

UNIVERSITY OF SARAJEVO  
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

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**DESTINATION COOLNESS AND TOURIST BEHAVIOUR**

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UNIVERSITY OF SARAJEVO  
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

MASTER THESIS  
DESTINATION COOLNESS AND TOURIST BEHAVIOUR

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## **ABSTRACT**

The presented study makes a contribution to the existing literature on tourism, consumer behavior, and destination coolness. Moreover, the study dives into a deeper understanding of the specific dimensions of destination coolness that are more likely to impact tourists' behavior. Additionally, it provides valuable insights into the relationship between destination coolness and perceived social return, visit intention, and willingness to pay a premium price. These findings have important implications for destination marketers and managers given that they emphasize the importance of creating a destination image that is perceived as cool and attractive to potential visitors. This might serve as guidance to destination marketers and managers seeking to enhance their destination's appeal to potential visitors.

Both a theoretical and a research component make up this master's thesis. The theoretical portion focuses on the literature review and relevant research done by other authors. Results from empirical research among travelers are presented in the second section. The main research aims of this master thesis are to provide a state-of-the-art literature review on the concept of perceived coolness of a destination, its antecedents, and consequences. Furthermore, to propose and test a conceptual model which examines the impact of the perceived destination coolness on social return, willingness to visit a cool destination, and willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination. Lastly, to recommend effective branding and marketing strategies for developing cool destinations.

Considering that this master thesis is related to the marketing aspect of coolness, it is important to dissect the marketing perspective of cool. Due to its nature, it is very hard to concretely and unanimously define what cool is. However, researchers do agree that "cool", on the whole, is regarded as a favourable and desirable quality (Sundar et al., 2014). Furthermore, Grossman (2003) states that coolness is an intangible component that can transform or dramatically increase the value of a certain brand of an otherwise interchangeable commodity.

Following our research, it is evident that authors go a step further and explore the concept of perceived coolness. This master thesis will follow the conceptualization of perceived coolness proposed by Kock (2021). According to Kock (2021), a destination coolness has five main dimensions, meaning cool destinations are perceived by tourists as authentic, rebellious, original, symbolic and vibrant.

In today's globally connected world, travellers have many options when deciding where to go on their next vacation. Globalization has caused the tourism industry to be one of the largest expanding sectors worldwide (Wang and Wang, 2018). Hence, tourist destinations have a unique opportunity to draw more tourists' attention, as well as to strategize how to attract all of these tourists to their particular destination instead of

others. However, besides knowing what attracts tourists to a particular destination, it is also significant to understand what makes them return to a place they have visited already.

We will explore increasing tourists' perceptions of the coolness of a destination will increase tourist satisfaction. By the same token, the perceived coolness of a destination can also increase their place attachment and their intention to revisit and enthusiasm to recommend it to other people.

In the theoretical research conclusion, it is safe to conclude that perceived coolness positively impacts travel behaviour. According to Chen & Chou (2019), increasing tourists' perceptions of coolness will enhance their satisfaction, attachment to the destination and other positive behavioural intentions like returning and recommending.

The second part of the literature review places emphasis on the conspicuous nature of consumption and explains conspicuous consumption in the context of tourism. This concept can be explained as the desire to attain status or social prestige by purchasing and consuming products and services is a significant factor affecting contemporary consumers (Goldsmith et al., 1996). The conspicuous consumption idea in tourism can characterize a traveler's urge to visit locations in order to advertise their status by portraying an idealized image of themselves or simply sharing aspects of their personalities through travel-related products or services on social media. (Correia et al., 2016). Therefore, a conspicuous destination is one where visitors feel like they are or could be seen and perceived by people of significance (Sirgy and Su, 2000).

Notably, the expanding importance of social media in the tourist industry has drawn the attention of scholars over the recent two decades, and this problem makes for an intriguing research topic (Law et al., 2014; Leung et al., 2013; Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014). According to published research, social media platforms are important for managing corporate operations and procedures, marketing, consumer behaviour (information search and decision-making), and customer connection and communication (Bilgihan et al., 2016; Gretzel and Yoo, 2013; Law et al., 2014). Therefore, new communication technologies and technological advancements have profoundly changed how tourists behave. Moreover, social media helps travellers to share their travel experiences easily. Information shared on social media platforms is acknowledged as a significant source that may aid in trip preparation for tourists or even affect future travel decisions (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014). According to Gretzel and Yoo (2008) and Hudson and Thal (2013), the use of social media has radically impacted how people plan and experience travelling.

Another important concept to mention is social return, which is the quantity of positive social responses from one's travel-related social media posts (Boley et al., 2018). Since varied travel experiences might yield different levels of social return, not all travel activities are judged equally.

The conceptual model in this work is based by the work of Kock (2021) and the attribution theory (Jackson, 2019; Saleh, 2021). Attribution theory provides a framework to explain how individuals interpret causes of incidents. It has been recognized as an essential method for analyzing individuals' psychological processes and behavioural outcomes. Our conceptual model strives to understand the following relationships: (1) the direct link between dimensions of destination coolness and perceived social return; (2) the direct link between perceived social return and visit intention; (3) the direct link between perceived social return and willingness to pay the premium price; and (4) indirect links between dimensions of destination coolness and behavioural outcomes.

The results show that destination coolness is positively related to the perceived social return in terms of a destination that is perceived to be rebellious and vibrant. Moreover, the impact of destination coolness on willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination is positively related to authenticity of a destination. Also, perceived social return is positively related to both visit intention and willingness to pay a premium price. Social return of a destination positively mediates the link between the vibrancy of a destination and the intention to visit a destination. These results are further interpreted in order for marketing managers to utilize them.

## **SAŽETAK**

Ovaj rad daje doprinos postojećoj literaturi o turizmu, ponašanju potrošača i koliko je određena destinacija kul. Štaviše, studija uranja u dublje razumijevanje specifičnih dimenzija kulnoće destinacije za koje je vjerovatnije da će utjecati na ponašanje turista. Osim toga, pruža uvid u odnos između koliko je određena destinacija kul i percipiranog društvenog povratka, namjere posjete i spremnosti da se plati premium cijena. Rezultati imaju važne implikacije za marketinške i turističke menadžere s obzirom na to da ističu važnost stvaranja imidža destinacije koji se percipira kao kul i atraktivan za potencijalne posjetitelje. Ovo može poslužiti kao smjernica za marketinške stručnjake i menadžere koji žele povećati privlačnost svoje destinacije potencijalnim posjetiteljima.

Magistarski rad čine teorijska i istraživačka komponenta. Teorijski dio se fokusira na pregled literature i relevantna istraživanja drugih autora. U drugom dijelu prikazani su rezultati empirijskog istraživanja među putnicima. Glavni istraživački ciljevi ovog magistarskog rada su pružanje pregleda najsavremenije literature o konceptu percipirane kulnoće destinacije, njegovih prethodnika i posljedica. Nadalje, predložiti i testirati konceptualni model koji ispituje uticaj percipirane kulnoće destinacije na društveni povratak, spremnost da se posjeti kul destinacija i spremnost da se plati premium cijena za posjetu kul destinacije. Na kraju, preporučiti učinkoviti branding i marketinške strategije za razvojne kul destinacije.

S obzirom da se ovaj magistarski rad odnosi na marketinški aspekt kulnoće, važno je sagledati marketinšku perspektivu kulnoće. Zbog njegove prirode, veoma je teško konkretno i jednoglasno definisati šta je kul. Međutim, istraživači se slažu da se "kul", u cjelini, smatra povoljnom i poželjnom kvalitetom (Sundar et al., 2014). Nadalje, Grossman (2003) navodi da je kulnoća nematerijalna komponenta koja može transformirati ili dramatično povećati vrijednost određenog brenda inače zamjenjive robe.

Evidentno je da autori idu korak dalje i istražuju koncept percipirane kulnoće. Ovaj master rad će pratiti konceptualizaciju percipirane kulnoće koju je predložio Kock (2021). Prema Kocku (2021), kulnoća destinacije ima pet glavnih dimenzija, što znači da turisti percipiraju kul destinacije kao autentične, buntovne, originalne, simbolične i živopisne.

U današnjem globalno povezanom svijetu, putnici imaju mnogo opcija kada odlučuju gdje će otići na svoj sljedeći odmor. Globalizacija je dovela do toga da turistička industrija bude jedan od sektora koji se najviše širi u svijetu (Wang i Wang, 2018). Stoga turističke destinacije imaju jedinstvenu priliku da privuku pažnju turista, kao i da osmisle strategiju kako sve te turiste privući na svoju destinaciju umjesto na druge. Međutim, osim saznanja šta privlači turiste na određenu destinaciju, važno je i razumjeti šta ih tjera da se vrate na mjesto koje su već posjetili.

Istražit ćemo kako sve veća percepcija turista o kulnoći destinacije će povećati zadovoljstvo turista. Isto tako, uočena kulnoća destinacije također može povećati njihovu privrženost mestu i njihovu nameru da je ponovo posete, te entuzijizam da je preporuče drugima.

U zaključku teorijskog istraživanja, sa sigurnošću se može zaključiti da uočena kulnoća pozitivno utječe na ponašanje pri putovanju. Prema Chen & Chou (2019), povećanje percepcije turista o kulnoći povećat će njihovo zadovoljstvo, privrženost destinaciji i druge pozitivne namjere ponašanja poput povratka i preporuke.

Drugi dio pregleda literature stavlja naglasak na upadljivu prirodu potrošnje i objašnjava upadljivu potrošnju u kontekstu turizma. Navedeni koncept se može objasniti kao želja za stjecanjem statusa ili društvenog prestiža, kupovinom i konzumiranjem proizvoda i usluga kao značajan faktor koji utiče na savremene potrošače (Goldsmith et al., 1996). Ideja o upadljivoj potrošnji u turizmu može se karakterizirati kao poriv putnika da posjeti lokacije kako bi pokazao svoj status prikazivanjem idealizirane slike o sebi ili jednostavno dijeljenjem aspekata svoje ličnosti putem proizvoda ili usluga vezanih za putovanja na društvenim mrežama. (Correia et al., 2016). Stoga je upadljiva destinacija ona u kojoj se posjetitelji osjećaju kao da jesu ili bi mogli biti viđeni i percipirani od strane značajnih ljudi (Sirgy i Su, 2000).

Sve veći značaj društvenih medija u turističkoj industriji je skrenuo pažnju naučnika u posljednje dvije decenije i ovaj problem predstavlja intrigantnom temom istraživanja (Law et al., 2014; Leung et al., 2013; Zeng i Gerritsen, 2014). Prema objavljenom istraživanju, platforme društvenih mreža važne su za upravljanje korporativnim operacijama i procedurama, marketingom, ponašanjem potrošača (pretraga informacija i donošenje odluka), te povezivanje i komunikaciju s kupcima (Bilgihan et al., 2016; Gretzel i Yoo, 2013; Law et al., 2014). Stoga su nove komunikacijske tehnologije i tehnološki napredak duboko promijenili ponašanje turista. Štaviše, društvene mreže pomažu putnicima da lako podijele svoja iskustva s putovanja. Informacije koje se dijele na društvenim mrežama mogu pomoći turistima u pripremi putovanja ili čak utjecati na buduće odluke o putovanju (Zeng i Gerritsen, 2014). Prema Gretzel i Yoo (2008) i Hudson i Thal (2013), korištenje društvenih medija je radikalno utjecalo na to kako ljudi planiraju i doživljavaju putovanja.

Još jedan važan koncept koji treba spomenuti je društveni povratak, što je količina pozitivnih društvenih odgovora iz nećijih objava na društvenim mrežama vezanih za putovanja (Boley et al., 2018). Budući da različita iskustva sa putovanja mogu donijeti različite nivoe društvenog povratka, ne ocjenjuju se sve aktivnosti putovanja jednako.

Konceptualni model u ovom radu zasnovan je na radu Kocka (2021) i teorije atribucije (Jackson, 2019; Saleh, 2021). Teorija atribucije pruža okvir koji objašnjava kako pojedinci tumače uzroke incidenata. Prepoznat je kao suštinska metoda za analizu psiholoških procesa i ishoda ponašanja pojedinaca. Naš konceptualni model nastoji razumjeti sljedeće odnose: (1) direktnu vezu između dimenzija kulnoće destinacije i percipiranog društvenog povratka; (2) direktna veza između percipiranog društvenog povratka i namjere posjete; (3) direktnu vezu između uočenog društvenog povrata i spremnosti da se plati premijaska cijena; i (4) indirektna veze između dimenzija kulnoće destinacije i ishoda ponašanja.

Rezultati pokazuju da je kulnoća destinacije pozitivno povezana s percipiranim društvenim povratkom u smislu destinacije koja se percipira kao buntovna i živopisna. Štaviše, uticaj kulnoće destinacije na spremnost da se plati premium cijena za posjetu kul destinacije je pozitivno povezana sa autentičnošću destinacije. Takođe, percipirani društveni povratak pozitivno je povezan i sa namjerom posjete i sa spremnošću da se plati premium cijena. Društveni povratak destinacije pozitivno posreduje vezu između životopisnosti destinacije i namjere da se posjeti destinacija. Ovi rezultati se dalje tumače kako bi ih marketinški menadžeri mogli iskoristiti.



## **KEYWORDS**

Destination coolnes,

Perceived Social Return,

Visit Intention,

Willingness to Pay a Premium Price, and

Conspicuous Consumption.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Research problem

Despite the relevance of coolness for destinations, its potential effect on travellers' decision-making, and its academic and practical worth, destination coolness study is scarce (Kock, 2021). Research on destination coolness has been scarce because of its intuitive but elusive nature. Although the general public can easily tell whether something is cool or not (i.e., easy to assess), researchers have a hard time explaining what coolness is and where it comes from (i.e., hard to define) (Kock, 2021; Rahman, 2013). Consequently, our understanding of destination coolness is archetypal, which precludes us from doing theoretical and practical research (Kock, 2021).

Over the last few decades, tourism research has been focused on the symbolic meaning of destinations as a factor affecting the travellers' destination choice process, such as a destination's social return (Boley, Jordan, Kline, and Knollenberg, 2018), ethnocentric biases (Kock, Josiassen, Assaf, Karpen, and Farrelly, 2019), or destination personality (Ekinci and Hosany, 2006). These studies show that symbolic destination factors complement functional ones (e.g., Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Kock, Josiassen, and Assaf, 2016). Anchored in the tourism research stream, which focuses on the symbolic destination factors, the current study explores how destination coolness shapes tourist behaviour (willingness to visit and willingness to pay). Since travelling has long been a conspicuous form of consumption (Boley et al., 2018), the present study attempts to investigate the role of the symbolic value of travel consumption (i.e., social return) in the relationship between destination coolness and tourist behaviour (willingness to visit a destination and willingness to pay a premium price).

The primary constructs of interest in the master thesis are destination coolness, social return, willingness to visit, and willingness to pay a premium price. The mentioned constructs of interest are described below.

- Destination coolness has four main dimensions. According to Kock (2021), cool destinations are perceived by tourists as authentic, rebellious, original, and vibrant.
- Social return refers to "the amount of positive social feedback that one's social media posts will generate" (Boley et al., 2018, p.120). It is generally accepted that a social media post will create a greater amount of social media return in the form of an enhanced number of 'likes,' 'comments,' and 'sharing' when it is more positively received by the target audience. Because of this, the person who posted it will ultimately have a higher

social standing inside their own social circle. Simply put, social media has created a channel for peer groups to manicure their social images to successfully exhibit the "cultural capital" necessary to climb the social ladder properly (Boley et al., 2018). According to Woodside and Lysonski (1989), the social return that tourists get from their various travel experiences may play a significant role in creating their destination selection set and, ultimately, in their choice of whether or not to visit a particular place. Thus, social returns can be viewed as conspicuous signals people use to elevate their social standing (Kock, 2021). Previous research suggests that the coolness of a destination is positively related to the perceived social return, indicating that posting photos of a destination that is perceived as cool yields a high social return (Kock, 2021).

- Willingness to visit refers to a person's desire or intention to travel to a specific destination. Personal and informational sources contribute to a person's travel intention. Sources of information, such as the news from mainstream and social media, have a significant role in constructing the perception of a destination and impact the person's willingness to visit that destination (Filieri et al., 2021).
- Willingness to pay a premium price refers to "the highest price level at which the consumer is willing to pay for the goods or services" (Homburg et al., 2005, p. 84). Previous research suggests that brand equity (Dwivedi et al., 2018), place of origin, and brand love lead to the premium pricing of a product/service (Santos & Schlesinger, 2021). Moreover, it has been established that premium pricing fits better within the hedonic product categories than utilitarian ones. Since travelling to a cool destination generates positive feelings, it can be expected that the willingness to pay a premium price is higher for cool destinations than for non-cool ones.

## **1.2. Research aims**

Based on the presented research problem, the main research aims of this master thesis are as follows:

- Provide a state-of-the-art literature review on the concept of perceived coolness of a destination, its antecedents, and consequences;
- Propose and test a conceptual model which examines the impact of the perceived destination coolness on social return, willingness to visit a cool destination, and willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination; and
- Recommend effective branding and marketing strategies for developing cool destinations.

### **1.3. Research hypotheses**

According to the objectives of the research, it is possible to define the hypotheses of the research that need to be tested, and those are:

H1a: Destination coolness is positively related to the perceived social return of a destination.

H1b: Destination coolness is positively related to the intention to visit the cool destination.

H1c: Destination coolness is positively related to the willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination.

H2a: Perceived social return from one's travel experience in cool destination will have a positive and significant relationship with one's intention to visit the cool destination.

H2b: Perceived social return from one's travel experience in cool destination will have a positive and significant relationship with one's willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination.

H3a: Perceived social return mediates the relationship between the destination's coolness and the intention to visit a cool destination.

H3b: Perceived social return mediates the relationship between the destination's coolness and willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination.

### **1.4. Research methodology**

This master thesis consists of a theoretical and a research part. The theoretical part focuses on the literature review and research conducted by other authors related to the subject matter. The second part contains the results of empirical research conducted among travellers. The primary data was collected structured online survey with closed-ended questions. Constructs of interest were measured by scales developed and validated in the previous research:

- Destination Coolness was measured by a multi-dimensional reliable, valid and parsimonious coolness scale developed by Kock (2021). The scale includes 25 items designed to measure five facets of destination coolness: authentic, original, rebellious, symbolic, and vibrant.
- The Social Return Scale - SRS was used to capture the perceived social return from travelling to a destination (Boley et al., 2018). Scale items asked respondents to consider a peer who has posted a travel experience on social media and to evaluate the social value the post provides the poster. As Boyle et al. (2018) suggested, SRS can be used to assess the perceived social return from various types of online tourist photography, like selfies and other posts on Instagram or Facebook.
- The three 3-items were used to measure willingness to visit a destination, as suggested by Boley et al. (2018).
- Willingness to pay a premium price to visit a destination was measured by four items developed by Netemeyer et al. (2004).

At the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked, "Please name a city that you think is cool (or that comes closest to it). After that, respondents were informed to answer a set of questions with that city in mind. The collected data were analysed in the statistical program Smart PLS 4.

## **2. DESTINATION COOLNESS: TOURIST PERCEPTION LEADING TO DESTINATION CHOICE**

### **2.1. Concept and definition of perceived coolness**

Firstly, to be able to work on the research topic, it is crucial to understand what "cool" means and what influences something to be perceived as cool. Due to its nature, it is very hard to concretely and unanimously define what cool is. However, researchers do agree that "cool", on the whole, is regarded as a favourable and desirable quality (Sundar et al., 2014). To take a step back, the emergence of the term cool can be traced back to the 1920s, and since then, it has been dissected from various perspectives in a multitude of disciplines (Loureiro et al., 2022). For instance, some academics attribute cool as a concept that could be seen as a personal characteristic (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012), some scholars approach it as a marketing tool (Rahman and Cherrier, 2010; Rahman, 2013; Kerner and Pressman, 2007; Nancarrow and Nancarrow, 2007; Warren and Campbell, 2014; Warren et al., 2019), while others describe it as a developing aspiration for innovation (Holtzblatt, 2011; Sundar et al., 2014).

Since this master thesis is related to the marketing aspect of coolness, it is important to dissect the marketing perspective of cool to a greater extent. Therefore, in the marketing field, there are many different ways to define the concept of cool. Furthermore, the concept of "coolness" has been viewed as a multifaceted phenomenon in the marketing world. According to Southgate (2003), the term cool or coolness can be defined as a "currency all brands can profit from". In like manner, Gurrieri (2009) claims that coolness can be "a vehicle to increase market share".

Additionally, Grossman (2003) goes into length by stating that coolness is evolving into the most valuable natural asset. He explains that it is an intangible component that can transform or dramatically increase the value of a certain brand of an otherwise interchangeable commodity. In order to prove his point, Grossman (2003) gives an example of how differently two brands of sneakers, movies, or jeans can be viewed by consumers based on how cool they are perceived.

Naturally, when marketing professionals discovered that, in the words of Belk et al. (2010), "coolness is an enviable quality that few people possess, but many pursue", they made an effort to commodify this phenomenon. In other words, they know that people desire to be cool or perceived as such and envy those who are; thus, they could bottle it up and sell it (Belk, 2011).



Now that the marketing aspect is covered let us circle back to how coolness is defined within the literature. According to some researchers, such as Frank (1997) and Pountain and Robbins (2000), coolness is not something people have to ponder very much since it is something people notice and recognize instantly based on what is witnessed inside that moment in time. This is suitable for individuals and things and is founded on an intuitive assessment. By the same token, Sundar et al. (2014) recognize coolness as a "multi-dimensional user-based judgment". Others view the term "cool" as slang for something outstanding, exceptional, socially proficient, and displaying remarkable aptitude that engages one's emotions (Belk et al., 2010). Additionally, Van den Bergh and Behrer (2016) suggest that the concept of coolness has a subjective meaning and denotes acceptance or approval. Furthermore, it is essential to note that some researchers find that "cool" is usually used to describe practically any entity, including things, people, ideas and/or phenomena (Belk et al., 2010; Peng et al., 2016). Although many scholars and professionals are interested in the concept of coolness, no exact definition has yet been established (Warren and Campbell, 2014). According to Van den Bergh and Behrer (2016), this is due to the fragmentation of trends and mass media.

Nevertheless, the lack of a general definition of coolness does not prevent researchers from finding explanations for the phenomena. As an illustration, Anik et al. (2017) created a conceptual model based on four characteristics to demonstrate what could make something cool. The mentioned four characteristics are autonomy, attitude, authenticity and association. On the other hand, Warren and Campbell (2014) did not develop a conceptual model; however, they did suggest four identifying characteristics of coolness in literature. Firstly, they suggest that something or someone being cool is a socially constructed term. Even though psychology research mainly focuses on people's judgments of coolness (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012), personal perceptions of coolness are influenced by cultural norms, according to the broad academic debate (Frank, 1998). Since perceptions of oneself and others are not constant, different social contexts lead to different interpretations of what it means to be cool (Sundar et al., 2014). Secondly, they propose that someone or something being cool is a positive quality. Supporting this claim, Warren et al. (2019) indicated that people usually connect being cool with generally desirable attributes. Moreover, based on their research, exceptional, aesthetically pleasing, original, subcultural, energetic, genuine, rebellious, high status, iconic and popular brands may become cooler. The third characteristic is that something or someone being cool is subjective and dynamic. Moreover, they add that time and culture significantly impact how cool is established. Lastly, the decision of what is cool or not is appropriately autonomous. Some researchers agree with this suggestion, such as Ferguson (2011). He believes that among Generation Y, personal values rather than group values drive the transference of brand products to an individual. However, other researchers believe that the sociological phenomenon of cool is only relevant if their peer group considers something or someone to be so (Belk et al., 2010; Gurrieri, 2009; Rahman, 2013).

Moving along, researchers go a step further and explore the concept of perceived coolness. Sundar et al. (2014) are the ones that have presented the idea of perceived coolness, including the three variables that contribute to it: attractiveness, subcultural appeal, and originality. Since Saundar et al. (2014) proposed the conceptualization of perceived coolness, many other scholars have researched this topic and expanded their conclusions. Examples of other scholars studying the impact of perceived coolness would be Liu and Mattila (2019), who explored how perceived coolness affects customer satisfaction. Furthermore, Chen and Chou (2019) explained how perceived coolness influences tourist satisfaction. Warren and Campbell (2014) did the same for brand preference and Im et al. (2015) for perceived value.

Besides declaring that perceived coolness can influence perceived value, Im et al. (2015) also stated that it could increase both hedonistic and utilitarian value. It is worth mentioning that Kim and Park (2019) accompanied this assertion. In order to understand these applications, a definition of what hedonistic values should be provided. Therefore, a service's hedonic value is the overall assessment of pleasure, amusement or playfulness accompanying its utilitarian (functional) values (Yoo et al., 2014). Higher hedonic value is associated with products with novel, interesting, and "cool" attributes, such as originality and trendiness, that are enticing and trendy (Im et al., 2015; Kim and Park, 2019). Moreover, Kim and Park. (2019) additionally emphasized that perceived coolness affects how hedonic value is perceived. In other words, being cool makes people happy.

Since the way people perceive themselves and others is not always constant, it is natural that perceptions of coolness might change depending on the social setting. Grossman (2007) and Petrucci and Head (2006) elaborated on this idea of being cool as a developing notion that shifts daily within everyday use. Expanding on this, Sundar et al. (2014) concluded that considering something or someone being cool is a social construct; the impression of cool is temporally interchangeable. Elseways, neither uncool nor cool products or services would ever be able to reverse their status. However, they emphasize that even though the perceptions of something or someone being cool can change at any given time, the concept of cool itself does not alter. They illustrate this with an example of digital devices and services. Digital devices and services, such as Playstation, Kindle, or World of Warcraft, could be considered cool today; however, the same may not be applicable tomorrow. Even though this change would not alter the conceptualization of cool. The authors conclude that "coolness as a concept is stable, but the perception of coolness in a given object is not" (Sunder et al., 2014, p. 170).

In this part of the thesis, one more concept associated with perceived coolness has to be defined, and that would be brand coolness. Later on, this master thesis will aim to analyse tourist behaviour; therefore, it will need to look into the hospitality business. Since hospitality is a service-based industry, service brand coolness should also be considered while exploring perceived coolness.

To begin with, it ought to be recognized that perceived coolness and brand coolness are two separate things. Authors such as Chen et al. (2021), particularize that brand coolness measurement approaches are frequently reflective rather than formative since they are representations of the latent idea of coolness rather than formative measures which characterize it. Furthermore, service brand coolness is a personal and changeable description since it is a social construct, and it, thus, suggests that what constitutes a service brand to be cool is how popular it is within its target audience (Warren et al., 2019). This implies that cool service brands can shift in attractiveness over time and among customers (Belk et al., 2010).

Furthermore, brand coolness is a crucial characteristic that helps customers distinguish between brands that matter and those that do not exist across industries. The first conceptualizations of brand coolness were centred on how consumers derive value from the interpretations of coolness that are typically connected with branded goods (Loureiro et al., 2020). It seems obvious that being a brand that is regarded as cool has its benefits. Therefore, Sundar et al. (2014) state that being perceived as such might lead to a greater value than competitors. Moreover, many studies on the perception of brand coolness found a positive impact of perceived brand coolness on consumer's self-brand connection, willingness to pay more, brand love, desire to buy products, intentions and attitudes (Li et al., 2021; Loureiro et al., 2020; Tiwari et al., 2021; Warren et al., 2019).

However, how is brand coolness defined? This master thesis will follow the definition proposed by Jiménez-Barreto et al. (2022). They grasped the four underlying assumptions that shape general perceptions of a brand's coolness. The first underlying assumption is that a service brand's coolness is a socially constructed perception. Warren et al. (2019) affirm this with their statement that a service brand is cool only to the extent that its target audience thinks it is. The second one states that brand coolness is a dynamic and individualized characteristic. As mentioned before, this implies that consumer perceptions of service brands that are considered cool can alter over time and audiences (Belk et al., 2010). The third is that a cool service brand might well be better known than its rivals in terms of value (Sundar et al., 2014). Lastly, employees, customers, and products/services all share a symbolic and social area of acknowledgement known as brand coolness. In like manner, throughout service contacts, users of cool service brands ought to be able to transmit the brands' figurative worth to their self-concepts around other customers and brand staff (Grove and Fisk, 1992). Jiménez-Barreto et al. (2022) considered all of these factors and defined service brand coolness as a favourable and culturally manufactured characteristic of businesses that provide exceptional consumer experiences in controlled environments. They gave examples of brands such as cultural brands, entertainment brands, and, most notably for this thesis, hospitality brands.

Finally, brand coolness is determined by a subjective standard solely relying on how customers view brands. Due to this fact, Pountain and Robins (2000) warn that because

customer brand evaluations can affect how cool a company is perceived, coolness is a dynamic phenomenon that is difficult to characterize and explore objectively. Moreover, academics and marketers interested in this topic should also consider the dichotomy in which specialized or niche and mass brands could be seen as cool. Warren et al. (2019) describe this as a phenomenon in which mass brands that are considered cool have an internationally recognized greater value, serving as the benchmark for a certain industry. In contrast, niche brands are considered cool when a subculture perceives and accepts them as autonomous feedback to standardization.

## **2.2. Perceived coolness in tourism**

In the past decade, globalization has caused the tourism industry to be one of the largest expanding sectors worldwide (Wang and Wang, 2018). Hence, professionals in the industry must strategize how to attract all of these tourists to their particular destination instead of others. Naturally, they first have to understand the tourists' perspective and how to boost their emotional experience. One way of boosting the emotional experience would be utilizing the concept of cool, since it has emerged as one of the phrases people frequently use today to describe their travel-related experiences. Chen et al. (2021) go even a step further and propose that the concept of perceived coolness is the base of any tourist experience of some destination.

After understanding the mentioned above, it is helpful to understand what makes cool destinations. Most people in the tourism sector instinctively know that if their business is in a destination perceived as cool, it should work to their advantage. According to Kock (2021), travellers adore 'cool' places and yearn to visit them, presumably because such visits make their social media profiles more attractive. Cool places attract people in ways that are hard to explain using current management techniques, especially when one city becomes cool overnight while another, previously considered cool, loses its coolness. As a result, being cool can be a unique advantage of a city or even a country. Not only do visitors choose to vacation in cool cities, but students, employees, and businesses also appear to be lured to them. Likewise, 'uncool' places are perceived as dull and hence suffer from attracting visitors.

The same could be applied to the hotel business in the tourism industry. Chen et al. (2021) explored the dynamic and context-specific nature of brand coolness in the hospitality sector. In particular, they were interested in exploring consumer perception of cool hotel brands across four generational cohorts (Gen X, Millennials, Gen Z, and Baby Boomers). They found that all generations enjoy hotel brands that are perceived to be cool. However, as expected, members of different generations perceived different elements of hotel brands as cool. For instance, hotel technology (e.g. virtual reality devices) can be considered cool for Gen Z, but

may not seem cool to Baby Boomers, while historical aspects of the hotel might be cool for Baby Boomers but not for younger generations (Chen et al., 2021).

This master thesis will follow the conceptualization of perceived coolness proposed by Kock (2021). According to Kock (2021), a destination coolness has five main dimensions, meaning cool destinations are perceived by tourists as authentic, rebellious, original, symbolic and vibrant. However, before this thesis goes deeper into that topic, it would be wise to revise on what did Kock (2021) base his conceptualizations of a cool destination.

Essentially, he used the definition of coolness from Warren and Campbell (2014) to guide him through the journey. For reference, the definition reads: "Coolness is a subjective and dynamic, socially constructed positive trait attributed to cultural objects inferred to be appropriately autonomous". Evidently, it is possible to derive five significant aspects of coolness from the definition, which would consist of something being subjective, dynamic, socially constructed, positive and autonomous. Firstly, he touched on the topic of subjectivity. Therefore, perceived coolness is operated on the individual level, meaning, a city one person deems as cool might not be cool at all to another one. Secondly, considering what is cool in the present might not even be cool in the near future, or vice versa, it is concluded that coolness is dynamic. For instance, it may be cool for tourists to go on holiday to Santorini in the summer of 2022, but it might not be the same case just a year later. Thirdly, since coolness is a social construct, it entails that different people will perceive different things to be cool, depending on which smaller or larger social reference groups they belong to. Thereupon, a broader segment of the population may view the city of New York as cool, while in contrast, some subcultures, such as electronic music lovers, may view Detroit as cool. Fourthly, people use the word cool to depict something in a positive manner. In like manner, when compared to other, more ambiguous adjectives that travellers use to characterize destinations, such as inexpensive or touristy, the adjective cool may be deemed unambiguously good (Kock et al., 2016). Lastly, being independent and unique rather than conforming to and relying on the judgments and aspirations of others is what it signifies to be cool.

After examining the definition of coolness, this thesis will circle back to the main dimensions of coolness. Kock (2021) explains that tourists perceive cool destinations as authentic, rebellious, original, symbolic and vibrant. However, what this means will be explored more in the following paragraphs.

Correspondingly to Kock's (2021) interpretation, previous research on coolness confirms the connection between authenticity and coolness (Nancarrow et al., 2003). In his research, Kock discusses what authenticity would represent to tourists when they say that a cool city is authentic. Respondents commonly identified authentic cool cities as being "non-artificial," "keeping true to themselves", and "historically grown" in the interviews he

conducted. On the other hand, they characterized cities that are uncool as artificial or emulating actual cool cities. Moreover, according to the participants, cool cities are the ones that act in accordance with their values and do not try to be something that the city is not. Understanding this concept is valuable since predominately research in the tourist sector focused on the authenticity of the tourist experience (Farrelly, Kock and Josiassen 2019; Cohen and Cohen, 2012) and not based on how authentic a place is perceived to be. Viewing authenticity as a distinctive quality of a cool city is important.

Rebelliousness was a quality further mentioned by respondents when describing cool cities. Similarly to the previous dimension, existing studies validated a link between rebellion and autonomy with coolness (Connor, 1995; Pountain and Robins, 2000). Likewise, according to Kock's research, rebellious cities stray from the conventional, choose not to follow the rules and are viewed as revolutionary in some sense. The respondents derived these conclusions from the acts or attitudes of the city, historical events or well-known citizens. Interestingly, Kock (2021) argues that being authentic and being rebellious are, in essence, different constructs because a city can uphold its principles and be true to itself without necessarily acting rebelliously. On the other hand, a city can be deemed authentic while also being rebellious. The author concluded that a city being authentic and rebellious might correlate in some situations but not in others.

Moving onto the dimension of originality, Kock discovered that individuals that participated in his research frequently connected particular culturally distinctive movements with cool cities. To illustrate his point, he gave the example of Liverpool, famous for its football club, or New Orleans, famous for Jazz. These cities have a particular subculture that originates from them, and, therefore, they are considered cool by people. Although the coolness of these cities is derived from sub-cultural values, it does not negatively impact the perception of them being original. Moreover, the subcultural value of these cities created the distinctive, difficult-to-replicate aspect of a city's coolness. Therefore, considering a city to be the birthplace of a subculture or cultural movement gives it originality and individuality, providing perceptions of coolness (Kock, 2021).

However, not to mix up the meanings, being authentic and being original are substantially distinct concepts, although they do have similarities because they can influence one another in both directions (Kock, 2021). Likewise, cool cities can be perceived as symbols representing something individuals appreciate and associate with it. This line of reasoning can be connected to previous research in marketing, which states that a psychological object having a symbolic connotation is very important for brands (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Morhart et al., 2015). According to Kock (2021), cool cities are frequently regarded as symbols of particular beliefs, organizations, memories, historical occurrences, identities or views of the world. For instance, New York City represents, for many, a place of opportunity and success;

Scandinavian cities were described as places that symbolize sustainability. Although symbolism is a fundamentally unique source of coolness, seeing cities as symbols can overlap with other dimensions, such as originality. The idea is that a destination could be cool due to a symbolic event that happened, but this event can also make the destination original.

The last dimension that contributes to a city being perceived as cool is vibrance. Thus, describing a city as alive, dynamic or energetic indicates that the city in question is vibrant. Places that exude energy and noise are perceived as cool. Destinations such as London or New York City are the most straightforward examples to demonstrate this point.

Overall, the referenced research is useful for identifying what makes a cool city but is also insightful in another aspect. Kock's (2021) work provides evidence that there are distinctions between what makes a city cool and what makes cool individuals or cool companies, emphasizing the necessity for creating a coolness metric specifically for the tourism industry. Three arguments were provided to support the development of tourism-specific coolness measures:

- Glamorousness and exclusiveness are not necessary conditions for destination coolness (Kock, 2021). Although prior studies demonstrated that customers think glamorous brands are cool (Warren et al., 2019), the same cannot be said for cities. Kock (2021) found that the participants did not perceive a cool city as glamorous or exclusive. Moreover, they mentioned some not glamorous cities as cool, such as Belfast or Barcelona, while glamorous cities, such as Monaco, were viewed as uncool.
- Aesthetic appeal is not a sufficient condition for destination coolness. Kock (2021) argues that aesthetic appeal alone, such as that provided by architecture, is insufficient to qualify a city as cool. Consequently, the absence of the mentioned would not impact the perceived coolness of a city. Interestingly, according to research on what makes brands cool, having an aesthetic appeal to its consumers is very important (Warren et al., 2019).
- Cool cities are not always the ones that are perceived as being young or new. For instance, Dubai was found to be an uncool city because it is new (Kock, 2021).

### **2.3. Tourist decision-making process**

In today's globally connected world, travellers have many options when deciding where to go on their next vacation. In light of this fact, tourist destinations have a unique opportunity to draw more tourists' attention. On the other hand, increasing tourist flow also increases intense

competition for travellers among destinations. Tourism research has responded by paying close attention to how travellers select their upcoming vacation spot. Naturally, it is important to understand how tourists think to attract them to the desired destination.

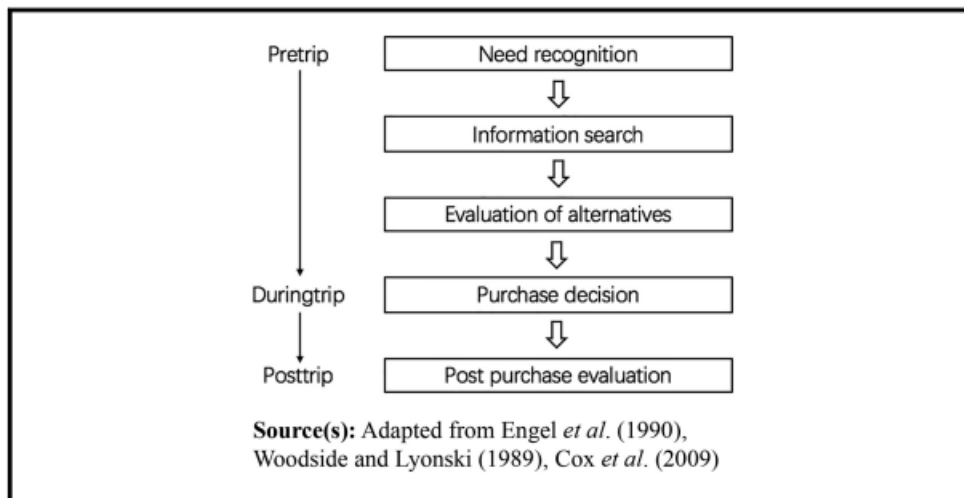
Most approaches are predicated on the idea that tourists' associations with a particular destination lead them to make decisions based on objective and practical destination quality criteria. These ideas are supported by research that is significantly featured in ideas behind destination imagery and image, which contributes a lot to research in the tourism sector, as well as in practice. (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Kock et al., 2016). Correspondingly, some other studies show that the symbolic qualities and sociocultural connotations attached to a destination impact visitors' choice of travel destination (Ekinici et al., 2013; Moran et al., 2018).

Additionally, according to Sirakaya and Woodside (2005), the literature indicates that travellers scale down their options among potential tourist destinations in a funnel-like fashion. Correspondingly, the decision-making process can be divided into a number of clearly defined stages. The first stage would be the acknowledgement that a choice needs to be made. Therefore, tourists have to recognise that they have to decide where to go. Furthermore, they will have to articulate what their goals and objectives would be. It is important for tourists to know what they want from their trip. The range of options is abundant. Subsequently, tourists will have a collection of destinations and their alternatives from which they will have to choose. Since this is not an easy decision to make, they will move on to the next stage.

The mentioned would be looking up information regarding the characteristics of the options that they are considering for their trip. The fifth stage would be when tourists have to make the final assessment or selection from a range of options they have selected for themselves. Thereupon, the only thing left is to actually act on their decision, in other words, actually go and experience the travel destination that they have predetermined. The last stage of this process would be providing feedback.



Figure 1. Travel planning process



Source: Yuan *et al.* 2022, page 4

As demonstrated, psychological or internal factors impact the decision-making process of a person wanting to travel. These factors can be presented in the form of attitudes, values, intentions and ambition. Likewise, non-psychological or external variables have a similar impact on the decision-making process, and they manifest in the forms such as time, marketing mix, and pull factors.

Two elements inspire individuals to travel: "push" and "pull" factors. The "push" factors are those factors that motivate a person to leave his or her home and go someplace else. The "pull" factors draw a person to a place because of its location/region and perceived attractiveness. According to Lam and Hsu (2006), people travel because they are pushed by internal motives as well as pulled by external factors of a destination. In the context of the present study, the coolness of the destination can be considered a pull factor that lures a person to a destination.

Similarly, when a tourist's perception of themselves aligns with that of a destination, then individuals are more likely to travel there (Sirgy and Su, 2000). Evidently, since this topic is significant in the tourism industry, many studies have been done to explore this phenomenon. According to research done by several authors such as Beerli *et al.* (2007), Correia *et al.* (2016), as well as, Lo and McKercher (2015) it is evident that tourists are more inclined to select a destination that complements the way they view themselves or an idealized version of themselves. The self-concept is very interesting from the marketing perspective since this behaviour can be connected with social media and similar self-expression platforms. Hence, self-concept is important in any setting, but it is particularly important in the tourist industry because the Internet offers a platform for the quick and obvious sharing of vacation photos that

supports impression management (Lo and McKercher, 2015; Lyu, 2016). Overall, tourists might use social media to showcase their status by portraying an idealized picture of themselves or to simply share aspects of their personalities by engaging with travel brands (Correia et al., 2016; Lo and McKercher, 2015, Taylor, 2020).

In like manner, as a type of symbolic consumption, travellers could also lean on a presentation of their experience (Boley and Woosnam, 2020). Studies done by Boley et al. (2018 4), Ekinici et al. (2013), and Jordan et al. (2018) demonstrate that tourists' decision-making is significantly influenced by symbolic consumption. Gazley and Watling (2015) added that when deciding which destination to travel to, besides considering the symbolic nature, tourists also look at the functional value. Therefore, people look at factors such as relaxing or having fun and whether the destination matches their self-image.

Moreover, to foster tourist satisfaction, it is crucial to concentrate on how one's self-image aligns with the branding of tourist sites, especially when aiming to target particular market segments (Chon, 1992). This can be evident in the fact that travel destinations where tourists connect with their self-image are more likely to experience brand loyalty (Ekinici et al., 2013).

Interestingly, this can be connected with the concepts of experience and transformational economy. Beall et al. (2020), argue that the experience economy might be slowly transitioning into a transformational economy. The experience economy is when high-quality services are so widely available that businesses are no longer able to differentiate themselves just by the quality of their products. Therefore, they rely on distinctive experiences to generate demand (Oh et al., 2007). From the consumer perspective, a transformational economy allows people/tourists to look for travel experiences that let them represent a part of themselves (Boley and Woosnam, 2020).

However, besides knowing what attracts tourists to a particular destination, it is also significant to understand what makes them return to a place they have visited already. Numerous studies, such as those of Brocato et al. (2015), Chen and Phou (2013) and Ekinici et al. (2013), showcase that one crucial factor that determines whether a place can remain sustainable is destination loyalty. According to Chen et al. (2016), one significant result of destination consumption through the influence of tourist satisfaction and experience has commonly been characterized as destination loyalty.

This kind of loyalty can be viewed through two perspectives: attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. Firstly, in the realm of tourism, attitudinal loyalty refers to a traveller's positive impression of a certain location. Moreover, attitudinal loyalty is typically operationalized as behavioural intention, which is assessed by the likelihood of returning and the likelihood of

recommending (Chen and Phou, 2013). Secondly, in the realm of tourism, behavioural loyalty is attributed to a repeat visit to a certain destination. However, destination loyalty cannot be accurately measured in practice using behavioural loyalty. This is due to the fact that tourists are not often likely going to revisit the same destination in a short amount of time (Chen and Phou, 2013). Regarding factors that drive tourists' revisit intention, Munawar et al. (2021) argue that several factors, including destination image, motivation, price promotion, destination personality, trust and tourist involvement, are important antecedents of tourists' revisit intention.

#### **2.4. The relationship between perceived coolness and tourist decision-making**

To begin with, the level of satisfaction among tourists has a significant impact on their decision to travel, how much they spend while there, how attached they are to their destination, and how loyal they are (Chen et al., 2016). In order to clarify what satisfaction would be, the definition that Oliver (1980) suggested will be used. It states that the apparent difference between service expectations and its delivery is referred to as satisfaction. Henceforth, in order to determine traveller satisfaction, a tourist's assessment of the difference between expectations prior to departure and experiences afterwards is used.

Ali et al. (2016) demonstrated that tourists' happy memories of their creative experiences are positively correlated with satisfaction regarding them and devoted behaviours such as returning and/or recommending the place they visited. In like manner, Kim (2017) indicated that providing memorable experiences is among the approaches to enhance visitor satisfaction.

Moreover, Chen and Chou (2019) found that increasing tourists' perceptions of the coolness of a destination will increase tourist satisfaction. By the same token, the perceived coolness of a destination can also increase their place attachment and their intention to revisit and enthusiasm to recommend it to other people. Other researchers such as Sangpikul et al. (2017), Bigne et al. (2005) and Chen et al. (2016) granted their interpretation that this topic leads to a lot of attention due to the fact that visitor satisfaction has been shown to increase intention to return, destination loyalty, place attachment and word-of-mouth.

Other authors, such as Munawar et al. (2021), also found that the impact of perceived coolness on tourists' intention to revisit a place is both positive and significant. In other words, visitors are more likely to plan a return trip when their perception of coolness is higher. More examples of literature that support the notion that perceived coolness affects loyalty in the sense of intention to revisit and the willingness to recommend the destination to others is Runyan et

al. (2013). Loureiro and Bunaco (2021) showed that the same conclusions can also be applied to creative tourism. Furthermore, Kock (2021) finds that if a city is perceived to be cool by tourists, they will connect with the city more, and this can predict perceived social return. A review of the recent studies exploring the role of perceived coolness in tourism research is presented in the table below.

*Table 1. Review of studies exploring perceived coolness in tourism research*

Studies	Sample	Main findings
Jamshidi et al. (2021)	483 international tourists visiting Shiraz (Iran)	The added value of social media destination information and the virtual presence of social media destination information impact the perceived coolness. Perceived coolness is positively related to the memorable tourism experience.
Kock (2021)	793 US respondents recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk	Perceived coolness includes four dimensions (authentic, rebellious, original and vibrant), and it is an important driver of attitudinal and behavioural phenomena, such as intention and actual visit behaviour, a destination's social return and destination-self connection.
Loureiro and Buanco (2021)	308 UK adult frequent visitors of museums	Atmospheric cues (staff, design, lighting, and learning) are positively associated with perceived museum coolness. The perceived museum coolness positively affects the passionate desire to visit a museum.
Munawar et al. (2021)	96 tourists visiting rative tourism sites in Indonesia	Perceived coolness and destination uniqueness are positively related to revisit intention. However, the tourist experience does not have a positive and significant impact on revisit intention.
Ridhani and Roostika (2020)	255 tourists visiting heritage sites in Indonesia	Identification with a destination and attractiveness of a destination are positively related to a perceived coolness of a destination. Perceived coolness of a destination only indirectly, via tourist satisfaction and place attachment, impacts destination loyalty.

Chen and Chou (2019)	281 Generation Y tourists visiting popular sites in Taiwan	The uniqueness of a creative tourism destination, identification with a creative tourism destination, and attractiveness of a creative tourism destination are positively related to tourists' perceived coolness. Satisfaction and place attachment have a mediating role in the perceived coolness-destination loyalty relationship.
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*Source: Author's research*

Evidently, scholars most likely agree that it is preferable to be perceived as cool. However, now, there is a lot of empirical evidence showing that establishing a cool destination, in fact, does pay off, and it is another crucial realization for people in the tourism industry. Researcher Kock (2021), explored this idea and discovered that coolness is not merely a secondary "nice to have" thing but rather, coolness is likely to improve a destination's performance. They explained that this is due to the fact that coolness is connected to greater rates of visits, recommendations and willingness to pay. Additionally, a city being regarded as cool could be a specific unique asset that other cities would find challenging to replicate. They conclude with the notion that marketing managers should look at the evidence provided and figure out how to market their destination as cool.

Correspondingly, tourists are seeking out experiences that they could show to other people online or offline. Litvin et al. (2018) suggest that since a good online presence and influence play pivotal roles in the hospitality industry, industry professionals have to recognize what determines consumers' perceptions of coolness. For instance, customers frequently post pictures of cool restaurants on social media to market themselves to others and look cool (Apaolaza et al., 2021). Moreover, people are more eager to discuss their prior experiences and make new ones due to the pandemic emergency in 2020 and the lockdown period (ICOM, 2020). Utilizing this and the cool factor could be the answer to increasing the number of visitors to a destination.

In addition, Chen and Chou (2019) examine the impact of perceived coolness on selecting destinations for creative tourism. By taking an active role in the programs and experiences offered by the destination they are travelling to, travellers can expand their creative potential (Tan et al., 2013). With this in mind, tourists can seek out engaging experiences to better understand who they are and develop more aspects of their personality. This would eventually lead to some form of self-realization and, therefore, they would connect this experience to the destination they were at, increasing the perceived coolness of the destination.

Thus, perceptions of coolness affect visitor satisfaction and destination connection (Loureiro et al., 2020).

Professionals in the hospitality industry should make an effort to understand the destination connection or place attachment since it is a meaningful emotional connection formed between an individual and a location as a result of their own experiences gained from visiting a destination (Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001). Chen et al. (2016) argue that an individual's emotional connection to a particular location is a compilation of their personal experiences, which are influenced by both physical and social elements on their visit. Having these definitions in mind, it is evident that perceived coolness will have some effect on tourist place attachment. Chen and Chou (2019) suggested that increasing visitor perception of coolness may increase a tourist's attachment to a place. Building off that, Ridhani and Roostika (2020) found in their research that tourists' attachment to a location is favourably influenced by how cool they perceive the destination to be.

People working in and for the hospitality industry should care about place attachment because it contributes to destination loyalty (Valle et al. 2006, Sangpikul et al. 2017, Patwardhan et al. 2019). Besides place attachment, one key factor contributing to destination loyalty is traveler satisfaction from a trip (Chen and Phou, 2013). Destination loyalty is a desired quality to have, so it is important to know what affects it.

In summary, it is safe to conclude that perceived coolness positively impacts travel behaviour. According to Chen & Chou (2019), increasing tourists' perceptions of coolness will enhance their satisfaction, attachment to the destination and other positive behavioural intentions like returning and recommending.

### **3. SOCIAL RETURN: CONSPICUOUS SIGNALS LEADING TO DESTINATION CHOICE**

The second part of the literature review places emphasis on the conspicuous nature of consumption and explains conspicuous consumption in the context of tourism. Moreover, this chapter tries to figure out whether social media influences tourism and, if so, in which ways. Lastly, the social return and intent to travel will be connected with the previous two topics and paint a harmonious picture.

#### **3.1. The conspicuous nature of tourism**

Admittedly, certain products and services are acquired, used, and possessed by people to gain many things. This can be projected by strengthening their sense of identity, reflecting their emotions and thoughts, providing an impression of who they are and facilitating the kinds of social connections they want to have (Belk, 1988; Braun and Wicklund, 1989; Eastman et al., 1999).

Some authors even argue that consumptive behaviour is a need ingrained in human evolution. For instance, Li et al. (2012) found that consumerism is motivated by biological necessities. Subsequently, Griskevicius and Kenrick (2013) agreed with the notion that consumptive actions satisfy a number of fundamental evolutionary demands in their work. This thesis concentrates on the social standing of an individual.

Kenrick et al. (2010) solidify this assumption by suggesting that a number of human motivations, such as enhancing one's status, are psychological responses to difficulties humans have encountered throughout evolution. Consequently, the desire to attain status or social prestige by purchasing and consuming products and services is a significant factor affecting contemporary consumers (Goldsmith et al., 1996). Mason (2000) states that this societal development has been acknowledged and observable in the consumer market since the 1970s.

It has been acknowledged that the ambition to impress everyone else with one's capacity to pay a premium for prestige goods drives consumer behaviour. Thus, the consumer's decision to purchase a particular good or service is influenced by the consumer's desire to impress others and advance his or her social standing. The terms "conspicuous," "symbolic," "status," "brand" and "luxury consumption" have all been used to study this purchasing pattern in sociology, economy and studies of consumer psychology and behaviour (Im et al., 2015).

Two terms can be attributed to the mentioned kind of consumer behaviour. The first would be conspicuous consumption, and the second would be status consumption. However, generally, most researchers use the terms interchangeably. In literature, the terms "conspicuous consumption" and "status consumption" are frequently used as if they represent the same thing (Im et al., 2015). They, both, show the same set of consumer behaviours and objectives.

The first description of conspicuous consumption can be found in the works of Veblen (1899) as part of his Theory of the Leisure Class. Hence, in his work, he characterizes conspicuous consumption as a recreational activity in which a person flaunts their wealth to upstage others and build a reputation in society. From that point forward, other researchers just kept building on this phenomenon that is displayed in consumer behaviour.

However, at the time, it was a groundbreaking claim. Thereupon, it was a strong assessment of the neoclassical theory of consumer behaviour, which held that all customer purchase decisions were made independently of other customers and to maximize functional utility (Leibenstein, 1950; Trigg, 2001). Besides defining conspicuous consumption, Veblen later added that with this kind of consumption, people seek to enhance their self-esteem and, ultimately, preserve or increase their social standing (Veblen, 1934). Regarding the social practices prevalent at the time and location of consumption, people would imitate the conspicuous conduct of those above them in the social hierarchy during this process (Trigg, 2001; Veblen, 1899). Building off this groundwork, other authors such as Packard (1959) also found that conspicuous consumption is a form of purchasing behaviour with which individuals buy a product or service to show off their higher position in society. Moreover, Mason (1981) and Braun & Wicklund (1989) demonstrated that conspicuous consumption is frequently used to describe utilizing products or services to communicate social status ambitions to other customers. Interestingly, conspicuous consumption is often accompanied by an extravagant wealth presentation (Mason, 1981). In other words, since individuals use conspicuous consumption to increase their social standing, it is only natural that they achieve their aspirations by publicly demonstrating their wealth and displaying affluence to everyone else (O'Cass and McEwen, 2004). Veblen (1934) suggested that these kinds of indulgent purchases are meant to magnify the ego of the purchaser as well. Bagwell and Bernheim (1996) have claimed that Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption is founded on the idea that people who demonstrate their wealth receive favourable treatment from their social connections and that this treatment relies on communicating their riches through price, quality or quantity.

Moreover, besides conspicuous consumption, there is product conspicuousness as well. According to Im et al. (2015), product conspicuousness would be the amount of public consumption, as opposed to private consumption, of a product. Therefore, it must be visible to others in order for it to perform its function. In like manner, Piron (2000) declared that



purchasing should be a social occasion observed by other purchasers to be considered conspicuous.

To conclude, a conspicuous customer's main goal is to impress everyone with extravagant wealth. They can display wealth by buying products such as cars, houses, and clothing, or services such as travelling to a tropical destination. Overall, products and services used and purchased publicly are more conspicuously consumed in comparison to products and services that are used or purchased in private.

However, there is more to conspicuous consumption. Therefore, when discussing conspicuous consumption, it is vital to be aware of two consumption elements.- product's or service's functional and s products and services' symbolic utility (value). Firstly, the functional utility of a product or service reflects the aspect that provides the inherent qualities that the consumer might seek from it (Leibenstein, 1950). On the other hand, the symbolic utility reflects the aspect that provides a tool consumers could use to demonstrate their social status to society (Hamilton and Tilman, 1983). Leibenstein (1950) described this occurrence as everything that is not connected with the actual inherent qualities of the product or service. For instance, these could be illustrated through the image or status that the purchase would provide to the buyer. Belk et al. (1982) described symbolic consumption in an interesting manner as "sharing information about oneself with others through the consumption of certain goods or services."

Furthermore, to add to this discussion, Hamilton and Tilman (1983) deliberated that both elements of consumption – functional and symbolic, are always present and influential in the process. Likewise, they mention Veblen's coherent arguments that products or services that will be purchased can be used as tools to attain desired goals and prestige markers. However, according to Boley et al. (2018), only the symbolic element of consumption can accommodate some kind of advantage over one's peers.

Since the symbolic element of conspicuous consumption is such a complex matter, it has gained attention from researchers. Due to this fact, understanding this concept goes deeper than compartmentalizing it to signal one's wealth to others. The first one to depart from this one-dimensional perspective was Leibenstein (1950), who introduced two distinct reasons for conspicuous consumption. Leibenstein notes two types of conspicuous consumption – the Bandwagon effect and the Snob effect.

"Bandwagon Effect," defined by Leibenstein (1950) is the degree to which the demand for a good or service is raised as a result of other people buying the same. With this new concept, Leibenstein differentiates from Veblen's explanation of conspicuous consumption in that the customer's purchases intend to show social inclusion rather than lavish riches. Thus, the

bandwagon effect implies that consumers want to be in the loop of what they should buy and display that they can afford it. Boley et al. (2018) further demonstrate that the bandwagon effect symbolizes people's aspirations to buy a product or service, aiming to be perceived as trendy or stylish and fit in with the social group they desire to belong.

"Snob Effect., described by Leibenstein (1950), is a situation when an individual's purchases are driven by the inclination of people to be exclusive, as well as to differentiate themselves, not by a desire for uniformity. These individuals want to distance themselves from the mainstream and what is attainable for everybody. It could be seen even as a form of elitism.

It is worth mentioning that in contrast to conspicuous consumption is inconspicuous consumption. This consumption is not driven purely by excessive wealth displays, as opposed to conspicuous consumption. According to Eckhardt et al. (2015), inconspicuous consumption is the usage of discreetly marked commodities that go unnoticed by most spectators but promote connection with individuals who possess the necessary cultural capital to interpret the discreet signals. He continues that this can be described as a "inward hedonistic turn", and people that experience it are only focused on impressing other elites rather than the general public. Moreover, for these people, the enjoyment comes more from consuming the good or service with other elite lovers rather than showing riches to everybody else. As an illustration, he gave examples of gourmet food enthusiasts and coffee connoisseurs.

Furthermore, according to Daloz (2013), the decreased need to squander money to demonstrate affluence is due to the more distinct boundaries between peer social groups. Hence, whenever class divisions are apparent, the attention on expressing oneself with money to the lower class is eliminated, and the attention shifts to one's own peer group.

Now that all of the main concepts of conspicuous consumption are defined, they will be analyzed through the lens of the tourism sector.

Many authors, such as Correia et al. (2016), Dimanche and Samdahl (1994) and Sirgy and Su (2000), agree that travelling has historically been a conspicuous type of consumption. They explain that travellers could utilize their adventures within their social circle. The examples they gave for such behaviour in history are events such as boat trips to other continents or the Grand Tour of Europe. Boley et al. (2018) mention that these conspicuous types of experiences are also evident in our modern society. For instance, they mention that this could be seen through people taking gap years to travel, having destination weddings or even ostentatious honeymoons.

After establishing that travel is a form of conspicuous consumption, it should also be mentioned that it can be in the form of symbolic consumption. According to Sirgy and Su

(2000), when a traveller uses a tourism brand or image to express a particular aspect of their personality or self-concept, this is symbolic tourism consumption. Likewise, Boley and Woosnam (2020) find that tourists may indeed lean on showing their travel experience as a sign of symbolic consumption. Furthermore, Sirgy and Su (2000) point out that when travellers' perception of themselves aligns with that of a place, they are much more likely to travel there. While referring to a tourist's self-concept or perceptions of oneself, they are applying the definition that it is the entirety of the person's opinions and emotions referencing him or herself as an object (Rosenberg, 1979).

By the same token, this concept is substantiated by studies that determined that travellers are more likely to select a destination that complements their desired self-image or self-image (Beerli et al., 2007; Lo and McKercher, 2015; Correia et al., 2016). Research done by Lo and McKercher (2015) and Lyu (2016) compliments these studies due to the fact that they found that self-concept is important in any setting, but it is particularly important in the tourist industry because the internet offers a platform for the quick and obvious sharing of vacation photos that support impression management. Therefore, social media provides travelers with a platform to advertise their status by portraying an idealized image of themselves or simply sharing aspects of their personalities through travel-related products or services (Correia et al., 2016).

Just like it was found that symbolic consumption comes into play in tourism, so does the snob effect. Thus, the snob effect in tourism can be seen as exceptional or unusual travel experiences that provide travellers sensation of prestige, elevating their status through a presumed elevation in social ranking and the expectation that other individuals will be impressed (Correia et al., 2016). This is feasible since tourist experiences are unique and exclusive, so only a select could undergo them and/or understand them.

The conspicuous consumption idea in tourism can characterize a traveler's urge to visit luxurious or prestigious locations in order to awe others as well as flaunt his or her wealth and position. Having the means to travel to a luxurious resort demonstrates one's financial success to others and elevates one's social status (Im et al., 2015). Interestingly, considering that the travellers have to decide where they will travel, conspicuous consumption could also be extended to touristic destination selections.

Therefore, a conspicuous destination is one where visitors feel like they are or could be seen and perceived by people of significance (Sirgy and Su, 2000). However, some tourists may find this occurrence more significant than others while deciding on a vacation destination. People who place a high priority on enhancing their social status and displaying it through purchasing and consuming goods and services are more inclined to travel to places that are more exclusive, visible and conspicuous. On the other hand, some tourists do not place such importance on going to a more conspicuous holiday location to impress others (Im et al., 2015).

On these grounds, it can be presumed that products and services consumed or utilized in public are more visible than those consumed privately. Thereupon, tourists that go on a lavish vacation at a popular destination will be more inclined to share their experience than those that go to a less glamorous or popular destination.

Hence, it can be concluded that travel destinations can be identified as conspicuous or inconspicuous. Alternatively, at least some destinations are more conspicuous or inconspicuous than others. According to Im et al. (2015), factors such as culture, place of origin, age, resident regions, income level, gender and other consumer social demographics are all factors that could influence individuals when classifying tourist destinations as conspicuous or inconspicuous.

However, while researching these concepts, Im et al. (2015) discovered that there is a third way a destination can be characterized. Besides a tourist destination being conspicuous and inconspicuous, it can be neutral as well. They came to this conclusion while doing their study in which they wanted to find what makes a city conspicuous or inconspicuous among their sample population. They categorized big and famous cities in the United States of America, such as New York City, Washington DC, Las Vegas, Los Angeles and Miami, as conspicuous destinations. On the other hand, cities such as Kansas City, Omaha, Branson, Boise and Fargo were indicated as inconspicuous destinations.

Predictably, their research participants confirmed their hypothesis. Hence, the majority of American metropolitan areas were classified as conspicuous, whereas lesser-known locations and smaller cities were viewed as inconspicuous. However, a new pattern emerged among cities that could not fit the standard categorisation of conspicuous or inconspicuous. The majority of these places were considered to be subordinate cities or suburbs of larger cities in their vicinity. Examples of such cities that they provided were Denver, Aspen, Orlando, Boston, Philadelphia, Key West, San Diego and South Padre Island. Due to the fact that these subordinate cities have a lot in common with both large, popular cities and smaller, lesser-known cities, many participants could view them as either conspicuous or inconspicuous. Furthermore, they explained that these kinds of cities were interesting in light of the fact that people had a conspicuous character to them since the participants knew them. On the contrary, these cities are modest enough for visitors to take pleasure in their stay there without appearing to overindulge. With this in mind, they came to the conclusion that neutral destinations exist. This finding reveals some confirmation that travellers evaluate destination conspicuousness on a variety of spectrums. In sum, the destination to where tourists visit might be classified as conspicuous, neutral or inconspicuous.

Knowing these findings, it is clear that marketers and managers in the tourism industry should be aware of what scale of conspicuousness their destination falls. When they know how tourists perceive their destinations, they can use those perceptions to their advantage and fully

maximize the strengths of the place. For instance, if visitors of conspicuous locations can discuss their trips with friends and acquaintances before and after the trip, they may be more satisfied with their experiences. Therefore, if a destination is targeting tourists that love to indulge in the conspicuous nature of consumption, they should provide events, scenery, or special locations that will be spectacular in order for their target audience to have a story to tell (flaunt) when they come back from their travel. On the other spectrum, if a destination's target audience is not interested in such activities, then the destination should concentrate on providing a pleasant experience for them in the way they would appreciate it, for example, dedicating themselves to being a place where tourists can have quiet and good quality time with their families.

Additionally, it would be beneficial to understand the dimensions of conspicuous consumption. According to Marcoux et al. (1997), there are five dimensions of conspicuous consumption: interpersonal mediation, materialistic hedonism, communication of belonging, status demonstration and ostentation. Firstly, interpersonal mediation reflects the impact of social relationships. Granted, this would be evident with travellers who are occupied with their social position and are more motivated to travel to places that can make them appear more respectable, valuable and popular to others. Secondly, materialistic hedonism represents enjoyable parts of consumption. Im et al. (2015) suggest that destinations can utilize this dimension by making their visitors feel unique and trendy. Thirdly, communication of belonging embodies connections that can be favourably or unfavourably regarding demographic, ethnicity, socioeconomic group and cultural group. Therefore, this can be seen with destinations that venues that give visitors a sense of community since other people in their social circles have also visited those places. The fourth dimension is status demonstration. Naturally, this dimension signals success, prestige and wealth among tourists. Lastly, the fifth dimension is ostentation. This dimension is related to goods and services that are expensive and well-known by other people in society. In the tourism aspect, this would be illustrated by going to a destination known for being luxurious and expensive.

### **3.2. The influence of social media on tourism**

Social media platforms have developed into powerful social tools for digital interactions. Social media platforms offer a communication canal through which travellers can participate in online travel communities, voice their opinions about destinations and cooperate among themselves. Lastly, they can be used to help create, expand, evaluate and discuss their travel experiences (Ayeh et al., 2013; Gretzel and Yoo, 2013; Leung et al., 2013; Sigala et al.,

2012). Today, social media is one of the most effective tools for online networking (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014) and is well integrated into people's lives.

In short, social media is a collection of Internet-based programs that support the production and sharing of user-generated content and build on the conceptual and technical principles of Web 2.0 (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). However, the definition of social media has generated much debate. The meaning of social media is constantly changing and expanding along with social media's usage. With this in mind, Cohen (2011) was on a mission to find an all-encompassing definition; hence, 30 different social media concepts were condensed. He identified some crucial characteristics, looked at different perspectives from these definitions, and concluded that social media are online platforms, applications, media and tools. Therefore, due to this nature, they rely on information technologies. Secondly, social media are peer-to-peer channels of communication that facilitate the collaboration, creation and exchange of interactive web content by users and the public. These features bring about significant and pervasive changes to how people communicate personally in communities, organizations and with one another. Lastly, social media uses cross-platform connections to bring users together in a virtual community, which impacts how individuals act in real life (Cohen, 2011).

Notably, the expanding importance of social media in the tourist industry has drawn the attention of scholars over the recent two decades, and this problem makes for an intriguing research topic (Law et al., 2014; Leung et al., 2013; Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014). According to published research, social media platforms are important for managing corporate operations and procedures, marketing, consumer behaviour (information search and decision-making), and customer connection and communication (Bilgihan et al., 2016; Gretzel and Yoo, 2013; Law et al., 2014). Therefore, new communication technologies and technological advancements have profoundly changed how tourists behave. The internet has overtaken other sources of information for consumers looking for information about travel locations and service providers, and it is now a crucial instrument for promoting tourist services (Benckendorff et al., 2014; Gretzel and Yoo, 2013; Law et al., 2014).

Moreover, social media helps travellers to share their travel experiences easily. Information shared on social media platforms is acknowledged as a significant source that may aid in trip preparation for tourists or even affect future travel decisions (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014). According to Gretzel and Yoo (2008) and Hudson and Thal (2013), the use of social media has radically impacted how people plan and experience travelling.

Social media platforms are utilized before, during, and after vacations to share travel experiences. Based on the experiential dimension of tourism, potential visitors might rely on others' experiences while making decisions (Litvin et al., 2008). Social media will heavily influence final decisions about vacation plans, especially in reputation-related areas (Fotis et

al., 2012). Furthermore, social media can be directly responsible for an increase in the number of tourists to a particular destination and help to build a strong brand for the long term period (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014).

Correspondingly, the emphasis on management and marketing tactics for enterprises has changed due to these technological advancements, particularly in the tourism sector (Cantalops and Salvi, 2014). Tourism professionals can offer individual tourists customized information thanks to social media. Delivering personalized information to travellers that take into account their requirements and preferences is a fantastic opportunity to win them over (Matloka and Buhalis, 2010). Research conducted by Valls et al. (2013) proposed that social media usage might offer a new online marketing approach for travel agencies that focuses more on leveraging new interactive communication with users rather than concentrating on sales.

After understanding the importance of social media on tourism, it would be beneficial to touch on how it affects travel as a conspicuous type of consumption. As discussed beforehand, travelling to foreign destinations has been a prominent kind of conspicuous consumption for a long time. The conspicuous dimension of travelling has become even more apparent in the Internet technology era, in which the popularity of social media as a channel for sharing travel experiences is rising (Boley et al., 2018).

Although travelling and society standing have always been linked, social media has profoundly altered the nature of this conspicuous consumption (Lo and McKercher, 2015). Even though social media makes travelling to cool destinations more noticeable and apparent, the careful selection and maintenance of admired social image through picture sharing should be seen as an artefact of sophistication (Lo and McKercher, 2015). Following this thought, they elaborate that travellers no longer ought to trust each other's word for it when it comes to where they have been travelling to or wait for the slideshow of pictures when they return from their vacation. Nowadays, travellers can reap instant gratification and validation by publishing pictures and videos of their latest adventure.

According to Snow (2008), with the development of photography starting in the late 19th century, snapping pictures while travelling has become a significant element of the tourism experience for tourists. Naturally, in the beginning, the distribution of these photographs was limited to a smaller quantity that would usually be reserved for the individuals or their close family and/or friends. However, with the introduction of social media, that changed. With its integration into tourists' lives, travel photography has expanded to a wide network of viewers and is used differently by tourists to showcase their experiences and even themselves (Bronner and de Hoog, 2018; Dinopl and Gretzel, 2016; Lyu, 2016; Munar and Jacobsen, 2014).

The importance of social media to the vacation experience is growing. This implies that numerous social media users have various effects on potential tourists. To illustrate, flashpackers are a newly identified tourist market subset that frequently uses social media while travelling and travels with digital gadgets, according to Richards (2015). However, research done by Vasiliki and Kostas (2010) and Yoo et al. (2011) suggests that even though "travel opinion leaders" or "central travellers" are only a small sample of travellers, they are more prone to influence how other travellers will receive information. According to Yoo et al. (2011), this is due to them having more travel experience and representing an official source of information. Likewise, Vasiliki & Kostas (2010) stated that they actively provide information to other travellers or potential travellers and are easily reachable by others.

Also, there is a rise in travel influencers whose job is to travel the world and present their adventures to their audience. Some players in the tourism industry such as hotels, restaurants or travel agencies, get free endorsements from travel influencers. Even more, there are tourist agencies such as Trova Trip that collaborate with influencers, and instead of just providing what a usual travel agency does, they also provide photographers so that every aspect of the trip can be documented and shared by the customers on their social media.

By the same token, Amaro et al. (2016) found that travellers who use social media while travelling fall into a variety of groups, ranging from 'inactive' to 'highly involved' users. Additionally, 56% of these tourists claimed to have observed or published social media posts somehow linked to their travels. (Boley et al., 2018). With this in mind, these authors conducted a research where they examined how does this process of showing to others their tourist experience affect the destination selection and intent to travel. They found that it has been demonstrated that the desire to take appealing travel photos influences travellers' inclinations to travel throughout a range of periods. Therefore, they discovered that social return could predict tourists' decision to visit or revisit a destination in one, five, and ten years.

There is the potential for various travel experiences to generate variable levels of "Social Return," taking into account that the traveller is acutely aware of the social value of their trip and that not all travel adventures are valued equally. Social return refers to the extent of favourable social feedback that someone's social media posts will accomplish (Deegan, 2015). It is generally accepted that a social media post will create a greater amount of social media return in the form of an enhanced number of 'likes,' 'comments,' and 'sharing' when the target audience more positively receives it. Because of this, the person who posted it will ultimately have a higher social standing inside their own social circle. In other words, social media has created a channel for peer groups to manicure their social images to successfully exhibit the "cultural capital" necessary to climb the social ladder (Trigg, 2001).



According to Woodside and Lysonski (1989), the social return that tourists get from their various travel experiences may play a significant role in creating their destination selection set and, ultimately, in their choice of whether or not to visit a certain place. Thus, social returns can be viewed as conspicuous signals people use to elevate their social standing (Kock, 2021). Previous research suggests that the coolness of a destination is positively related to the perceived social return, indicating that posting photos of a destination that is perceived as cool yields a high social return.

For instance, Millennials' decisions about alcohol-based travel have also been proven to be influenced by the anticipated favourable response from social media, as those who value the social return from vacation photos are more likely to visit wineries than breweries (Bachman et al., 2020). Furthermore, tourists research other tourists' past experiences through posts on social media and reviews as a trustworthy source of information while looking for a cultural attraction (Antón et al., 2018; Presi et al., 2014). According to Loureiro et al. (2021), visitors' satisfaction with a museum or exhibition may be observed in postings and comments on social media sites.

Although the overt nature of tourism and the notion that different tourist places have unique symbolic images are not recent (Eckinci et al., 2013), travellers can now share their trip experiences with peer networks that are considerably bigger than they were in the past (Munar and Jacobsen, 2014). The rise of social media has fundamentally turned an activity previously conspicuous into one of the most conspicuous kinds of consumption. Even though social media makes travelling more noticeable, there is a certain degree of sophistication surrounding online photo sharing, where the images are carefully chosen and edited to project a particular social image (Lo and McKercher, 2015).

Moreover, this is even more evident as narcissism grows increasingly more accepted and sharing vacation experiences on social media takes centre stage as the main reason people travel (Canavan, 2017). Sedera et al. (2017) assert that one's contentment with their vacation or travel experience is regulated by the social return through likes they receive on social media. According to Munar and Jacobsen (2014), these self-centred incentives are tied to the technomeritocratic society in which people currently live, where a person's value is partly derived from the picture of themselves that they cultivated through digital platforms. Dinhopl and Gretzel (2016) complement these findings by examining selfies. They discuss that with them, the tourist attention shifts away from the remarkable items within the place that they travelled to and toward the remarkableness of oneself for their social media profiles and for their audience to see.

Overall, there is an expanding collection of research that believes that the advantages of social media motivate tourists to travel. These benefits come in the form of being able to demonstrate a tourist's self-concept, posting content that would include impression management

and gaining positive feedback on social media. Travel photos have long been a significant component of the travel experience; however, social media is quickly altering how travellers share and use photos online.

### **3.3. Social return and intent to travel**

First and foremost, willingness to visit refers to a person's desire or intention to travel to a specific destination. Personal and informational sources contribute to a person's travel intention. Hence, sources of information, such as the news from mainstream and social media, have a significant role in constructing the perception of a destination and impact the person's willingness to visit that destination.

In the tourism literature, the subject of intention to travel has been extensively studied. Plenty of evidence supports the Theory of Planned Behavior structure, which has been widely used and is effective in predicting engagement in behaviours. Theory of Planned Behavior is a foundation for comprehending the motivations behind people's actions. Additionally, according to this theory, behavioural motives are predicted by subjective norms, attitudes and perceived behavioral control (Bianchi et al., 2017; Hsieh et al., 2016; Lam and Hsu, 2006).

On the other hand, social return is the quantity of positive social responses from one's travel-related social media posts (Boley et al., 2018). Since varied travel experiences might yield different levels of social return, not all travel activities are judged equally. The mentioned leads to the conclusion that travelling has historically always been the noticeable type of consumption, with tourists leveraging their experiences in social situations. However, the environment and reach of this social activity have changed due to social media's rising popularity as a platform for sharing travel experiences.

Moreover, social media facilitates and fuels conspicuous travel; therefore, its prominence will likely increase. According to Kock (2021), the degree of social return that travellers attribute to a location is explained by its perceived coolness. He continues that this conclusion can also advance studies on how travellers relate to travel places. The mentioned would include destination identification, destination attachment and destination affinity. Hence, these initiatives look into significant symbolic factors that influence destination choice. However, it was established that enhanced relationships between tourists and locations can be attributed to a city's perceived coolness.

The relationship between social return and intent to travel is best showcased in the research done by Boley et al. (2018). This study aimed to create a scale for assessing the

expected social return of sharing travel adventures on their on social media and investigate its connection with a destination's intent to travel. With this in mind, they developed a Social Return Scale that was created to quantify the expected social benefits that visiting a certain location would offer a prospective visitor. They used the Social Return Scale to investigate and predict the intentions of travellers from the United States of America to visit Cuba. Six structural equation models with varying time horizons all showed Social Return Scale to have a favorable and substantial connection with the intention to travel to Cuba. The time horizon was across one year, five years and ten years' time period. Furthermore, the respondents participating in the survey were required to assess whether the traveller appeared to be cool, unique, popular, stand out and savvy in social media posts that they showed from that location.

In more detail, the results indicated that the expected social return is one crucial factor in choosing a destination for a trip. This research broadens the knowledge of what happens when people consider the social rewards offered by online peer communities. The social Return Scale is used as an assessment method to evaluate the impact of predicted social media feedback on the decision-making process for choosing a travel location.

Furthermore, all three of the time horizons showed a strong association between social return and travel intention, but as the time horizons grew longer, the relationship lessened. Likewise, the results contributed that, in contrast to long-term plans, social media posts regarding travel experiences had a stronger symbolic impact on short-term travel intentions. Regarding this finding, the authors suggested that practitioners in the tourism sector should consider exploiting the bandwagon effect and the snob effect. Especially if the destination they are working at is a place that has great potential to be used in the social media space.

All things considered, the decision-making process for travel destinations is impacted by social media. Choosing a destination involves more than just the functional value that the location offers (Ekinici et al., 2013). Therefore, marketing professionals working for tourist destinations can utilize and promote experiences that could yield a strong social return. This way, they will be able to attract more tourists to come to their destination.

Lastly, another important concept to mention regarding tourist behaviour and their intent to travel is the willingness to pay a price premium. The mentioned can be defined as the price a consumer is willing to spend for their favoured brand over similar, or lesser in their eyes, brands in the same size of packaging or quantity. Willingness to pay a price premium is a great predictor of brand loyalty and a reliable measure of general brand equity (Aaker, 1996a).

It is worth mentioning that there are a few elements that have an impact on the willingness to pay a price premium. According to the research conducted by Netemeyer et al. (2004), there is a heavy positive correlation between perceived quality, perceived value for the

cost and uniqueness of a brand with the willingness to pay a price premium. Consequently, these elements are significant antecedents of the willingness to pay a price premium, and the mentioned is a significant antecedent to consumer behaviour.

Moreover, it has been established that premium pricing fits better within the hedonic product categories than utilitarian ones. Since travelling to a cool destination generates positive feelings, it can be expected that the willingness to pay a premium price is higher for cool destinations than for non-cool ones.

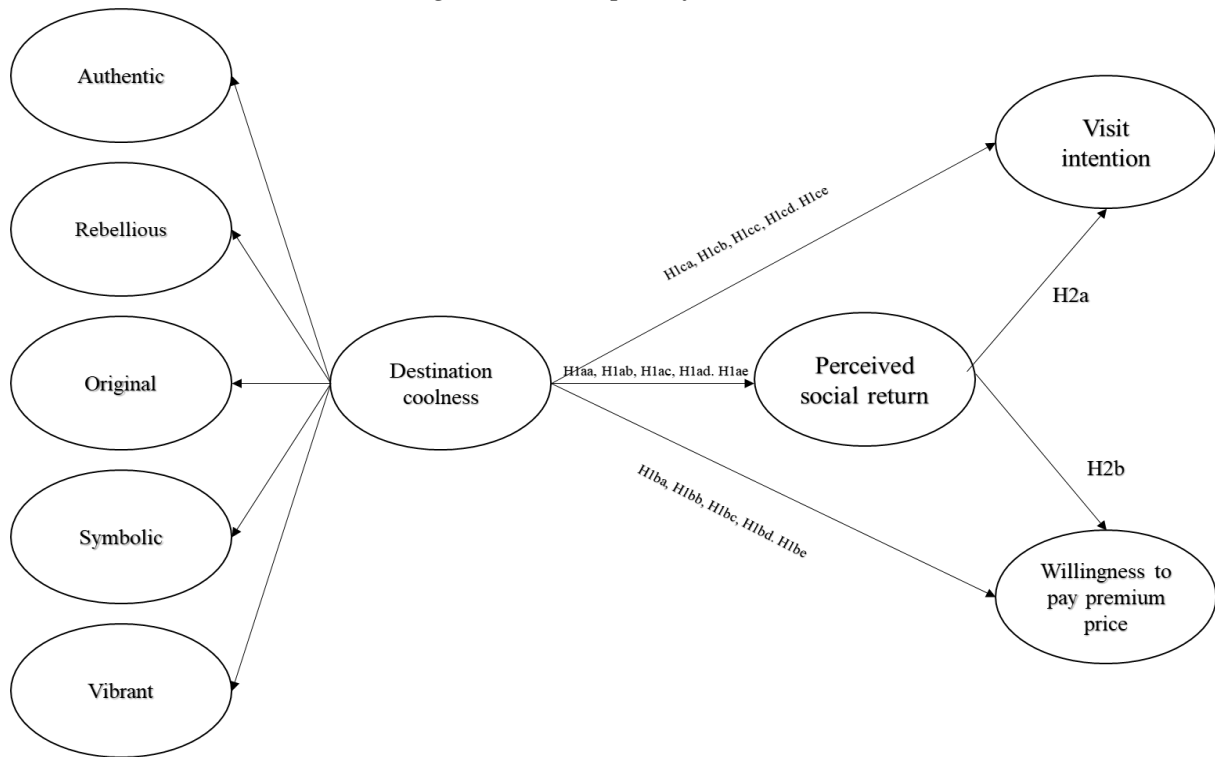
Overall, the theoretical part of this thesis explored the existing body of research about the role of destination coolness in shaping tourist behaviour by looking at travelling as a means of conspicuous consumption. In other words, literature reviews aimed to discover how links between the coolness of a destination and the willingness to visit a cool destination as well as the willingness to pay a premium price for a trip to the cool destination, are mediated by the social return (i.e., a positive social response received as a result of one's travel-related social media posts). The next section of this paper will be showcased by conducting primary research to determine if the findings match the theoretical background.

## 4. EXPLORING THE ROLE OF DESTINATION COOLNESS IN TOURISM BEHAVIOUR

### 4.1. Conceptual framework

Research on destination coolness is scarce and inconclusive; therefore, this master thesis tries to enhance the existing body of knowledge in the area of destination branding by exploring the concept of brand coolness in the tourism context and understanding the relationship between various components of destination coolness and behavioural outcomes (visit intention and willingness to pay the premium price).

Figure 2. Conceptual framework



Our conceptual model (Fig. 2) is underpinned by the work of Kock (2021) and attribution theory (Jackson, 2019; Saleh, 2021). Attribution theory provides a framework to explain how individuals interpret the causes of incidents. It has been recognized as an essential method for analyzing individuals' psychological processes and behavioural outcomes. Our conceptual model strives to understand the following relationships: (1) the direct link between dimensions of destination coolness and perceived social return; (2) the direct link between

perceived social return and visit intention; (3) the direct link between perceived social return and willingness to pay the premium price; and (4) indirect links between dimensions of destination coolness and behavioural outcomes (visit intention and willingness to pay the premium price).

*Destination coolness and perceived social return.* We propose that a perceived social return of a destination can be enhanced by its perceived coolness. This is because cool cities are associated with the desirable characteristics of originality, authenticity, and being rebellious and vibrant, which a traveller may find appealing to communicate through social media platforms to signify their online status. Therefore, it is theoretically and managerially pertinent to examine whether cool cities also promise a high social return and whether they are more likely to be discussed on social media. Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1aa: The authenticity of a destination is positively related to the perceived social return of a destination.

H1ab: Rebelliousness of a destination is positively related to the perceived social return of a destination.

H1ac: The originality of a destination is positively related to the perceived social return of a destination.

H1ad: Symbolic meaning of a destination is positively related to the perceived social return of a destination.

H1ae: The vibrancy of a destination is positively related to the perceived social return of a destination.

*Destination coolness and visit intention.* Previous research suggests that dimensions of destination coolness are positively related to visit and revisit intentions (Kock, 2021). For instance, it has been argued that the authenticity of a destination is related to individuals' perceptions of a destination and its offerings, as well as their emotional attachment to it (also known as place attachment) and positive actions toward a destination (i.e., destination loyalty) (Kim and Kim, 2019). Moreover, recent studies (e.g. Nizar et al., 2017; Kim and Lee, 2015) emphasized the pivotal role of destination personality in tourism behaviour, suggesting that a strong destination personality leads to favourable destination evaluations and positive behavioural outcomes. Since destination personality is defined as “the set of human

characteristics associated with a destination as perceived from a tourist viewpoint” (Nazir et al., 2017, p. 56), we can assume that characteristics such as authenticity, rebelliousness, originality, vibrancy, symbolic meanings of a destination are positively related to the behavioural outcome – visit intention. Therefore, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1ba: The authenticity of a destination is positively related to the intention to visit the cool destination.

H1bb: Rebelliousness of a destination is positively related to the intention to visit the cool destination.

H1bc: The originality of a destination is positively related to the intention to visit the cool destination.

H1bd: Symbolic meaning of a destination is positively related to the intention to visit the cool destination.

H1be: The vibrancy of a destination is positively related to the intention to visit the cool destination.

*Destination coolness and willingness to pay a premium price.* Previous research found that a high level of immersion can trigger an individual's willingness to pay premium prices (Niu and Chang, 2014). Empirical research by Ross (2014) showed that positive feelings around consumption (such as a high level of immersion) could increase the net income of retail service providers. It is estimated that every dollar invested in enhancing positive feelings around consumption (such as a high level of immersion) nets from \$2 to \$100 of income (Ross, 2014). Therefore, it has been argued that positive feelings about consumption, such as immersion, positively influence individuals' actual willingness to pay more. Since dimensions of destination coolness can enhance visitors' immersion within a destination, we hypothesize the following:

H1ca: The authenticity of a destination is positively related to the willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination.

H1cb: Rebelliousness of a destination is positively related to the willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination.

H1cc: The originality of a destination is positively related to the willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination.

H1cd: Symbolic meaning of a destination is positively related to the willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination.

H1ce: The vibrancy of a destination is positively related to the willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination.

*Perceived social return as a mediator.* We propose that the influence of destination coolness dimensions on behavioural outcomes – visit intention and willingness to pay a premium price, is mediated by the perceived social return. Thus, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H3a: Perceived social return mediates the relationship between the destination's coolness and the intention to visit a cool destination.

H3b: Perceived social return mediates the relationship between the destination's coolness and willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination.

## **4.2. Research Methodology**

This master thesis will consist of a theoretical and a research part. Within the theoretical part, the focus will be on the review of literature and research conducted by other authors related to the subject matter. The second part will contain the practical part of the paper in the form of primary research. Therefore, in this research, the preferences and perceptions of tourists will be collected and analysed. This form of primary data will be collected through a pre-structured online survey with closed-ended questions. Moreover, the Likert scale (1 to 5) will be used for this online survey. Constructs of interest will be measured by scales developed and validated in the previous research:

- Destination Coolness will be measured by multi-dimensional reliable, valid and parsimonious coolness scale developed by Kock (2021). The scale includes 25 items designed to measure five facets of destination coolness: authentic, original, rebellious, symbolic, and vibrant.



- The Social Return Scale - SRS will be used to capture the perceived social return from traveling to a destination (Boley et al., 2018). Scale items ask potential tourists to consider a peer who has posted a travel experience on social media and to evaluate the social value that the post provides the poster. As suggested by Boyle et al. (2018), SRS can be used to assess the perceived social return from various types of online tourist photography, like selfies and other posts on Instagram or Facebook.
- 3-items will measure willingness to visit a destination suggested by Boley et al. (2018).
- Willingness to pay a premium price to visit a destination will be measured by four items developed by Netemeyer et al. (2004).

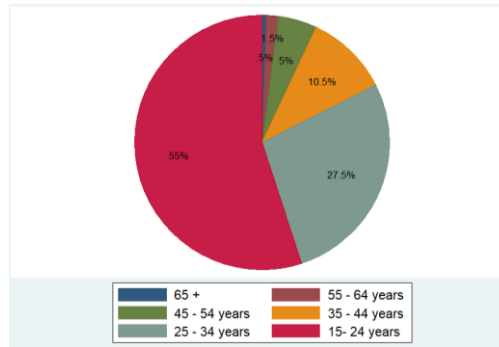
At the beginning of the survey, respondents will be asked the following question "Please name a city that you really think is cool (or that comes closest to it). After that, respondents will be informed to provide answers to a set of questions having that city in mind.

However, before conducting the primary research, a pilot test will be done to determine whether all the questions asked in the survey are clear to the respondents that will be participating in it. For this study, the target population will be citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina aged between 16 and 65+ years. However, people from other countries will be welcomed to participate in the survey. The goal is to have 200 participants in the survey. After collecting the necessary data, the same will be analysed in the statistical program Smart PLS 4. Therefore, the formulated research hypotheses will appropriately be tested and analysed.

### **4.3. Research results**

The study aimed to investigate the impact of the perceived destination coolness on social return, willingness to visit a cool destination, and willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination. The sample consisted of 200 participants that were aged from 18 to 65 years old. Among the participants, the majority, 55%, were aged between 15 to 24 years old, while 27.50% were aged between 25 to 34 years old. Additionally, 10.50% of the respondents were aged between 35 to 44 years old, while 5% were aged between 45 to 54 years old. A small percentage of 1.50% were aged between 55 to 64 years old, and only one person was aged 65 and above.

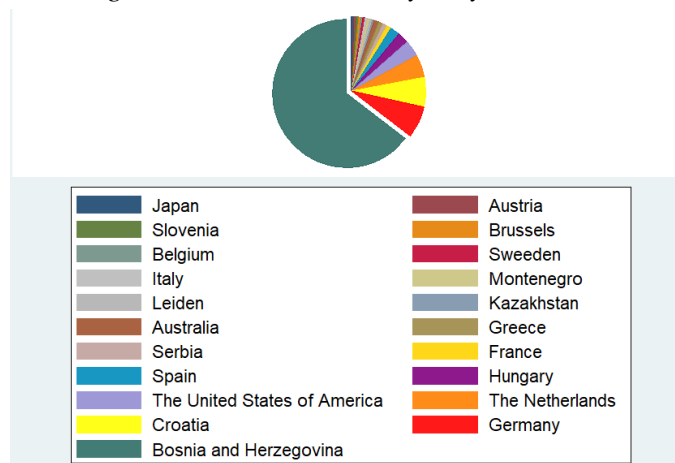
Figure 3. Age of participants



Source: Author's research

The sample was diverse in terms of gender, with 55.5% of participants identifying as female and 44.5% identifying as male. The participants in the survey were not only diverse in terms of gender, but they also came from various countries. Out of 200 participants, 64.50% of participants were from Bosnia and Herzegovina, indicating that the survey was primarily conducted in this country. 7% of participants were from Germany, followed by 6.50% from Croatia and 5% from the Netherlands. The remaining participants were from various other countries, which adds an additional layer of diversity to the survey results. These findings demonstrate that the survey reached a broad range of people from different cultural backgrounds and nationalities, which is valuable in providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic being studied.

Figure 4. In which country do you live in?

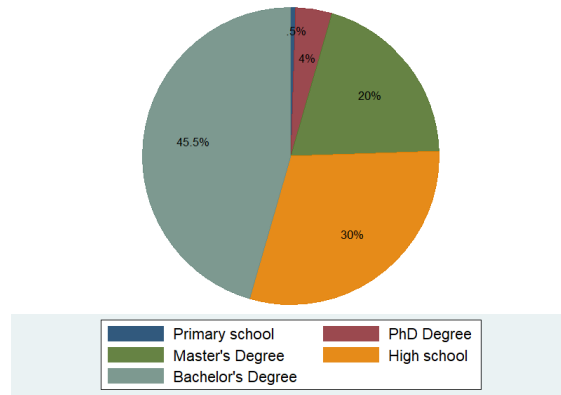


Source: Author's research

In terms of education level, it can be concluded that the majority of the participants have obtained a bachelor's degree, accounting for 45.50% of the total sample. A significant portion of the participants, about 30%, have completed high school education. Furthermore, 20% of the

participants have attained a master's degree, suggesting that a smaller but notable portion of the sample has pursued advanced education beyond a bachelor's degree. Additionally, a small fraction of the participants, only 4%, have completed a PhD, which indicates that they possess a high level of expertise in their field of study. Finally, one participant reported completing primary school education

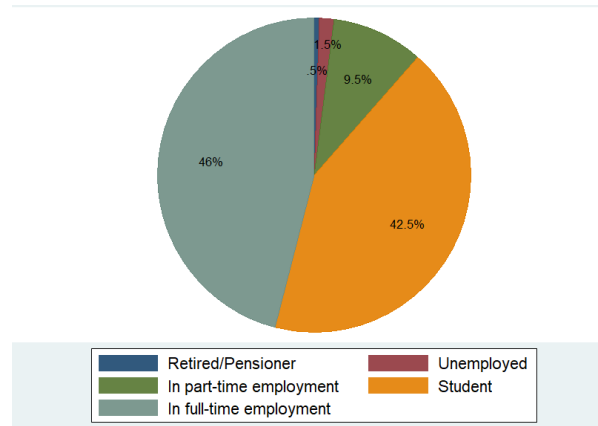
Figure 5. Highest degree or level of education completed



Source: Author's research

Moreover, employment status was also examined. Based on the provided data, 55% of participants reported being employed full-time. Students comprise 42.5% of the respondents, which is a sizeable percentage. Furthermore, 9.5% are employed part-time, indicating that some participants may have other commitments such as caregiving or studying. The percentage of unemployed participants is relatively low at 1.5%. Lastly, only one person in the sample is retired, which may suggest that the sample is relatively young and that the research topic is more relevant to working-age individuals.

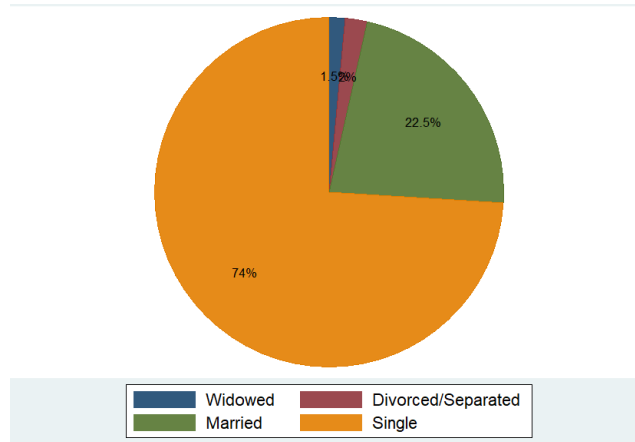
Figure 6. Employment status



Source: Author's research

Marital status varied within the sample, with 74% reporting being single, 22.5% being married, 2% being divorced or separated, and 1.5% being widowed.

*Figure 7. Marital status*



*Source: Author's research*

Following the discussion regarding the demographics of the study's participants, the subsequent step involves a scholarly review of the outcomes obtained from the analysis executed using the Smart PLS 4 software.

Firstly, it was important to test if the measurement model was solid and trustworthy. Therefore, the composite reliability (CR) values show adequate internal consistency since the CR values are greater than 0.7. Based on the average variance extracted (AVE) values, it was determined that all values are above the cutoff, which was specified as being greater than 0.5. (Table 2.) This indicates that the degree of convergent validity was established. As suggested by Hair et al. (2010), factor loadings should be higher than 0.5 and, ideally, 0.7 or higher. All factor loadings are above 0.5 and statistically significant, indicating that the measurement model is reliable and valid (Table 3.)

*Table 2. Values of Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted*

Construct	Composite reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Destination coolness – Authentic	0.914	0.681
Destination coolness – Rebellious	0.939	0.755
Destination coolness – Original	0.896	0.641
Destination coolness – Symbolic	0.957	0.848
Destination coolness – Vibrant	0.964	0.843
Perceived social returns	0.945	0.775

Willingness to pay a premium price	0.917	0.734
Visit intention	0.861	0.679

Source: Author's research

*Table 3. Factor loadings*

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Factor loadings</b>	<b>t-value</b>
Destination coolness – Authentic	... is authentic.	0.812	12.539
	.. doesn't seem artificial.	0.780	21.101
	... is true to its roots	0.809	12.128
	.. doesn't try to be something that it's not.	0.847	20.565
	... is genuine.	0.876	25.051
Destination coolness – Rebellious	... is nonconformist.	0.828	21.368
	... has revolutionary spirit.	0.843	32.793
	... is edgy.	0.852	33.187
	... is rebellious.	0.926	77.863
	... is defiant.	0.892	48.124
Destination coolness – Original	... is original.	0.862	20.545
	...stands apart from the crowd.	0.873	28.354
	... is unique.	0.890	28.354
	... is creative.	0.804	26.854
	... is often copied.	0.511	7.807
Destination coolness – Symbolic	... is iconic.	0.905	34.631
	... is cultural symbol.	0.932	54.384
	... means something to people.	0.935	64.053
	... is leading in what it does.	0.910	57.873
Destination coolness – Vibrant	... is outgoing.	0.894	28.393
	... is vibrant.	0.913	44.453
	... is lively.	0.933	59.640
	... is exciting.	0.904	36.754
	... is energetic.	0.946	91.506
Perceived social return	Trravelling to that city, makes the traveler look cool.	0.881	50.275
	Travelling to that city, makes the traveler more popular.	0.856	34.345
	Travelling to that city, makes the traveler look savvy.	0.931	64.578
	Travelling to that city, makes the traveler stand out.	0.892	39.737

	Travelling to that city, makes the traveler look unique.	0.840	29.482
Willingness to pay premium price	I am willing to pay a higher price for visiting this city than for other cities.	0.821	34.429
	I am willing to pay a lot more for visiting this city than other cities.	0.929	85.521
	The price of visiting this city would have to go up quite a bit before I would switch to another city.	0.819	26.602
	I am willing to pay 30% more to visit this city over visiting other cities.	0.854	29.846
Visit intention	I plan to travel to this city within the next year,	0.643	9.493
	I plan to travel to this city within the next 5 years	0.923	46.588
	I plan to travel to this city within the next 10 years.	0.879	17.503

Source: Author's research

Fornell-Larcker criterion was used to evaluate the discriminant validity of the measurement model. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Discriminant validity

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Authentic (1)	0.825							
Original (2)	0.440	0.801						
Perceived social returns (3)	0.326	0.431	0.881					
Visit intention (4)	0.414	0.430	0.344	0.824				
Rebellious (5)	0.352	0.555	0.500	0.073	0.869			
Symbolic (6)	0.217	0.246	0.353	0.045	0.430	0.921		
Vibrant (7)	0.151	0.352	0.392	0.237	0.322	0.593	0.918	
Willingness to pay a premium price (8)	0.514	0.458	0.561	0.448	0.397	0.297	0.357	0.857

Source: Author's research

Important to remark about values in Table 4, values at a diagonal are the squared root of AVE, while values below the diagonal are coefficients of correlation. Since the square root of AVE of each construct is higher than the correlation between constructs, we can conclude that the Fornell-Larcker criterion was satisfied.

The values of the path coefficients in the structural model are presented in Table 5. The model's predictive relevancy was first tested by the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ). In our model, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) for the perceived social return of a destination was 0.341, indicating that 34.1% of the variance in the perceived social return of a destination can be explained by different dimensions of perceived coolness. Also, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) for visit intention was 0.374, and for willingness to pay a premium price was 0.466. Therefore, we found that 37.4 % of variation in the visit intention can be examplined by perceived social return of a destination and dimensions of perceived destination coolness. In addition, 46.6% percent of the variation in the willingness to pay premium price to visit a destinations can be explained by social return of a destination and dimensions of perceived destination coolness.

Also, the predictive power of the model was assesd by path coefficient ( $\beta$  value) and t-statistic value, and effect size ( $f^2$ ).

*Table 5. Path coefficients*

		Path coefficien t	t-values	p values	$f^2$	Outcome
H1aa	Authentic -> Perceived social return	0.124	1.426	0.154	0.018	Not supported
H1ab	Rebellious -> Perceived social return	0.301	3.956	0.000	0.082	Supported
H1ac	Original -> Perceived social return	0.126	1.517	0.129	0.014	Not supported
H1ad	Symbolic -> Perceived social return	0.044	0.628	0.530	0.002	Not supported
H1ae	Vibrant -> Perceived social return	0.205	2.961	0.003	0.038	Supported
H1ba	Authentic -> Visit intention	0.303	3.852	0.000	0.112	Supported
H1bb	Rebellious -> Visit intention	-0.350	5.159	0.000	0.107	Not supported
H1bc	Original -> Visit intention	0.360	3.018	0.003	0.118	Supported
H1bd	Symbolic -> Visit intention	-0.146	1.812	0.070	0.019	Not supported
H1b	Vibrant -> Visit intention	0.164	2.029	0.043	0.025	Supported
H1ca	Authentic -> WTP	0.329	4.421	0.000	0.155	Supported
H1cb	Rebellious -> WTP	-0.001	0.009	0.993	0.000	Not supported
H1cc	Original -> WTP	0.115	1.218	0.223	0.014	Not supported
H1cd	Symbolic -> WTP	-0.005	0.073	0.942	0.000	Not supported

H1cd	Vibrant -> WTP	0.131	1.777	0.076	0.018	Not supported
H2a	Perceived social return -> Visit intention	0.252	3.273	0.001	0.067	Supported
H2b	Perceived social return -> WTP	0.355	5.239	0.000	0.155	Supported

(Source: Author's research)

After assessing the path coefficient, we tested the mediating role of the perceived social return of a destination using specific indirect effects. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Mediation role

	St. coefficient	t-values	P values
Authentic -> Perceived social return -> Visit intention	0.031	1.179	0.298
Rebellious -> Perceived social return -> Visit intention	0.076	2.257	0.024
Original -> Perceived social return -> Visit intention	0.032	1.413	0.158
Symbolic -> Perceived social return -> Visit intention	0.011	0.582	0.561
Vibrant -> Perceived social return -> Visit intention	0.052	2.078	0.038
Authentic -> Perceived social return -> WTP	0.044	1.403	0.161
Rebellious -> Perceived social return -> WTP	0.107	3.180	0.001
Original -> Perceived social return -> WTP	0.045	1.460	0.144
Symbolic -> Perceived social return -> WTP	0.016	0.632	0.528
Vibrant -> Perceived social return -> WTP	0.073	2.519	0.012

Source: Author's research

The study used mediation analysis to examine the relationship between variables at the significance level of 5%. In the next section of the paper, a more detailed explanation will be provided of the mediation analysis conducted in this study. Examining the mediating effects of the variables can lead to a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms that drive the relationships between them.

#### 4.4. Discussion of findings

According to the results of the path coefficients in the structural model (Table 5), only two dimensions of destination coolness (rebellious and vibrant) have a statistically significant positive influence on the perceived social return of a destination. Thus, hypothesis H1a: Destination coolness is positively related to the perceived social return of a destination, is partially supported. Our findings suggest that posting photos of a destination that is perceived to be rebellious and vibrant will yield a high social return in terms of 'likes,' 'comments,' and



'sharing' across social media. We also assessed the  $f^2$  effect size, following the rule that  $f^2$  values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 suggest small, medium and strong effects. The  $f^2$  values indicate that the vibrancy of a destination has a strong effect on the perceived social return of a destination. On the other hand, the rebelliousness of a destination has a moderate effect on the perceived social return of a destination.

The second set of hypotheses (H1ba, H1bb, H1bc, H1bd, H1be) tested the effect of different facets of destination coolness on visit intention. Path coefficients revealed that a destination's authenticity, originality, and vibrancy have positive and statistically significant impacts on tourists' intention to visit a destination. In terms of effect size, the originality of a destination has the most substantial impact on visit intention, followed by the authenticity of a destination. Opposite to our expectations, symbolic meanings of a destination and the destination's rebelliousness negatively affect tourists' intention to visit a destination. Based on our findings, we can conclude that hypothesis H1b: Destination coolness is positively related to the intention to visit the cool destination, is partially supported.

The third set of hypotheses (H1ca, H1cb, H1cc, H1cd, H1ce) tested the effect of different dimensions of destination coolness on willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination. Our findings indicate that only one dimension – the authenticity of a destination is positively related to the willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination. Therefore, a destination perceived as 'non artificial', 'historically grown' and 'staying true to itself' can charge premium prices for a tourism experience. Since only one attribute of destination coolness is related to tourists' willingness to pay a premium price, we can conclude that our results do not support the hypothesis H1c: Destination coolness is positively related to the willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination.

In terms of the impact of the perceived social return of a destination on visit intention and willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination, our results showed that the perceived social return is positively related to both visit intention and willingness to pay a premium price. The effect size indicates that these effects are very strong. Therefore, two hypotheses:- H2a: Perceived social return from one's travel experience in cool destination will have a positive and significant relationship with one's intention to visit the cool destination, and H2b: Perceived social return from one's travel experience in cool destination will have a positive and significant relationship with one's willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination, are supported.

On the other hand, the mediation analysis (Table 6) showed that at the significance level of 5%, the perceived social return of a destination positively mediates the link between the vibrancy of a destination and the intention to visit a destination. Since we found a positive direct effect of the vibrancy of a destination and tourists' visit intention, we can conclude that this is

the case of partial mediation. In terms of the rebelliousness of a destination, the indirect effect is positive and significant at a level of significance of 5%. Since the direct effect of the rebelliousness of a destination on visit intention is negative but the indirect effect positive, we can conclude that this is the case of partial competitive mediation.

The partial competitive mediation implies that the intermediate variable – the perceived social return of a destination decreases the magnitude of the relationship between the independent variable – rebelliousness of a destination and the dependent variable – visit intention. In other words, conspicuous signals of a destination created through social media posts about a destination have the potential to diminish the magnitude of the negative effect of the rebelliousness of a destination on visit intention. The mediating role of the perceived social return in the relationship between the other three dimensions of destination coolness (authentic, original, symbolic) and visit intention was not supported. Therefore, hypothesis H3a: Perceived social return mediates the relationship between the destination's coolness and the intention to visit a cool destination, is partially supported.

Moreover, the mediation analysis (Table 6) showed that at the significance level of 5%, the perceived social return of a destination positively mediates the link between the vibrancy of a destination and the willingness to pay a premium price. Since the direct effect of the vibrancy of a destination on willingness to pay a premium price was found to be significant, we can conclude that this is the case of full mediation. In other words, the vibrancy of the destination is not enough to yield a tourist's intention to visit a destination. However, the perception of others' social media posts about travel to a cool destination serves as an intermedator in the vibrancy–visit intention link.

Partial competitive mediation was found in the case of rebelliousness of a destination and willingness to pay a premium price. In other words, the intermediate variable – the perceived social return of a destination decreases the magnitude of the relationship between the independent variable – rebelliousness of a destination and the dependent variable – willingness to pay a premium price to visit a destination. Other indirect, specific effects are not significant, suggesting that the perceived social return of a destination does not mediate the link between the authenticity of a destination, symbolic meanings of a destination and originality of destination. Overall, our findings suggest that hypothesis H3b: Perceived social return mediates the relationship between the destination's coolness and willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination, is partially supported.

## **5, CONTRIBUTION, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

The current study makes a contribution to the existing literature on tourism, consumer behavior, and destination coolness. It sheds light on the variables that affect travelers' preferences when choosing a travel destination through its investigation of the impact of perceived destination coolness on social return, willingness to visit a cool destination and willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination. Furthermore, by investigating the link between destination coolness and travel behaviors, it contributes to the body of knowledge already available on destination marketing and branding.

Additionally, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the specific dimensions of destination coolness that are more likely to impact tourists' behavior. Moreover, it provides valuable insights into the relationship between destination coolness and perceived social return, visit intention, and willingness to pay a premium price. These findings have important implications for destination marketers and managers, as they highlight the importance of creating a destination image that is perceived as cool and attractive to potential visitors. This can be used as guidance to destination marketers and managers seeking to enhance their destination's appeal to potential visitors.

In more detail, social media platforms have evolved into influential social tools that facilitate digital interactions. They provide a communication channel that enables travelers to engage in online travel communities, express their viewpoints on various destinations, and collaborate with fellow travelers. Additionally, these platforms serve as valuable resources for creating, expanding, evaluating, and discussing travel experiences. In today's interconnected world, social media has become a highly effective tool for online networking and has seamlessly integrated into people's daily lives. Depending on what marketing managers would like to focus on, perceived social return of a destination, visit intention, willingness to pay a premium price or all three, there are things they could implement to increase their desired effects.

Since destination coolness is positively related to the perceived social return in terms of a destination that is perceived to be rebellious and vibrant, marketing managers should use this to their advantage. Therefore, if the destination they are trying to promote has elements of rebelliousness or vibrancy, they should put emphasis on it for their promotional material. Our findings suggest that posting photos of a destination that is perceived to be rebellious and vibrant will yield a high social return in terms of 'likes,' 'comments,' and 'sharing' across social media. This is very important due to the fact that organic reach is immensely valuable for companies, and this is one way how it can be produced.

For instance, if a Social Media Manager wants to promote the hotel they work for, they should post content that shows how vibrant their hotel is. The mentioned could be done by making videos that showcase how the hotel has the same vibrant atmosphere as the city it is in. They could take a couple of shots of the city and of the hotel, as well as of the happy or energetic visitors and edit it all together to make a whole. Videos are the content form most social media platform prefer to push, so that is the best form to concentrate on. The same could be done for rebelliousness. It can be done by putting focus on how the rebelliousness of the product or service of the company intersects with the rebelliousness of the destination.

Another way companies could be utilizing these dimensions to their advantage is hiring social media influencers that represent the dimension they want to put focus on. In case of rebelliousness, social media manager could hire an influencer that is known for their rebellious, out-of-the box style of content creation. This way, they are buying content that is already perceived to be different and can be utilized for the image of the company. As mentioned before, these content creators have a direct influence of their audience and if the audience represents a rebellious crowd, by time this image will become synonymous with the destination or company. Hence increasing its perceived social return.

In case the company does not have the budget to hire influencers, they can utilize their guests. Travelers reap instant gratification and validation by publishing pictures and videos of their latest adventure. The company could put emphasis on “rewarding” guests that tag their establishment in their social media posts or stories. This can be done by reposting their content, giving them a free dinner or any other stimulant they see fit. It is an easy way to promote themselves to the social circle that is similar to the guests they already have.

Furthermore, if a company would like to increase their visit intention, it should concentrate on expanding on the destination's authenticity, originality, and vibrancy. These dimensions have positive and statistically significant impacts on tourists' intention to visit a destination. In terms of effect size, the originality of a destination has the most substantial impact on visit intention, followed by the authenticity of a destination. As suggested above, the utilization of social media can help with increasing visit intention due to the fact that social media platforms facilitate seamless sharing of travel experiences for wanderers. The information exchanged through these channels holds immense value as it serves as a crucial resource, aiding tourists in trip planning and potentially influencing their future travel choices.

Therefore, social media managers can encourage more visitors by making content that promotes the authenticity, originality, and vibrancy of their establishment or destination. They can do this by making content in form of itineraries that showcase activities that are authentic and original to the destination. For example, they can make videos of what a tourist can do in their city that they cannot do in other cities. This can be in the form of visiting some local

museums or trying local delicacies. Even more, they can put an authentic or original experience that can be only lived in their establishment. Some hostels have become popular by providing unique tours of their cities, as well as, food/drinking tours. All of this can be recorded as used as promotion. Seeing these experiences on their feed, travelers might be influenced to plan their next trip to the wanted destination. Furthermore, establishments can form partnerships with local restaurants or museums and make a unique selling point for them. This way, tourism professionals are offering tourists individual customized information thanks to social media. Delivering personalized information to travelers that take into account their requirements and preferences is a fantastic opportunity to win them over.

Lastly, in regards to the impact of destination coolness on willingness to pay a premium price to visit a cool destination we found that authenticity of a destination is positively related. Therefore, a destination perceived as 'non artificial', 'historically grown' and 'staying true to itself' can charge premium prices for a tourism experience. By this token, these characteristics should be showcased on social media since internet has surpassed alternative information sources when it comes to consumers seeking details about travel destinations and service providers. It has evolved into an indispensable tool for promoting tourist services, playing a pivotal role in connecting potential travelers with relevant information and offerings. Marketing managers should concentrate on the authentic parts of their destination and connect it with their business. For instance, if their business is close to a historical landmark, they should put emphasis on it. Moreover, promote the interior that has some relation to the historical landmark or invest into having it. Also, they could connect with a local influencer that can show their foreign followers why this destination is authentic and entice new visitors. We know that this might attract a new crowd of people that would be willing to pay a premium price since the experiential aspect holds great sway over potential visitors, often leading them to rely on the experiences of others when making decisions.

As we have established, social media, in particular, exerts a significant influence on the ultimate choices individuals make regarding their vacation plans, particularly in areas related to reputation. Moreover, social media platforms have the potential to directly contribute to a surge in tourist numbers to specific destinations and play a vital role in establishing a robust and enduring brand presence. On that note, if the destination itself is not 'non artificial', 'historically grown' or 'staying true to itself', destination marketing managers could invest into promotion that focuses on features that give off the feeling that they are. As an example, bungalow hotels in Thailand offer open-space bedroom concepts, where the bed is facing the desired view. However, Lalanna Resort offers a bed that can be remote controlled and moved from the back of the bungalow to the front. Hence, visitors can choose whether to sleep under the stars or the comfort of a roof. This special feature enables them to attract more people and increases the willingness to pay a premium price.

Moreover, in the conducted research, it was found that perceived social return is positively related to both visit intention and willingness to pay a premium price. Social return of a destination positively mediates the link between the vibrancy of a destination and the intention to visit a destination. The mediating role of the perceived social return in the relationship between the other three dimensions of destination coolness (authentic, original, symbolic) and visit intention was not supported, according to our research. Therefore, if marketing managers want to concentrate on increasing visit intentions of travelers, they should make content that showcases how vibrant is their destination or business. Vibrancy is, also, important for willingness to pay a premium price due to the fact that perceived social return of a destination positively mediates the link between the vibrancy of a destination and the willingness to pay a premium price. It is crucial for marketing managers to genuinely reflect the vibrancy of the destination or business and ensure that the marketing efforts align with the target audience's preferences and interests. They can do this by utilizing the local community. Organizing events that reflect the vibrant aspects of the destination and business. This could be in a form of making a performance show that exhibits the local vibrant spirit, food or drink tasting and theme parties.

Additionally, they could collaborate with local businesses that could assist them in providing this experience if they do not have the means to do it by themselves. During these activities, social media managers should record pictures and videos to edit them that convey vibrancy. In the editing process, they can use effects that add to the vibrancy such as using high saturation or quirky/trendy edits. While these activities are taking place, they should be capturing testimonials of their guests and showing how they are having a good time. Moreover, if the company has enough funds, they can hire a local influencer or a influencer that is know for his/hers vibrancy. This way, they are utilizing the reach and influence this person has, as well as, creating evergreen or timely content. However, the most important thing to keep in mind is that they should be building an organic audience that is interested and invested in the content and business. This way managers are not only attracting visitors but, also, making sure that they will be coming back.

Naturally, the study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Namely, the study's sample size is relatively small and may not be representative of the larger population. It only includes participants from a few countries, with majority of participants that are from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, these findings are limited in their generalizability to other populations or cultures. Furthermore, the study relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias or social desirability effects. Participants may have answered the survey questions in a way that aligns with their perceived image or social norms, rather than their actual behaviors or attitudes. Finally, the study only considers a limited set of dimensions of destination coolness, and other dimensions may also be relevant in shaping tourists' behavior.

Future research could consider additional dimensions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of destination coolness.

Future research could, also, address the limitations of this study and further explore the relationship between destination coolness and tourists' behaviors. For instance, future studies could use a larger and more diverse sample to examine whether the findings of this study are generalizable to other populations and cultures. Moreover, future research could investigate other factors that may influence tourists' behaviors, such as safety and security, accessibility and affordability. Moreover, future research could investigate the role of additional dimensions of destination coolness, such as environmental sustainability or social responsibility, in shaping tourists' behavior. Lastly, future studies could use experimental designs to manipulate different aspects of destination coolness and examine their impact on tourists' behaviors.

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## APPENDIX

1. Please name a city that you really think is cool (or that comes closest to it).
2. With this cool city in mind, please indicate how you would describe it.

The next questions were multiple choice questions from a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

3. - Authentic

This chosen cool city  
is authentic.  
doesn't seem artificial.  
is true to its roots.  
doesn't try to be something it's not.  
is genuine.

- Rebellious

This chosen cool city  
is nonconformist.  
has revolutionary spirit.  
is edgy.  
is rebellious.  
is defiant.

- Original

This chosen cool city  
is original.  
stands apart from the crowd.  
is unique.  
is creative.  
is often copied.

- Symbolic

This chosen cool city  
is iconic.  
is a cultural symbol.  
means something to people.

is leading in what it does.

- Vibrant

This chosen cool city

is outgoing.

is vibrant.

is lively.

is exciting.

is energetic.

4. Travelling to that city, makes  
the traveler look cool.  
the traveler more popular.  
the traveler look savvy.  
the traveler stand out.  
the traveler look unique.
5. Having in mind the chosen cool city, please answer the questions below.  
I am willing to pay a higher price for visiting this city than for other cities.  
I am willing to pay a lot more for visiting this city than other cities.  
The price of visiting this city would have to go up quite a bit before I would switch to visiting another city.  
I am willing to pay 30% more to visit this city over visiting other cities.
6. Having in mind the chosen cool city, please answer the questions below.  
I plan to travel to this city within the next year.  
I plan to travel to this city within the next 5 years.  
I plan to travel to this city within the next 10 years.
7. In which country do you live in?
8. Please indicate your gender.  
Male  
Female  
Other
9. Please indicate your age group.  
15- 24 years  
25 - 34 years

- 35 - 44 years
- 45 - 54 years
- 55 - 64 years
- 65 +

10. Which category best describes you?

- In full-time employment
- In part-time employment
- Student
- Unemployed
- Retired/Pensioner
- Housewife/Husband

11. Please indicate your marital status.

- Single
- Married
- Widowed
- Divorced/Separated

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

- Primary school
- High school
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- PhD Degree