2019

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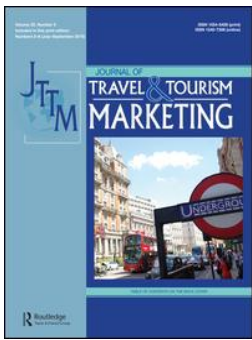Dean Creevey
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Published online: 31 May 2019.

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ARTICLE

From dreaming to believing: a review of consumer engagement behaviours with brands' social media content across the holiday travel process

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews social media user engagement behaviours with brands and proposes a new stage within the travel process. Specifically, the pre-trip stage is examined and investigation into a two sub-stage split is proposed; pre-purchase and post-purchase. Dubbed the Believing phase, this paper calls for research into the patterns of engagement behaviour towards hotel brands' content at this currently under-researched stage. Current social media-focussed research examines influence on purchasing decisions of users, social media usage on-site, and post-trip evaluation. There remains a conceptual gap highlighting the behavioural patterns of users during the period between initial purchase and subsequent departure.

Introduction

Both business and society continue to be shaped by technological evolution. Digital platforms, including social media, have transformed the ways in which consumers interact and engage with brands (Kabadayi & Price, 2014; Ritz, Wolf, & McQuitty, in press), particularly how travellers access and utilise travel-related information (Xiang, Magnini, & Fesenmaier, 2015). These platforms have become crucial components within travel planning and play pivotal roles in travellers' overall experiences (Amaro, Duarte, & Henriques, 2016), due to the intangibility of the tourism product and the absence of evaluation prior to consumption (Schmalleger & Carson, 2008). Marketers have increasingly adopted social media platforms as pivotal consumer engagement avenues (Harrigan, Evers, Miles, & Daly, 2017). Concurrently, scholarly interest in social media's role within the tourism and hospitality spheres has grown (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

Previous research has examined social media's role across each individual stage of the travel process, i.e. *pre-trip, during the trip*, and *post-trip* (Leung et al., 2013). The classical three-stage model has also been proposed as a cyclical process with the addition of the *dreaming* stage (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2011). However, there remains a paucity within the extant literature which

examine how organisations may utilise social media platforms to engage consumers sequentially across all stages of the travel process, (Wang, Xiang, & Fesenmaier, 2014). The conceptualisations of consumers' behaviour at both the *dreaming* and *pre-trip* stages within the literature omit one key behavioural stage; that being consumer activity *post-purchase* but *pre-consumption* (see Wang, Xiang, et al., 2014). This paper proposes the *Believing* phase, a novel proposition within the context of consumer engagement behaviour and social media platforms enabling a more holistic travel process model. This phase will entail the split of the classical pre-trip phase into two distinct phases, separated by the point of actual purchase or booking. The Believing phase represents a to-date wholly under-researched phase of the travel process yet also, with the advent of social media platforms, a rich opportunity for brands to connect and engage with their clients prior to their departure.

Approach to this review

The purpose of this paper is to investigate past research on consumer engagement behaviours with hotel brands on social media platforms at varying stages of the travel cycle. For the purposes of this literature review, only full-length peer-reviewed articles from recognised high-quality publications were considered.

Whilst a literature search for engagement behaviours with hotel brands on social media specifically may have proven too narrow in scope, the search was broadened to include consumer/customer engagement more generally, including relevant studies incorporating social media marketing in hospitality to further strengthen the contextual contribution of the review. Adopting this approach ensured relevant literature published in other specialist fields was not overlooked; for example engagement behaviour research within a general strategic marketing journal (i.e. Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, & Goodman, 2016). To guarantee consistency in consideration of source quality, only publications listed within the 2018 Academic Journal Guide (ABS, 2018) or the Australian Business Deans Council Journal List (ABDC, 2019) were included, omitting other sources such as book chapters, conference proceedings, and trade publications.

Online databases and collections were utilised for searching for relevant articles for the review (Amaro & Duarte, 2013), including Web of Science, EBSCO, Scopus, and ScienceDirect. However, as the search function differs amongst the various databases, the search strategy was not always identical. For example, while Scopus allows for a search within article *title, abstract,* and *keywords*, Web of Science allows for a search within articles' *topic*. However, where appropriate, multiple searches were carried out to minimise the potential for oversight. Relevant articles were found utilising search strings such as < engagement AND "social media" AND hotel >. Article abstracts were then consulted to ensure relevancy to the current review as well as adherence to our screening criteria and either accept or discarded as appropriate. Finally, within the chosen articles, the reference lists were consulted for any additional literature which was not initially found during the search stage. This ensured a comprehensive pool of relevant and valuable articles for analysis.

Literature review

Engagement

Described by Thakur (2018) as "a state of mind of being emotionally invested with the focal object (brand or medium), which leads to customers' frequent interactions with the focal object" (p. 49), engagement continues to generate discussion across multiple domains (Hinson, Boateng, Renner, & Basewe Kosiba, in press). While not a new concept within the domain of business relationships, it has experienced an increase in practitioner interest over the past number of years (Alvarez-Milán, Felix, Rauschnabel, & Hinsch, 2018; Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, &

Ilić, 2011; Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015; de Villiers, 2015; Hollebeek, 2018; So, King, & Sparks, 2014) as organisations strive to encourage and foster participation with their brands (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Sawhney, Verona, & Prandelli, 2005; So, King, Sparks, & Wang, 2016). Nevertheless, there exists a level of debate regarding its conceptualisation (Hinson et al., in press; Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Leeflang, 2011). Despite the increasing interest in engagement as a marketing concept, there remains a lack of consensus regarding the appropriate definition, forms, dimensionality, and operationalisation of the term within that domain (Calder, Malthouse, & Maslowska, 2016; Gambetti, Graffigna, & Biraghi, 2012; Hollebeek, 2011b).

While both consumer engagement and customer engagement are seemingly used interchangeably by scholars (see Table 1), Brodie, Ilic, Juric, and Hollebeek (2013) scrutinise the relatively few succinct definitions of the terms within the literature. Further related terms including 'brand engagement' and "brand community engagement" have also been utilised in the literature (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2016). Patterson, Yu, and de Ruyter (2006) describe customer engagement as the level of a *customer's* various presence in their relationship with an organisation, incorporating behavioural, emotional, and cognitive presences. Alternatively, consumer engagement is defined by Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014) as a *consumer's* (i.e. not necessarily having made the purchase) positively-valenced cognitive, emotional and behavioural brand-related activity during, or related to, specific interactions between brand and consumer.

It may be argued that initial content marketing efforts on social media may be an attempt to generate favourable levels of brand awareness among *consumers* (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012) in the early stages of the consumer journey. Efforts, therefore, at latter stages (post-purchase) may then be geared toward more *customer* service elements (Schamari & Schaefers, 2015) and relationship building (Atwood & Morosan, 2015; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Ho & Lee, 2015). Drawing on this distinction, customer engagement pertains to engagement activities occurring post-purchase, while consumer engagement represents a more all-encompassing definition and may be applied to engagement activities that occur at any stage of the holiday travel cycle.

Marketing literature shows a wide approach to the concept that is indistinctly referred to as consumer engagement, customer engagement, or brand engagement, adopting different approaches, meanings, and foci (Martí, Bigné, & Hyder, 2013). Some scholars have posited their own conceptualisations of consumer engagement as either predominantly behavioural

(Bijmolt et al., 2010; van Doorn et al., 2010) or psychological (Brodie et al., 2011) in nature, while further positions pertain to a multidimensional construct, consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions (Hollebeek, 2011b; Brodie et al., 2013; Patterson et al., 2006; So et al., 2014; Solem & Pedersen, 2016; Hinson et al., in press; see Table 1). The proceeding discussion centres on the behavioural manifestations of engagement on social media, as the success of content marketing strategies on social media platforms is predicated on the continuous generation of user interactions with brands. This may entail behavioural engagement with brands' content (likes, shares, retweets, filters/lenses) as well as the creation and distribution of brand-related user-generated content (reviews, hashtags, direct mentions). A behavioural based perspective of engagement has gained wide recognition within the literature (Dessart et al., 2015; Hinson et al., in press; Hollebeek et al., 2014) and is therefore deemed appropriate as a focus for the subsequent discussion. While the role of both cognitive and affective dimensions of engagement are widely acknowledged, as mentioned above, the constantly altering social media landscape consistently introduces novel ways for brands to interact with users, further vindicating the behavioural focus within a social media context, as explored below.

Consumer engagement behaviours

Consumer engagement is viewed as a central pillar in determining the effectiveness of marketing and communications strategies on social media platforms, yet little is currently known about the underpinning factors which initiate it (Ge & Gretzel, 2018). In bestowing the term *brand dialogue behaviours*, Maslowska, Malthouse, and Collinger (2016) recognise the growing role of engagement behaviours outside that of actual purchase. Within a service environment specifically, previous frameworks have acknowledged the role of the customer in contributing to the overall experience, yet typically focus solely on the duration of the service encounter. The consumer engagement behaviour concept views consumers as being driven by own personal intentions and motivations, rather than those originating from the firm (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). The definition put forward by van Doorn et al. (2010; Table 1) has also been adopted in

Table 1. Engagement conceptualisations and dimensionality in the marketing literature (adapted from Brodie et al., 2011, p. 256; Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 151).

Author(s)	Concept	Defmition	Dimensionality
Patterson et al (2006)	Customer engagement	The level of a customer's physical, cognitive, and emotional presence in their relationship with a service organisation	Multidimensional: absorption (C), dedication (E), vigour/interaction (B)
Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan (2012)	Consumer engagement	The intensity of an individual's participation and connection with the organisation's offerings and activities initiated by either the customer or the organisation (cf.Vivek, 2009)	Multidimensional:C, E, B
Mollen and Wilson (2010)	Online brand engagement	The customer's cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand! value	Multidimensional:sustained cognitive processing (C), instrumental value (C), experiential value (E)
Bowden (2009)	Customer engagement process	A psychological process that models the underlying mechanisms by which customer loyalty forms for new customers of a service brand as well as the mechanisms by which loyalty may be maintained for repeat purchase customers of a service brand	Multidimensional:C, E, B*
van Doorn et al. (2010)	Customer engagement behaviour	Customers' behavioural manifestation toward a brand or flllll, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers such as word-of-mouth activity, recommendations, helping other customers, blogging, writing reviews	Unidimensional: B
Hollebeek (2011a)	Customer brand engagement	The level of a customer's motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterised by specific levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural activity in brand interactions	Multidimensional:C, E, B
Brodie et al. (2013)	Customer engagement	A multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral dimensions, [which] plays a central role in the process of relational exchange where other relational concepts are engagement antecedents and/or consequences in iterative engagement processes within the brand community	Multidimensional: C, E, B
Hollebeek et al (2014)	Consumer brand engagement	A consumer's positively valanced cognitive, emotional and behavioural brand- related activity during, or related to, specific consumer/brand interactions	Multidimensional:C, E, B

Engagement dtmenstonahty: C, Cogmttve; E, Emot10nal; B, BehaviOural.
*InfetTed from, rather than made explicit in the relevant research.

subsequent social media-focussed studies (see Schultz, 2017). One additional note on van Doorn et al. (2010) definition is that it explicitly pertains to "*customer* engagement behaviors" (p. 254, emphasis added), yet the authors proceed to suggest that these behaviours may also be targeted to "a much broader network of actors including other current and *potential customers* … " (p. 254, emphasis added). van Doorn et al. (2010) clearly acknowledge the capacity for not only current customers, but consumers in general, to generate these engagement behaviours with either the brand directly or other consumers. Kumar et al. (2010) acknowledge van Doorn et al (2010) view yet argue that such a conceptualisation is incomplete while actual purchases remain omitted. Such a stance would further exemplify the requirement for a more holistic view of engagement, such as throughout the entire travel process.

Social media in tourism and hospitality

Social media platforms have fundamentally altered the ways in which travellers search, find, read, co-produce, and distribute information regarding tourism providers, destinations, and experiences (Sotiriadis, 2017). The term *social media* refers to a group of internet-based applications built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, facilitating the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Through engaging on social media platforms, travellers gain the capacity to become co-designers, co-producers, co-marketers, and co-consumers of the tourism experience (Sigala, Christou, & Gretzel, 2012). However, social media is relatively under-researched in the field of tourism and hospitality despite travellers' increased usage of social platforms (Ying, Ze, & Law, 2018). Many previous social media-focussed studies have examined areas such as consumers' online search behaviours and perceptions of social media (Hudson & Thal, 2013; Kang & Schuett, 2013; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010) as well as social media's role in shaping post-trip experience and evaluation (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017). Research adopting a practitioner's perspective includes the use of social media by national tourism organisations and destination marketing organisations (Dwivedi, Yadav, & Venkatesh, 2012; Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013; Wozniak, Stangl, Schegg, & Liebrich, 2016), hospitality brands (Chan & Guillet, 2011; Leung & Bai, 2013), as well as the lesser-investigated small business sector (Ritz et al., in press).

Much of past research examining social media within tourism and hospitality has adopted a consumer perspective (Ying et al., 2018). Consumers' destination- and hotel-related decision-making has fundamentally changed over the last number of years (Hudson & Thal, 2013; Pabel & Prideaux, 2016; Serra Cantallops & Salvi, 2014), particularly driven by the continued development of information and communications technologies (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2012). Research regarding the use of social media among travellers has primarily examined its impact on travellers' travel planning process and there is a consensus that travel decisions are highly influenced by social media (Amaro et al., 2016). Recent work has examined social media's role in creating and shaping tourist expectations (Narangajavana, Callarisa Fiol, Moliner Tena, Rodríguez Artola, & Sánchez García, 2017). Typically discussed within the scope of the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1980), consumers develop expectations regarding a product or service before they proceed to purchase. Within the tourism sphere, travellers will usually develop initial expectations regarding the form and quality of services offered within a specific destination (Lorenzo, Avilés, & Centeno, 2010) and, by extension, hotels. The study by Narangajavana et al. (2017) found that user-generated content on social media platforms does play a role in the development of traveller expectations. A user's level of trust in the information is based on its content, not on the providers, fuelling the notion that tourists' expectations will be created once they believe in or trust the information they receive, regardless of its source (Narangajavana et al., 2017). This finding raises important questions regarding the effectiveness of brand-created content, especially when considering the study of Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, and Buultjens (2009) who state that, while user-generated content is well-accepted, it is not considered to be as credible or as reliable as official, government sponsored websites. Taking the findings of both Narangajavana et al. (2017) and Cox et al. (2009) into account, future research may look at the impact of social media content in creating and shaping expectations after a purchase or booking has been made, yet before the individual or group travels (i.e. the *Believing* phase). Such an inquiry may further guide brands who continue to seek to understand how and why travellers utilise social media platforms at varying stages of the travel cycle (i.e. Amaro et al., 2016).

Consumer engagement behaviours on social media platforms

Online environments such as social media platforms have significantly extended the manner and depth of consumer–brand interactions (Christodoulides, 2009; Vohra & Bhardwaj, 2019) as well as consumer-consumer interactions (Hook, Baxter, & Kulczynski, 2018). Examining online content marketing as a prospective, as well as already-existing, customer relationship marketing tool potentially

revolutionises the scope of relationship marketing (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). While their influence within the hospitality industry has already been recognised (Cervellon & Galipienzo, 2015), there remains an open question regarding the users' motivations in interacting with brands on these platforms (Schultz, 2017). The most common approach typically involves brands designing and posting content (text, images, and/or videos) on their social media pages for their consumer "fans" or community to see and, hopefully, interact with. This is commonly referred to as social media content marketing and has become an important part of major brands' media mixes (Stephen, Sciandra, & Inman, 2015).

Engagement has been found to be a predictor of multiple brand-related outcomes, such as brand usage intent and self-brand connection, while consumer involvement has been found to be a predictor consumer-brand engagement (Harrigan, Evers, Miles, & Daly, 2018). Increasing engagement is desirable because it is thought to be associated with a stronger consumer-brand relationship and brand affinity, increased satisfaction and loyalty, and increased purchases (Brodie et al., 2013; Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009; Gummerus, Liljander, Weman, & Pihlström, 2012; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013; van Doorn et al., 2010; Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012). However, few studies have considered engagement from both a consumer-initiated and firm-initiated perspective (Yang, Lin, Carlson, & Ross Jr., 2016). The idea of a brand-initiated and controlled marketing communications model has been described as being unreflective of today's reality of a more demo-cratised marketing communications landscape (Maslowska et al., 2016).

While also recognising the role and importance of the cognitive and affective components of engagement, previous studies within a social media context have examined the *behavioural* manifestations of engagement (Dessart et al., 2016; Gummerus et al., 2012; van Doorn et al., 2010) including within a service marketing context (Solem & Pederson, 2016). Both consumer and expert informants focus heavily on behavioural aspects when discussing and defining engagement which has led to three sub-dimensions of engagement being proposed; sharing, learning, and endorsing (Dessart et al., 2016). Users who are engaged with brands on Facebook not only invest their energy, time, and effort on behaviours such as posting comments and liking posts, but also feel enthused and positive toward these brands (Hinson et al., in press). The definition of social media engagement behaviours proposed in this paper originates from the seminal definition posited by van Doorn et al. (2010, p. 254), which was also later adapted to include a consumer

and social media-specific focus by Dolan et al. (2016, p. 265). Our definition is as follows:

> Social media engagement behaviours may be specifically defined as a consumer's behavioural manifestations that have a brand-created social media content focus, resulting from motivational drivers, across all stages of the travel cycle.

Dolan et al. (2016) focus on the behavioural aspects of engagement and propose a seven-pronged typology of social media engagement behaviours (SMEBs): *co-creation, positive contribution, consumption, dormancy, detachment, negative contribution*, and *co-destruction* (cf. Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek & Chen, 2014; Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011). The typology highlights the importance of recognising negatively-valenced engagement behaviours (NVBs) (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014), despite much of current literature examining customer engagement focusing on positive-valenced engagement behaviours (PVBs) (van Doorn et al., 2010). Due to the diverse nature of the communication and interaction between brands and users offered by varying social media platforms, a typology such as that proposed by Dolan et al. (2016) remains of import. As Figure 1 graphically depicts on the positive scale, *consumption* represents a passive viewing, listening, or reading of content (such as a tweet or Facebook post), while *positive contribution* behaviour would include liking and/or commenting on social media content. The highest-level construct, *co-creation*, refers to users' spontaneous and positive contribution to brands' social media presences through behaviour such as posting brand-related images or video, reviews, or blogs. Conversely, the negative constructs represent the opposing instances of such behaviours (Dolan et al., 2016). Co-production of marketing content reflects a transfer of control to users, facilitating their input on the frequency, timing, and relevance of marketing content they consume online (Ritz et al., in press).

So far, there have been few empirical studies on customer engagement behaviours, in general, and particularly in social media (Gummerus et al., 2012; Stephen et al., 2015). Stephen et al. (2015) assert that research that has been conducted within this context has offered only a limited perspective on how *different types* of brand content on social media (such as what is said as well as how it's communicated) affect *different forms* of CEB in response to that content. For example, persuasive content was found to have a significant effect on engagement behaviours. Consumers were found to react more favourable to content which was relevant to the brand, yet not overtly advertising-focussed (Stephen et al., 2015).
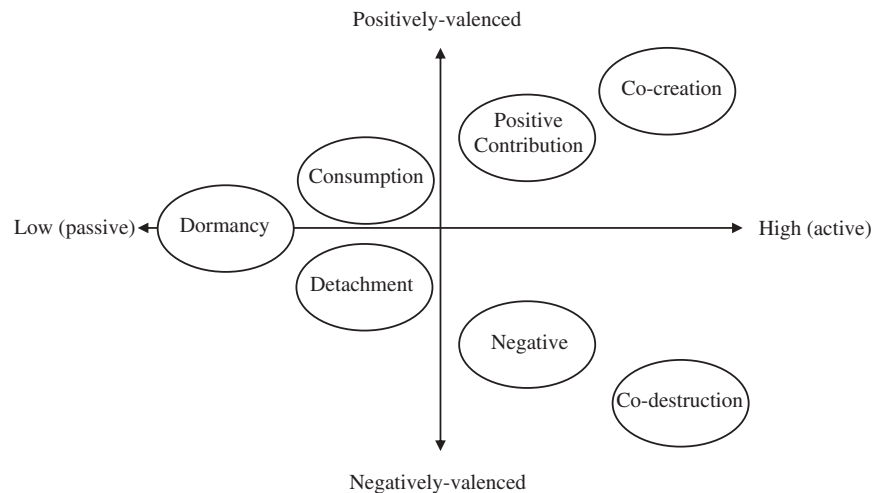
Figure 1. Typology of social media engagement behaviours (Dolan et al., 2016).

Characteristics of social media content

An emerging theoretical literature in advertising has started to investigate the effects of content (Lee, Hosanagar, & Nair, 2018) although the volume of digital content research remains sparse (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Social media platforms offer brands myriad options for marketing, including the sharing of branded content (Tuten & Solomon, 2013). The travel industry can be viewed as occupying an ideal position to exploit the potential of information and communications technology (Law, Buhalis, & Cobanoglu, 2014); this explains the increasing use of the internet to research and purchase tourism products and services (Buhalis & Law, 2008). This has paved the way for social media content to become a powerful force driving travel planning and decision-making, playing a crucial role in travellers' overall experience. Travellers now have access to ample travel information and content created by other travellers and brands alike (Amaro et al., 2016), although few studies to date have examined social media message effectiveness within the hospitality industry (Leung, Tanford, & Jiang, 2017).

Contrary to advertising's traditional role of generating desire and persuading consumers into a purchase, social media content aims to engage users to develop a more substantial appreciation of the brand by providing various forms of value (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Existing literature has categorised four distinct groups of social media content: *informational, entertainment, remunerative*, and *relational* content (see de Vries, Gansler, & Leeflang, 2012; Dolan et al., 2016; Muntinga et al., 2011; Taylor, Lewin, & Strutton, 2011). Previous research has outlined how *information*-seeking remains an important motivating factor for individuals to utilise social media platforms (Lin & Lu, 2011; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). Content with a *functional*

appeal (i.e. describing the utility of functionality of a product or service) has been cited as the most-commonly used appeal among brands (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). The value of *entertaining* media is rooted in its propensity to fulfil an individual's need for escapism, hedonistic pleasure, aesthetic enjoyment and emotional release (McQuail, 1983), while the entertainment value of a social networking site is important for attracting users (Lin & Lu, 2011; Park et al., 2009). Further, several social media-focused studies have signalled *remuneration* as a driver of online community contribution, involving engagement with social media to gain some future reward (Muntinga et al., 2011), such as special offers, promotions, prices and exclusive deals (Dolan, 2016). Finally, Dolan (2016) explains that *relational* content as appealing to fans' needs for social interaction by asking the audience questions, providing fun quizzes, or posting photos of customers or staff members. Such content can appease consumers' needs for integration and social interaction and their desires for social benefits which have been highlighted as key motivators for internet usage (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Previous research into brand content strategies and audience response has indicated only a marginal support for the hypothesis that entertaining posts generate a higher number of likes than informational content, while there existed no statistically significant difference between the two content categories in terms of shares on social media (Tafesse, 2015). Tafesse (2015) surmises that content type does not seem to play a role in determining the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) potential of brand's posts. Similar content analysis by Lee et al. (2018) found that directly informative content yielded lower engagement rates, yet certain types could induce higher click-through rates. More positive engagement levels were found to be associated with more brand

personality-related content (Lee et al., 2018). In terms of modality of content, Leung et al. (2017) maintain that it is not the format which is the key factor in determining the effectiveness of hotel content, but its purpose. Leung et al. (2017) found that product-centric messages in either a word-based or web link format were most effective in influencing intention to spread eWOM and booking intention. However, the varying methodologies employed in these studies, in terms of both the industry examined and the use of genuine Facebook pages, may account for these discrepancies. Finally, readability has also been shown to impact social media post popularity, whether such posts were shorter (such as tweets) or longer (such as Facebook posts) (Pancer, Chandler, Poole, & Noseworthy, 2019). One consistent thread throughout these studies is the omission of any postulation as to the most effective forms of content at varying stages of the consumer journey. Further inquiry is needed to address this gap, while a more holistic approach to examining consumer engagement behaviours with brands' content over the course of the entire consumer journey will provide a more comprehensive content marketing framework for tourism and hospitality brands.

Re-examining the holiday travel process

Many travellers are nowadays connected to the internet in all stages of the travel cycle (Leung et al., 2013; Pabel & Prideaux, 2016). Social media remains a force in shaping travel planning behaviour (Pabel & Prideaux, 2016; Xiang et al., 2015) across all age groups (Kim, Xiang, & Fesenmaier, 2015). However, its use in the hotel decision-making decisions of consumers remains an under-developed topic (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017) in favour of other stakeholders such as destination marketing organisations (Pabel & Prideaux, 2016). The travel process is often characterised in a three-stage framework: pre-trip, during-the-trip, and post-trip and search for varying forms of information across these diverse stages (Choe, Kim, & Fesenmaier, 2017; Choi, Lehto, & O'Leary, 2007; Cox et al., 2009). Tourism and hospitality brands require effective social media strategies to enhance users' ability to maximise these platforms in their information search activities (Pabel & Prideaux, 2016). Correia (2002) investigated the decision-making process of travellers and proposed the act of purchasing a trip be classified into three distinct phases: the pre-decision, and the decision stage, and the post-decision stage. Other prior research has shown that, in terms of information search, professional sources play a significant role before a definite decision is made, with information from friends and family being more significant after the definitive trip decision (Bieger & Laesser, 2004). Internet tools remain a critical source of information pre- and post- purchase of trips,

with little deviation occurring between these two stages in terms of source (Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2015), still research is yet to enquire whether there is a deviation in behaviour regarding social media activity with brands.

Information and communications technologies have been widely-cited as playing an important role within the travel planning process and subsequent traveller behaviour and decision-making across all stages of the process (Gretzel et al., 2006; Korneliussen & Greenacre, 2018; Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998; Wang, Park, & Fesenmaier, 2012). Social media platforms specifically have been found to be more important sources of information for younger travellers rather than for those within a more mature age group (Draper, 2016). However, it has been argued that travellers' use of social media at the pre-trip phase is not exclusively devoted to trip planning but also dreaming or fostering a desire to travel at some time in the future (Gretzel et al., 2006; Volo, 2010). Consumers often search for information regarding their already-made purchases, even when such purchases are irreversible (Russo & Leclerc, 1994). Given the myriad of options available to travellers, credible and trustworthy sources have been highlighted as key components in predicting the use of information sources (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004). First-time visitors to a destination have been found to be more likely to frequent various websites in search of information regarding a destination over a repeat visitor (Draper, 2016; Lehto, Kim, & Morrison, 2006). Social media platforms can influence traveller perception and (re)interpretations of places and people (Jansson, 2007; Kang & Gretzel, 2012; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009) and even facilitated new experiences through the reinforcement (or reinterpretation) of the meaning of a trip (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). However, more recent research has endeavoured to examine the influence of social media platforms in the decision-making process of consumers when seeking to book travel accommodation (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017). Online consumers now not only expect truthful information, but also seek hedonic pleasure while searching for such information (Song & Yoo, 2016).

One significant literature gap remains in examining the examining consumers' propensity to generate consumer engagement behaviours towards hotel brands own social media content at these distinct phases of the travel cycle. For example, Choe et al. (2017) call for further research to be conducted exploring the various touchpoints of travellers to understand their behaviours and experiences through all phases of the travel process, and how social media platform use varies throughout the entire process. Recent research has sought to investigate the role and influence of online reviews and evaluations at all stages of the tourism experience, yet the area remains insufficiently investigated (Sotiriadis, 2017;

Thakur, 2018). Barger, Peltier, and Schultz (2016) mirror this sentiment in their call for the development of comprehensive frameworks examining antecedents and consequences of consumer engagement on social media.

One area which is yet to be specifically investigated is consumers' engagement behaviour with hotel's social media content post-purchase, but before consumption (i.e. during-the-trip). Under the current model, the cessation of the dreaming stage and the beginning of the pre-trip stage occurs once the *decision* to travel to a specific destination has been made, this research acknowledges the *decision* to travel and actual *purchase* or *booking* remain two mutually exclusive events within the travel process. Therefore, this research proposes a distinct *Believing* stage within the historically holistic *pre-trip* phase of previous conceptualisations of the travel cycle. As Figure 2 shows, the *Believing* phase occupies the time between the *booking* and departure.

While social media has already been cited as being a key factor in consumer decision-making across the pre-, during, and post-trip phases of the cycle, there remains little research empirically examining how consumers interact with hotel brands' content across these three broad stages and, therefore, the diverse sub-phase encased within. Further inquiry into the use of online information channels throughout the travel consumption cycle has also been called for (e.g. Cohen, Prayag, & Moital, 2014). One note on this proposal is the length of time, and its susceptibility to change, a traveller will occupy the *Believing* phase of the travel cycle. Certain "deal-seekers" adopt a strategy of minimising the financial investment in travel via a high-involvement approach in researching and comparing varying providers, often only completing a booking at the last minute (Scaglione, Johnson, & Favre, 2018). Such an approach would constitute a very low amount of time that the consumer would be in the *Believing* phase. However, some consumers, particularly groups, tend to book further in advance of travel (Kimes, 1989),

resulting in a longer occupancy of the *Believing* phase. Further research could explore the consequences of travellers being in the *Believing* phase for longer or shorter time periods, and the subsequent effect on their social media engagement behaviours.

Conclusion & further research

This paper calls for increased attention to be paid to the antecedents and consequences of consumer engagement behaviours of social media users towards hotel brands' content across all stages of the travel cycle. Reducing cognitive dissonance has been found to be a decisive factor in the post-purchase behaviour of tourists (Decrop & Snelders, 2004); further inquiry should also examine the forms and characteristics of content which generate positively- (and negatively-) valenced engagement behaviours across these diverse phases to generate a more holistic consumer engagement behaviour with hotel brands' social media content model (Figure 3). As consumers continue to rely on such technologies for gaining purchase information, an increased focus from brands on targeting consumers more effectively at distinct stages of the consumer journey will be critical to their marketing success. The *Believing* phase represents an under-researched phase of the travel cycle to date, yet one which may uncover multiple avenues for consumer behaviour research. For example, researchers may investigate if, upon completing a booking with a hotel brand, consumers are more likely to interact with the brand on social media, thus potentially increasing engagement levels prior to their actual visit. Additionally, would social media user's behavioural engagement levels with hotel brands' content rise following a booking and would factor such as escalation of commitment influence engagement behaviours.

Practitioners will gain invaluable insight into which forms of brand-created content holds the most value for users at varying stages of the travel cycle, leading
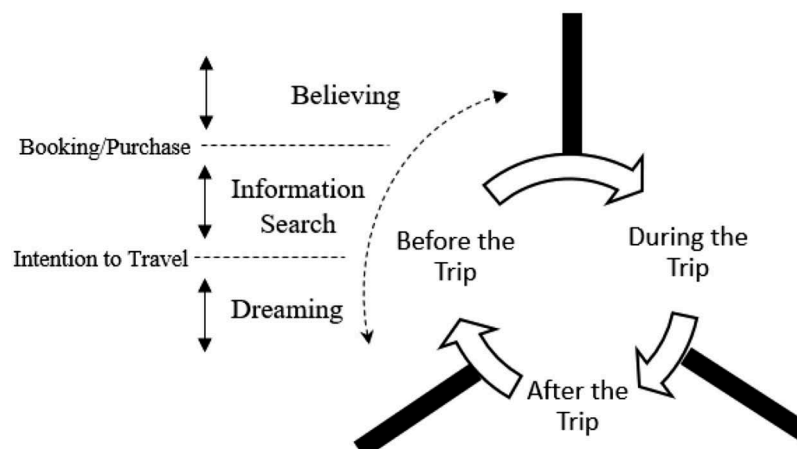
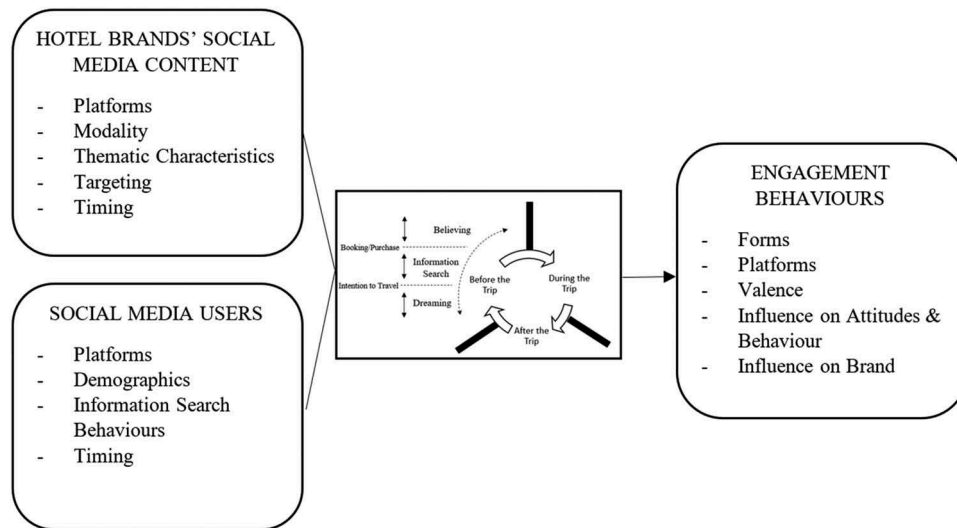**Figure 2.** Updated holiday travel process model.

Figure 3. Future research directions.

to more in-depth content marketing and targeting strategies as well as higher levels of engagement. A potential contribution of the *Believing* phase would be the establishment of more targeted content marketing processes on social media platforms, targeting specific forms of content to social media users based on their current position along the cyclical travel cycle, rather than solely by the more traditional indicators, such as demographics, interests, etc. In practice, how this may operate would be through the design and development of a system which would allow hotel brands to connect with their recently-booked guests via social media platforms, adding them to a database of other guests occupying specific phases of the travel cycle (such as *Believing*, on-site, post-trip, etc.) in real time. This would enable the brand to add further contextual awareness to their social media marketing strategies which may target specific forms of content to users at certain travel cycle stages.

While past research has examined the performance of varying forms of content across multiple social media platforms via netnographic methodological approaches, such inquiry lacks the contextual evidence to aid brands in understanding which forms of content generate consumer engagement behaviours at which stages of the travel cycle. More focussed inquiry into addressing this literary gap can make significant contributions to both the marketing and travel consumer behaviour literatures. Finally, varying adoption and usage rates of social media platforms across cultures (Alsaleh, Elliott, Fu, & Thakur, 2019) also poses interesting opportunities for tourism and hospitality brands to refine their content marketing strategies toward consumers from diverse backgrounds.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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