experience. … Not everybody has been there' (BL191219). These thoughts about the potential ability of the destination to differentiate oneself from others through travelling can be referred to as prestige motivations for travelling, where the uniqueness of the destination is considered an important factor (Correia & Moital, 2009).

3.1.4.8 Behavioural/intentional ODEs

All participants mentioned thoughts about and activation of motivations towards the physical destination experience on-site. Based on the data, participants' behavioural reflections can be described on three levels.

On the first level, participants want to receive an overview of the offer in place and consider whether the presented activities fit their interests and needs. One participant said, for example: 'I thought: okay, perhaps it is a destination which is rather for more active vacationers. Lots of sports, lots of exercise, lots of nature' (LF200109).

On the second level, participants' desires to visit the destination were awakened. For example, one participant said: 'Now that I'm on this website, I definitely get a taste for hiking and nature. As I said, I'd probably go there [laughs]' (JH200214).

On the third level, some participants felt deeply immersed in the destination: 'And here also is a picture of the [city] centre, or some people partying, and I actually imagined exactly what it would be like if I was there now' (BL191219). This third level can be referred to as a high level of imagery elaboration (Le et al., 2019) or, more specifically, the concept of telepresence (Choi et al., 2007; Shih, 1998).

These findings are also in line with past research (Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al., 2019), yet show a more detailed description of the evoked behavioural/intentional thoughts.

In addition to these positive behavioural reflections, some participants had critical thoughts as well. Apart from motivation, the ability to travel to a destination is an important prerequisite for demand (Lohmann & Beer, 2013). Most participants reflected on the personal financial constraints hindering them from engaging in travel experiences. Furthermore, seven participants reflected very critically on the probability of experiencing in reality what was shown on the website, for instance in the case of Rovaniemi: '… it all seemed very nice and somehow everything looked very unreal to me. I don't know, maybe it's the same on site. Possibly, but it didn't seem that way to me at first' (LF200109).

This again demonstrates website users' scepticism and the influence of a user's attitude towards ODWs (that is, its trustworthiness) on their perception of its content.

3.1.4.9 Factors of influence and responses

A comparison of participants' self-reports and observed surfing behaviour and emotions with their questionnaire data showed the expected subjectivity of ODEs (Jantzen, 2013; Karayilan & Cetin, 2016; Knobloch et al., 2017), which are strongly influenced by personal factors, that is, psychological aspects (especially motivation as reflected in interest in holiday activities) and demographic aspects (especially having children). As shown during the interviews, personal memories, prior experiences with and attitude towards ODWs (trustworthiness) as well as general attitude towards the destination also influenced ODEs. Moreover, it is suggested that involvement and mood influence ODEs as well (Jantzen, 2013; Karayilan & Cetin, 2016; Kroeber-Riel & Gröppel-Klein, 2013). However, due to the study design, which required high involvement and the reported positive mood of all participants, these influential factors could not be proven in this research. Despite the subjectivity of the individual experience, the six derived ODE dimensions were identified between all participants, albeit with different characteristics.

Besides, environmental factors influenced participants' perceptions of experiential stimuli. Usability, or the technology-based performance of the website (e.g. ease of use, interactivity), had a halo effect (Kroeber-Riel & Gröppel-Klein, 2013) on the ODE. Although it was intended to include only positive usability examples in this study in order to avoid this anticipated influence, it was notable in the interviews that poor performance with regard to website speed or the clarity of the presented information sometimes led to frustration, negatively influencing the ODE. Further environmental aspects such as the used device and the season were stable in the course of this study and the possible impact kept

to a minimum. A general impact of the destination scale represented on the ODW (country, region, island or city) on the ODE dimensions as reported in previous research (Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al., 2019) was not observed.

Participants' narratives suggest that positive ODEs lead to positive attitudes towards the websites as well as image improvement and willingness to visit the destination. Negative ODEs impact these responses in reverse. For example, ODWs that triggered many affective reactions, such as the Rovaniemi site, resulted in willingness to visit the destination even if participants were completely unaware of the destination beforehand. As such, this study supports previous research on responses to ODWs (Jeong et al., 2012; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, Campo, & Molinillo, 2020; Molinillo et al., 2018).

All presented findings are summarised in a conceptual framework based on the SOR model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; see Figure 3). In the pre-travel phase, ODWs and their content elements represent the stimulus (S) that triggers a process of positive and negative ODEs on the six dimensions, described as the individual's internal state within the organism (O). ODEs lead to the aforementioned attitudinal or behavioural responses (R). The conceptual framework also includes the aforementioned personal and environmental factors influencing ODEs.

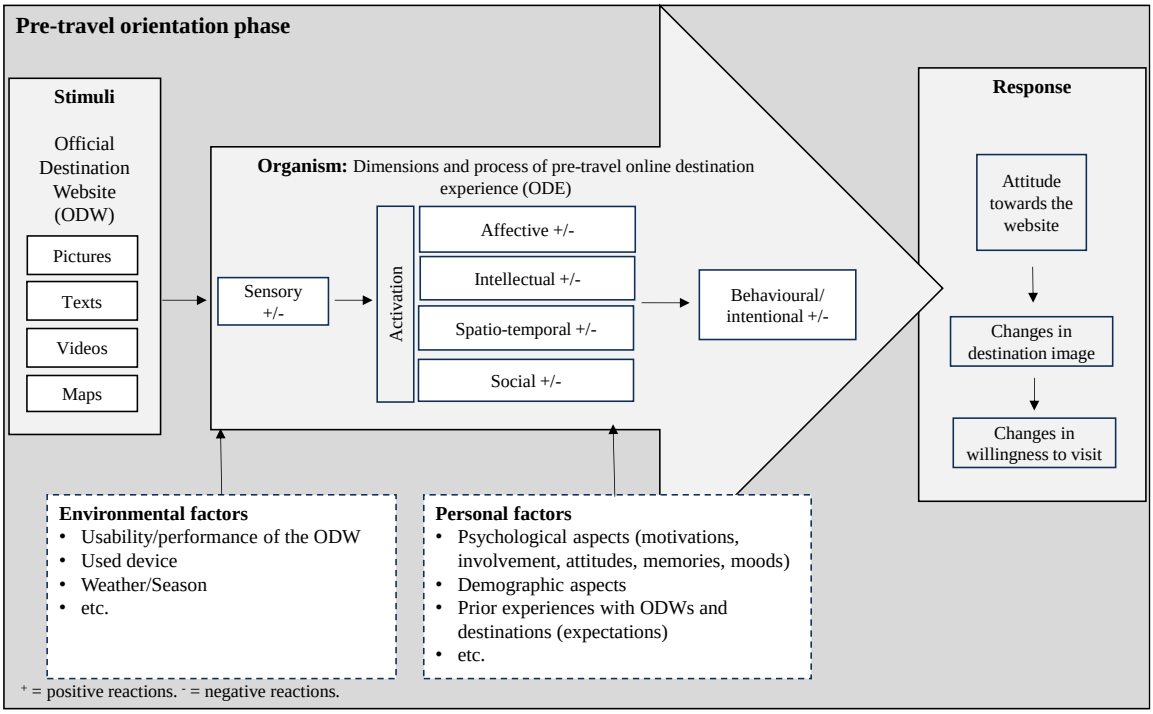

Figure 3: Conceptual framework of pre-travel ODEs on ODWs (Study 1)

Note: The conceptual framework summarises findings based on the SOR model. ODWs (S) stimulate positive and negative ODEs on six dimensions (O) that influence responses (R) towards the ODW and the destination. Several environmental and personal factors have an impact on ODEs.

3.1.5 Conclusion

Mental and emotional perceptions of destinations play an important role in tourists' travel decisions (Lohmann, 2008; Tung & Ritchie, 2011). As ODWs are the most relevant DMO-controlled source of information in the pre-travel phase, DMOs that manage to support the creation of positive pre-travel ODEs through their websites can gain competitive advantages. In light of COVID-19-related travel restrictions, experience-oriented website content has received a further boost. However, so far, an understanding of the nature of ODEs on ODWs from a demand-side perspective has fallen short. This research qualitatively explored how users of ODWs experience unfamiliar tourist destinations in the pre-travel phase, taking a German demand-side perspective and the most frequent user group of ODWs in Germany (millennials) as an example. Other authors raised the need for innovative research methods to explore experiences holistically (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). Using a multi-method approach, comprehensive data from real-time observations (gaze plots and videos from eye-tracking) and self-reports (RTA and interviews) were obtained and analysed with an abductive approach. Overall, this research shows that ODEs have specific characteristics which go beyond the experiential modules of product brands (Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt, 1999). The spatio-temporal ODE plays an important role in the pre-travel phase. Thereby, this research expands previous ODE dimensions (sensory, affective, intellectual, behavioural and social; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo Martínez, 2019; Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al., 2019). Furthermore, this research demonstrates the relevance of the sensory, affective, intellectual, behavioural and social dimensions for the ODE context. Yet the behavioural/intentional and social dimensions in particular have destination-specific characteristics that are better understood through the study. Alongside positive ODEs, some negative ODEs were found as well, for example, in connection with expectations of crowded places. As negative reactions were neglected in previous studies, these outcomes further contribute to an advanced understanding of ODEs. Findings are brought together in a conceptual framework of ODEs on ODWs based on a SOR model, hence taking the mental process of ODEs into account.

This research adds value to the still young theoretical discussion of technology-mediated tourist experiences (Navío-Marco et al., 2018; Neuhofer et al., 2014). The conceptual framework derived from this research deepens the knowledge of the process and the dimensions of ODEs on ODWs in the pre-travel phase. The study also contributes to a better understanding of individual dimensions of the ODE. The complex methodological approach responds to the need for more innovative and multi-method research to explore complex topics in the context of tourist experiences. While the use of eye-tracking technology is still

rare in tourism research (Scott et al., 2019), this research demonstrates that it can be a valuable method for qualitative explorations, particularly when combined with RTA. Going beyond dominant quantitative evaluation of the eye-tracking material, the recorded gaze-plot served as a stimulus to explore the participants' thoughts and feelings during website exploration (RTA). In addition, the videos of the test persons' faces recorded in parallel with the gaze plot were analysed to observe emotional reactions not mentioned by the test person and to associate them with specific triggers on the websites. The gaze plot was also used to validate whether the surfing behaviour reported in the interview corresponded to reality.

In addition, this study delivers valuable managerial implications for DMOs that focus on millennials as a target group. The awareness of the multiple thoughts and feelings during website navigation may help DMOs to tailor ODW content and enhance the likelihood of positive ODEs, leading to desired user responses. Experiential marketing should consider all six ODE dimensions while acknowledging the subjectivity of user perceptions. For example, managers should be aware of the central role of sensory ODEs and the negative impact that unrealistic pictures, or pictures of crowded people, as well as uncontrollable sound in videos, might have on millennials' ODEs. Moreover, the newly discovered spatio-temporal ODE dimension might be positively stimulated by interactive maps, for instance.

After all, this research comes with some limitations. This study purposefully focused on German millennials only. Analysing the same phenomenon among different age groups and cultures would further expand the understanding of this subject. For instance, the scepticism towards ODWs, often mentioned by the participants, might be less pronounced in other age groups. Besides, the study followed a best-practice approach with regard to the selection of the stimuli (ODWs). The destinations included mainly focused on nature-oriented holidays and were all exceptional in terms of the landscape and the local characteristics (e.g. La Réunion as a volcanic island, the polar and Santa-Claus related Rovaniemi). Using less spectacular destination and ODW examples might lead to less pronounced user reactions. Furthermore, the usage of eye-tracking technology required data collection to take place in a laboratory. Although some participants mentioned in the interviews that they had forgotten that they were being observed during navigation, the artificial nature of this situation might have impacted their behaviour. Finally, for technical reasons, website surfing took place on a public computer. Using personal devices, such as smartphones or tablets, might also have an impact on website surfing behaviour and perceptions as users are more personally attached to them.

Given the infancy of the scientific discussion related to ODEs in a tourism context, there is also room for further research. This study's conceptual framework might be tested for generalisability with complementary quantitative studies. This could result in a measuring instrument for DMOs to examine the experience value of ODWs. For instance, moderating effects of the personal and environmental factors such as age or type of destination could be explored. The relationships between ODE dimensions could also be investigated. For the measurement of the sensory and affective ODE dimensions, further psychophysiological methods (e.g. skin conductance, automatic facial expressions) could be applied. These have hardly been used in tourism research so far, but offer great potential for further exploring emotional reactions in real time (Fesenmaier & Xiang, 2017; Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). In addition, the effects of website content or design elements on ODEs should be further analysed to advance knowledge about the triggers of ODEs on ODWs.

3.2 Study 2: Experiential marketing as a tool to enhance tourists` pre-travel online destination experiences? A web-based experiment

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Abstract

Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) are increasingly using experiential marketing on their websites to generate positive pre-travel online destination experiences (ODEs). However, little is known about the ODE construct and the effects of applying experiential marketing on destination websites on ODEs. A scale was developed and applied in a web-based experiment to measure ODEs and to enhance the understanding of the dimensionality of this construct. The travel inspiration phase was simulated and the ODEs of three experimental groups exposed to different websites of the destination Reunion Island were compared. The experiment was conducted with a representative sample of German internet users. Findings indicate that when surfing on a destination website in the inspiration phase, the users` ODE is holistic and cannot be differentiated into theoretically relevant dimensions (e.g. sensory or affective). Moreover, the application of experiential marketing had a statistically significant, small effect on ODEs when adjusted for aspects of personal relevance. Yet, ODE differences between high and medium levels of experiential marketing were negligible. Accordingly, DMOs should realise that experiential marketing enhances ODEs, but beyond a certain level, additional complex multi-media elements do not necessarily further increase the experiential effect. For the important assessment of experiential user reactions, the developed ODE scale provides a first approach.

3.2.1 Introduction

Tourists, in their pre-travel phase, are not only searching for information but are also looking for anticipated experiences and inspirations for experiences (Fesenmaier & Pearce, 2019; Larsen, 2007; Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Volo, 2010). This research focuses on this phase of inspiration, when 'distant', technology-mediated online travel experiences occur (Sundbo & Dixit, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the usage of online platforms has further increased and the meaning of online-mediated, contactless experiences in tourism is supposed to grow beyond the pandemic (Bae & Chang, 2021). Moreover, recent research

has shown that mental pre-experiences of holidays and accompanied positive emotions can mitigate risk perceptions and increase patience with travel delays in times of pandemics (Karl et al., 2021). As such, the stimulation of positive pre-travel online destination experiences (ODEs) is more crucial than ever for destination success. Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) strive to achieve such positive ODEs with their websites (Ketter, 2018). Following definitions of customer experiences in marketing literature (Meyer & Schwager, 2007) ODEs are defined as destination website users` internal and subjective responses with regard to the destination presented. In this sense, ODEs exclusively include website users` thoughts and feelings related to the destination and the notion of a holiday there. In contrast to this and in line with Zhang et al. (2018), user reactions on technological aspects of the website, such as perceived ease of use or usefulness, are not considered as part of the ODE.

Already prior to the pandemic, DMOs have increasingly been shifting from traditional marketing towards experiential marketing (Dixit, 2020; Sotiriadis & Gursoy, 2016). Hereby, they aim to engage website visitors beyond the place`s characteristics, and instead also try to attract their senses and emotions with complex contents (Hudson & Ritchie, 2009; Ketter, 2018; Nelson, 2014). With reference to consumer brands in general, Schmitt (1999) postulates that consumers can be addressed via different mental 'modules'. Accordingly, marketing campaigns for consumer brands can simultaneously or separately stimulate sensual, emotional, intellectual, behavioural or social customer experiences (Schmitt, 1999, 2011). Whether ODEs have the same features as brand based customer experiences and can be addressed in the same way has not yet been sufficiently explored. Specifically, in the travel inspiration phase, when dealing with rather unknown destinations in contrast to established consumer brands, differences might occur as consumers do not necessarily have a fixed goal in mind and fewer cognitive resources are used for information processing (Kim, Kim, & Bolls, 2014). Emotional reactions could also be lower because, unlike with brands, there is not yet a bond shaped through previous experiences with the product.

Initial attempts to transfer the multi-dimensional experiential marketing approaches and the measurement of brand experiences from products (Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt, 1999) to the online destination context failed to acknowledge the specifics of ODEs. Instead, conceptualisations and measurements remained very similar to those of product-brand experiences (Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo Martínez, 2019; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo, 2020). These include the following four dimensions: sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioural experiences (Brakus et al., 2009). However, first qualitative approaches have shown that there are particularities in experiencing tourist destinations on destination

websites such as additional social and spatio-temporal aspects (Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al., 2019; Köchling, 2020). Therefore, it can be questioned whether the measurement tool adopted from the consumer goods industry is appropriate in the context of destination websites. For instance, Godovykh and Tasci (2020) doubted to adopt the scale for measuring the destination experience on-site, i.e. in the destination, as applied by some scholars (Barnes et al., 2014; Kumar & Kaushik, 2018; Rather, 2020). Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, Campo, and Molinillo (2020) also pointed out that further investigation of the ODE construct is advisable. Hence, the first objective of this research is to develop a more context-specific measurement instrument and to enhance the understanding of the dimensionality of the ODE construct on destination websites in the travel inspiration phase.

Besides, given that experiences are shaped by multiple personal aspects such as prior experiences or general interests as well as situational influences (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Jantzen, 2013; Lanier & Hampton, 2009), the question how much the application of experiential marketing on a website can actually contribute to the overall ODE or different experience dimensions arises. Research regarding the emotional and experiential effects of tourism website design and content is limited (Björk, 2010; Jeon et al., 2018; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo Martínez, 2019; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo, 2020). Therefore, the second objective of this research is to analyse the effects of experiential marketing on ODEs, in light of the various personal and situational influencing factors. A quantitative experimental design with 1722 German internet users was applied to address these research questions.

3.2.2 Theoretical background

3.2.2.1 Experiential marketing

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) formed the basis for later concepts of experiential marketing. The scholars postulated that rational consumption values are supplemented by experiential values generated in the consumption process such as fantasies, feelings and fun. Later, Schmitt (1999) distinguished experiential marketing from traditional marketing as it aims at holistic – rational and emotional – customer experiences and it uses marketing channels that can deliver emotions and complex messages. In the branding context, he emphasised the multi-dimensionality of customer experiences evoked by contacts with brand-related stimuli and stated that customers can be reached through marketing on sensory, affective, behavioural, intellectual and social experiences (experiential marketing modules). Either individual modules (e.g. sensory with a marketing focus on aesthetics /

design) or, even more promising, holistically integrated experiences including several modules can be addressed through experiential marketing (Lanier & Hampton, 2009; Schmitt, 2008). As such, affect or 'emotions are only one internal outcome of the stimulation that evokes experiences' (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 54). Yet, positive emotions play a major role in building consumer desire and consumption decisions in tourism (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Le et al., 2019; Lohmann & Kuhn, 2021). Particularly, affective forecasts, i.e. the anticipation of future emotions in the pre-consumption phase (Wilson & Gilbert, 2005), are supposed to be of relevance for travel behaviour intentions (Karl et al., 2021). However, experiences can also be of a thought-provoking nature (Raghunathan, 2008) which Schmitt (1999) refers to as intellectual experiences. Despite all discussions on the positive impact of experiential marketing, there is also strong agreement that the interpretation of marketing stimuli is subjective and shaped by diverse personal and situational influencing factors (e.g. attitudes or moods; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Lanier & Hampton, 2009).

3.2.2.2 Pre-travel online destination experiences (ODEs): Dimensions and measures

Based on Schmitt´s experiential modules (1999), Brakus et al. (2009) developed a four-dimensional scale (sensory, affective, behavioural and intellectual) to measure brand experiences. This scale has also been used to measure online customer experiences in various industries (Bleier et al., 2019; Yoon & Youn, 2016). Scientific discussions on destination brand experiences evolved when Barnes et al. (2014) and later others (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018; Rather, 2020) adopted Brakus et al.'s brand experience scale to measure experiences during physical visits of tourist destinations. Furthermore, Ketter (2018) analysed the application of the experiential modules in destination marketing campaigns and concluded that the approach can serve as an analytical framework to analyse destination marketing.

The importance of online media for the marketing of travel destinations has been growing (Bae & Chang, 2021; Stankov & Gretzel, 2020). For example, in Germany destination websites are used intensely for travel inspiration (FUR, 2020). Nevertheless, research on destination experiences in the online and pre-visit context is still nascent. Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, and Campo Martínez (2019) were the first to adapt Brakus et al. 's (2009) scale to measure selected experience dimensions (sensory and intellectual) in a destination website context. They found that sensory experiences condition intellectual experiences. Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al. (2019) and Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, and Campo (2020) added qualitative approaches to analyse online destination brand experiences (ODBE) and explored the elements of a positive ODBE on destination platforms (website, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter). The authors confirmed Brakus et al.'s brand experience dimensions

in the online destination context, but expanded the multi-dimensional approach by social ODBEs, referring to communicative aspects. Despite these advancements, subsequent studies on ODBE mostly applied only slight adaptations of Brakus et al.'s scale, including sensory, intellectual, behavioural and affective dimensions (Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, Campo, & Molinillo, 2020; Khan & Fatma, 2021).

Köchling (2020) went beyond the brand focus and analysed pre-travel ODEs among German millennials in a qualitative multi-method approach. Agreeing with other scholars (Beritelli & Laesser, 2018; Eisenstein, 2018; Kladou et al., 2017; Tasci, 2011), she argued that the complexity of tourist destinations impedes destination branding and challenges ODEs. Findings of her explorative study showed that the ODE dimensions considered so far need to be complemented by a spatio-temporal dimension (perceived accessibility of expected experiences and experience density in the destination). Regarding the social dimension, findings also demonstrated the importance of reflections on co-creation of potential on-site experiences by encounters with the destination's inhabitants, other tourists (crowding) and travel companions or potential prestige effects when visiting the destination.

Overall, the literature review shows that the application of Schmitt's experiential marketing framework is appropriate in the context of online destination marketing. At the same time, the hitherto practiced exact adoption of this approach which originates from branding in other industries to the destination context might be insufficient (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020; Köchling, 2020) and the ODE construct needs further research (Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, Campo, & Molinillo, 2020). The adaptation of the brand experience measurement tool should particularly be reconsidered for the travel inspiration phase. This research gap is addressed in this research. Accordingly, the development of a more context-specific ODE measurement tool was necessary to further analyse the construct`s dimensionality and, as such, capture the dependent variable in the experiment appropriately.

3.2.2.3 Triggers of ODEs

In the online-context, research on the triggers of experiential reactions is scarce. Björk (2010) analysed the impact of website design (atmospherics) on pre-consumption emotions and found that information (content and structure) as well as pictures were the most important aspects on tour operators` websites. Other authors focused on triggers related to flow experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and showed that destination website´s informativeness, design, and interactivity (Jeon et al., 2018) and, in virtual reality travel, sense and information quality (An et al., 2021) positively relate to flow experiences. Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, and Campo Martínez (2019) and Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, and

Campo (2020) found that visual stimuli (video and image galleries) were the most important antecedents for sensory ODBEs, but have to be supplemented by content creating curiosity to provoke behavioural intentions. Lee et al. (2010) and Lee and Gretzel (2012) analysed the antecedents of mental imagery, i.e. the process by which sensory information is represented in working memory (MacInnis & Price, 1987), and persuasion. Experiential marketing stimuli are designed to evoke a high level of imagery elaboration, which can lead to concrete travel visions and immersion in fantasies and dreams (Le et al., 2020) as well as affective forecasting (Karl et al., 2021). It was found that sensory descriptions of destinations and the presence of pictures on destination websites have a positive effect on imagery elaboration. However, neither the overall effect of experiential marketing on destination websites on the ODE nor possible nuances of this effect depending on the degree of application of Schmitt`s (1999) experiential marketing framework have been explored.

Moreover, the personal relevance of the destination presented determines the level of marketing induced arousal and activation (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) as well as emotional reactions in the pre-travel phase (Le et al., 2020). Personal relevance regarding travel destinations is closely connected to motivation and involvement (Decrop, 2006). Involvement is people`s perceived relevance of the object or topic based on their needs, values and interests (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Personal travel motives determine the personal relevance as 'push factors' of motivation. While surfing a destination website, personal travel motives are matched with the 'pull factors', i.e. the perceived offer of the destination (Dann, 2018). Prebensen et al. (2013) found that involvement and motivation are linked to tourists' experience value in the on-site destination context and that motivation influences the level of involvement. Past research has shown that familiarity with a destination impacts the way a destination's promotional information is processed, because tourists search according to their memories or previous attitudes towards the destination (Gowreesunkar & Dixit, 2016; Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al., 2019; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997). Besides these socio-psychological impacts, various other situational aspects while surfing (e.g. device used, season, mood or COVID-19 pandemic-caused travel restrictions) as well as personal aspects (e.g. personality/ lifestyle, socio-demographics) impact the ODE and visit intentions (Decrop, 2006; Köchling, 2020).

Based on the literature review, this research puts forward the following hypotheses:

> *H1:* The application of experiential marketing on destination websites positively affects the online destination experience (ODE) in the travel inspiration phase.

H2: The more comprehensive the application of the experiential marketing framework to destination websites, i.e. the higher the level of experiential marketing, the more positive the ODE.

Controlling for aspects of personal relevance is essential when analysing experiential reactions on marketing stimuli. Therefore, involvement with holidays, the perceived match of important travel motives with the offer of the destination, the preliminary attitude towards the destination and the preliminary interest to visit the destination were included as covariates into the research model. Besides, further personal and situational aspects were also considered. The variables and hypotheses to be tested within the scope of this research are summarised in Figure 4.

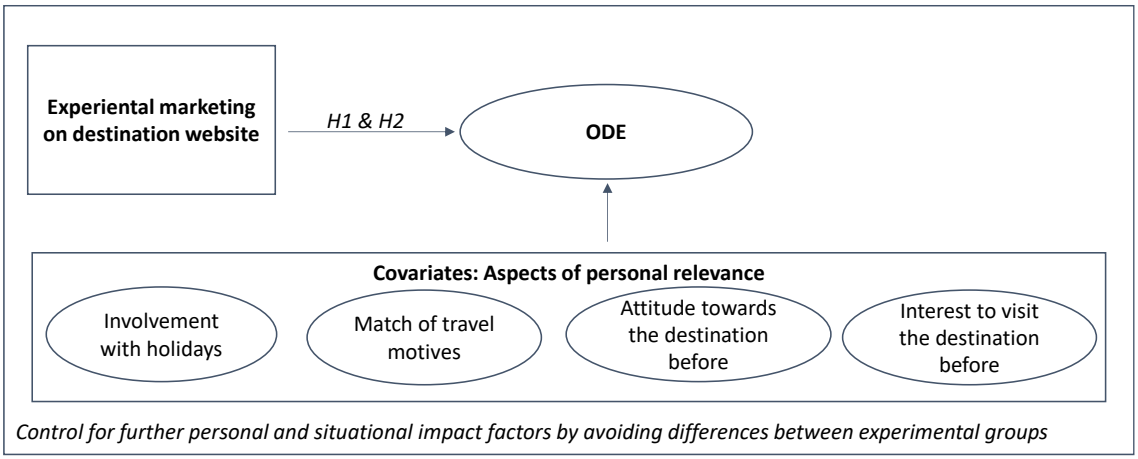


Figure 4: Research model and hypotheses (Study 2)

3.2.3 Methods

3.2.3.1 Research design

In November 2020, a web-based experiment was conducted with three different websites (treatments). Real destination websites were used to ensure that surfing on the website was as close as possible to a real travel inspiration situation. In order to evaluate potential personal and situational influences as accurately as possible and compare those between the experimental groups, several variables were included as controls (see 3.2.3.2). Data collection took place within five days, to minimise seasonal or other situational impact factors.

Reunion Island, a French overseas department located in the Indian Ocean, was selected as a case study. Its natural beauty and pleasant tropical climate make it potentially attractive for many Germans. At the same time, Reunion Island is a destination rarely visited by

Germans, which makes it a good example to simulate the pre-travel inspiration phase for the German demand. Further, the selection of the destination was guided by the need of a destination website that applied experiential marketing at a high level, while finding two other real websites for the same destination with minor levels of experiential marketing (three factor levels). To identify high and low levels of experiential marketing, six destination marketing experts (scientists and practitioners) were asked to evaluate the degree of the professional application of experiential marketing on several pre-selected destination websites based on Schmitt's (1999, p. 30) definition. As such, a high level of experiential marketing was defined as addressing a holistic customer experience, i.e. both sensory/emotional and rational aspects, very professionally. Reunion Island Tourism, the island`s DMO, aims to develop an 'experiential ecotourism' (Innovons La Réunion, 2016, p. 42) and applies several means of experiential marketing (e.g. huge emotional photos with integrated links to experiential offers, videos, decorative font and narrative texts) on their official destination website. The experts approved the high experiential level of the Reunion Island tourism website and also rated the level of experiential marketing of two other selected websites representing Reunion Island. Accordingly, the level of experiential marketing on the second website was rated as medium and the third, the presentation of the island on Wikivoyage, was confirmed to apply no experiential marketing at all. The second website also uses many photos, but they are displayed smaller and do not include moving images. In addition, the texts are more fact-oriented and the overall design is soberer. Typical of Wikivoyage, the destination is described in factual language and only a few small pictures are integrated (Figure 5). Moreover, the experts also approved that all websites had satisfactory usability to minimise the impact of the technological experience on the emotional experience, which had been approved in previous studies (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018).

Overall, 4445 participants drawn from the Norstat consumer panel (for further information see www.norstatpanel.com/en) in Germany representing German internet users aged between 18 and 75 (quota sample according to age, sex and region) were invited to participate. During data collection, the sample was randomly split into three representative experimental groups, each exposed to one of the aforementioned websites (between-subjects design). Exclusion criteria for participants in the survey were a) pre-visitation of Reunion Island, b) failure to answer correctly to two control questions after exposure to the website or c) non-completion of the entire questionnaire. This process resulted in 2007 complete questionnaires. Data cleaning led to the exclusion of additional 285 cases. The final sample consisted of 1722 respondents distributed among the three subsamples.

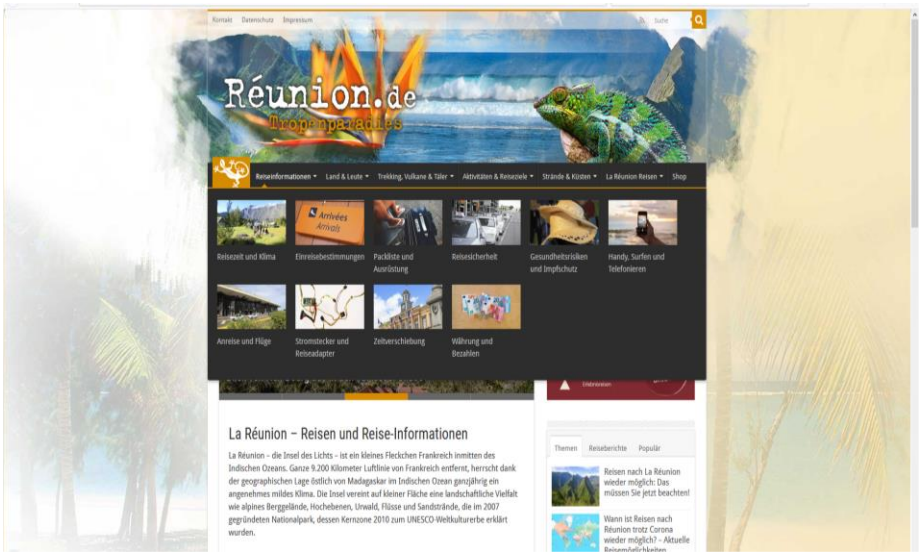
3.2.3.2 Research procedure and measures

The data collection technique was a web questionnaire. Subjects were informed that the research dealt with holidays and the perception of destination websites. First, socio-demographic aspects, the device used and the current mood were asked for. Mood was measured on a 5-point metric-slide scale with smileys and verbalised end points from 'very bad' to 'very good'. The first covariate to reflect personal relevance, involvement with holidays, was measured using an established semantic multi-item scale, the revised personal involvement inventory scale adopted for the holiday context (McQuarrie & Munson, 1992; Schmücker, 2007). The importance of travel motives reflecting central aspects of Reunion Island properties, e.g. experiencing nature (beautiful landscapes, clean air, clean water) were measured on single-item metric-slide scales ranging from 1 = 'not important at all' to 7 = 'particularly important' and a sum-score was calculated. Among participants that were familiar with the island by name, the attitude towards the destination and the interest to visit before and after exposure to the website were measured. The attitude towards the destination semantic multi-item-scale was adopted from Pallud and Straub (2014) building on Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). Interest in visiting the destination was measured on a single-item metric-slide scale ranging from 1 = 'is not an option at all' to 7 = 'is definitely an option'.

After these introductory questions, participants were asked to imagine themselves in a travel inspiration situation with Reunion Island as a potential destination recommended by a friend. Participants were then forwarded a link to one of the three websites (randomly assigned) and were asked to surf for at least three minutes before continuing the survey. The minimum time requirement of three minutes served to ensure that the test persons could get an impression of the destination. To guarantee that the time was met, the next question could be answered only three minutes later. However, participants were able to surf the website for longer than the specified minimum time. As such, the time between leaving the questionnaire and answering the next question was measured for quality assurance. During data cleaning, subjects with a conspicuously long pause between leaving the questionnaire and answering the next question were excluded. After exposure to the stimulus, participants had to answer two control questions to check whether they had really visited the website. Participants who failed to answer both questions were excluded. The remaining participants were asked to evaluate their ODE.

Website 1: High level of experiential marketing (www.insel-la-reunion.com)

Website 2: Medium level of experiential marketing (www.reunion.de)



Website 3: No experiential marketing (https://wikivoyage/wiki/Reunion)

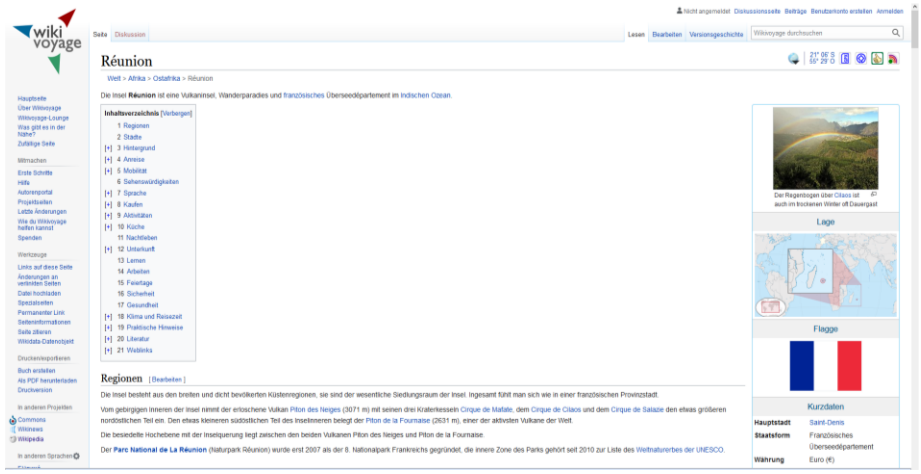


Figure 5: Websites selected as stimuli for representing different levels of experiential marketing (Study 2)

A new measurement instrument to measure the ODE was developed. The scale was designed to assess the degree of positive ODEs or individual experience dimensions that were triggered when surfing the websites. In addition to the scales previously adapted from the brand context (Barnes et al., 2014; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo Martínez, 2019), the qualitative studies by Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit et al. (2019) and Köchling (2020) served as the basis for item formulation covering all ODE dimensions and facets suspected in previous research (sensory, affective, intellectual, social, spatio-temporal and behavioural/intentional ODEs). Four experts assessed the face and content validity of items. Based on their feedback, some items were modified and the entire questionnaire pre-tested. In a think-aloud approach, comprehensibility and user guidance of the survey were checked to eliminate ambiguity (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Thereafter, the questionnaire was tested in a web-survey through the Norstat consumer panel (n = 239) for two different destination websites. Results indicated data suitability for factor analysis, but the dimensions previously suspected in the literature were not replicated. Hence, some items were reformulated and two additional items were added. In the final questionnaire, a multi-item scale of 28 items was used (Appendix A). The survey concluded with questions on the usage of destination websites during the customer journey in the past three years and further socio-demographic details.

All constructs included in the model (covariates and ODE) were measured on seven-point scales, to improve reliability and validity (Preston & Colman, 2000). All scale points were numbered and the end points labeled. In this way, the intervals between response options appeared equidistant to respondents, so that the scales could be considered interval scales (Alreck & Settle, 2004; Fowler, 2014). All scales included a balanced amount of positive and negative items in order to control for acquiescence or disacquiescence response style biases (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Negatively scored items were reversed before data analysis. For the multi-item scales, composite indices (means) were calculated. Items were presented randomised to avoid sequential effects.

3.2.4 Results

3.2.4.1 Descriptives

The results of the descriptive statistics show that more than half of the respondents (54.4%) knew the destination Reunion Island by name. Three quarters of the respondents had used destination websites at least at one point throughout the customer journey in the last three years. Destination websites are mostly used for information (53.7%), planning the journey

(43.7%) and inspiration (40.2%) before a journey (Table 3). This result underlines the importance of destination websites in the pre-travel phase.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics categorical variable (Study 2)

Variables		**n**	**%**
Gender	Male	842	48.9
	Female	880	51.1
Age class	18-29	271	15.7
	30-39	257	14.9
	40-49	381	22.1
	50-59	355	20.6
	60-75	458	26.6
Device used	Laptop without additional monitor	314	18.2
	Laptop or computer with monitor	1006	58.4
	Smartphone	207	12.0
	Tablet	186	10.8
	Another device (e.g. smart TV)	9	0.5
Familiarity with Reunion Island	Familiar by name, but not visited	937	54.4
	Not familiar at all	785	45.6
Usage of destination websites last 3 years*	For travel inspiration before a journey	693	40.2
	For information before a journey	924	53.7
	For planning the journey	753	43.7
	For booking the journey/availing offers	433	25.1
	For information during the trip	349	20.3
	For information after the trip	133	7.7
	No usage	390	22.6
	Don`t know	53	3.1

Note: Base: total sample (n = 1722); *multiple answers possible

Despite the categorical variables, the overall sample can be described in terms of the measured socio-psychological constructs reflecting the participants` current mood in the survey situation, and the personal relevance with regard to holidays on Reunion Island (Table 4). The multi-item measurement scales adopted for the constructs involvement with holidays and attitude towards the destination showed very high reliability, as assessed by Cronbach`s α values > .9. A list of all items of these constructs can be found in Appendix B.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics: socio-psychological aspects (Study 2)

	n	Min	Max	M	SD	Skew-ness	Kur-tosis	Cron-bach's α
Current mood	1722	1.00	5.00	3.69	0.85	-0.50	0.32	n.a.
Involvement with holidays	1722	1.00	7.00	5.49	1.29	-1.13	1.24	.944
Importance of travel motives RI*	1722	4.00	28.00	18.99	4.15	-0.47	0.35	n.a.
Attitude towards RI before website visit**	937	1.00	7.00	5.45	1.25	-0.85	0.76	.940
Interest to visit RI before website visit**	937	1.00	7.00	4.70	1.70	-0.59	-0.43	n.a.

Note: Base: total sample (n = 1722); RI = Reunion Island; *Sum score of importance of travel motives reflecting Reunion Island properties: 1) Experience nature (beautiful landscapes, clean air, clean water) + 2) Experience faraway countries, see a lot of the world + 3) Experience a lot, have a lot of variety, do a lot + 4) active sports; **Only asked if destination was familiar by name.

3.2.4.2 ODE dimensions: Principal component analysis

To check the ODE dimensionality, all cases were included in the data analysis independent of the assigned treatment (n = 1722). Limiting the sample to a specific group could have imposed biases and confounders such as an over-representation of certain experience dimensions. A principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted on the 28 ODE items with oblique rotation (direct oblimin), as it was assumed that the underlying experience components were related to each other. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO = .974 ('marvellous' according to Kaiser & Rice, 1974, p. 112). All KMO values for individual items were greater than .85, which is well above the acceptable limit of .5 (Kaiser & Rice, 1974). Moreover, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (30,088.075; d. f. = 378, p<.001). An initial analysis was run to obtain Eigenvalues for each component in the data. Four components had Eigenvalues greater than 1 (Kaiser`s criterion) and in combination, explained 61.0% of the variance. However, Kaiser`s criterion tends to overestimate the number of components to retain (Field, 2018) and the scree plot was ambiguous, showing inflexions that would justify retaining both only 1 or 4 components. Further, the Eigenvalues of factors 2, 3, and 4 were close to 1 (1.594, 1.551, 1.226). On each of the three factors, less than four items showed a high factor loading of >.60. Therefore, it was not advisable to interpret these factors (Universität Zürich, 2021). Additionally, the four-factor solution did not yield a plausible solution with regard to the interpretation of the components. Hence, it was decided to retain only one component. The PCA was run again for the one-component solution and thereafter, 15 items were excluded due to low communalities <.5. Among these excluded items were all items that aimed at reflecting the spatio-temporal ODE dimension, as well as all items reflecting the social dimension in terms of encounters with other tourists, inhabitants or travel companions

(Köchling, 2020). For this reduced solution in a final run, one component with 13 items and high loadings that explained 69.1% of the variance was received. The resulting ODE component included items that aimed at reflecting the sensory (SEN), affective (AFF), intellectual (INT) and behavioural (BEH) dimensions, with one item for the social dimension (SOC). Hence, the component was interpreted as a holistic ODE. The resulting multi-item scale shows a very high reliability with Cronbach`s α = .962. All data showed item-to-total correlations above < .6 and deletion of items would not have further improved Cronbach`s α. Table 5 shows the component loadings of the final scale.

Table 5: Summary of PCA results for ODE measurement (Study 2)

Items	**Component loadings**
INT3: The website made me curious about the destination.	.913
BEH2: The website created desire to visit the destination.	.891
AFF1: I had positive feelings about the destination while browsing the website.	.873
INT2: The website made me interested in learning more about the destination.	.873
SEN4: The presentation of the destination stimulated my senses.	.869
BEH5: I think I could experience a lot in the destination.	.842
AFF4: The destination left me completely cold (reversed).	.827
SOC5: I would like to tell friends and acquaintances about a holiday in the destination.	.802
AFF2: I imagined how good I would feel during a visit to the destination.	.800
INT4: The destination seems uninteresting to me (reversed).	.791
SEN3: The destination looks great.	.779
INT1: I found the destination boring (reversed).	.769
BEH3: I could easily imagine myself in the destination experience while browsing the website.	.762
% of variance	69.1
Cronbach`s α	.962

Note: Base: total sample (n = 1722); 1 component extracted

To ensure that the one-component solution is also adequate in specific target groups, additional PCAs were calculated for a) Millennials with a high level of education and b) participants that are familiar with Reunion Island by name and that had high evaluations of importance of travel motives reflecting Reunion Island properties. These calculations did not produce contradictory or more nuanced component solutions. For a first check of external validity, correlations between ODE values and the changes in attitude towards the destination and interest to visit (difference before and after website exposure) were

calculated. Bootstrapping was applied (n = 1000) because variables were not normally distributed. Results showed that the ODE score was significantly correlated with the change in attitude towards the destination, r = .319 [.262, .378] and interest to visit the destination, r = .310 [.250, .363]. These medium positive correlations (Cohen, 1992) further support the validity of the measurement tool.

Hence, these results indicate two things: first, in the context of experiencing an unfamiliar destination during a contact with a destination website in the travel inspiration phase, sensory, affective, intellectual, social and behavioural experiences seem to be so highly interrelated that they blur into one holistic destination experience. Second, the additional destination-specific spatio-temporal dimension and certain aspects of the social dimension could not be shown as being part of this overall ODE and seem to constitute different constructs or become relevant parts of an ODE at a later stage of the travel decision process.

3.2.4.3 Triggers of the ODE: Effects of experiential marketing

To test the hypotheses (see section 3.2.2.3), a one-way ANCOVA was conducted. Past research found that familiarity with the destination influences the ODE (Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit et al., 2019). Therefore, the analyses were based on respondents that were familiar with Reunion Island by name (n = 937). Thus, the variables 'attitude towards the destination before' and 'interest to visit the destination before' could be controlled for, as only respondents familiar with the destination by name were asked to evaluate those aspects before the website visit.

Descriptive statistics approved the homogeneity of the three experimental groups regarding personal and situational impact factors (Table 6). For the main analysis, the composite index (mean) of the items of the final ODE one-component solution was used to compare the three website effects and test hypotheses 1 and 2. The composite indexes of the four variables reflecting personal relevance were added as covariates into the model (Figure 4).

To check assumptions for the ANCOVA, first four ANOVAs were calculated to check homogeneity of variances for the four covariates. No significant differences were found between the variances of involvement with holidays (p = .054), importance of travel motives (p = .159), attitude towards the destination (p = .276) and interest to visit before website exposure (p = .298) between the three groups. Homogeneity of regression slopes was not violated with regard to the dependent variable, as the interaction terms were not statistically significant for the four covariates either (p = .297/ .092 / .713 / .880). Moreover, based on leverage and cook-distance, there were no outliers in the data. Levene`s

test was non-significant ($F(2, 934) = 2.904$, $p = .055$) indicating homogeneity of variances. Shapiro Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests both were significant ($p < .001$), indicating that residuals were not normally distributed. Hence, bootstrapping was conducted for the analysis (n = 1000 samples) to counter possible biases.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics experimental groups and total (Study 2)

		Experimental groups			
Variables		Website 1: high level experiential marketing (n = 329)	Website 2: medium level experiential marketing (n = 298)	Website 3: no experiential marketing (n = 310)	Total (n = 937)
Gender	Male	55.0%	54.0%	51.6%	53.6%
	Female	45.0%	46.0%	48.4%	46.4%
Age class	18-29	15.8%	12.8%	12.9%	13.9%
	30-39	12.8%	14.4%	16.1%	14.4%
	40-49	24.3%	23.5%	23.2%	23.7%
	50-59	18.5%	19.8%	21.0%	19.7%
	60-75	28.6%	29.5%	26.8%	28.3%
Device used	Laptop without additional monitor	22.8%	19.5%	17.4%	20.0%
	Laptop or computer with monitor	60.2%	60.7%	58.7%	59.9%
	Smartphone	7.9%	10.1%	11.9%	9.9%
	Tablet	8.5%	9.4%	11.3%	9.7%
	Another device (e.g. smart TV)	0.6%	0.3%	0.6%	0.5%
Current mood	M	3.75	3.75	3.79	3.76
	SD	0.76	0.82	0.84	0.81
Involvement with holidays	M	5.64	5.63	5.83	5.70
	SD	1.29	1.09	1.00	1.14
	Skewness	-1.43	-0.92	-1.01	-1.24
	Kurtosis	2.25	0.94	1.07	1.98
Importance of travel motives RI*	M	19.67	19.26	19.85	19.60
	SD	3.91	3.79	3.87	3.86
	Skewness	-0.61	-0.53	-0.48	-0.53
	Kurtosis	0.27	0.45	0.08	0.39
Attitude towards RI before website visit	M	5.42	5.38	5.54	5.45
	SD	1.29	1.22	1.25	1.25
	Skewness	-1.04	-0.52	-0.94	-0.85
	Kurtosis	1.38	-0.03	0.81	0.76
Interest to visit RI before website visit	M	4.62	4.66	4.82	4.70
	SD	1.73	1.70	1.65	1.70
	Skewness	-0.53	-0.64	-0.59	-0.59
	Kurtosis	-0.47	-0.40	-0.40	-0.43

Note: Base: Respondents familiar with Reunion Island by name (n = 937); RI = Reunion Island * Sum score of importance of travel motives reflecting RI properties: 1) Experience nature (beautiful landscapes, clean air, clean water) + 2) Experience faraway countries, see a lot of the world + 3) Experience a lot, have a lot of variety, do a lot + 4) active sports;

Unadjusted means showed a higher ODE score in the website 1 group (high level of experiential marketing), than in website 2 (medium level) and 3 groups (no experiential marketing). Means adjusted for the four covariates representing personal relevance showed slightly different results in the ODE scores: for website 1 and 2, a slight ODE increase could be observed, while for website 3, a slight decrease was found (Table 7). The ODE differences in the adjusted model were statistically significant, $F(2, 930) = 21.45$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .044$. As such, evidence for hypothesis 1 was found. Yet, the overall effect of the website, i.e. the application of experiential marketing, was rather small, explaining 4.4% of the variance between the ODEs that was not explained by the covariates.

Table 7: Comparison of unadjusted and adjusted ODE values between experimental groups (Study 2)

	Unadjusted					**Adjusted for covariates**			
				95% confidence interval				95% confidence interval	
Experimental group	n	M	SE	lower bound	upper bound	M	SE	lower bound	upper bound
Website 1: High level experiential marketing	329	5.55	0.07	5.40	5.68	5.57	0.06	5.46	5.67
Website 2: Medium level experiential marketing	298	5.37	0.07	5.23	5.52	5.42	0.06	5.31	5.55
Website 3: No experiential marketing	310	5.17	0.07	5.02	5.30	5.10	0.06	4.98	5.22
Total	937	5.37	0.04	5.29	5.45				

Note: SE = standard error; Bootstrapping was applied (n = 1000)

Planned contrasts were calculated to test hypothesis 2. Results revealed that a high level of experiential marketing (website 1) significantly increased the ODE, compared to the website 3 (no experiential marketing) group with a medium effect size (Gignac & Szodorai, 2016), $M_{Diff} = .468$, 95%-CI[.324, .612], $t(930) = 6.37$, $p < .001$, $r = 0.20$. In addition, a medium level of experiential marketing (website 2) increased the ODE value compared to website 3, but to a smaller degree, $M_{Diff} = .319$, 95%-CI[.169, .469], $t(930) = 4.17$, $p < .001$, $r = .14$. Finally, the comparison of the ODE values between the high and medium level of experiential marketing showed a significant, yet negligibly small effect, $M_{Diff} = .149$, 95%-CI[.008, 289], $t(930) = 2.08$, $p = .038$, $r = .07$. As such, hypothesis 2 is only partially supported: Compared with no experiential marketing at all, there is a greater effect with the high application of experiential marketing than with medium application. However, in a direct comparison of the two marketing levels, the effects achieved are negligible.

Because no differentiated experience dimensions emerged in the previous PCA, the analysis of the effects was based on the holistic ODE. In order to find indications of how the experiences on the websites differed more concretely depending on the level of experiential

marketing applied, an exploratory analysis of group differences between the 13 individual items compiling the ODE scale (see Table 5) was added. For each item, a separate ANCOVA was calculated using the same covariates as in the main analysis. Significant differences between the three groups were found for all 13 items (p <.003). But the effect sizes differ and are biggest for the items SEN4 ('The presentation of the destination stimulated my senses.'), $F(2,930) = 22.081$. $p < .001$, partial η^2 =.045, BEH5 ('I think I could experience a lot in the destination.'), $F(2,930) = 19.168$, $p < .001$, partial η^2 =.040 and AFF1 ('I had positive feelings about the destination while browsing the website.'), $F(2,930) = 16.218$, $p < .001$, partial η^2 =.034. The smallest group difference was noticed for the item SOC5 ('I would like to tell friends and acquaintances about a holiday in the destination') $F(2,930) = 6.242$, p = .002, partial η^2 =.013. This shows that the application of experiential marketing promoted sensory / affective experiences and the idea of an eventful holiday, while intellectual and social experiences were less triggered through the marketing. Planned contrasts were additionally calculated for each item to check differences between the groups. The results underline that, especially for the website with a high experiential marketing level, effects are strongest among the mentioned sensory / affective items. All results for the planned contrasts are displayed in Appendix C.

Finally, the effect of the treatment on the overall ODE was compared to the effect of the covariates (personal relevance). The covariates importance of travel motives, $t(930) = 4.93$, $p < .001$, $r = 0.16$, attitude towards the destination before, $t(930) = 8.78$, $p < .001$, $r = .28$, and interest to visit before website exposure, $t(930) = 4.74$, $p < .001$, $r = .15$, were significantly related to the participants` ODEs. In contrast, involvement with holidays did not show a significant relation to the ODEs, $t(930) = 0.47$, $p = .634$, $r = .02$. A reason might be that this construct is unrelated to the destination. Moreover, compared to the effect size of high level of experiential marketing, the attitude towards the destination showed a bigger effect on the ODE.

3.2.5 Discussion and implications

With the tourism industry currently facing its biggest crisis in history due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the huge competitive pressures destinations are facing post-opening, it will be more critical than ever for DMOs to inspire guests to visit through their websites. However, research on how tourists actually experience a destination when browsing its websites before travelling and on what effect experiential marketing has on this ODE, is still scarce. Yet, for an efficient design of destination websites and strategic marketing decisions,

it is critical for DMOs to assess the experiential impact of their website. These issues were addressed in this research.

A new ODE measurement instrument was developed and applied in a web-based experiment with three different website treatments using Reunion Island as a case study. The experiential marketing framework (Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt, 1999; 2008) served as the basis for developing the measurement tool, but was customised to the destination-context based on first qualitative findings on ODE particularities (Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al., 2019; Köchling, 2020). Hence, the first aim was to capture the ODE on websites in the inspiration phase more appropriately and to test experience dimensions proposed in past research. The results suggest that the ODE in the inspiration phase is less differentiated than past studies assumed. In the data, it was not multiple experience dimensions that crystallised, but a holistic experience encompassing sensory, affective, intellectual, social and behavioural aspects, all loading on the same component. Several causes for this are possible: Brakus et al.`s scale was developed based on brand experiences in the consumer goods sector. In the case of brands, consumers can be attracted by brand-related stimuli to individual experience dimensions only (e.g. affective or intellectual). With a product as complex as a travel destination, the experience might automatically be more comprehensive and occur through multiple dimensions simultaneously. This might be reinforced in the inspiration phase, when people do not yet have a fixed goal in mind and involvement is lower. When individuals go online to find specific information, they exert more effort in finding it and encode information more effectively compared to simply surfing for inspiration (Kim, Kim, & Wise, 2014). Additionally, low involvement was intensified due to the fact that subjets with previous visiting experiences were excluded and the simulated situation in which subjects did not choose the destination of their own interest. This could also explain why the results did not evidence the presumed spatio-temporal and social experience dimensions including aspects of accessibility or encounters in the destination (Köchling, 2020) being part of the ODE in the inspiration phase. Yet, the exploratory analysis of group differences of individual items showed that the measurement instrument is able to differentiate sensory, affective as well as behavioural reactions. In the case study, intellectual trigger were less prominent on the websites applying experiential marketing, so it is plausible that less pronounced differences between groups emerged here. Accordingly, the scale is able to capture key aspects of ODEs. As such, it is appropriate to apply it to quantify the effect of experiential marketing on ODEs.

Hence, the ODE-effect of experiential marketing (high and medium level) applied on destination websites was compared with a purely fact-based destination presentation on

Wikivoyage. Significant differences between the websites were found, albeit the overall effect of experiential marketing was rather small. It can be concluded that experiential marketing does enhance the ODE on a destination website, but the results underline the subjectivity of ODEs and the countless influencing factors which limit the impact of marketing. For example, the effect of prior attitudes towards the destination on the ODE was greater than the marketing effect. Further, the significant but very small effect between the high and the medium level of experiential marketing indicates that destination inspiration is essentially about the destination's characteristics and less about the perfect, complex staging of experiences. Compared to the complete omission of experiential elements, however, a larger effect could be shown.

Although the conclusions have to be restricted to the sample collected, the results underline that the previously practiced exact adoption of the experiential marketing modules and the measurement instrument from the branding context falls short and that a more context-specific view is required for ODEs. Through the development and application of a new ODE measurement tool, this research contributes to the still nascent discussion on ODEs and encourages further research in this field. Moreover, these results have important managerial implications for DMOs: Overall, the influence that experiential marketing has on the ODE could be a competitive advantage and convince the guest to visit the destination. As such, investments in experiential marketing are worthwhile, but the small differences between an extremely experiential, multi-media website and a solid website containing fewer experiential elements show that a more sophisticated presentation does not necessarily lead to much better ODEs. It is therefore important for DMOs to assess the impact of the experiential marketing applied on their website. After further validation, the scale developed here can be used for this purpose. In addition to that, in light of the subjectivity of ODEs underlined in this research, it is crucial for DMOs to tailor marketing and offerings to the right target groups.

3.2.6 Limitations and future research

As with any research, this is not free of limitations and several aspects need to be addressed in future studies. First of all, the developed measurement instrument and the corresponding ODE unidimensionality need to be validated in future studies, including tests for further destinations of different scale, other stages of the customer journey (e.g. information and planning phases) and in different intercultural settings (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2018; Khan & Fatma, 2021). In the experimental design, real websites were used as stimuli, since

replicated websites for experimental usage find it difficult to reproduce the complex design of modern, experience-oriented websites. While leading to a more realistic scenario, this also entails less control over the stimuli. There is a need for further research to examine whether a more differentiated ODE picture emerges with more isolated stimulation of individual experience modules. This should include investigating whether spatio-temporal and social ODEs can be explicitly triggered by certain content or whether they are moderating aspects which are less triggerable by marketing and shaped almost exclusively by personal influences (e.g., in terms of perceived destination distance). Future research is also necessary to test whether these aspects become parts of the ODE in the later information or planning phase with rising involvement.

Due to the web-based design, also control over the survey situation was limited. Although several personal and situational aspects were measured as controls, it is impossible to capture all potential aspects impacting on the experience in a single study. For example, the perceived technological experience (usability etc.) of the websites might mediate the effect between experiential marketing and ODE (Zhang et al., 2018). This should be tested in future studies and was not covered here. Moreover, retrospective self-reports were used to measure the ODE. The recording of emotional reactions by means of such surveys is fundamentally limited, especially since emotions cannot be captured at the moment of the experience. Future studies might in addition test the emotional part of ODEs with psychophysiological methods, to detect unconscious emotions and reactions such as facial expressions in real-time (Li et al., 2016). Another potential bias could be the time of data collection in the midst of the second COVID-19-related lockdown in Germany with various travel restrictions. The inability of participants to travel might have impacted their ODEs. Hence, a validation of the results after the pandemic would be worthwhile. Further, ODEs could be compared between different personalities or lifestyles (target groups) to provide even more precise information for DMOs on whether their websites address the desired target groups.

3.3 Study 3: How to assess the pre-travel online destination experience value of destination websites? An experiential marketing perspective

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CRediT author statement

Anne Köchling: Conceptualisation, formal analysis, investigation, resources, data curation, writing – original draft, visualisation, project administration; Martin Lohmann: Conceptualisation, supervision, writing – review & editing

Abstract

Destination websites, provided by destination marketing/management organisations (DMOs), are central environmental drivers of tourist experiences in the pre-travel phase. DMOs increasingly apply experiential marketing on their websites to support positive online destination experiences (ODEs) and attract tourists. However, research into technology-driven tourist experiences is still nascent and theoretical knowledge on the nature of ODEs is limited. Particularly, an appropriate measurement tool to evaluate the pre-travel experience value of destination websites is missing. In this paper, we propose a reliable, valid, and parsimonious measure for assessing pre-travel ODEs on destination websites, building on two prior studies. In a quasi-online field experiment, German millennials (n = 1820) evaluated the ODEs of different destination websites. The ODE scale was developed using principal component analysis based on half of the cases; the other half was used to validate the scale via confirmatory composite analysis. In result, the overall ODE is reflected by two interrelated dimensions: hedonic and utilitarian experiences. Websites with a high level of experiential design yield significantly higher ODE values, supporting the construct validity. Results contribute to the theoretical understanding of the technology-driven tourist experience in the still under-researched anticipatory phase. Moreover, the developed scale yields a methodological knowledge gain and will help destination managers to evaluate and purposefully review and improve their website designs and contents.

3.3.1 Introduction

Inspiring tourists to visit a destination by promising memorable experiences (Tung & Ritchie, 2011) and, thus, securing destination competitiveness are core responsibilities of

destination marketing/management organisations (DMOs; Eisenstein, 2014). Accordingly, the anticipation phase of the tourist experience (Agapito, 2022) is particularly important to DMOs. In this pre-travel phase, experiences occur when consumers are exposed to marketing communication (Brakus et al., 2009), such as destination websites – one of the key sources of information in the travel-decision process (Choi et al., 2016; Jeon et al., 2018). We refer to these specific pre-travel experiences as online destination experiences (ODEs) and define them as *destination website users` internal and subjective responses to the destination as presented.* Positive ODEs that evoke pleasure, fantasies and dreams (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) have an inherent value and influence travel decisions (Lohmann & Kuhn, 2021). Furthermore, such anticipatory experiences can shape trip expectations (Larsen, 2007), are connected to subsequent experience phases (Chen et al., 2018), and influence satisfaction during and after the trip (Ek et al., 2008; Tung & Ritchie, 2011). In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, when travel has been subject to many restrictions and planned trips often have to be postponed, mental pre-travel experiences and associated affective forecasts (Wilson & Gilbert, 2005) of the trips have become even more important as they can mitigate travel risk perceptions and increase patience (Karl et al., 2021).

The experiential marketing approach to tourism claims that sensory and physical stimuli (corporeal and virtual) can be addressed in the process of tourism experience design (Agapito, 2022). Accordingly, DMOs apply experiential marketing (Le et al., 2019; Schmitt, 1999) to engage website visitors beyond the places' rational aspects, attempting to awaken their senses and emotions using complex contents (Hudson & Ritchie, 2009; Ketter, 2018; Nelson, 2014) to create technology-empowered experiences (Neuhofer et al., 2014). Studies on experience characteristics and triggers in the anticipatory phase remain scarce despite the relevance for DMOs. Moreover, evaluation instruments for websites in tourism focus primarily on technical website characteristics and related attitudinal outcomes (e.g. ease of use, usability), neglecting the specifics of the customer journey's early stages (Sun et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2012). However, DMOs that can assess the experiential pre-visit value of their websites gain competitive advantages by improving their website design and contents accordingly. Initial attempts to measure pre-travel ODEs utilised Brakus et al.'s (2009) multi-dimensional brand experience scale derived from product brands in the online destination context (Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo Martínez, 2019; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo, 2020), differentiating sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural experiences. Nevertheless, early qualitative approaches (Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al., 2019) and two of our prior studies (Köchling, 2020, 2021) suggest that pre-travel ODEs have particularities such as a spatio-temporal component and higher interrelation of

singular experience aspects. Hence, a more context-specific measurement instrument is needed.

This study aims to further analyse the dimensionality of the ODE construct and develop and validate a scale for measuring ODEs in the pre-travel phase. Building on the knowledge gained in two prior studies, we applied a quantitative quasi-experimental design (online field experiment) with German millennials as the respondents (n = 1820). We used half the dataset for developing the scale and the other half for validating it. The quasi-experimental approach contributes to the study`s originality and allowed us to test the scale's validity by comparing the ODE scores of destination websites at different levels of experiential design.

3.3.2 Development of the conceptual model

3.3.2.1 The experience concept in tourism marketing

Fantasies, feelings, and fun (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) and affective forecasts – 'predictions about […] emotional reactions to future events' (Wilson & Gilbert, 2005, p. 131) – guide consumption decisions to a considerable degree, complementing rational arguments. The experiential marketing approach (Schmitt, 1999, 2011) emphasises that experiences, while personal, can be partially designed to facilitate both emotional and rational customer engagement. The opportunities to design consumption environments supporting the creation of positive experiences have been underlined in tourism (Agapito, 2022; Frochot & Batat, 2013; Tussyadiah, 2014). This research is centred on experiences arising from destination websites being one of the most important consumption environments in the pre-travel phase (FUR, 2020; Jeon et al., 2018). Beyond the phasic nature (Aho, 2001), further characteristics of tourist experiences must be considered in the application of experiential marketing; tourist experiences are multidimensional (Seeler, 2018), but perceived holistically, hedonic in nature and determined or co-created by situational factors and factors internal to the individual (subjectivity; Agapito, 2022). As experiences are subjective, it is particularly crucial for emotion-focused marketing that 'marketing content is appraised as highly goal-relevant by targeted customers' (Le et al., 2020, p. 7). A stringent target-group orientation is consequently of great relevance in experiential marketing.

3.3.2.2 Conceptualising pre-travel ODEs

According to Churchill (1979), specifying the construct's domain is the first step in developing a measurement instrument. The ODE construct encompasses destination

website users' psychological reactions to the destination in the anticipation phase of the tourist experience. In accordance with other authors (Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo Martínez, 2019; Zhang et al., 2018), we limit the ODE to the virtual experience of the *destination*, thus differentiating it from the experience with or the perception of the *destination website* (i.e. the perceived website quality, including aesthetics, usefulness, ease of use, trust, and interactivity). Most existing studies on destination website performance have focused on evaluating website characteristics (Sun et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2012), without analysing the experiential outcome regarding the destination. Choi et al. (2016) analysed the antecedents and outcomes of telepresence on destination websites (i.e. the experience of being temporarily present in the remote environment rather than the physical environment; Steuer, 1992); they adapted Huang's (2005) scale to measure the utilitarian (benefit-oriented) and hedonic (fun-oriented) website performance, which also focuses on the general site performance instead of destination pre-experiences. They used a separate scale to capture telepresence (Park et al., 2010) and showed that the 'I am there feeling' mainly results from entertaining website features and contributes to hedonic and utilitarian website performance (Choi et al., 2016).

The few existing studies that measured multidimensional ODEs (Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo Martínez, 2019; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo, 2020; Khan & Fatma, 2021) adapted the experience modules and measurement instrument from the product-brand context (Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt, 1999). Hence, they differentiated between *sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural experiences* that contribute to the overall 'online destination brand experience'. Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, et al. 's (2019) initial qualitative approach revealed that *social experiences*, which refer to communicative aspects, also occur with destination websites. Moreover, Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, Campo, and Molinillo (2020) concluded that further research on the construct is advisable.

To gain a deeper understanding of the ODE dimensions, we conducted a preliminary exploratory qualitative study (Köchling, 2020), analysing the experiential reactions of German millennials exposed to destination websites in the inspiration phase. We found that, beyond the four elements adapted in previous research, the development of a *spatio-temporal idea of the destination* (e.g. accessibility, location of attractions) and reflections on social encounters with the destinations' residents, other tourists (e.g. crowding), or family and friends form part of the ODE. We also found that the affective ODE element includes a future-oriented perspective related to a consumption vision or *affective forecasting of the trip* (Karl et al., 2021; Walters et al., 2012; Wilson & Gilbert, 2005) and telepresence (Choi et al., 2016; Steuer, 1992).

In a follow-up online experiment (Köchling, 2021), to assess the ODE, we tested items developed from this exploratory study and the literature on a representative sample of German internet users. We simulated the travel inspiration phase and used three websites of one destination with different levels of experiential marketing as stimuli. The findings showed that the ODE was less differentiated than previous studies proposed. The ODE was holistic, with sensory, affective, intellectual, behavioural, and social elements all loading on the same component. Moreover, the items we included to capture the spatio-temporal aspects and most items related to social encounters were omitted from the analysis due to low communalities. However, further validation of these findings was deemed necessary.

With this research, we aim to re-evaluate the dimensionality of the ODE construct and continue the development and validation of a measurement instrument. The scale is supposed to differentiate the overall experiential values generated through destination websites rather than describe concrete individual experiences. Building on dual process theory as the theoretical foundation of experiential marketing (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Le et al., 2019) and in accordance with Huang's (2005) scale for assessing website performance, we suggest that ODEs are reflected in two underlying components (second-order model), covering the elements identified in previous research. The first component reflects the *hedonic value of the destination experience*, encompassing sensory, affective, and related spatio-temporal (affective forecasts or telepresence) aspects. Hedonic value primarily results from the fast, automatic, and affective mental processes triggered by affective features (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) that lead to high-level imagery processing (Kim, Kim, & Bolls, 2014; Le et al., 2019; Le et al., 2021). This hedonic ODE component may be predominant in the inspiration phase, in which website users dream about a potential holiday without immediate travel needs or plans (Dai et al., 2022) and involvement is low (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Tang et al., 2012). The second, complementary ODE component will be strongly interrelated to the hedonic one, reflecting the slow, rational, and analytic route of information processing associated with rational thinking (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982); it will embrace the *utilitarian value*. This ODE component will likely encompass intellectual, social, and behavioural aspects and dominate the mental processes in the information phase arising directly from the inspiration, wherein website content is processed cognitively and involvement is higher (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Tang et al., 2012).

Along with personal and situational factors, ODEs will be informed by experiential marketing: the integration of experiential design elements such as pictures and videos (hedonic component) and content that rouses curiosity (utilitarian component; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo, 2020). The perceived quality of the website is also an important

predictor of destination emotional experiences (i.e. the expectation of pleasure and excitement when travelling to the destination; Zhang et al., 2018). Congruity theory, which suggests that individuals are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards a product when the elements composing the consumption environment are perceived as consistent, can explain this (Agapito, 2022). The overall conceptual model of our quasi-online field experiment is summarised in Figure 6 and will be explained in the following section.

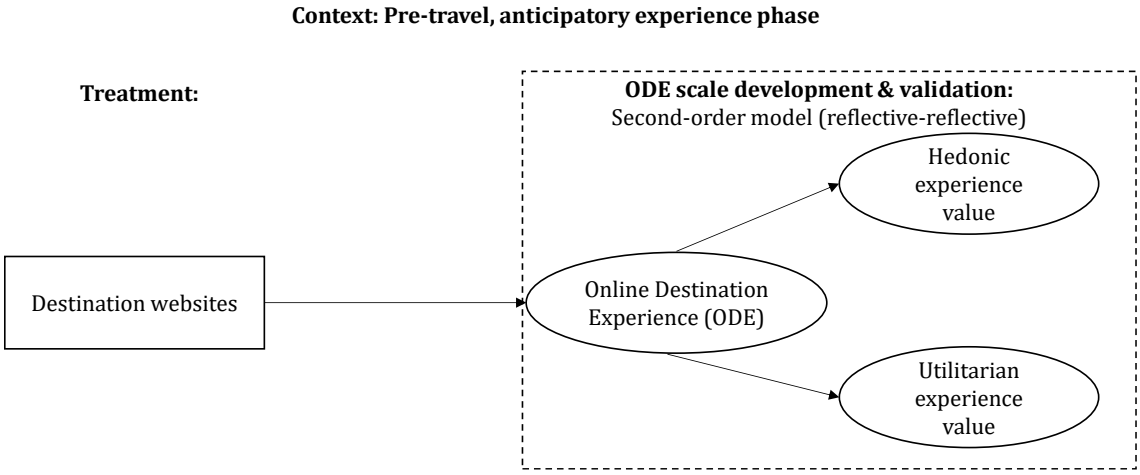

Figure 6: Conceptual model (Study 3)

3.3.3 Methods

3.3.3.1 Research design

We conducted a quasi-online field experiment with eight different real destination websites as treatments (between-subjects design) for the development and validation of the scale. We chose a quasi-experimental approach to evaluate the measurement instrument by comparing the ODE values of destination websites under conditions closely simulating reality (external validity). To control for non-stimulus-related factors influencing the ODE while also ensuring a high degree of personal relevance regarding the topic and destinations presented, the sample was drawn from a homogenous group, namely millennials (25–35 years old) living in Germany with an affinity for holidays and interest in travelling to at least one of the selected sample destinations. Millennials were particularly suited to the study's purpose due to their high affinity for travel and online activities (Ketter, 2021).

Several aspects guided the selection of the destination websites (treatments). Destinations should provide many natural and/or cultural attractions, rendering them potentially interesting to the target group. A mixture of different destination categories (city, nation, region) should demonstrate that the scale is applicable independently of the destination scope. However, the most important selection criteria were the experiential design and the

quality of the website. Previous research has shown that the application of pictures and videos as well as high-quality content (e.g. sensory or narrative descriptions) positively impact imagery elaboration and pre-consumption emotions (Björk, 2010; Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2003; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo, 2020; Le et al., 2019; Lee & Gretzel, 2012). Guided by these principles, we aimed at selecting one website without experiential design elements (i.e. a purely informative website) as a control group and one website with only a few experiential design elements (e.g. small pictures, no moving images). The remaining websites contained higher degrees of experiential design elements. The perception of the website quality in terms of aesthetics or design, usefulness, ease of use, trust, and interactivity impacts the destination experience (Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo Martínez, 2019; Zhang et al., 2018). Aesthetics or design and interactivity are directly related to the experiential design, while trust is highly subjective and difficult to control for; thus, we aimed to select websites with solid usefulness (relevant content) and ease of use (easy navigation) parameters. A pre-selection of websites was evaluated with regard to the aforementioned aspects by the research team and via a quantitative pre-test (n = 50) with students, resulting in the final website selection for the eight treatment groups and overall assessment of experiential design level (Table 8). As we did not find a destination website without any application of experiential design, we chose Copenhagen's representation on Wikivoyage as the control website. Screenshots of the websites are displayed in Figure 7.

Table 8: Destination website selection (experimental groups Study 3)

Destination	**Website URL**	**Assessment of Experiential Design Level**
Copenhagen (Denmark)	https://de.wikivoyage.org/wiki/Kopenhagen	No (control)
Andalusia (Spain)	https://www.andalusien.de/	Low
Bavaria (Germany)	https://erlebe.bayern/	Medium
South Tyrol (Italy)	https://www.suedtirol.info/de	Medium
Switzerland	https://www.myswitzerland.com/de-de/	Medium to high
British Columbia (Canada)	https://www.hellobc.de/	High
Reunion Island (France)	https://www.insel-la-reunion.com/	High
Australia	https://www.australia.com/de-de	High

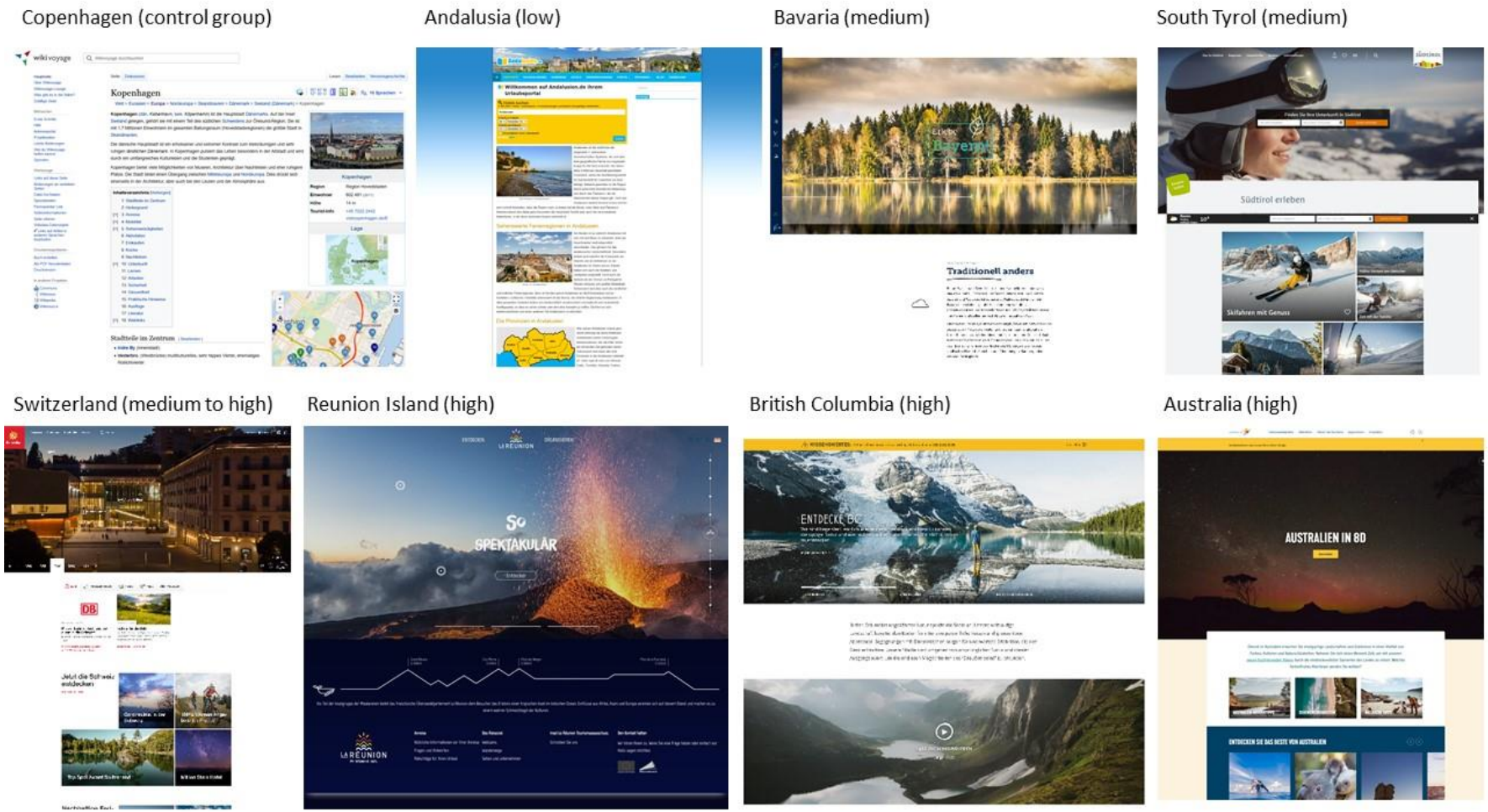

Figure 7: Screenshots of selected websites from November 2021 and the assessed experiential design level (Study 3)

Source: see Website URL in *Table 8*

3.3.3.2 Research procedures and measures

Data collection occurred via the field-institute respondi's online consumer panel from 4 to 25 November 2021; we used a web questionnaire to collect the data. The participants who completed the entire survey received incentives. After data cleaning, 1820 complete questionnaires remained in the dataset. Various questions on personal and situational aspects were included to facilitate a comparison of the participants' general conditions and to control these between the experimental groups. Their age (filter question), gender, origin (federal state), and level of education were requested. Furthermore, the number of long holiday trips (at least 4 nights) undertaken in the past 4 years was used as the inclusion criterion (at least three trips). Regarding situational factors, we measured the device used for the survey as a categorical variable. Smartphone users were excluded to ensure that the participants had a similar visual experience on the websites. The participants' current mood was measured on a 5-point bipolar rating scale with values ranging from '-2 = very bad' to '+2 = very good'. In addition, the frequency of using destination websites before a trip was included as a categorical variable, indicating the experience with the information source. The respondents were also asked to indicate their familiarity with the destinations: from one or more personal visit(s), by name only, or not at all. Finally, the interest in visiting the familiar destinations (at least by name) for a holiday trip was rated on a bipolar 5-point scale with values ranging from '-2 = not at all interested' to '+2 = very interested'.

In the main part of the survey, the respondents were assigned a destination they had expressed interest in visiting, regardless of previous visiting experience. This supported the goal relevance. The respondents were asked to imagine that they wanted to decide whether their next trip should be to the destination or not. Then, to facilitate decision-making, they were asked to browse the assigned website for 5 minutes to gather information on the destination and attempt to obtain an accurate picture of their potential holiday at the destination. To guarantee that this minimum time was met, the follow-up questions could only be answered after 5 minutes. Respondents who needed more than 15 minutes to answer the follow-up questions were excluded from the survey to ensure that the experience's evaluation could be conducted immediately after browsing. The respondents also had to answer at least one out of two control questions correctly, verifying they had visited the website.

For the ODE evaluation, the participants had to rate what they thought and felt about the destination and the associated holiday experience while browsing the website on a multi-item scale. In accordance with Churchill's (1979) proposed procedure for scale

development, we first generated a sample of 32 items based on our two preliminary studies and the literature review covering all potential experience facets that had emerged (sensory, affective, intellectual, spatio-temporal, social, and behavioural). In a pre-test study (n = 50), the participants were asked to evaluate their ODE based on these items and comment whether the items seemed inappropriate for the chosen task or were formulated incomprehensibly; this eliminated ambiguity (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Based on this feedback and an evaluation of inter-item correlations, we purified the measure (Churchill, 1979) and deleted 11 items. In particular, we reduced items that had emerged in our first, exploratory study, concerning the perceived distance of the destination (spatio-temporal aspects) and reflections on crowding and potential encounters with other people at the destination (social aspects). Dropping these items aligned with the results of our second study. Furthermore, our formulations were partially revised. Finally, we included 21 statements in the questionnaire and added two items from Zhang et al.'s (2018) research to operationalise 'destination emotional experiences' to test whether they correlate to our newly developed scale, thus supporting the construct validity. We used a bipolar 7-point scale ranging from '-3 = don't agree at all' to '+3 = fully agree' to capture the ODE. Except for one negatively worded control item, all items were positively formulated as this supposedly leads to a lower proportion of residual error compared to balanced negative and positive scales (Peng & Finn, 2015). Respondents with inconsistent response behaviour were excluded.

The respondents then rated the website quality on a 7-point scale. Five items covering aesthetics, usefulness, ease of use, trust, and interactivity were formulated based on the measurement instruments used in previous studies (Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo Martínez, 2019; Zhang et al., 2018). The aim involved using the perceived website quality as part of our manipulation check and checking the discriminant validity. The main part of the manipulation check comprised the inclusion of three items for evaluating the perception of the website's experiential design. Furthermore, we used a single-item scale to measure the intention to revisit the website on a 7-point scale ranging from '-3 = on no account' to '+3 = in any case'. This variable supported the nomological validation. A list of all items related to the evaluation of the website and the ODE is displayed in Appendix D.

All scale points were numbered, with only the end points labelled. Thus, intervals between response options appeared equidistant to the respondents and the scales could be interpreted as interval scales (Alreck & Settle, 2004; Fowler, 2014). Items of the multi-item scales were randomised to avoid sequential effects. To facilitate result interpretation, the scale labels were converted to purely positive values for data analysis (i.e. instead of -3 to

+3, we used 1 to 7).

3.3.3.3 Operationalising the ODE

We operationalised the ODE as a higher-order construct that is reflective at the first and second order for several reasons. First, our preliminary studies have shown that individual experience elements correlate very strongly in the online destination context; we expect this to occur for the two assumed ODE dimensions (hedonic and utilitarian; see Figure 6). Hence, in the first order, each ODE dimension is expected to be a composite latent construct whose indicators are assumed to be influenced, affected, or caused by the underlying latent variable (Hair et al., 2020). In the second order, the overarching ODE can be seen as a latent construct that manifests in each identified dimension instead of being formed by it. Another argument supporting this operationalisation is that, in previous studies that used an adapted version of Brakus' (2009) four-dimensional scale to measure online destination brand experiences, the construct was also operationalised as reflective-reflective (Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, Campo, & Molinillo, 2020). While we are aiming to develop a more context-specific scale and expecting only two dimensions to emerge in the first order, we agree with the authors regarding the overall operationalisation. Finally, as compared to formative models, modelling the ODE as a reflective construct is more advantageous in terms of interpreting the scale's reliability and validity (Hair et al., 2020).

3.3.4 Results

3.3.4.1 Descriptive statistics

The respondents' structure in the relevant characteristics was as planned: millennials with a high affinity for holiday travel. The average age was 30.8 years, and the number of female participants (58.6%) was higher than the number of male participants (41.1%). The high affinity for holidays was expressed in the following mean value: 6.7 long holiday trips in the last 4 years (2018–2021). Furthermore, most participants stated they used destination websites at least occasionally for holiday preparation (Table 9), confirming the relevance of this information source for the target group. As we intended to use the data collected for developing and validating the scale, we randomly split the dataset via IBM SPSS Statistics 27 into two datasets, each containing approximately 50% of the cases, prior to data analysis. No significant differences were found between the sub-samples regarding the personal and situational aspects (Table 9) or the number of cases assigned to the different treatments.

Table 9: Descriptive statistics of sample and sub-samples (Study 3)

Variables			**Randomly split datasets**		
		Total (n = 1820)	Dataset 1: scale development (n = 937)	Dataset 2: scale validation (n = 883)	Statistics & significance
Gender	Male	41.1%	39.3%	43.0%	$\chi^2(2) = 2.752$; p = .253*
	Female	58.6%	60.4%	56.7%	
	Diverse	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	
Age	M	30.8	30.9	30.8	t(1818) = .395, p = .693*
Number of holiday trips 2018-2021	M	6.7	6.8	6.7	t(1818) = .477, p = .634*
Usage of Destination websites before trip	Always	26.5%	25.9%	27.1%	$\chi^2(5) = 2.056$; p=.841*
	Often	33.1%	33.4%	32.7%	
	Sometimes	24.5%	24.2%	24.8%	
	Rarely	10.5%	11.0%	10.0%	
	Never	4.8%	4.6%	5.0%	
	Don't know	0.7%	0.9%	0.5%	

Note: *not significant at the 5%-level

3.3.4.2 Scale development

To further purify the measure for the ODE assessment and analyse the construct's dimensionality, we used Dataset 1 (n = 937). We conducted a principal component analysis (PCA) with oblique rotation (direct oblimin) on all 21 items (see 3.3.3.2 and Appendix D). The negatively connoted control item was reversed before data analysis. Oblique rotation was chosen as we expected the experience dimensions to be interrelated. Sampling adequacy for the analysis was verified using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure (KMO = .975) and KMO values > .9 for all individual items (Kaiser & Rice, 1974). Furthermore, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (12,233.75; d. f. = 210, p < .001).

Two components with Eigenvalues greater than one (Kaiser's criterion: Kaiser & Rice, 1974), explaining 58.5% of the variance, were derived. The scree plot and parallel analysis (Horn, 1965) also indicated that two components should be retained. In the first run, we deleted four items due to low communalities (≤ .5) and two other items due to high cross-loadings. Two more items were deleted in the second run due to high cross-loadings (Appendix D). In the final run, the two-component solution explained 64.3% of the variance. Table 10 shows the component loadings after rotation.

Table 10: PCA results ODE measurement: pattern matrix of the final two-component solution (Study 3)

Question: We would now like to know what you thought and felt while browsing the website in relation to the destination and the associated holiday experience. To do this, you will find some statements below. Please indicate in each case to what extent you agree with the statement.					
Items	**Utilitarian ODE**	**Hedonic ODE**	**CA**	**CR**	**AVE**
I would like to tell friends and acquaintances about a holiday spent in the destination.	**.922**	-.137	.901	.895	.553
I would very much like to share my experiences in the destination with family or friends afterwards.	**.835**	-.048			
I would love to explore the destination with family or friends.	**.779**	-.040			
I think I could experience a lot in the destination.	**.672**	.132			
The destination seemed very interesting to me.	**.669**	.207			
The destination looked great.	**.648**	.188			
I had positive feelings about the destination.	**.633**	.254			
I could really feel the holiday experience.	.009	**.842**	.888	.893	.584
The destination touched me emotionally.	-.061	**.813**			
I could imagine the destination very well spatially (location of the sights, surroundings, etc.).	-.072	**.795**			
I was able to put myself very well into the travel experience on site.	.095	**.758**			
The destination stimulated my senses.	.196	**.686**			
I imagined how good I would feel during a visit to the destination.	.166	**.676**			

Note: n = 937; Rotation method: Oblimin with Kaiser normalisation. The rotation has converged in eight iterations. Bold numbering denotes high component loadings (>.5).

The first component represents the *predominantly rational evaluative part (utilitarian value)* of the ODE, while the second component represents its *affective immersive part (hedonic value).* Both components were highly correlated (r = .668), which justified applying oblique rotation and confirmed that the two components belong to a *reflective higher-order construct*. Moreover, both components exhibited high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) being higher than .8. The deletion of further items did not engender an increase in the CR of the respective components. The average variance extracted (AVE) was greater than .5 for both components, indicating the convergent validity.

3.3.4.3 Confirming the measurement's validity and reliability

We used Dataset 2 (n = 883) to conduct a confirmatory composite analysis (CCA; Hair et al., 2020), using the software Smart PLS 3 (Ringle et al., 2015) to assess the dimensionality and

validity of the developed ODE scale. We chose a CCA instead of a confirmatory factor analysis because the ODE construct is still in the early phase of theory development; therefore, we are focused on analysing the content validity of the construct (Hair et al., 2020). Cases from all eight treatment groups Table 8 were included.

In accordance with the operationalisation of the ODE as a reflective-reflective second-order measure, we calculated a model with the two components and the underlying items extracted from PCA (first order) and the overall ODE (second order) via a repeated indicators approach (Sarstedt et al., 2019). We expected the two components to be distinct, yet related, constructs that are concrete reflective manifestations of the higher-order ODE construct. For assessing the first-order components, we followed the steps in CCA with the reflective measurement models proposed by Hair et al. (2020); we began by assessing the indicator loadings and their significance. Other than one item of the hedonic dimension, the standardised loadings for the two components (first order) showed significant ($p < .001$) values above the critical threshold of .708 (Hair et al., 2020). At the second-order level, the loadings of four items were slightly below this threshold, showing that the overall model might benefit from a further purification of the measure. Hence, we tested whether deleting any of the five items would increase the CR and AVE. Eventually, we dropped all five items (Appendix D), as the AVE increased for both subscales, and estimated the model again. Consequently, we received satisfactory loadings for both components. Moreover, the reliability and convergent validity were confirmed by CA and CR values greater than .8 and AVE greater than .5 for both dimensions (Table 11).

Table 11: CCA results: loadings, CA, CR and AVE of the final solution (first order; Study 3)

	Loadings first order*				
	Utilitarian ODE	**Hedonic ODE**	**CA**	**CR**	**AVE**
The destination looked great.	.848		.853	.901	.694
The destination seemed very interesting to me.	.843				
I had positive feelings about the destination.	.824				
I think I could experience a lot in the destination.	.817				
I was able to put myself very well into the travel experience on site.		.826	.838	.891	.672
The destination stimulated my senses.		.826			
I could really feel the holiday experience.		.824			
I imagined how good I would feel during a visit to the destination.		.803			

Note: n = 883; *Based on bootstrapping procedure (n = 3000) loadings are significant for a two-tailed test at the 5% level ($p < .001$)

We conducted another PCA on the final eight items, with the specification of a two-component solution, with Dataset 1. The CR values for both components were still over .8, and the AVE values increased, becoming greater than .64. This solution explained 71.6% of the variance. The higher AVE values (Table 10) confirmed the better suitability of the reduced item solution for this sample as well.

We continued with Dataset 2 to check the discriminant validity between the two first-order components, using the hetereotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). HTMT values smaller than 1 indicate that the true correlation between the two constructs should differ. Discriminant validity problems occur when HTMT values are high. For conceptually similar models, such as our two interrelated ODE dimensions, scholars propose a value lower than 0.90 as the threshold for discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019). In our study, the HTMT value was 0.85; hence, the discriminant validity was satisfactory.

We then checked the relationships between the higher-order component and its lower-order components to assess the measurement model of the second-order construct (i.e. the overall ODE). Therefore, the two components were interpreted as if they were indicators of the overall ODE construct, and the path coefficients between the ODE and its two components were interpreted as loadings (Sarstedt et al., 2019). The analysis produced significant ($p < .001$) loadings of .931 for the utilitarian ODE and .926 for the hedonic ODE, thereby providing support for indicator reliability. We calculated further reliability and validity criteria based on the factor loadings and received high values both for the composite reliability (CR = .926) and the average variance extracted (AVE = .862). Finally, we checked the discriminant validity for the overall ODE. We calculated the HTMT values for the ODE and each of the five items for measuring the website quality (aesthetics, usefulness, ease of use, trust, and interactivity) and the single-item measure for assessing the revisit intention for the website (Appendix D). All HTMT values were lower than 0.70 and, thus, well below the critical, more conservative threshold of 0.85 (Hair et al., 2019).

To check the construct validity, we assessed whether the resulting construct scores of the first-order components were consistent within the nomological network (i.e. the representation of further constructs within our study and their interrelation; Hair et al., 2020). To examine whether our scale corresponds with other measures designed to measure similar constructs (convergent validity; Churchill, 1979), we checked correlations with the two-item scale (mean value) we had adapted from Zhang et al. (2018) to measure 'destination emotional experiences'. We found very strong significant correlations ($p < .001$; Cohen, 1992) between the construct and both ODE dimensions (utilitarian ODE: $r = .806$;

hedonic ODE: r = .704), confirming the convergent validity. We then assessed whether the scale was behaving as expected (Churchill, 1979). We expected positive ODE values to be a predictor of the revisit intention for the website; hence, we analysed correlations with the revisit intention for the website and found positive significant ($p < .001$) correlations (utilitarian ODE: r = .538, $p < .001$; hedonic ODE: r = .595). Overall, the significant, strong correlations with the other constructs in our study indicate the nomological validity of the developed scale (Hair et al., 2020).

3.3.4.4 Differences between the websites: ANOVA

As further proof of the construct validity, we tested whether the developed measurement instrument revealed different ODE values corresponding to the treatment (destination website). We tested the following hypothesis:

> H1: Websites that apply experiential elements generate higher ODE values (both dimensions) compared to a website without experiential design.

For this analysis, we used both datasets to ensure a sufficiently large number of cases for each group to detect small and medium effects. As the proportion of participants with destination experience differed significantly between the eight treatment groups ($\chi^2(7) = 516.062$, $p < .001$) and prior knowledge impacts imagination (Le et al., 2021), to ensure homogenous groups, the analysis was based on participants without previous visiting experience. Accordingly, we included 1163 cases distributed among seven groups (excluding the Bavaria group). Descriptive statistics confirmed the homogeneity of the experimental groups regarding personal (e.g. age and gender) and situational (e.g. device used) impact factors (Appendix E).

First, we checked whether the websites were perceived as expected (manipulation check). We applied ANOVAs for the perception of the experiential website design (mean value of three items) and for each website quality aspect. The results confirmed that the websites were perceived as expected, with significant differences between the seven groups and a large effect (Kirk, 1996; Appendix F). Furthermore, we found significant differences between the websites concerning the quality aspects. However, the effect sizes differed; they ranged from large to medium for aesthetics, interactivity, and trust but were small for usefulness and ease of use. Australia received the highest scores on all variables, while Copenhagen and Andalusia received the lowest; hence, the overall perception of the stimuli aligned with our expectations (Table 8).

We then calculated ANOVAs for the two ODE dimensions. We found that the utilitarian ODE (Welch's $F(6, 473) = 21.442$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = 0.093$) and hedonic ODE (Welch's $F(6, 474) = 19.268$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = 0.083$) differed significantly, with medium effect sizes between the seven groups. To test our hypothesis, we calculated planned contrasts and used the Wikivoyage website about Copenhagen (no experiential design) as the comparison group. Table 12 displays the mean scores and mean differences for both ODE dimensions. Overall, the mean values for the utilitarian ODE were higher than those for the hedonic ODE. Even the scores for the non-experiential Wikivoyage presentation of Copenhagen (M = 5.58 on the 7-point scale) indicated that the impact of the experiential website design was rather limited for the utilitarian ODE dimension. Effect sizes were strong for Australia and British Columbia, medium for Reunion Island and Switzerland, and small for Andalusia. The South Tyrol website also scored higher than the Copenhagen one; however, the difference was non-significant. For the hedonic ODE, the mean values varied between M = 4.81 (Copenhagen) and M = 5.68 (Australia), and mean differences compared to Copenhagen were significant for all groups, with effects being strong for Australia, British Columbia, and Reunion Island, medium for Switzerland, and small for South Tyrol and Andalusia (Table 12). The comparison of these results with our assessment of the experiential design (Table 8) and the manipulation check (Appendix F) supports our hypothesis that the *experiential website design is a predictor for both ODE dimensions*; this is further supported by the bigger effect sizes, particularly for the hedonic ODE. Overall, the results show that the measurement instrument is suitable for differentiating high ODE values from lower ones depending on different stimuli, which is a further indication of the construct validity.

Table 12: Descriptive statistics ODE scores and planned contrasts (Study 3)

Variable	**Group**	**Descriptive statistics**							**Planned contrasts (Copenhagen as comparison)**					
					95% CI						95% CI			
		n	M	SD	LB	UB	Min	Max	M_{Dif}	SE	LB	UB	p	Cohen's d
Utilitarian	Copenhagen	161	5.58	0.79	5.45	5.70	3.50	7.00						
ODE	Andalusia	161	5.81	0.83	5.68	5.94	3.25	7.00	0.23	0.09	0.01	0.45	.011*	.302
	South Tyrol	125	5.75	0.90	5.59	5.91	2.50	7.00	0.17	0.10	-0.06	0.41	.090	.226
	British Columbia	203	6.21	0.68	6.11	6.30	2.50	7.00	0.63	0.08	0.42	0.84	<.001*	.819
	Switzerland	113	5.97	0.84	5.81	6.13	2.50	7.00	0.39	0.10	0.15	0.64	<.001*	.510
	Reunion Island	183	6.14	0.77	6.03	6.26	1.75	7.00	0.57	0.08	0.35	0.78	<.001*	.736
	Australia	217	6.30	0.66	6.21	6.39	4.00	7.00	0.72	0.08	0.52	0.93	<.001*	.936
	Total	1163	6.00	0.81	5.95	6.05	1.75	7.00						
Hedonic	Copenhagen	161	4.81	0.96	4.66	4.96	1.25	7.00						
ODE	Andalusia	161	5.18	1.00	5.03	5.34	1.75	7,00	0.37	0.11	0.09	0.65	.001*	.384
	South Tyrol	125	5.25	0.96	5.08	5.42	1.50	7.00	0.44	0.12	0.14	0.74	<.001*	.452
	British Columbia	203	5.66	0.88	5.54	5.78	2.75	7.00	0.85	0.10	0.59	1.11	<.001*	.871
	Switzerland	113	5.48	1.15	5.26	5.69	1.00	7.00	0.67	0.12	0.36	0.98	<.001*	.686
	Reunion Island	183	5.61	0.99	5.47	5.75	1.25	7.00	0.80	0.11	0.53	1.07	<.001*	.821
	Australia	217	5.68	0.96	5.55	5.81	1.75	7.00	0.87	0.10	0.61	1.13	<.001*	.890
	Total	1163	5.41	1.02	5.35	5.47	1.00	7.00						

Note: *significant at the 5%-level, CI = Confidence Interval, LB = Lower Bound, UB = Upper Bound

3.3.5 Discussion and Conclusion

DMOs heavily invest in the experiential design of their websites to arouse emotions, along with rational arguments, to inspire tourists to visit. The COVID-19 pandemic has engendered various travel restrictions, and often, tourists can only visualise rather than actualise their next trip; in this context, inspiration from destination websites has become extremely important (Dai et al., 2022). DMOs are keen to attract new guests and mitigate the perception of travel risks. Designing websites that support positive pre-travel ODEs can help DMOs achieve these goals. However, there was a need for a deeper theoretical understanding of the dimensions of ODEs and a context-specific measurement tool to assess ODE values. In this study, we developed and validated a *reliable, valid, and parsimonious higher-order measure of ODEs*.

Based on our two previous studies, we expected ODEs to show fewer differentiated dimensions than product brands (Brakus et al., 2009). These assumptions were confirmed in this study, as individual theoretically relevant experience facets (sensory, affective, intellectual, spatio-temporal, behavioural) merged into two interrelated experience dimensions. These dimensions – *hedonic and utilitarian* – can be explained by the dual process theory (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) and have also been used to explain general website performances (Huang, 2005).

The hedonic dimension requires a high level of mental imagery processing (Le et al., 2019), leading to affective forecasts (Karl et al., 2021; Wilson & Gilbert, 2005) of the future holiday experiences and feelings of telepresence (Choi et al., 2016; Steuer, 1992). This experience dimension incorporates items reflecting sensory and affective facets, as well as space-time facets, and is particularly dependent on the experiential website design (e.g. videos, pictures). The utilitarian experience value incorporates an evaluation of the benefit of the potential destination experience, including intellectual, behavioural, and affective aspects, albeit with an evaluative character ('the feeling was good'). This experience component is predominantly triggered by informative content, as seen in the high values obtained even for the Wikivoyage page about Copenhagen. Generating utilitarian ODEs involves rational thinking and, therefore, requires higher levels of involvement compared to hedonic ODEs (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Our research participants were interested in the destinations they rated; furthermore, as the task involved collecting information about a potential holiday in the destination, the level of involvement was rather high. This partially explains the overall higher scores on this experience dimension. The lower values on the hedonic dimension, even for destinations with high levels of experiential design, show that this

experience aspect is more difficult to arouse. Notwithstanding, particularly in the inspiration phase, when involvement is low, triggering hedonic experience value with experiential website designs can ensure DMO competitiveness.

Our data analysis has shown that the developed second-order measurement tool based on these experience components is reliable and valid across different destinations. The differences between the experiential websites and the control website were mostly in line with our expectations based on the website selection and the manipulation check. However, the comparatively poor performance of the South Tyrol website was surprising. The manipulation check showed that the evaluation of the experiential design and all quality aspects of the website was higher for the South Tyrol website than for Andalusia. As we have chosen a quasi-online field experiment with real websites to create a scenario closely simulating reality (high external validity), the possibilities of controlling external influences were limited. Hence, the South Tyrol scores cannot be explained in detail. Nevertheless, overall, the differences between the websites and the experience dimensions showed plausible results, indicating the construct validity of the measurement instrument.

The contributions of our study to the field of technology-driven tourist experiences are threefold. First, the theoretical value lies in an increased understanding of the mental processes at a central online marketing contact point in the under-researched anticipatory travel experience phase. Second, the presented measurement instrument constitutes a valuable methodological contribution: through the generated understanding of the dimensionality of the pre-travel ODE and the developed measurement tool, we have shown that the previously practised adaptation of the brand experience scale in the online destination context (Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo Martínez, 2019; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, Campo, & Molinillo, 2020; Khan & Fatma, 2021) falls short while our more context-specific scale that incorporates aspects of affective forecasting and telepresence is appropriate. Third, the new measurement instrument delivers managerial value as it will support DMOs in assessing the experiential outcomes of their websites. This can help improve website design and content depending on specific target groups of potential tourists. Moreover, we assume the measurement instrument can be easily utilised by DMOs as the scale is relatively short, with only 8 items.

However, our research has certain limitations that must be considered in future research. Considering the length and complexity of the online survey, we refrained from collecting variables that quantify the behavioural consequences of positive ODEs with regard to the destination (e.g. a change in the intention to visit). Thus, our options for testing the predictive validity (Hair et al., 2020) with our data were limited to checking correlations

with intentions to re-visit the website. In further studies, this aspect should be expanded. Furthermore, as per Churchill's (1979) steps for delivering better marketing measures, the next step should be to collect further data from destination websites to develop 'norms' (i.e. a standard of comparison). When comparing ODE values between different destinations, destination-specific characteristics cannot be excluded as a cause for different experience values. Thus, norms should be developed for different destination categories to create the best possible comparisons for destinations. In our study, the scale development and validation were based on samples of German millennials, who were used to test the differences between the websites with a homogeneous target group. In further studies, the measurement instrument should also be tested for different target groups, including those from other cultural backgrounds. Finally, the developed measurement instrument relies on self-reports. Future studies could supplement this with psychophysiological techniques to capture emotions during the moment of surfing, thus obtaining a more holistic idea of the ODE (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020).

4 General discussion and contributions of the dissertation

4.1 Discussion of the findings of the sub-studies

This dissertation set out to explore destination website users' psychological responses towards the tourist destination in the early pre-trip phase (inspiration and information phases). The objectives were to explore the influence of experiential design on destination websites on pre-travel ODEs (RQ1) and, to this end, to generate extensive knowledge regarding the nature and dimensions of ODEs (RQ2). The development of a measurement tool that could assess the pre-travel ODE values of destination websites was another aim (RQ3). In the course of the three sub-studies presented in Chapter 3, these objectives were achieved, and substantial theoretical, methodological, and managerial contributions were made to the nascent research field of technology-empowered tourist experiences. An innovative set of research methods was applied to comprehensively approach the ODE construct in its dimensionality as well as measurability and to assess the experience design possibilities through marketing.

The aim of the first study, which was qualitative in nature, was to gain a better understanding of the ODE construct while also verifying the multiple personal and environmental factors influencing the experience reviewed in the literature (Figure 1). The two subsequent experimental, quantitative studies built on these findings and served to test the ODE dimensionality as well as the influence of the experiential website design; ultimately, a measurement instrument for assessing ODE values was developed. The methodological diversity of the research helped obtain a holistic picture of the complex ODE construct and has contributed to the originality of the research project.

In addition to the mixed-methods approach, the ODE scenarios developed in the individual studies varied slightly to meet distinct personal and situational influencing factors. In Studies 1 and 2, the participants only visited the websites of destinations they did not know from a personal visit or, partly, not even by name. Moreover, an interest in holidaying at the destination was not a mandatory participation criterion for these. This served to simulate the very early phase of the travel-decision process – the travel *inspiration phase* – in which involvement is rather low and people are *surfing* the internet instead of *searching* for information (Kim, Kim, & Wise, 2014). However, as the inspiration and information phases flow smoothly into one another, in the third study, a scenario with a higher level of involvement was chosen. The participants browsed the websites of travel destinations they were interested in visiting and in some cases, had visited before. Their task was to *inform* themselves about the travel destination while surfing. The different methodological

approaches as well as these slight adaptations in the context of visiting destination websites explain why some ODE facets identified in Study 1 did not prove to be relevant components of the ODE in the subsequent quantitative studies. For example, as the participants in Study 1 viewed the websites of destinations partly or completely unknown to them, pre-knowledge on general destination characteristics, such as accessibility, was partly low. Hence, some spatio-temporal (e.g. thoughts such as 'Where is the destination?' or 'How can I get there?') and social reactions (e.g. 'How crowded is the destination?') while surfing the websites were somewhat overrepresented. Overall, most of the ODE facets identified in Study 1 are reflected in the two final ODE dimensions: hedonic and utilitarian. While the hedonic component includes the sensory, affective and future-oriented ODE facets, the utilitarian component predominantly encompasses the intellectual reflections on the destination. Moreover, the spatio-temporal dimension in terms of reflections on the distribution of attractions at the destination has been shown to be conceptually linked to the immersion in the future holiday experience (hedonic dimension). The final conclusion regarding the ODE dimensionality (RQ2) and the development of the second-order measurement instrument (RQ3) build on the findings from all three studies, resulting in a valid, reliable, and compact scale (Study 3).

Furthermore, this dissertation has evidenced that experiential website design positively influences ODEs (Studies 2 and 3; RQ1). Prior to this research, mostly the positive impact on the response level (e.g. image and willingness to visit) had been evaluated. In contrast, this research sheds light on the hitherto scarcely explored perspective of internal *experiential reactions towards the destination* while browsing a destination website – an important antecedent of the aforementioned responses. Nevertheless, it has also been demonstrated that personal and environmental filters in mental information processing (see Figure 1) lead to the ODE having clear limits on the marketing influence. For instance, if a website user is interested in a destination, even factual descriptions of the destination can trigger rather high ODE values. Yet, it was also found that, to achieve a hedonic experience value and, thus, an affective forecast of the journey, emotional design elements such as videos or pictures are essential. Overall, the value of experiential marketing in supporting ODEs could be confirmed; however, for greater efficiency, this should be accompanied by strict target-group orientation and controlling (i.e. the measurement of experiential effects).

An overview of the methodological approach, contributions, and major findings of each publication is given in Table 13. In the following sections, the theoretical, methodological,

and managerial contributions are further discussed. The limitations of this work as well as future research directions are also presented.

Table 13: Overview of contributions

Publication	**Methodological approach**	**Contribution**	**Main findings**
1	Qualitative, interpretive approach (combination of real-time observations through eye-tracking, retrospective think-aloud protocols, and qualitative interviews)	- Deep understanding of ODE facets, processes, and influencing factors in the travel inspiration phase - (Preliminary) conceptual framework of ODEs on ODWs based on a SOR model	- Previously applied ODE dimensions (sensory, affective, intellectual, behavioural, and social) were confirmed and expanded in terms of spatio-temporal aspects. - A better understanding of all ODE dimensions and destination particularities (positive and negative facets) was obtained.
2	Quantitative, experimental approach (online field experiment)	- First assessment of the effects of experiential marketing on ODE values - Initial development and testing of an ODE measurement instrument	- Experiential marketing enhances the ODE on a destination website, but the design effects are limited. - Previously identified ODE dimensions are highly interrelated and, in a low-involvement scenario, merge into one holistic experience dimension.
3	Quantitative, quasi-experimental approach (online field experiment)	- Re-evaluation of ODE dimensionality - Final ODE scale development and validation - Affirmation of the effects of experiential marketing on ODE values	- Previously identified ODE dimensions, in a higher-involvement scenario, are merged into two underlying ODE dimensions: *hedonic* (affective immersive) and *utilitarian* (cognitive evaluative) ODEs. - ODE values are triggered by experiential website design, particularly on the hedonic dimension. - The resulting two-dimensional second-order ODE scale is reliable and valid.

4.2 Theoretical contributions

This research draws attention to the *pre-trip phase* and *virtual, technology-empowered destination experiences*. In contrast, the focus of previous research in tourism was on *physical* (i.e. on-site) travel experiences *during the trip*. Hence, the theoretical contribution of this dissertation lies in the advancement of knowledge gained in an area that has been neglected in tourism experience research until now. As a result, this dissertation contributes to the understanding of the mental processes of experiencing a destination at a key contact point in travel decision-making: the destination website.

Moreover, this dissertation reveals that the hedonic vision of the future holiday experience is a central component of the ODE. This hedonic ODE value is related to the concepts of mental imagery elaboration (Le et al., 2021), consumption visions (Walters et al., 2012), and affective forecasting (Karl et al., 2021; Wilson & Gilbert, 2005) as well as telepresence (Choi et al., 2016; Steuer, 1992). Tourism research has only recently begun to acknowledge these concepts, and they have not yet been conceptualised as an integral part of ODEs. Accordingly, the insights derived from this dissertation also increase the theoretical knowledge with regard to these interrelations.

4.3 Methodological contributions

In the course of this dissertation, it has been shown that the previously practised adaptation of the experience dimensions identified for consumer brands is inadequate in the specific context of pre-travel online destinations. Hence, based on the knowledge gained about the ODE facets, a new context-specific measurement instrument for the assessment of pre-travel ODE values was developed and validated throughout the course of the studies; this instrument is the central methodological contribution of this dissertation.

Furthermore, methods that are still neglected in tourism research, such as eye-tracking combined with retrospective think-aloud protocols and online (quasi-) experiments, were applied. Therefore, this dissertation also contributes to the use of innovative research methods and, consequently, a more holistic view of the tourist experience, as called for by Godovykh and Tasci (2020). For example, the experimental approach of Studies 2 and 3 made it possible to estimate the effects of experiential marketing on the experiential outcomes of destination websites for the first time. In addition, the use of eye-tracking and subsequent video analysis in Study 1 facilitated the consideration of real-time emotional reactions when analysing experiences.

4.4 Managerial contributions

This dissertation also provides key insights for tourism practice, especially for DMOs. In view of the severe crisis tourism destinations all over the world are currently facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the insights obtained have become even more valuable; they may help attract new visitors in the future while also keeping in touch with previous guests, thereby supporting destination competitiveness.

First and foremost, this dissertation presents a compact measurement tool that can be used to assess the experience value of destination websites. A combination of experience-oriented stylistic means, such as large images, videos, sensual descriptions, and instructions that foster imagination, can positively influence the ODE. On the other hand, the limits of experience design have also become evident; with regard to investments in experiential website design, DMOs must strive for the best possible cost–effect relation to gain competitive advantages. Therefore, a regular evaluation of the ODE values based on different website design options is indispensable. With the newly developed and validated scale, the ODE value can be analysed, for instance, in correspondence with the individual target groups the destination focuses on or in comparison with other destinations (a benchmark). Moreover, a close link between website quality and the ODE has been confirmed. This shows that, despite the emotional design, aspects such as usability, ease of use, and interactivity should not be neglected when designing a destination website. Accordingly, the controlling of destination website success should, in addition to the ODE value, also include the measurement of perceived website quality aspects and the resulting behavioural intentions as well as quantitative indicators (e.g. the time spent on the website).

4.5 Critical reflections and future research

Besides the limitations of the individual studies, which have already been outlined in Chapters 3.1–3.3, a few overarching critical reflections on the results of this dissertation should be mentioned; this also leads to a discussion of future research possibilities.

This dissertation consciously limited the analysis to virtual experiences in the context of destination websites because these, unlike social media channels for instance, can be controlled and shaped to a high degree by DMOs and comprise some of the most relevant information sources in the pre-travel phase. To dive deeply into this particular touchpoint, the isolated ODE on individual real destination websites was investigated. However, people combine different sources of information when looking for holiday inspiration and information; they may use destination websites alongside tour operator sites, individual

supplier sites, blog posts, and other such sources (Kang et al., 2020). It cannot be ruled out that the isolation of this one information source has influenced the experience values and experiential effects assessed in Studies 2 and 3. Moreover, nowadays, there are hardly any official destination websites of attractive travel destinations that work entirely without experiential design elements; thus, a Wikivoyage site was used as a control for the comparisons of the design effect in Studies 2 and 3. Unlike destination websites, Wikivoyage sites are based on user-generated content, which may have influenced the experience ratings and the measured effect sizes. Notwithstanding, the derived experience dimensions and the measurement instrument in general should not have been affected by this. Nevertheless, further validation and development of norms with reference to the measurement tool in a real information search context, as suggested in the research outlook of Study 3, is advisable. Furthermore, future research could test and possibly adapt the measurement tool for other online information channels.

The decision to conduct online field experiments with real websites in Studies 2 and 3 was accompanied by limited control over the survey situation and stimuli. Consequently, despite the inclusion of numerous control variables, not all potential confounding variables could be considered. As already pointed out in the presentation of the two studies (Chapters 3.2 and 3.3), this was a conscious decision made to ensure the highest possible external validity of the results. Future studies should test whether the results can be confirmed in an even more controllable laboratory situation. In the course of such a laboratory situation, psychophysiological methods, such as facial expressions or skin conductance measurement, could be used in addition to the scale presented here to deepen the perspective on spontaneous emotional reactions in real time. The measurement instrument developed as part of the current research serves to capture the overall value of the ODE, distinguishing between hedonic and utilitarian experience values. Through the aforementioned supplementary psychophysiological methods, individual reactions (e.g. certain emotions) could also be recorded in more detail.

Within the scope of this dissertation, not all aspects of the currently under-researched ODE construct could be examined in depth. Hence, the aim also included laying the foundations for future research. There is considerable room for further research, particularly in the consideration of individual personal or situational factors influencing ODEs as well as the responses to them. For instance, findings from the first qualitative study indicated that the website content's perceived closeness to reality and the user's scepticism regarding the source of information both influence the experience. These interrelationships can now be investigated in greater depth with the help of the developed measurement instrument. The

same applies to the attitudinal and behavioural reactions to the ODE expected from previous studies, such as a change in the intention to visit (Figure 1) or the perceived authenticity of the destination (Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo, 2020).

Finally, there are several research opportunities to investigate the destination experience across all phases of the customer journey. It is to be expected that ODEs in the early pre-trip phase studied here shape the expectations of the stay and exert a corresponding effect on satisfaction as well as possible intentions to visit again. Such longer-term research approaches would be of great interest to tourism experience research as a whole. In addition, the ODE triggered by destination websites in the later stages of the customer journey can also be investigated. For instance, destination websites are also used for information purposes during the journey; in this experience phase, the ODE is likely to be of a different nature.

The previous discussions have emphasised that the findings of this dissertation comprise valuable contributions to both tourism science and practice. Furthermore, it has become evident that there remains considerable room for further research in the nascent research field of technology-empowered tourism experiences. Thus, this dissertation has also paved the path for subsequent research projects.

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VII Appendix

VII.I Supplementary information Study 2 (Chapter 3.2)

Appendix A

Question and items to measure the ODE construct (original questionnaire in German)

Question: We would now like to know what you thought and felt in relation to the destination and the associated holiday experience while browsing the website. In this regard, you will find some statements below. Please indicate in each case to what extent you agree with the statement. You can answer with: 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. You can use the values in between to grade your statement.

(1) SEN1: The destination did not impress me much visually.
(2) SEN2: The presentation of the destination did not appeal to me much.
(3) SEN3: The destination looks great.
(4) SEN4: The presentation of the destination stimulated my senses.
(5) AFF1: I had positive feelings about the destination while browsing the website.
(6) AFF2: I imagined how good I would feel during a visit to the destination.
(7) AFF3: I felt negative emotions about the destination while browsing.
(8) AFF4: The destination left me completely cold.
(9) INT1: I found the destination boring.
(10) INT2: The website made me interested in learning more about the destination.
(11) INT3: The website made me curious about the destination.
(12) INT4: The destination seems uninteresting to me.
(13) ST1: I had in mind where the destination was when I was surfing.
(14) ST2: I thought about the destination being difficult to reach.
(15) ST3: I had in mind while surfing where each attraction was located in the destination.
(16) ST4: I did not find out when the best time to travel to the destination was.
(17) SOC1: I think it is easy to get in touch with locals there.
(18) SOC2: I think the destination is not for a holiday with my family or friends.
(19) SOC3: I think there are too many other tourists in the destination.
(20) SOC4: I would not be able to impress friends and acquaintances by visiting the destination.
(21) SOC5: I would like to tell friends and acquaintances about a holiday in the destination.
(22) SOC6: I think you have unforgettable encounters with other people in the destination.
(23) BEH1: I could not explore well what you can experience in the destination.
(24) BEH2: The website created desire to visit the destination.
(25) BEH3: I could easily imagine myself in the destination experience while browsing the website.
(26) BEH4: I think a holiday in the destination is too expensive for me.
(27) BEH5: I think I could experience a lot in the destination.
(28) BEH6: I think the website gives an unrealistic representation of the destination.

Appendix B

Questions and measures for covariates involvement with holidays and attitude towards the destination (original questionnaire in German)

Involvement with holiday:

Question: Next, we would like to know the importance of holiday travel to you. Please indicate your opinion of the statements below about holiday travel, using the slider.

For me, holiday travel is...

(1) important _ _ _ _ _ unimportant
(2) irrelevant _ _ _ _ _ relevant
(3) means a lot to me _ _ _ _ _ means nothing to me
(4) unexciting _ _ _ _ _ exciting
(5) worthless _ _ _ _ valuable
(6) touches me _ _ _ _ _ does not touch me
(7) boring _ _ _ _ interesting
(8) appealing _ _ _ _ unappealing
(9) fascinating _ _ _ _ _ commonplace
(10) not necessary _ _ _ _ _ necessary

Attitude towards the destination:

You have indicated that you know the destination Reunion Island. How do you feel about a holiday in this destination? Please give your opinion on the statements below using the slider.

Holidaying in this destination would be... for me.

(1) enjoyable _ _ _ _ _ unenjoyable
(2) good_ _ _ _ _ bad
(3) pleasant_ _ _ _ _ unpleasant
(4) worthless_ _ _ _ _ valuable

Appendix C

Table 14: Appendix C: Comparison of items adjusted for covariates between experimental groups (planned contrasts; Study 2)

	Website 1 (high level EM) vs. Website 2 (medium level EM)						**Website 1 (high level EM) vs. Website 3 (no EM)**						**Website 2 (medium level EM) vs. Website 3 (no EM)**					
		95% confidence interval						95% confidence interval						95% confidence interval				
Items	M_{Diff}	LB	UB	F	Sig	r	M_{Diff}	LB	UB	F	Sig	r	M_{Diff}	LB	UB	F	Sig	r
SEN3	.178	.008	.348	4.209	.039*	.07	.467	.299	.634	29.562	<.001*	.17	.289	.116	.462	10.778	.001*	.11
SEN4	.238	.044	.432	5.793	.016*	.08	.645	.453	.838	43.428	<.001*	.21	.407	.210	.605	16.465	<.001*	.13
AFF1	.182	-.005	.368	3.641	.057	.06	.530	.345	.715	31.631	<.001*	.18	.349	.159	.538	13.007	<.001*	.11
AFF2	.137	-.073	.348	1.635	.201	.04	.474	.265	.683	19.797	<.001*	.14	.336	.122	.550	9.490	.002*	.10
AFF4	.012	.189	.212	.013	.910	.00	.379	.181	.578	14.111	<.001*	.12	.368	.165	.571	12.615	<.001*	.11
INT1	.132	-.061	.324	1.808	.179	.05	.398	.207	.588	16.806	<.001*	.13	.266	.071	.461	7.154	.008*	.08
INT2**	.274	.071	.478	7.015	.008*	.09	.497	.295	.699	23.403	<.001*	.16	.223	.016	.429	4.470	.035*	.07
INT3	.141	-.066	.348	1.795	.181	.05	.452	.247	.657	18.739	<.001*	.14	.311	.101	.521	8.426	.004*	.09
INT4	.083	-.129	.294	.587	.444	.03	.372	.163	.582	12.161	.001*	.11	.290	.075	.505	7.006	.008*	.09
SOC5	.108	-.093	.308	1.106	.293	.03	.351	.152	.550	12.003	.001*	.11	.243	.040	.447	5.492	.019*	.07
BEH2**	.215	.012	.418	4.304	.038*	.07	.529	.327	.730	26.445	<.001*	.16	.314	.107	.520	8.856	.003*	.10
BEH3	.187	-.013	.387	3.359	.067	.06	.481	.283	.680	22.703	<.001*	.15	.294	.091	.498	8.082	.005*	.09
BEH5	.253	-.075	.284	1.308	.253	.04	.533	.356	.711	34.676	<.001*	.18	.429	.247	.611	21.318	<.001*	.15

Note: EM = Experiential Marketing; LB = Lower Bound, UB = Upper Bound; The specific item formulations can be found in Table 5 and Appendix A, respectively. Bootstrapping was applied (n = 1000).

*significant on .05-level **Due to violation of homogeneity of regression slopes, for this item we could not control for the variable importance of travel motives.

VII.II Supplementary information Study 3 (Chapter 3.3)

Appendix D

Table 15: Appendix D: Items used for the included constructs and reasons for dropping items from the ODE scale (Study 3)

		ODE scale
Constructs	**Items****	**Main reason for dropping the item**
Online Destination Experience (ODE)*	**The destination looked great.**	
	The destination stimulated my senses.	
	I could really feel the holiday experience.	
	The destination looked very stimulating.	PCA: low communalities
	I had positive feelings about the destination.	
	I imagined how good I would feel during a visit to the destination.	
	The destination touched me emotionally.	CCA: low loadings on second order
	My interest was aroused to learn even more about the destination.	PCA: high cross loadings
	I became very curious about the destination.	PCA: high cross loadings
	The destination seemed very interesting to me.	
	I could imagine the destination very well spatially (location of sights, surroundings, etc.).	CCA: low loadings on first and second order
	I now have a much more concrete picture of the destination (location of attractions, surroundings, etc.).	PCA: low communalities
	I have discovered where I could do which activities.	PCA: low communalities
	I was able to put myself very well into the travel experience on site.	
	I would like to tell friends and acquaintances about a holiday spent in the destination.	CCA: low loadings on second order
	I would very much like to share my experiences in the destination with family or friends afterwards.	CCA: low loadings on second order
	I would love to explore the destination with family or friends.	CCA: low loadings on second order
	I think I could experience a lot in the destination.	
	It really made me want to visit the destination.	PCA: high cross loadings
	I would like to start my holiday there right away.	PCA: high cross loadings
	I would rather not go there. (control item)	PCA: low communalities
Destination Emotional Experience (Zhang et al., 2018)	A trip to the destination would make me feel good.	
	A trip to the destination would make me feel enthusiastic.	

Constructs	**Items****
WQ: Aesthetics***	The design of the website looks nice.
WQ: Usefulness***	The website is useful for my travel decision.
WQ: Ease of Use****	The categories on the website are well organised.
WQ: Trust***	The website looks trustworthy.
WQ: Interactivity***	The website has interactive features (e.g. commenting on content) that meet my needs.
Perceived Experiential Design (Manipulation Check)	The website is very much focused on experiencing the destination before the trip.
	The publishers of the website want to make browsing an experience.
	The website is very emotionally designed.
Website Revisit Intention	Would you like to surf the website again?

Note: *The 21 items included in the main survey are listed. **Bold text indicates that the item was included in the final scale. *** WQ=Website quality adapted from Zhang et al. (2018) **** adapted from Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo Martínez (2019)

Appendix E

Table 16: Appendix E: Descriptive Statistics experimental groups and total (Study 3)

Variables			**Experimental groups**							
		Total (n = 1163)	Copen-hagen (n = 161)	Andalusia (n = 161)	South Tyrol (n = 125)	Switzer-land (n = 113)	British Columbia (n = 203)	Reunion Island (n = 183)	Australia (n = 217)	Statistics & Significance
Gender	Male	39.5%	39.8%	38.5%	44.8%	38.1%	39.9%	34.4%	41.5%	$\chi^2(12) = 8.345$,
	Female	60.1%	59.6%	60.9%	54.4%	61.9%	60.1%	65.6%	57.6%	p = .758*
	Diverse	0.4%	0.6%	0.6%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	
Age	M	30.8	30.9	30.8	30.6	30.8	30.9	30.9	30.8	Welch's F(6, 483) =
	SD	2.9	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.5	2.9	3.0	3.0	.197, p = .977*
No.of holidays	M	6.7	6.5	6.6	6.2	7.1	6.7	7.0	6.6	Welch's F(6, 474) =
2018-2021	SD	4.0	3.7	3.8	4.0	5.3	3.7	4.3	3.5	.682, p = .664
Current mood	M	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.8	3.8	Welch's F(6, 481) =
	SD	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.9	.600, p = .730*
	Min	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
	Max	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	
Device used	Laptop without external monitor	51.8%	49.1%	52.8%	56.0%	51.3%	52.2%	53.0%	49.8%	$\chi^2(18) = 12.294$,
	Laptop or PC with external monitor	37.7%	39.1%	34.8%	37.6%	41.6%	37.4%	34.4%	40.1%	p = .832*
	Tablet	10.0%	11.2%	11.8%	6.4%	6.2%	10.3%	12.6%	9.2%	
	Another device (e.g. smart TV)	0.4%	0.6%	0.6%	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	
General usage of	Always, i.e. for all holiday trips	26.2%	28.6%	22.4%	28.8%	29.2%	27.6%	25.7%	23.5%	$\chi^2(30) = 28.754$,
destination	Often, i.e. for most holiday trips	31.7%	34.2%	28.0%	29.6%	30.1%	35.0%	28.4%	34.6%	p =. 531*
websites before	Sometimes, i.e. for some holiday trips	24.6%	19.9%	29.8%	27.2%	23.0%	23.2%	29.0%	21.2%	
a trip	Rarely, i.e. for few holiday trips	11.5%	13.7%	12.4%	5.6%	14.2%	8.9%	11.5%	13.8%	
	Never, i.e. for no holiday trips	5.3%	3.1%	6.8%	8.0%	2.7%	4.9%	4.4%	6.9%	
	Don't know	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.8%	0.9%	0.5%	1.1%	0.0%	

Note: *not significant on the 5%-level; Base: respondents without visiting experience (n = 1163)

Appendix F

Table 17: Appendix F: Manipulation Check: comparison of website perception between the groups (Study 3)

Variables			**Experimental groups**							
		Total	Copen-hagen (n = 161)	Andalusia (n = 161)	South Tyrol (n = 125)	British Columbia (n = 203)	Switzer-land (n = 113)	Reunion Island (n = 183)	Australia (n = 217)	Welch's F
Experiential	M	5.19	3.81	4.31	5.34	5.61	5.66	5.67	5.76	F(6, 474) = 68.502,
Website	SD	1.28	1.33	1.28	0.98	0.92	1.06	0.95	0.88	p<.001*, ω^2 = .315
Design**	Min	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.67	1.00	2.33	2.00	
	Max	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	
WQ***: Aesthetics	M	5.49	4.11	4.37	5.87	5.93	5.94	5.91	6.15	F(6, 476) = 56.057,
	SD	1.48	1.54	1.70	1.12	1.11	1.08	1.15	0.98	p <.001*, ω^2 = .278
	Min	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	
	Max	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	
WQ***: Usefulness	M	5.48	4.96	5.09	5.53	5.69	5.55	5.57	5.82	F(6, 476) = 10.574,
	SD	1.24	1.47	1.29	1.10	1.16	1.31	1.13	1.03	p<.001*, ω^2 = .053
	Min	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	
	Max	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	
WQ***: Ease of Use	M	5.53	5.37	5.27	5.44	5.72	5.60	5.30	5.84	F(6, 477) = 6.611,
	SD	1.23	1.21	1.26	1.15	1.17	1.29	1.42	1.02	p<.001*, ω^2 = .026
	Min	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	2.00	
	Max	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	
WQ***: Trust	M	5.68	5.09	5.01	5.88	5.97	5.91	5.80	6.02	F(6, 480) = 21.453,
	SD	1.14	1.20	1.34	0.92	1.00	1.01	1.02	0.96	p<.001*, ω^2 = .117
	Min	1.00	1.00	1.00	3.00	1.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	
	Max	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	
WQ***: Interactivity	M	4.73	4.16	4.25	4.74	4.95	4.86	4.86	5.12	F(6, 479) = 12.682,
	SD	1.33	1.49	1.29	1.12	1.20	1.44	1.25	1.25	p<.001*, ω^2 = .062
	Min	1.00	1,00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	
	Max	7.00	7,00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	

Note: *significant on the 5%-level; **Mean value of three items (for details of the items, see Appendix D); ***WQ = Website quality