Exploring Presentations of the Self: Tourist Identity and Representation on

Facebook

by

Helen Sarah Cohen

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore how tourists present and manage impressions of the self as tourist, on Facebook, while travelling. This study applies a qualitative content analysis to the tourism-related, user-generated content of individual Facebook pages with the aim of exploring mid-travel tourism identity representation on Facebook. A literature review uncovered a shortage of academic research on the mid-travel phase of tourism consumption, prompting the focus of this study. The study is framed through the lens of symbolic interactionism, the theoretical perspective guiding this research journey. Eight semi-structured interviews were carried out, and a constant comparative analysis was applied to generate three main themes, each with subsequent sub-themes. The results include a discussion on place and self-representation, perpetuating popular destination images, situating the self as part of a collective, and social media engagement and reciprocity. Opportunities for future research in social media tourism are elucidated.

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This thesis is dedicated to my late mother, whose lifelong dedication to learning and continuous education I greatly admired. The value she placed on enriching her life through knowledge is something I'm proud to carry onwards.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Social media is changing the tourism culture" (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014, p. 32).

That bold assertion is driving new research on the influence of ubiquitous social

connectivity on tourist motivations, behaviours and environments (Zeng & Gerritsen,

2014). As the popularity of social media increases, including the use of social media via

mobile technologies, tourism researchers have the opportunity to tap into a vast and ever-

evolving field of user-generated data, offering rich explorations into the personal

experiences of tourists. Tourists use social media before, during and after the travel life

cycle to plan itineraries, research tourism products and services, organize bookings, post

travel updates, connect with loved ones, share experiences, and post reviews or

information for fellow travellers. Social media and new media landscapes have

effectively democratized tourist behaviour by allowing tourists the freedom to retrieve,

interpret and broadcast personal tourist experiences.

The use of social media has become a widespread phenomenon in a relatively short

amount of time (Papacharissi, 2011). Since 2009, social media networks have emerged as

the primary way active internet users stay in contact with one another (Kang, Tang &

Fiore, 2014). This next-generation Web 2.0 evolution has become one of the fastest

growing user-generated areas of content online, surpassing blog posts, chat rooms, and

message boards of the Web 1.0 early internet communication platforms (Coons & Chen,

2014; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Kang, Tang & Fiore, 2014; Parra-Lopez, Bulchand-

Gidumal, Gutierrez-Tano, Diaz-Armas, 2011). Popular social media platforms consist of

blogs (e.g. Medium, WordPress), microblogs (e.g. Twitter), photo-sharing sites (e.g. Instagram, Flickr, Google Photos), video-sharing sites (e.g. YouTube, Vimeo, Snapchat), review sites (e.g. TripAdvisor, Yelp), and social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn).

If culture is defined as "socially patterned human thought and action" (Kozinets, 2013, p. 95), relocated to a digital space centered on interconnectedness and sociability, culture re-appropriated on social networking sites such as Facebook provide the opportunity for valuable insights into what it means to be a member of that particular community, governed by implicit norms, rules and social expectations. Content-based research methods that produce themes or units of analysis, such as qualitative content analysis, is employed in this study to generate an understanding of how a perceived sense of community or 'culture' on Facebook influences tourist presentation and identity practices (refer to Section 4.1.2 for a detailed explanation).

The sociological perspective chosen to frame this thesis is symbolic interactionism, the premise of which views meaning as socially constructed, represented and interpreted through socially-infused symbols and expressions of communication (Sandstrom, Martin & Fine, 2010; Suljak, 2010; DePutter, 2007; Crotty, 2003). With an emphasis on the constructive process of sharing textual and image-based forms of communication, symbolic interactionism as a theoretical perspective lends itself well to the context of social platforms in a quest to evaluate "word of *mouse* testimonies" (Mkono & Markwell, 2014; Mkono, 2011, p. 255, italics added) of tourist experiences and presentation of travel narratives. Yet, with new technologies evolving almost as fast as our understanding of them, "the successful practice of manipulating and managing social media still remains

largely unknown to practitioners and scholars" (Leung, Law, van Hoof & Buhalis, 2013, p. 5). Accordingly, this thesis will fill a void in the tourism literature by examining how social media, specifically Facebook, is used as a tool to present a tourist identity.

To reiterate, the individual tourist's voice is democratized and empowered through internet-enabled technologies with implications across the entire travel cycle. It is therefore important for researchers and practitioners to understand the mechanisms that enable sharing tourist information and the effect on the overall tourist experience across the entire process of anticipating, experiencing and reflecting on travel (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2013). A noticeable gap in the tourism literature that will be demonstrated and supported in this thesis (refer to Table 1, section 3.1.1) is the shortage of research in the mid-travel, en route, experiential phase of tourism consumption (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2013), presenting researchers with a unique opportunity to explore new understandings of tourism experiences (Mkono & Markwell, 2014) with implications for both businesses and individual tourists. Since tourism experience has a direct impact on satisfaction levels, intention to revisit, and e-WOM or electronic word of mouth, it is critical for tourism organizations to mobilize understandings of what constitutes a meaningful tourist experience (Kim & Tussyadiah, 2013). Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) concur that present-day academic research is lagging behind the growth of social media in practice, regarding the pace of publications and the breadth of content and research locations. "Although the research of social media in tourism has been increasingly broadening and deepening its interests, research on social media in tourism is still in its infancy" (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014, p. 33). This thesis will therefore add value to the growing body of social media

tourism literature by contributing to the under-researched mid-travel phase of tourism consumption.

1.1. Research Objectives

To broaden the research in this area my study applies a qualitative content analysis to the tourism-related, user-generated content of individual Facebook pages with the aim of exploring the mid-travel identity construction processes behind tourist representation on Facebook. Specifically, the aim of this study is to explore how tourists present and manage impressions of the self as tourist, on Facebook, while travelling. Three research objectives support this aim:

1). To explore how tourists present travel experiences on Facebook, *while travelling*, using digital photos, videos, emoticons or text.

2). To examine how tourists present an identity on Facebook (a 'tourist' identity) through their travel experiences.

3). To investigate how tourists interpret and manage impressions of the self as tourist on Facebook.

For the purpose of this thesis it will be assumed that tourism experiences and tourist identity are mutually influential and that one cannot exist without the other. Constructing

and presenting a particular type of tourist identity may stem from experiences acquired during travel; while on the contrary, tourism experiences that cater to certain 'types' of tourists may serve to shape or reinforce a tourist's sense of self. I am interested in how tourism experiences are presented and reflected in tourist identity. My first research objective thus helps contextualize the two research objectives thereafter. Similarly, a close association will be assumed between terms such as identity and sense of self. Sense of self may be perceived as an inwardly-oriented perception of one's own being (Weiten, 2001), while identity can be perceived as an outward expression of that insight.

1.2. Structural Reasoning of Thesis

This thesis is arranged by initially situating the purpose of my study within the epistemological leanings of qualitative inquiry. I discuss how symbolic interactionism is a fitting theoretical perspective from which to ground my study and base my analysis. The philosophical underpinnings of my research are important as a framework of analysis; therefore, the Theoretical Perspective guiding this research is positioned with Epistemology. I then discuss my topic in relation to previous literature on the three main constructs, namely social media and tourism, identity presentation on social media, and tourist identity on social media, followed by the Methods chapter which details my recruitment strategy and data collection process, including qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews. Next, a presentation of the results from my analysis are interspersed with a discussion of the three themes, namely, the cool factor: place and self-representation, situating the self as part of a collective, and social media etiquette:

mindful engagement in a digital space, as well as a breakdown of sub-themes for each. A

conclusion chapter discussing my research objectives in light of findings, limitations of

the study, opportunities for future research, as well as benefits and contributions of the

research will close the thesis.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspective & Methodology

The following chapter provides justification for the use of a qualitative form of inquiry based on the research objectives guiding my study. The philosophical stance positioning my research is that of symbolic interactionism which views meaning as adaptable, socially constructed and subject to interpretation.

2.1 Epistemology: Qualitative Research & Reflexivity

Reflectively speaking, this thesis is informed by a confluence of my own interests and undergraduate education in communication studies and psychology. To start, the general topic I selected to study and research objectives I moulded and refined over time are born out of my own curiosities, life experience and "personal biography" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 11). They are therefore already predisposed and arguably slanted by the filtered lens through which I see the world as a person of a particular gender, culture, and ethnicity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Higgs and McAllister (2001) believe fundamental questions must be asked by the researcher in an honest, self-reflective manner before engaging in rigorous academic study. The thinking process behind my decision to engage in qualitative inquiry began with becoming mindful of where my attention goes while I am reading something or listening to someone, for example, where my focus lands on a page, where my thoughts linger. I also considered how the knowledge I have gained from my previous academic and personal endeavours could be best used to move a new research agenda forward. I questioned what type of project could provoke intellectual

curiosity and sustain my interest over time, what type of research undertaking would best reflect my values and beliefs as a person, and which research stream has the potential to make a relevant and timely contribution to academic discourse. My curiosity about the nature of human thought and behaviour, interest in expressions of communication and culture, passion for travel and tourism, and appreciation for the 'social' in social media effectively converged to shape my current research journey.

Once I conceptualized the answers, it became clear that qualitative research, with an emphasis on multiplicity, the social construction of reality, deeper explorations of understanding, and individual meaning-making is naturally aligned with my epistemological assumptions. "The research question dictates what paradigm the research should be located in…." (Higgs & McAllister, 2001, p. 33). My understanding of the nature of reality is not necessarily determined by objective reasoning, linear thinking, or logical associations; instead it is socially situated, flexible and open to change, and oriented towards people. Unlike positivist paradigms, qualitative research is not clear cut and linear, (Higgs & McAllister, 2001), but instead can be muddled, meandering and open to interpretation, as research involving people often is.

The epistemology that best grounds this research study is that of constructionism. Constructionism is the belief that "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 2003, p. 42). Instead of a fixed reality existing in the world, independent of human consciousness, a subjectivist stance takes the view that meaning is created out of engagement with the world (Crotty, 2003). We come to know

the world we live in by living in it, not as an outsider or strict observer, but as a person infused with thoughts, feelings, and motivations.

While it may be tempting to dichotomize qualitative research and quantitative research as subjectivism and objectivism respectively, Crotty (2003) makes an important distinction between the two. According to constructionist thought, meaning is not *created* but "meanings are *constructed* by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 2003, p. 43, italics added for emphasis). Meaning is not created out of nothing; humans merely build upon that which already exists in the world. Meaning is not an innate characteristic of objects in the world, but rather it is built and layered by socialized humans. It is therefore more accurate, Crotty claims, to describe constructionism as interpretivist in nature, a bridging of subjectivism and objectivism perspectives (Charmaz, 2006).

In a similar vein, qualitative researchers must be acutely aware of how their own inherent biases as people may influence their interpretation of data. Research of this nature is often described as interpretivist because of the co-construction of meaning generated between a researcher and a participant (S. Arai, personal communication, January 23, 2014; Charmaz, 2006; Higgs & McAllister, 2001). Researchers arguably cannot enter into the research process with a tabula rasa, or blank slate, because we are people, just like our participants, who come equipped with pre-conceived notions of reality based on our individual socialization (S. Arai, personal communication, January 23, 2014). It is therefore important for researchers to practice reflexivity, which requires honesty and self-awareness, to openly illustrate the meaning-making process that the researcher goes through in the gathering, analysis and interpretation of data (Daley,

2007). Instead of a neutral state, we can perhaps be mindful of remaining open and suspending our assumptions as part of a reflexive practice (S. Arai, personal communication, January 23, 2014). In fact, "some interpretive researchers consider researchers to be among the research tools," Higgs and McAllister claim (2001, p. 38), because they are inevitably intertwined "in a dance with the data" (Higgs & McAllister, 2001, p. 38). I further elaborate on my own measures to demonstrate reflexivity and transparency throughout my research journey in the Methods chapter of this thesis (see Section 4.2).

Crotty (2003) stresses the need to justify research in a framework informed by a thorough understanding of four distinct yet interrelated elements that guide the social research process: methods, methodology, theoretical perspective, and epistemology. Starting with the former concept, the methods chosen in a research design should be an appropriate form of data collection for the type of research being conducted, the purpose of the research questions or research objectives, and the way in which the research is situated in theory. "Methodological assumptions, values, and theoretical influences thereby give direction to the methods or techniques used in the process of empirical inquiry" (Daley, 2007, p. 84). Theoretical assumptions, in turn, are informed by the researcher's own understanding and awareness of the characteristics of knowledge and should be guided by a sound, constantly reflexive process. Crotty states, "…the epistemology generally found embedded in symbolic interactionism is thoroughly constructivist in character" (2003, p. 4). Indeed, the construction and presentation of identity is a process that makes meaning of symbols designed to represent elements of the self. In this view, knowledge is not an object of reality but is subject to individual

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creation and interpretation and one person's interpretation is only reflective of that one individual at one particular moment in time.

Figure 1 is an adaption from Crotty's (2003, p.4) 'scaffolded learning' framework of the four elements of the research process as applied to my own research journey. Constructionism is the epistemology which most appropriately informs the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism, and is therefore the epistemological stance best suited for this thesis. My research objectives are elucidated through semi-structured participant interviews and qualitative-minded content analysis of symbols as communicative of tourist identity.

Figure 1: My research proposal as positioned according to Crotty's 'scaffolded learning' research design (2003, p. 4).

Constructionism

Symbolic Interactionism

Content Analysis, Participant Interviews

2.2 Theoretical Perspective: Symbolic Interactionism

Central to the issue of interpreting symbols online is the notion of how the self is presented, modified and reiterated through the process of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is a sociological perspective that views meaning-making and interpretation as the basis for understanding the human social world (Sandstrom et al., 2010; Suljak, 2010; Crotty, 2003). The ideas behind this perspective were developed from a philosophy known as pragmatism which countered the more mechanistic worldview of classical rationalism that placed emphasis on causation and positivist scientific investigations (Sandstrom et al., 2010; Suljak, 2010; DePutter, 2007). Unlike a strictly rationalist view of the nature of reality as fixed and 'waiting to be discovered', pragmatists countered with a belief in the multiple realities of nature; meanings are subject to human interpretations which are shaped and re-shaped as new information becomes available, thereby producing multi-layered meanings of reality (Sandstrom et al., 2010). As each new layer of information is added, another may be modified or removed altogether if it causes tension in the coherence of the whole.

The epistemological stance or nature of reality that informs symbolic interactionism, as Crotty states, is that of constructionism, a belief that reality is continuously shaped, re-shaped, multiplied, open to negotiation, and an iterative process dependent on individual perspectives, culture, and meaning-making (Creswell, 2014; Mkono, 2012; Sandstrom et al., 2010; Crotty, 2003). "Constructionism's main ontological assumption is that there is no unique real world that pre-exists independently of human mental activity and human symbolic language" (Mkono, 2012, p. 389). It considers social

forces from society, community, and institutions as influential in affecting individual

behaviour. Language and other systems of communication and representation are filtered

through personal ideologies, informed by history, culture, relationships and everyday

encounters. Constructionism views people as social actors, who from childhood are

socialized into playing roles, imitating others, and modifying behaviour to garner certain

rewards, such as praise or other forms of positive reinforcement. We are born into "a

social world of organized, symbolic action – a world of rules, roles, relationships, and

institutions" (Sandstrom et al., 2010, p.5), and we learn to adapt, navigate social space,

and negotiate relationships as we evolve into cultured, socialized beings. It is through this

socialization process that we use and interpret symbols to gain understanding,

communicate with others, and express our needs and wants.

   Social psychologist and philosopher George Herbert Mead is historically credited

with adapting the principles of pragmatism and social behaviourism in the development

of symbolic interactionist theory (Sandstrom et al., 2010; Suljak, 2010; DePutter, 2007;

Crotty, 2003). A student of Mead's at the University of Chicago, Herbert Blumer, further

elaborated and expanded upon symbolic interactionism, the basis of which can be

surmised as follows:

1. People act in accordance to the meanings they ascribe to things; behaviour is
   guided by interpretations of actions, objects, situations.

2. Meaning is derived from social interactions with other people; symbols of
   meaning are thus socially filtered.

3. Those meanings are encountered and adjusted in an interpretive process
   (Sandstrom et al., 2010; DePutter, 2007; Crotty, 2003).

As Crotty states, "…the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism has clearly proven useful in identifying research questions and framing research processes for several generations of researchers" (Crotty, 2003, p. 78). Indeed, it is in this spirit that I as a researcher employ symbolic interactionism as a guide to my investigative journey throughout this thesis project. While this theoretical perspective informs the grounding of my study, it does not serve as firmly entrenched theory that I seek to either prove or disprove. Instead, in keeping with the goals of qualitative inquiry, my research is of an inductive, exploratory nature, generating themes through an analysis of data guided by the principles of symbolic interactionism. The research objectives of this thesis are closely aligned with the goals and philosophy inherent in the three aforementioned principles of symbolic interactionism, rendering this theoretical perspective a fitting foundation from which to base my study.

First, in looking at how tourists present their travel experiences using symbols such as language or images on Facebook while travelling, I uncover the meaning behind decisions to use certain symbols in presenting experiences. My analysis centred on this line of questioning, while remaining open to new insights along the way: What are the choices guided by? What do the symbols represent to the tourist? Why are they selected over others? What makes the selected symbols socially infused with meaning? Why are they shared when they are?

Second, in looking at how tourists present their identity as tourists on Facebook using symbols, I examine how the user situates the self in relational contexts. Are there other people mentioned or shown? Is the environment considered? What is the

interrelationship between the self, people, objects and the tourist environment? How are other people or objects used to convey messages of identity?

Third, in looking at how tourists interpret and manage impressions of the self as tourist on Facebook, I consider the interaction between the user and their fellow Facebook 'friends'. What type of comments are made, if any? How are they managed by the user and by others? Does the impression of others affirm or conflict with the tourist's intended identity claims? Is tourist identity altered, reconstructed or reiterated as a result? Does it change presentation tactics?

Sandstrom and colleagues (2010) expand on these basic principles by highlighting several other assumptions inherent in symbolic interactionism, influenced by a myriad of thinkers such as Mead, Herbert and American sociologist Charles Cooley. Five of those assumptions will be discussed here. To begin with, human beings are unique in their ability to use symbols and assign meaning to them. As Sandstrom et al. (2010) note, our reactions are not based strictly on stimuli in our environment, but are instead mediated by the meanings we assign to the stimuli, the nature of which are socially constructed through symbols such as language. Symbols therefore can be thought of as conduits of socially constructed meaning. Secondly, it is on the basis of our interpretation and interaction with these symbols that we become socialized and learn how to act, react, and generally behave in given situations. Thirdly, we act with agency and purpose based on conscious, self-reflective consideration of our goals in a particular setting. Fourth, emotions are pivotal in shaping behaviour and self-identity. Meanings involve feeling and we act based on how we feel about objects and people, expressing and managing emotions while keeping with cultural expectations for emotional display. Lastly,

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researchers aligned with this theory believe it is important to try to understand meanings from the perspective of the research participants in a 'naturalistic' manner through observation and interaction.

In his seminal piece of work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* (1959), Erving Goffman uses the theatre as a metaphor to describe the performances we attach to our everyday social interactions. Goffman's concept of symbolic interactionism consists of the presentation of self as a social construct through the use of symbols and how they are interpreted (Goffman, 1959). This interaction is a dynamic, mutually-feeding process wherein construction of the self informs the way it is interpreted or deconstructed, and that interpretation reflects back onto how the self is reconstructed in a continuous feedback loop. Presenting a favourable impression of the self that is validated by others is optimal, and construction of the self is motivated by choosing appropriate images or symbols to guide and control behaviour (Kim & Tussyadiah, 2013).

Dramaturgical theory is a social psychological perspective most closely aligned with symbolic interactionism (Sandstrom et al., 2010). However, instead of focus on meanings and interpretations, dramaturgical theory places emphasis on the manipulation of actions and appearances in everyday situations. Goffman believes we try to manage impressions that other people have of ourselves, and we constantly check in with other's reactions to our self-presentations in appraising whether our desired self is realized and supported (Sandstrom et al., 2010; Goffman, 1959). Part of managing impressions involves suppressing certain aspects of ourselves while exaggerating others to achieve a desired effect or a particular identity in a given social situation (Suljak, 2010; DePutter, 2007; Goffman, 1959). The dramaturgical approach to self-presentation, which

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analogizes a theatrical production as everyday social life, sees people as actors on a stage with a script, surrounded by a cast of fellow actors, supported by props, viewed by an audience, moving between the 'front-stage' and 'back-stage' regions, while role-playing is enacted through costumes, makeup, speech, and other communicative symbols. This often-quoted phrase from Shakespeare's *As You Like It* crystallizes the concept: "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts…"

Chapter 3: Literature Review

This chapter provides a breakdown of the myriad of social media and social networking sites in existence today, including defining characteristics and user engagement figures, with a focus on the chosen platform of study, Facebook. I trace the focus of social media in the tourism literature from its inception a few short years ago and discuss present-day opportunities for expanding the research base. I then discuss the body of knowledge existing on the formation of the digital self and the construction of identity as socially situated and managed by self-presentation and impression management techniques, as analyzed from the viewpoint of the theoretical perspective guiding this thesis, symbolic interactionism. Next, I go on to investigate tourist identity and representation on social media, including the construction of travel narratives, and explore the concept of tourism mobilities as applied to the mid-journey, on-route travel phase. The three main constructs of this literature review, social media, identity representation on social media, and tourist identity on social media, and the interrelationships between them are expanded upon and illustrated in a figure at the conclusion of this chapter.

3.1 Social Media

3.1.1 Social Media & Tourism Research

With its emphasis on the exchange of user-generated content in a digital space, social media is increasingly a popular platform to showcase personal tourism experiences which naturally lend themselves to visual and narrative presentations in the form of photographs, videos, captions, blog posts or any other form of digital expression with meaning inscribed. A desire to build social capital by sharing information and experiences while sustaining social relations is often the impetus for using social media while travelling (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013) and may provide the tourist with a 'real-time' sense of identity in this realm (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Baym, 2010). Social capital can be loosely defined as positive social outcomes from connecting with people through social networks (Callegher, 2013; Pappacharissi, 2011) and as appropriated online through social networks such as Facebook, may include validated identity claims, such as comments or 'likes' interpreted as support, new friendships acquired, and attention received, for example.

In an expansive review of tourism-related social media, Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) trace the trajectory of the topic from its first appearance in academic journals in 2007. Emphasis has shifted from the supplier-focused impact of social media on tourism businesses and the industry as a whole, to the role and use of social media in tourism marketing and management, tourist behaviours, and information creation and sharing. Tourist or consumer-centric social media studies have typically been divided into three

research streams: pre-travel (sometimes referred to as anticipatory phase), mid-travel (also known as experiential phase), and post-travel (or reflective) consumption (Wang, Park & Fesenmaier, 2012). Based on an extensive content analysis of social media articles in tourism and hospitality, Leung, Law, Hoof & Buhalis (2013) found more attention directed to businesses application of social media than to consumer-centric studies, with an overemphasis on marketing or profit-oriented purposes (e.g. Bosangit, Dulnuan & Mena, 2012; Hsu, Dehuang & Woodside, 2009). Much research has focused on the pre-consumptive travel stage, such as information search and planning (e.g., Perra-Lopez et al., 2011; Yoo & Ulrike, 2011; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Post-travel discussions centering on the representation of tourism experiences on social media have been gaining ground in academia (e.g. Rink, 2017; Mkono, 2016; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014; Leung, Law, van Hoof & Buhalis, 2013); however, according to Zeng and Gerritsen (2014), research has been somewhat unbalanced, with a tendency towards the use of quantitative methodologies (e.g. Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Kang & Schuett, 2013; Kim & Tussyadiah, 2013; Yoo & Ulrike, 2011; Parra-Lopez et al, 2011; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), especially online surveys in the data collection process (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014), which may be considered a limitation (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). A more recent study by Leung, Sun and Bai (2017) conducted a comprehensive review of social media trends in the tourism and hospitality field between 2007 and 2016. The authors concluded that a more systematic review of social media in tourism was warranted due to a gap in knowledge acquired through quantitative methodologies. Using bibliometrics, including co-citation analysis and co-word analysis, Leung, Sun and Bai (2017) found not only a rapid expansion of social media research in the aforementioned period of time, but a shift

away from hotel-specific and blog-focused reviews towards a diverse array of social networking sites as they relate to managerial applications, such as destination image, reputation management and consumer behaviour, and content analysis and netnography of UGC (user-generated content). Specifically, the authors note an uptick in the usage of TripAdvisor and Facebook as platforms for analyzing content, with an evolution towards studying visual content, such as photography. However, online reviews continued to remain the most commonly type of content of studied.

Table 1 compiles a list of academic journal articles consulted in this research process which specifically focus on social media (excluding other web tools, such as search engines) and travel or tourism. Articles reviewing previously published literature on the subject were omitted, and only articles highlighting newly undertaken studies were included. The authors and corresponding dates of publication are listed and categorized according to whether the study employed quantitative (listed as 'QN') or qualitative ('QL') methodologies in its data exploration, the type of methods carried out to collect and analyze data, whether the focus of the research took place in the pre-travel ('Pre'), mid-travel ('M'), or post-travel ('Post') consumptive stage of tourism, whether the research took the perspective of the individual tourist or consumer of a tourism experience (marked as 'C') or the supplier (most often marketer) of the tourism experience (marked as 'S'), a brief description of the topic, and a column pertaining to the social media platform(s) explored. In consideration of the relatively novel methodology used in this thesis project, I have also demarked an 'N' in parenthesis under the Methodology column to indicate those studies using a Netnography framework of analysis. In a review of netnography studies in tourism, Mkono and Markwell (2014)

found that tourist-oriented reviews, such as destinations, were the most studied area of

user-generated content by netnographers. To extend Mkono and Markwell's research, I

have compiled Table 1 below to include tourism netnography studies which have

specifically used social media sites as platforms to explore user-generated data. Articles

which specifically reference the use of netnography as a methodology were entered into

the University of Waterloo's library page. Terms included 'netnography',

'webnography', 'cyberethnography', 'online ethnography', and 'virtual ethnography'. In

a second field 'social media' and 'social networking' were searched separately with each

of the above variations on netnography, along with a third field: 'tourism'. Articles solely

reviewing previously published research on netnography or weighing the merits of the

methodology were discarded, and only newly generated studies were included.

Table 1: Review of academic articles on Social Media in Tourism using Netnography

Author	Methodology	Methods	Stage	Orientation	Platform	Topic
Lund, N. F., Cohen, S. A. & Scarles, C. (2017).	QL (N)	Case study; Discourse analysis	Post	S	Facebook	Co-branding of Denmark
Mkono, M. & Tribe, J. (2017a).	QL (N)	Content analysis	Post	C	TripAdvisor, Google	Alienation in 'smart' tourism
Mkono, M. & Tribe, J. (2017b).	QL (N)	Content analysis	Post	S	TripAdvisor	Multiple roles of tourism social media users
Rink, B. (2017).	QL (N)	Thematic content analysis	Post	C	TripAdvisor	South Africa's landscape from an aerial perspective

Baka, V. (2016).	QL (N)	Longitudinal case study, semi-structured interviews	Post	S	TripAdvisor, Facebook	Managing reputation in the travel sector
Muldoon, M. & Mair, H. (2016).	QL	Critical discourse analysis	Post	C	Blogs	Uncovering power structures in 'slum tourism' blogs
Rami, K. I. & Cakmak, E. (2016).	QL (N) / QN	Content analysis, Semantic network analysis, frequency analysis	Post	C	TripAdvisor, Blogs	Dark tourism - motivations for visiting a genocide museum in Cambodia
Li, J. & Pearce, P. (2016).	QN	Content analysis	Post	C	Blogs	Chinese travellers' and domestic scams
Mkono, M. (2016).	QL (N)	Thematic analysis	Post	S	TripAdvisor	Australian Aboriginal tour operators
Walter, G. P. (2016).	QL (N)	Thematic analysis	Post	C	TripAdvisor, blogs, videos	Experiences of authenticity in Thailand
Mkono, M. (2016).	QL (N)	Narrative analysis; content analysis	Post	C	Review sites (Yelp, TripAdvisor), blogs	Self-reflexivity in narratives of 'slum' tourism
Wu, M. & Pearce, P. L. (2016)	QN	Questionnaire	Post	C	Blogs	Chinese tourists' motivations for blogging
Berezan, O., Raab, C., Tanford, S. & Kim, Y. (2015).	QL	Content analysis	Post	C	Blog	Aspects of loyalty among hotel reward program members
Chandralal, L., Rindfleish, J., & Valenzuela, F. (2015)	QL (N)	Thematic content analysis	Post	C	Travel blogs	Memorable tourism experiences
Liyanage, S. Coca-Stefaniak, J. A. & Powell, R. (2015).	QL (N)	Semi-structured interviews	Post	C	TripAdvisor, Facebook discussion groups	Dark tourism - Holocuast memorial stie
Tavakoli, R. & Mura, P. (2015).	QL (N)	Semi-structured interviews	M & Post	C	3D virtual destinations via 'Second Life' website	Iranian women's behaviour in virtual tourist destinations

**Munar & Jacobsen (2014)	QN	Questionnaire	M	C	Facebook; Twitter; Blogs; Review sites	Motivations for sharing tourism experiences on social media
Wu & Pearce (2014)	QL (N)	Content analysis; Email & online messages;	Post	C	Blogs	Chinese RV use in Australia
Kang & Schuett (2013)	QN	Questionnaire	Post	S	Facebook; Twitter & others	Determinants of sharing travel experiences on social media
Kim & Tussyadiah (2013)	QN	Online survey	Post	C	Facebook; Twitter; Blogs	Tourists' self-presentation on social media
Mkono (2013)	QL (N)	Thematic analysis; Participant interviews	Post	C	TripAdvisor	Tourists' perceptions of cultural authenticity
Mkono, Markwell & Wilson (2013)	QL (N)	Thematic analysis	Post	C	Review sites	Food tourism in Zimbabwe
Munar & Jacobsen (2013)	QN	Questionnaire	Pre, M, Post	C	Facebook; Twitter; Blogs; Review sites	Trust in social media and web-based information sources
Rageh, Melewar & Woodside (2013)	QL (N)	Content analysis	Post	S	Review sites	Tourists' experiences in Egyptian resort hotels
Bosangit, Dulnuan & Mena (2012)	QL	Content analysis; Narrative analysis; Discourse analysis	Post	S	Blogs	Motivations for presenting travel experiences

Hvass & Munar (2012)	QL (N)	Content analysis	Pre	S	Facebook; Twitter	Marketing strategies of airlines
Paris (2012)	QN	Surveys	Post	C	Facebook; Twitter; Blogs; Youtube	Technology use of backpackers
Pearce (2012)	QL	Content analysis; Narrative analysis	Post	C	Blogs	Tourists' reactions to poverty in southern Africa
Jeacle & Carter (2011)	QL (N)	Content analysis	N/A	S	TripAdvisor	Trusting the use of TripAvisor in tourists' rankings
Parra-López, Bulchand-Gidumal, Gutiérrez-Taño & Díaz-Armas (2011)	QN	Questionnaire	Pre	C	Facebook; Twitter; Blogs; Review sites	Intentions to use social media in taking trips
Mansson (2011)	QL	Content analysis	Post	C	Facebook; Twitter; Blogs; YouTube; Flickr	Tourists' influence on and by media
Mkono (2011)	QL (N)	Thematic analysis	Post	C	Review sites	'Othering' ethnic food
Yoo & Gretzel (2011)	QN	Survey	Pre	C	Review sites, Blogs	Influence of personality on tourism social media use
Xiang & Gretzel (2010)	QN	Content analysis; Multivariate analysis	Pre	S	Review sites; Blogs & others	Role of social media in online travel search

Hsu, Dehuang & Woodside (2009)	QL (N)	Narrative analysis; brand analysis	Post	C	Blogs	Urban tourist experiences in China
Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier (2009)	QL (N)	Content analysis; Narrative analysis; Textual analysis	Post	C	YouTube	Effect of shared videos as mediators of NYC tourist experiences

Legend:
QN = Quantitative
QL = Qualitative
N = Netnography
Pre = Pre-travel
Post = Post-travel
M = Mid-travel
S = Supplier
C = Consumer

**Study was conducted in the intermediate period between pre- and post-travel, and focused on the sharing of travel experiences on social media during the trip and the *intention* to share after the trip.

Results from Table 1 elicit a tendency towards the use of qualitative methodologies as evident in 25 out of 36 cases, expanding Zeng and Gerritsen's 2014 research which showed a heavier use of quantitative methodologies in social media tourism. Out of those qualitative studies profiled, 21 explicitly reference netnography as their primary methodological lens, suggesting this type of in-depth, exploratory research has been gaining ground in social media tourism studies. It is apparent from Table 1 that researchers are tapping into the potential for netnography to uncover rich insights into online data. Results of Table 1 support the literature on netnography as primarily a multi-methodic approach to data collection. The majority of articles examined used two or sometimes three types of analyses, the most

prevalent of which for qualitative studies was content analysis. The benefits and use of content analysis as a tool for collecting data in my study are explored in Section 4.1.

Also gaining ground are consumer-focused studies, updating 2013 findings by Leung, Law, Hoof & Buhalis which showed greater emphasis on supplier-oriented studies. Twenty-six out of the 36 studies represented in Table 1 take the perspective of the individual tourism consumer as opposed to a tourism organization or destination marketing organization (DMO), for example. It should be noted, however, that this determination was made by myself as researcher, and is therefore a subjective interpretation of the direction or focus of each article. With the exception of five articles examined, which clearly analyzed the topic at hand from an organization's perspective, such as in the case of airlines' social media strategies, it was left unsaid on the part of the author as to the intention or direction behind the research. Thus, in the interest of transparency and reflexivity, it is important to note that this particular interpretation may be subject to my own personal biases and assumptions. Furthermore, while not the sole focus, most studies deemed consumer-oriented in Table 1 made reference to ways in which tourism suppliers or travel organizations could utilize and benefit from the study's findings in the discussion section of the papers.

Results from Table 1 illustrate a mixed use of social media platforms in the data collection process. Just over half of the studies used multiple platforms, including a combination of Facebook, Twitter, blogs, review sites, and other popular social networking or social media sites. Out of the studies that focused on one specific medium, such as blogs or review sites, in most cases, multiple websites under this category were examined. Eight studies reviewed in Table 1 concentrated on a singular social media

website. Results support Mkono and Markwell's 2014 findings that tourists' contributions to review sites were the primary sources for exploring user-generated content, perhaps because of the ease of access, purpose-specific nature, and readily available information on these types of websites.

Despite Facebook's popularity as the single most heavily used social networking site (see Section 3.1.3), and popularity as a photo-sharing site (Good, 2013; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), results from Table 1 would suggest it is underutilized as a primary research site for tourist-specific purposes. Ten research articles used Facebook as a field of study, while only one researched this platform exclusively. Privacy or ethical dilemmas as to accessing the site and disclosing researcher identities may explain its relative neglect as a sole platform in tourism netnography research thus far. The results leave the door open for more intensive, platform-specific studies in social media tourism. Facebook, as a user-generated, multi-media database encapsulating comments, photos, videos and more, is a condensed, 'one-stop shop' for data collection and therefore a valid site of exploration for the purposes of this project.

Furthermore, a glaring gap from Table 1 is the shortage of studies in the mid-travel phase, highlighting an important opportunity to analyze the 'real-time' use of social media while travelling. Only three of the 35 studies shed light on this experiential phase of tourism, with one using a virtual 3D platform as a stand-in for real-life destinations (Tavakoli & Mura, 2015). Zeng and Gerritsen concur, stating the lack of studies conducted in this travel phase is an "obvious gap(s) in the current research literature" (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014, p. 33) with implications for our understanding of travel behaviour.

3.1.2 Characteristics of Social Media

A current discussion in the academic literature brings attention to the differences between two terms often used interchangeably, namely 'social media' and 'social networking' Zeng and Gerritsen (2014, p. 28, italics added for emphasis below) highlight three important characteristics that summarize the nature of social media based on varying definitions.

1. "Social media are online *tools, applications, platforms and media*, and therefore depend on information technology."

2. "Social media are peer-to-peer *communication channels*, which enables the interactive web's *content creation, collaboration and exchange* by participants and the public, facets which introduce substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities and individuals."

3. "Social media link users to form a *virtual community* by using cross-platforms, and therefore affects people's behaviours and real life."

Thus, social media provides a template to create and manipulate content, a platform to exchange information and ideas, and an opportunity to communicate in real-time, synchronous exchanges through technology-enabled services in an online community designed to facilitate social exchange, the result of which can be termed 'social networking.' If social media is the foundation, social networking is the residual build of that foundation, spearheaded by a technology-derived, digital expression of

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identity. On Facebook, for example, this may appear as a profile page, in the macro sense, or on a smaller scale, a profile picture. A profile page acts as the central hub of a user's online presence; it is usually a carefully crafted presentation of the self, perhaps a digitalized 'home' which also serves as a "locus of interaction" (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 43) with other users in the system, or an online welcome mat, of sorts, that greets virtual visitors, provides identifying information, and encourages communication and interaction. Furthermore, Papacharissi (2011) characterizes social networking sites as distinct from other genres of social media by the very nature of their architecture or structural design. A combination of features give social networking sites special status; these include the presence of a profile page within a bounded system or community, usually requiring membership in the form of a username and/or password, the opportunity to generate connections (e.g. friends lists on Facebook, or followers on Twitter) and interact with those connections, and tools to facilitate dialogue and the sharing of content.

Deemed 'social' in nature because of their primary function of sharing and relationship-building, social networking sites provide users with varying degrees of control and interaction in the exchange of personal information, and may differ according to temporal structure or layout (e.g. posts arranged in a chronological timeline, such as with Facebook or Twitter, or categorically according to galleries or collections on Flickr), administrative control (e.g. the extent to which users can alter details on the site, including privacy restrictions), social interactivity (e.g. private messaging services versus public replies and/or comments; or a 'static' profile page by a user who mainly scrolls passively versus an active user who posts and comments frequently), and communication

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reach (e.g. the ability to tailor posts by audience, such as public, friends only, friends and acquaintances, or certain groups or individuals only) (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Social interaction is enabled through networking functions such as templates for text (e.g. comment boxes; 'walls' on profile pages on Facebook) or symbols (e.g. an ability to 'like' a friend's posting on Facebook by clicking a 'thumbs up' symbol), photos (e.g. albums or individual photos), and videos that act as a visual language to convey information with fellow members in an online community built with the purpose of social contributions (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014; Baym, 2010).

A snapshot of user statistics shows social media usage rates for both web-based and mobile devices vary across sites, suggesting some platforms are currently more popular than others. Twitter, for example, boasts 330 million active monthly members, 83% of which access the site via mobile technology, for a total of approximately 500 million tweets sent daily (Twitter, last updated October 26, 2017). Similarly, Instagram's popularity has skyrocketed since its inception in 2010, with roughly 800 million active monthly users, 500 million of whom are active on Instagram on a daily basis, and who post 95 million photos and/or videos each day (Instagram, last updated September, 2017). LinkedIn, on the other hand, claims to be the largest professionally-oriented network online, with approximately 467 million members worldwide (LinkedIn, last updated April 5, 2017). Of the 76% of U.S. adults who use social networking sites, roughly one-quarter have a Twitter account, while roughly one-third have an Instagram, Pinterest and LinkedIn account (Pew Research Center, 2016). User segmentation or demographic information points to males as slightly trailing females in social networking use, at 75% to 83% respectively, while Facebook users skew female (Pew Research Center, 2016;

Guimaraes, 2014). A deeper exploration of Facebook, the site of interest for this thesis

project, follows in Section 3.1.3.

3.1.3 Facebook: Site of exploration

Facebook, which boasts the largest membership or community of any social

networking site worldwide (Good, 2013), was designed with the mission to "give people

the power to build community and bring the world closer" (Facebook Newsroom,

Company Info, 2018, para. 1). Initially created by Harvard University student Mark

Zuckerberg in 2004 for intra-campus socializing, Facebook soon infiltrated to other

university campuses and extended its membership to non-students in 2006, opening itself

up to users of different age groups (Good, 2013; Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008). With

over two billion monthly active users as of September 2017, and 1.37 billion users who

log on daily, (Facebook Newsroom, Company Info, 2018), Facebook is now a key player

in representing the digital self for one-sixth of all humanity (Belk, 2013) and 11.5% of

the earth's population (Leung, 2013), rendering it a relevant, a timely, and a fruitful area

of exploration.

With its wide reach, emphasis on sharing, and photo application added in 2005

(Good, 2013), Facebook is a popular platform for sharing travel-related information with

family and friends, allowing the user to mediate their tourism experiences by

reconstructing and reliving their trips in the process of sharing them (Xiang & Gretzel,

2010). Users can upload photos, post captions to photos interpreting and describing the

content therein, hyperlink or 'tag' individuals in photos, thereby connecting others'

profiles to one's own, create whole photo albums, and use other techniques enabled by the site's functions to present their travel experiences, create an identity of the self as tourist, and manage impressions based on feedback received. Core functions of Facebook include documenting the social self within the context of friendship, demonstrating social and cultural preferences, and building cultural capital (Good, 2013).

Facebook can be seen as a parallel social world to offline social networks and in-person, embodied friendships. In fact, users of Facebook reportedly receive more social support from their social networks compared to non-Facebook users, and have closer, more trusting relationships (Pew Research Center, 2014), demonstrating the impact of the site as a social phenomenon. Coons and Chen (2014) analyzed Facebook as a primary tool for the construction of social ties. Expressive communication in the form of emotion-laden status updates, wall posts, descriptions and photos are the most common means of constructing sociability on Facebook (Coons & Chen, 2014). Expressive communication, they claim, manifests mainly through engagement, empathy, and entertainment on the site. Since activities on Facebook are inherently social, engagement with others is the first step in achieving sociability. A user posts content with the intention of engaging others through a 'like', a share or a comment. In early 2016, Facebook launched 'reactions', an extension of the 'like' button that expands user options for expressive communication by introducing 'Love, Haha, Wow, Sad or Angry' emoticons with corresponding facial expressions (Krug, 2016). Receiving a response, reaction or acknowledgment of some kind is said to be "the ultimate reward" on Facebook (Coons & Chen, 2014, p. 55). Empathy is expressed as part of an expectation of what it means to be social, and most often takes the form of compliments or encouragement, according to

Coons & Chen (2014). Facebook as a community is a place for sharing, maintaining friendships and engaging in leisure. Additionally, the entertainment aspect of sociability, according to the researchers, may materialize in the sharing of humorous videos, amusing photos, or sarcastic statements, for example.

A study conducted by the U.S. think tank Pew Research Center in 2016 gave a detailed outlook on the demographics of key social networking platforms, including Facebook. The results show that despite an influx of newer, more specialized social networking sites which are quickly gaining popularity, such as Snapchat, Facebook is still the most heavily used, with 79% of all adult internet users in the U.S., aged 18 and up, or 68% of all U.S. adults, counted as members. While it is still the top social network for U.S. teenagers and younger adults with 88% of users in the 18-29 age bracket holding an account, Instagram is a strong second, counting 60% of this segment as members (Pew Research Center, 2016). The perception of Instagram as a more esteemed platform for photo-sharing and social engagement in this age group may mean that Facebook's social relevance is decreasing, despite the increasing user engagement rates with Facebook, suggesting that more time is in fact being spent on the network (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart & Madden, 2015). Approximately 76% of users engage with the site daily (Pew Research Center, 2016), compared to 49% for Instagram, and 45% of Facebook users check their profiles several times a day (Duggan et al., 2015). Perhaps complementary to the slowly declining social importance of Facebook among younger people is that seniors are now adopting the network in greater numbers; more than half of all online adults aged 65 plus now have a Facebook account (Duggan et al., 2015), with 2016 data showing that number had increased to almost two-thirds, or 62%, of internet users aged 65 or above.

The infiltration of parents and grandparents to Facebook may disincentive younger

people from 'hanging out' with their peers in this particular space. If Facebook is

primarily a means to engage with peers while affirming a particular identity online, as

this thesis asserts, younger people may be encouraged to explore identity presentations on

newer platforms away from prying parental eyes. However, because of its firm

entrenchment in internet culture and steady hold with younger users, Facebook serves as

the setting from which to deconstruct and analyze tourist representation and identity

among participants in this thesis.

3.2 Identity Presentation on Social Media

3.2.1. Identity as Socially Situated

According to prevalent thought in the field of developmental psychology, identity

formation is a lifelong process, spurred by challenges or critical turning points in each

stage of social-psychological development (Weiten, 2001; Shaffer, 1999). Identity

formation combines cognitive, parental, educational and socio-cultural factors which are

most influential in early childhood and adolescence (Shaffer, 1999), and involves

"working out a stable concept of onseself as a unique individual and embracing an

ideology or system of values that provides a sense of direction" (Weiten, 2001, p. 461).

Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson and other theorists in this realm believed

forming an identity is "a cornerstone of sound psychological health" (Weiten, 2001, p.

461) and necessary for relating well to others and adapting to life changes. American

psychologist Carl Rogers pioneered the idea that one's self-concept, a core construct of identity, may or may not be consistent with life experiences (Weiten, 2001). He believed people have a tendency to embellish positive characteristics which may prove incongruent with reality. If 'reality' on social media is socially-situated interpretive meaning, seen from the lens of symbolic interactionism, identity performance is checked against the consistency of interpretations by others for congruency, a lack of which may cause a re-shifting of a person's sense of self in order to maintain psychological equilibrium.

In social psychology, the concept of the self is often debated from two opposing viewpoints: from an individualistic (i.e. 'nature') perspective, where one's personality, general disposition and enduring values constitute a relatively stable structure, and from a social (i.e. 'nurture') perspective, where the self is primarily socially oriented and shaped through relationships (Sandstrom et al., 2010). In this regard, the sense of self is malleable to different contexts and is acquired through a collaborative process with others. This socially-oriented sense of self is most closely aligned with symbolic interactionist thought which views the self as a reflexive process that constantly weighs and interprets social cues, including reactions from others, against our own self-concept. By taking the perspective of others, initiated through role playing as children, we learn to define our sense of self in relation to social standards, shared expectations, and general frames of reference (Sandstrom et al., 2010; Shaffer, 1999).

Identity is a construct of our sense of self, a way of defining ourselves physically, according to visible characteristics, socially, according to our roles and statuses from group memberships, or reflectively, involving innate characteristics, personality

dispositions and behavioural tendencies (Sandstrom et al., 2010). A multitude of identities make up our self-concept, and depending on the particular setting, some are more salient than others. Goffman believed that identity construction is a collaborative process that begins with negotiating identities in a given social situation. Identity negotiation involves locating the self as a social object in relation to other social objects, thus determining which identity is at play in a particular setting. For example, if a person arrives at a hotel as a guest, the successful performance of the guest's role will be reinforced by the roles enacted by the staff, including being greeted at the front desk, checked into a room, provided with maps or other information, assisted with luggage, and generally being treated hospitably in that setting. Congruency between enacted identities and performances is preferable, and in most cases, the setting dictates who acts as what to whom in "a dance of give and take" (Sandstrom et al., 2010, p.130). The self in this view is thus situated socially, co-constructed with others, and communicated according to the demands of the situation.

Identity as expressed on Facebook, given the social nature of the setting and shared expectations for engagement and sociability, will differ from identity expressed as a hotel guest, for example. Furthermore, because Facebook is mediated through technology, text, photos and other symbols of communication become more salient and selectively used given the disembodied nature of the setting (Baym, 2010; Walther, 2007). The digital self crafted in this space is negotiated within the confines of the social roles and expectations of the community of Facebook, and managed and re-negotiated according to feedback from other members.

3.2.2. The Digital Self

Belk (2013), who coined the term "extended self" in 1988, describes computer-mediated, digitally-influenced expressions of the self in the form of social media, smart phones, and virtual worlds as an extension of one's corporeal body, with implications for behaviour, identity and social relations. This "new wave of technologies is changing consumer behaviour in ways that have implications for the formulation of the self" (Belk, 2013, p. 477). The self in the digital age is characterized in part by dematerialization; for instance, by publishing digital artefacts which serve the same purpose as material objects in their representation of the self (Belk, 2013). Instead of physical photo albums we have digital photo albums; instead of wearing a branded watch on our wrists our extended self may 'like' a photo of a branded watch on Facebook, thereby associating our identity with an immaterial possession. Objects and possessions are seen as an extension of the self and act as memory indicators, prompts of prior experiences, or may be self-enhancing or nostalgic (Belk, 2013). In the digital world, the relevance of these objects remains but the objects themselves change form. Indeed, when we check our social media sites we are reaffirming our digital self identities (Belk, 2013). Belk asks the question of whether we can be as attached to immaterial possessions to the same extent as material ones, and whether we can gain the same status and enhancement of self through virtual possessions. On Facebook, a person's profile, timeline and friends may only act as part of the extended self when online, or for those who are granted access (Belk, 2013). Thus, the self in this context is situational and temporal.

A key aspect of the digital self is characterized by the act of sharing, and social media sites in particular thrive on the concept of self-disclosure. "For those active on Facebook, it is likely that their social media friends know more than their immediate families about their daily activities, connections, and thoughts" (Belk, 2013, p. 484). Feelings of invisibility on social media might prompt a tendency toward self-revelation or even over-sharing, as one is protected with the knowledge that representation can easily be altered or deleted, usually without harsh consequences. Online spaces provide an opportunity for re-contextualizing experiences and meanings attached to those experiences. Digital artefacts, such as uploaded photographs, "can accrue cumulative meanings from their digital contexts. The process of uploading images to specific web spaces and thus re-contextualizing them invests them with new meaning, transforming the original narrative or experience" (Davies, 2007, p. 550). Digital photos, unlike analogue photos before them, have the potential to the widely circulated by virtue of their immaterial nature, yet conversely, may ultimately be less perceptible due to an influx of other digital images competing for attention (Picken, 2014). Still, the images we select become a part of our 'identity project' and serve as a means of not only communicating outwardly to others, but of telling our own internal tales of the self *to* the self (Belk & Yeh, 2011; italics added for emphasis).

Accordingly, instead of receiving others' reactions in bodily form or in the physical presence of others, our interaction online is disembodied and digitalized for an electronic audience (Baym, 2010; Zhao, 2005). "Since social actors must establish their identities online without relying on the embodied cues normally available in the offline world, attentiveness to primarily textual cues is necessary to read digital expressions 'given off'"

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(Robinson, 2007, p. 105). In this disembodied, digital format, content, phrasing and vocabulary become aspects of performing identity (Robinson, 2007). Emoticons, combined from the words 'emotion' and 'icon', offer a condensed symbolic form of communication which "reduce interactional signals to a single visual cue embedded in the text" (Robinson, 2007, p. 107). In summary, according to Zhao (2005), the digital self is inwardly oriented (with a social exterior and psychological interior), narrative in nature (i.e. our online existence depends on what we post), retractable (i.e. easily deleted), and multiplied (i.e. allows for self-selection and the creation of multiple identities).

3.2.3. Self-presentation & Impression Management

Good (2013) analyzes social media platforms as a modern day "digital carryover" from personal scrapbooks, where thoughts and feelings and a window into personal lives are shared with others. Social media profiles, like scrapbooks, are highly social texts where users engage in impression management, identity performance, and express taste, often with the intention of highlighting social status (Good, 2013). The self as 'social actor' is projected visually via photographs where users implicitly engage in "showing without telling" who they are, according to Zhao et al (2008). If one's social network speaks to a particular social class or cultural identification, then Facebook acts as a means to construct identity implicitly. Sharing digital articles or videos on a friend's profile wall, and engaging in other exchanges of media, is a social performance that expresses shared interests, cultivates commonality and builds rapport among contacts (Good, 2013).

Zhao et al. (2008) distinguish several modes of self-presentation techniques on Facebook that range from implicit, such as the placement of the self within peer groups, to explicit, such as written descriptions of interests in the 'About Me' section, to a middle ground where cultural identification is created by aligning the self with 'liked' company pages, for example. According to their study, implicit identity claims were the most common type of self-presentation tactic on Facebook (Zhao et al., 2008). Interestingly, almost 40% of the sample used in the study had a profile picture placing the self within the context of a group, indicating an effort to construct a group-oriented social self, perhaps not surprisingly as "showcasing one's social relationships is a major purpose of using Facebook" (Coons & Chen, 2014). Activities that reflect a well-rounded, sociable and fun-loving individual were highlighted most frequently, including sports, art, and travel. Kang & Schuett (2013) applied the constructs of social influence theory to understand why tourists share experiences and information on social media post-travel. The researchers found that users who identify and feel a sense of belonging with members of a social media community and who internalize the norms and expectations of the social media community are more likely to share tourism experiences with others. A 2016 study examining blogging motivations of Chinese tourists confirmed this finding. Wu & Pearce (2016) found a sense of belonging to an online social community, and an enjoyment of the respect and recognition received through these environments proved a main impetus for sharing travel experiences. Secondary motives included altruism (posting to help fellow tourists), social status and achievement (self-promotion, pride), and self-documentation (writing to record travel stories). Social status is also highlighted as an incentive for using TripAdvisor to share post-travel reviews in a 2017 study by

Mkono & Tribe (2017b). The authors categorize 'the socialite' as one of five 'roles' played by TripAdvisor users. The socialite's main motivation is to display status through social and cultural capital acquired while travelling, such as exclusivity (i.e. staying in expensive destinations, dining at restaurants with prior reservations), sophistication (distinguishing class through high culture, such as museums and art galleries), and name-dropping (associating the self with celebrities who have shared hotel / restaurant experiences, thereby asserting their social hierarchy). Furthermore, tourists who highlight positive aspects of their travel are likely to generate positive feedback and greater attention from social media friends, especially when stories are selectively presented (Kim & Tussyadiah, 2013).

The construction of a socially desirable self is a deliberate manipulation of tools and techniques that place the self within social environments to achieve certain performance goals (Zhao et al., 2008). Our use of social media to this end and "…our fascination with creating digital self-portraits is indicative of our collective coming of age where we as a culture are discovering that we have voices online and can express ourselves rather than simply accepting the mass media's views of the world" (Rettberg, 2009, p. 463). Identity construction, however, involves a cyclical, iterative process of symbolic interactionism, whereby endorsement from others is a crucial component in maintaining and managing a sense of self (Zhao et al., 2008). "Positive remarks from others are more effective than self-praise" (Zhao et al., 2008) in ensuring one's social media identity is validated. Belk (2013) reiterates the importance of affirmation seeking in the process of co-constructing the self. A study of 13 teenage girls found a total of 2,055 photos uploaded to Facebook between them over the course of one-month, and

those photos garnered a total of 2,356 comments (Drenton, 2012, as cited in Belk, 2013). As discussed, part of the task of managing impressions is ensuring the likelihood that others will respond in accordance with our desired self-image. The performance of self-identity can be jeopardized if others' interpretations and our assessment of those interpretations are off the mark (Goffman, 1959).

Furthermore, Robinson (2007) concurred that Goffman viewed the self as strategically producing multiples selves for multiple performances, depending on the audience and image deemed credible. Facebook, for example, allows users to construct customized performances targeting particular viewers by blocking certain parts of their profile to others, thereby tailoring their self-presentation to suit the audience (Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008). Performance consists of two modes of communication: conscious and intentional signs and expressions, which are 'given', and those that are mostly unconscious or reactive, or 'given off.' (Goffman, 1959). We come to know ourselves by how others react to us, and others serve as a mirror in which we see ourselves (Zhao, 2005). The mirror defines the self as a reflection generated by others which is paired with their judgment. "In other words, our sense of self is really our perception of society's evaluation of us" (Robinson, 2007, p. 94-95).

In a netnography study of 346 Facebook users, Farquhar (2013) used Goffman's performance of self as a social-psychological framework to understand the presentation and interpretation of social media identities. Interestingly, research points to the tendency for others to seek out information regarding identity online that is not directly from the user, or presenter, but rather that comes from others who interact and respond to the user. Findings indicate that Facebook users align themselves with particular groups and also

avoid identifying with other groups in an effort to control identity and "ontological security" (Giddens, 1991, p. 187). Having a secure sense of self is important and even more reassuring when it is validated by others. We are "judged by the company we keep," according to Farquhar, (2013, p. 448); therefore, identification with the 'right' groups becomes critical to maintaining a desirable self-image and eliciting validation from members. Perhaps not surprisingly, Facebook users seek acceptance "by presenting themselves in the best possible light" (Farquhar, 2013, p. 447), often through the use of exaggerated performance techniques, such as over-simplified, unambiguous images that manipulate impressions and reduce uncertainty in identity.

In terms of interpretation, Facebook users rely on schemas to organize and relate to others' profiles, perhaps due to an overabundance of identity-geared information on the site (Farquhart, 2013). In a study by Farquhart (2013), profiles that were judged as 'successful presentations' by their peers tended to be simple, direct, and contain 'positive' imagery, such as sociability, athleticism, and a sense of humour, especially about oneself. Other impression management techniques found in the results include the deliberate selection of a profile picture, tagging or hyperlinking others' profiles to posts or photos, adding comments to images, and untagging or leaving out unflattering images (Farquhart, 2013).

Schau and Gilly (2003) emphasize the importance of symbols in forming an "intentional and tangible component of identity" (p. 387) wherein "the social actions required for self-presentation are consumption oriented and depend upon individuals displaying signs, symbols, brands and practices to communicate the desired impression" (p. 387). Impression management requires a manipulation of signs to create and maintain

an embodied representation of identity; however, "digital association blurs the distinctions among the material, the immaterial, the real, and the possible" (Schau and Gilly, 2003, p. 387). Expressions of digital identity, such as photographs and blog archives therefore become the "digital crumbs that we leave behind in a digital age" (Belk, 2013, p. 488). We can check impressions of our identity based on feedback received from online interactions; for example, how many 'likes' or positive, self-affirming comments a photograph or post receives. "Every time we check our social media sites we are effectively checking to see who we are, who we were, and who we seem to be becoming" (Belk, 2013, p. 492). If 'the medium is the message', as communications theorist Marshall McLuhan famously purports, the nature of Facebook as an "ego-centred" social tool encourages users to craft their profiles and actively manage interactions in line with the communication norms of that platform and their own self-image (Eftekhar, Fullwood & Morris, 2014, p. 166). "For the Internet constantly asks us: 'Who are you?' 'What do you have to share?'" (Belk, 2013, p. 484).

3.3 Tourist Identity on Social Media

3.3.1 Travel Narratives

In 2011, Facebook added a timeline feature, allowing users to create a reverse-chronological representation of important events in their lives, a key feature in compiling a narrative digital self (Belk, 2013). The temporal or chronological organization of events or posts is the most common narrative form used in social media (Rettberg, 2009). "One

of the ways we find our place in our culture and among our friends and families is by creating and consuming stories and images. These representations of ourselves and of others connect to larger cultural templates, which we adopt, adapt or reject" (Rettberg, 2009, p. 453). The mass customization of templates, such as those adopted by Facebook, help the user place their digital identity or extended self within "larger stories and cultural templates of the world…" (Rettberg, 2009, p. 464). Stories serve to construct and interpret not only an event itself, such as taking a vacation, but also reinforce or perhaps challenge culturally-imposed identities within the context of that vacation (Daley, 2007).

Part of the totality of identity construction online is that of the self as tourist. The performative approach to tourism is rooted in the dramaturgical view of everyday life presented by Goffman (1959) where the tourist's identity is judged by other 'actors' in the space, each enacting their own role. This perspective views tourism as performance in which tourists both give and receive staged presentations in the process of constructing tourist identity (Hyde & Olesen, 2011). Self-identity is continually constructed in the form of narrative, in particular settings, and for intended audiences. Motivation for constructing a narrative will depend on who the audience is and how the tourist wishes to present themselves (Daley, 2007). On family vacations, for instance, photographs may represent the tourist within the context of his or her role as a parent, while a tourist hiking through a national park will construct his or her identity around the concepts of nature and adventure (Hyde & Olesen, 2011). Constructing identity is a constant and reflexive process which evolves according to the life course (Hyde & Olesen, 2011). Hyde & Olesen (2011) argue that there are multiple ways of enacting tourism identities; for example, as an airline passenger, a hotel guest or member of a tour group. "The full

process of the anticipation of holidays, the act of travel, and the narration of holiday stories on return are all tied into an imagination and performance which enables tourists to think of themselves as particular sorts of persons" (Desforges, 2000, p. 930).

In an examination of post-travel behaviour, Bosangit, Dulnuan and Mena (2012) identified three common themes for travel blogging: representing places, 'othering,' or placing the self in relation to others at the destination, such as locals, to highlight differences, and acts of self-presentation and identity construction. Travel narratives that serve to construct the self as tourist were found to be dominated with stories of overcoming risks and challenges, such as participation in extreme activities like bungee jumping or skydiving, or enduring hardships while travelling, such as long bus rides or bad weather (Bosangit et al., 2012). Self-presentation strategies include self-promotion, or calling attention to accomplishments; blasting, or associating the self with others who are viewed positively; self-handicapping, or using excuses to prevent others from making negative judgements, and enhancement, or exaggerating outcomes (Bosangit et al, 2012). Research on the post-consumption stage of tourism has mainly focused on satisfaction and evaluation of tourism experiences, but using discourse analysis, the researchers found satisfaction and narrative presentation is tightly woven with personal experiences, emotions, relationships and self-identity. In a study on the user-generated content of travel blogs, Yoo and Ulrike (2011) found a dominant narrative that placed the self at the centre of stories; 81% of American travellers wrote about personal experiences, while 63% gave practical information about the destination, 54% concentrated on local people, food and culture, 51% gave facts about the destination, 49% discussed people they met

while travelling, 48% gave tips or warnings to other travellers, and 43% evaluated travel services.

Similarly, in a study on tourist photography, Belk and Yeh (2011) found that personal travel photos parallel tales about the self and script a travel tale that places the tourist at the centre of a self-narrative. In collecting photos or videos for an imagined self-narrative, Belk and Yeh argue that tourists are likely to take on the role of author, playwright or director in crafting a narrative genre to place the tourist self, such as a pilgrimage, adventure tale or quest journey. They argue that tourist photography is more representative of the self as tourist than it is about the people and places encountered along the way. Desforges (2000) argues for the importance of storytelling from both an internal and external point of view. Externally, travel narratives orient the self socially and help construct a 'travel biography' (Pappacharissi, 2011; Daley, 2007). Narrative devices include selecting certain experiences to capture and share, editing them, exaggerating them for effect (via technology such as photo editing software or using embedded filters in applications such as Instagram) and connecting plot points that make up the structure of a narrative. Generating narratives through photographs allow tourists to explore and reproduce their identity (Daley, 2007). Tourist photos are taken therefore selectively with a particular audience in mind and are a conscious attempt to manipulate our self-image for a desired effect (Belk & Yeh, 2011).

Blogging about travel experiences online serves as a storage site for memories, a space to reflect on experiences, and an opportunity for enrichment by sharing experiences with family and friends. Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) and Munar and Jacobsen (2014) argue that tourism experiences are not simply evaluated spatially by visiting

places but are also mediated by personal experiences, such as interaction with other tourists, the host community or travel providers, and non-personal experiences which are guided by aesthetics, landscape, setting or signage. "Social media provide new channels for the production and circulation of meaning in tourism experiences and imaginations" (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014, p. 47).

In a study investigating British tourists' intention to post travel-related photos to Facebook, Munar and Jacobsen (2014) found 31% of people planned to do so upon returning home, while 11% posted photos about their trip on route; 3% had used Facebook to post a travel-related blog, while 7% planned to do so upon returning home. The results show the importance of Facebook as a means to share tourism experiences with family and friends, with a heavier emphasis on conveying visual information. Results also indicated a preference for sharing tourism experiences within the confines of a selective network where the user can control who sees what, as compared to websites with a wider or global reach. Audience selectivity is thus one component of a self-presentation strategy where users mix the social need for sharing and connecting with privacy concerns and image control.

In a netnographic content analysis of New York City videos uploaded by tourists to YouTube, researchers discerned self-centric strategies of tourism presentation to be a major category of representation. According to Mansson (2011), tourists are both consumers and producers of media content and often seek out sites and images that are represented through mass media in their process of constructing narratives of the self. This 'circle of representation' is perpetuated by tourists through social media pages where media in this platform, such as photos and individual commentary, are reproduced

for one's online social circle, rather than the masses. The emphasis with social media is on personal agency; we select the photos we post and control how our identity is presented and maintained. Picken (2014) critiqued the notion of 'snap-happy' tourists as "cultural dupes" who seek out and replicate iconic images as a "list […] which is a validation to have *been there, done that*" (Picken, 2014, p. 4, italics in original).

3.3.2 Tourist Mobilities

A relatively new research domain in the tourism literature is the concept of tourism mobilities, based on the idea that modern-day society is marked by a high degree of fluidity and ease of movement, which consequently have implications for tourism (Mkono & Tribe, 2017a; Hannam, Butler and Paris, 2014; Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Paris, 2012, Picken, 2014). The tourism mobilities paradigm considers issues of globalization, migration, emerging technologies, and communication and information systems as they relate to tourist behaviour and impact tourism theories (Cohen & Cohen, 2012). According to Hannam, Butler and Paris (2014), tourism mobility is not only a form of physical mobility, but also informs and is informed by those processes which affect the movement of people more generally, such as transportation, trade and commerce, and new technologies. Sociological understandings of tourism in previous research, including traditional binaries such as 'home' and 'away,' (Hannam et al., 2014) are becoming "destabilized by contemporary communication technologies" according to Erik Cohen and Scott Cohen (2012, p. 2181), effectively changing the outlook of researchers. The notion of mobilities here will be conceptualized from the perspective of the ubiquity of

internet connectivity, social media and mobile technologies which allow immediate access to information sharing by opening up channels to instantaneous communication. For the purpose of this thesis, I am interested in applying a discussion of the concept as it relates to the mid-travel phase of tourist consumption, the phase where the tourist is literally mobile and consuming tourism on the go.

In his study of tech-savvy backpackers, Paris (2012) coined the term 'flashpacker' to describe an emerging sub-culture of backpackers who embrace social media and mobile technologies while travelling, and rely on technology-mediated information to stay connected and plan their journey throughout the travel process. Tourist experience is mediated by communications technology, often through mobile devices by 'hypermobile' 'digital nomads' (Paris, 2012), embodied by the flashpacker culture. The omnipresence of mobile phones, especially smartphones, makes staying connected to social networks easier, and for some, more important, than ever before. According to a report, 91% of 19-29 year olds use social networking sites on their phones, the highest of any age group (Pew Research Center, 2015). The prevalence of new technologies and a desire to stay 'social' while on route is infiltrating tourism culture more widely, Paris argues, by changing how we think about tourism from space-time dichotomies (Hannam et al., 2014) that are effectively closing gaps between virtual and physical space, home and away, connection and disconnection, and tourist and non-tourist experiences (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014; Paris, 2014). Flashpackers or 'lifestyle travellers' may maintain constant states of mobility through technology which allows them to work anywhere, independent of a home base, effectively merging identities (Hannam, Butler and Paris, 2014; Paris, 2012). These types of tourists also have new opportunities "to 'perform'
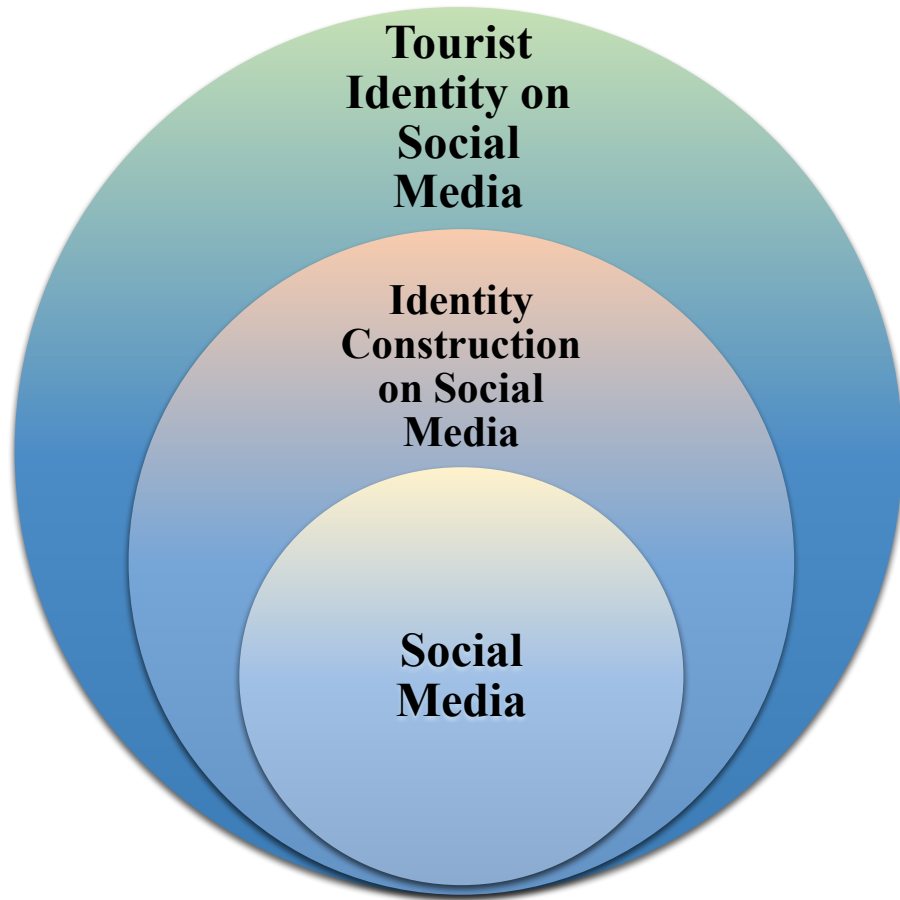
while traveling by constructing the photos, stories, places, and experiences that they share with their virtual networks" (Paris, 2012, p. 1111). This 'performance' allows for a spontaneous advantage as photos can be shared instantaneously with social networks, thus serving as 'live' or 'real-time' evidence that traverse time and space (Picken, 2014). Perhaps a stabilizing 'location', Facebook and other social media technologies allow for the creation of a central meeting space, enabling communication through different time zones and rendering time and space essentially irrelevant (Coons & Chen, 2014). In effect, a blog, email, Twitter or Facebook account may serve as a traveller's only permanent address (Hannam et al., 2014).

Wang, Park and Fesenmaier (2012) note that smartphones and the corresponding use of mobile applications (apps) have implications for information search, processing and sharing in the experiential or 'en route' phase of tourism, thereby mediating the tourist experience through behavioural and psychological aspects. Travellers can download maps, search restaurant reviews, translate currency, learn a new language, connect with other travellers, and share experiences with friends and family back home, all while on the move. "Mobile devices and social media enable an individual's social networks with a 'surveilling gaze' through which they can follow, watch, monitor, and track tourists virtually from a distance through constant and often concise 'byte-sized' updates" (Hannam et al., 2014, p. 179). A tourist's Facebook friends can follow a tourist's journey, becoming 'virtual travel companions' in the process, indirectly experiencing the trip, while also giving social support to the (actual) tourist (Hannam et al., 2014; Kim & Tussyadiah, 2013). Indeed, Kim and Tussyadiah (2013) found that the more tourists are engaged with social networking activities while travelling, the more

social support they will receive, which positively contributes to their overall tourism experience. Mkono and Tribe (2017a) coined the term 'e-lienation' to describe how the constant connectedness of 'smart tourism' can paradoxically cause tourists to feel more detached and alienated (e-lienated) from the tourist experience itself. Are Facebook users, for example, more interested in capturing their travel experiences for consumption by their social network 'friends' or for their own genuine interest in the moment? What are the implications of this? Does this motivational shift change the way tourists think about destinations, attractions and experiences?

Researchers claim that knowledge surrounding the use of mobile technology on tourism is only beginning to take shape, but may have important social and behavioural implications from both industry and individual tourist perspectives (Hannam et al., 2014; Kim & Tussyadiah, 2013; Wang et al., 2012). "…it is essential that we understand how mobile social networks encourage instant sharing of travelers' stories, and how the instant feedback supported within these networks may lead to new activities in the destination as well as the 'reinterpretation' of the touristic experience" (Wang et al., 2012, p. 385). This study aims to helps shed light on that process.

Figure 2: The interrelationship between the three main constructs of the literature review.

Tourist Identity on Social Media

Identity Construction on Social Media

Social Media

The above figure illustrates the association between the three central constructs of the literature review, the base of which is the foundation for this study. To summarize, previous research on social media within an academic context was analyzed, demonstrating a lack of studies in the mid-travel phase of tourism consumption, as well as with Facebook as a single source of study. Facebook's continued popularity as the most heavily utilized social networking site was explored, with statistics showing a slight decline in overall engagement among younger people, due in part to competition for users by a proliferation of social networking platforms which followed. The next section examined the construction and presentation of the digital self on social media, with a focus on the digital self as socially situated and adjusted according to impression management techniques, under the guiding framework of symbolic interactionism. The last construct examined the ways in which tourist identity and representation is created on social media, such as through travel narratives, and touched on the concept of tourism mobilities as it applies to the mid-travel, real-time phase of tourism consumption.

Chapter 4: Methods

This chapter highlights the methods used for collecting and analyzing participant data in my exploration of tourist identity and representation on Facebook. I outline the strategies employed for recruiting participants and justify the criteria for participation in my study. I then discuss qualitative content analysis, its appropriateness as a research method for this project, and the process of systematic coding for generating patterns of meaning or themes.

4.1 Data Collection & Analysis

Qualitative researchers strive for what Higgs & McAllister (2001) describe as 'quality criteria' of rigour, credibility and authenticity, as opposed to statistical reliability, random sampling and research validity, as quantitative methods typically focus on. This is practiced primarily through transparent processes that help elucidate the truth, value and believability of findings. Triangulation of data requires using multiple sources of information to more fully understand the phenomenon under study, substantiate findings and help build credibility (Daley, 2007). To this end, I have employed the use of qualitative content analysis and participant interviews in my collection of data, while practicing active reflexivity throughout.

From a broad perspective, I examined the relevant data presented in each individual Facebook account to conduct an image-based content analysis of photos, videos and/or emoticons posted in the context of travel, as well as text-based messaging attached to the images, including captions of photos or videos, and comments posted by other users with reactions to those comments. I analyzed anything symbolizing tourist

identity and representation within the context of the tourism experience or activity as it took place. With regard to visual data, this included the chosen subject matter of each photo, the placement of objects or people in photos in relation to the background, for instance, (i.e. are people perceived as the focus or do they serve as context?), and the number of people within. With regard to textual data, the nature, tone or type of language used to describe tourism experiences, reactions and feedback from Facebook 'friends', and any other symbolic representations such as emoticons or other characters were analyzed.

4.1.1 Recruitment Strategy & Criteria for Participation

For the purpose of reducing researcher bias to the extent possible, I deliberately avoided using my own Facebook contacts as sources of referral for potential research participants (i.e. friends of friends) and instead employed a type of non-probability sampling technique appropriate for the purpose or objectives of my research: purposive sampling. As a first step in my recruitment strategy, I contacted the administrators of four Facebook groups affiliated with the University of Waterloo. Four groups were chosen instead of fewer to cast a wider net and maximize the pool of possible candidates. The first was the school's 'official' Facebook page, called 'University of Waterloo'. As of 2013, certain accounts on Facebook are denoted with a blue checkmark to indicate the official status or authentic identity of a company after being verified by Facebook (Facebook Desktop Help, 2014). The school's official Facebook page is one such company as it is administered by the school itself. The second group was the university's

'Faculty of Applied Health Sciences,' which posts information and events related to the three disciplines of Health, Kinesiology and Recreation and Leisure Studies. It too is administered through the school, though not deemed 'official' by Facebook. The third group was an unofficial group also called 'University of Waterloo' that is a public group geared to those identifying as students, faculty members, administrators, alumni, or anyone associated with the school at all. Members are given free reign to post content relating to the school or affiliated social activities and information. There was no information given on the group's administrators. The fourth group is called 'UWaterloo Life' and is geared to current students of the university with posts coming from the Student Success Office on campus.

My first step was to contact the two groups officially affiliated with the University of Waterloo by sending a private message to the administrators requesting permission to post an Ethics-approved recruitment letter directed towards students and potential participants. This step was necessary because, unlike the open groups, students in one of the official Facebook groups do not have the authority to post on the pages of the official school groups, with the exception of posting comments under the school's posts. In the case of the second official page, posts by students are permitted, however requesting permission from the administrators was deemed important to minimize any perceived overstepping of authority on the part of the people who run the group. While permission per se is not necessary if posts are allowed, it was considered a courteous step in the spirit of goodwill to gauge response before posting to a larger database of people. Unfortunately, however, no response from these two official groups was received within a reasonable timeframe. In order to avoid delaying the recruitment process, I then focused

on recruiting through the two remaining open groups affiliated with the university. My recruitment strategy consisted of posting information regarding the study to potential participants, including an assurance of the ethical grounding and integrity of the study, which had gained approval from the University of Waterloo's Office of Research Ethics. (See Appendix A for the Information and Recruitment Letter provided to these students.) Potential participants were encouraged to contact the researcher by private message on Facebook for further information. Surprisingly, only a handful of Facebook members in those two groups expressed interest in the post through 'likes' and no private messages were received by the researcher. Recruiting via Facebook for a study on Facebook had seemed like a common sense strategy, although the lack of response forced the researcher to take more targeted recruitment approach. Consequently, I contacted some colleagues and professors at the University of Waterloo who were teaching courses during the period of my recruitment and asked for their assistance in sharing my study's information with their students (see Appendix B for Recruitment Slides). This strategy proved successful and several students expressed interest in participating, although less than initially anticipated. For this reason, and in order for the study to proceed in a reasonable timeframe, the original criteria for participation were revised and expanded to allow for greater participation.

Participants for my study were based on the following five criteria, which were revised given limitations in recruitment numbers.

1. University of Waterloo graduate or undergraduate students who are unknown to the researcher *(This was expanded to any young people unknown to the researcher)*.
2. Active users of Facebook, loosely defined by 'regular visits and posts.'
3. Those who have travelled at least once for pleasure within the last 6 months *(This was expanded to 3 years to allow for a much wider inclusion of participants)*.
4. Those who have shared information and/or experiences from their travels with friends on Facebook, such as photo albums and/or dialogue centred around photos or comments of the trip more generally.
5. Those who have shared and posted travel information to Facebook <u>during</u> their vacation or trip, <u>while</u> travelling. Postings can be verified on Facebook according to a date-time stamp which should correspond with stated travelling time.

For criterion 3, six months was initially chosen as a timeframe so that knowledge and memory of the participants' trips could be easily recalled, but was later expanded to three years to allow for the inclusion of a much wider pool of candidates. Participants were chosen on a first-come, first-served basis (earliest response to recruitment) with no regard to gender, age, or background, as long as they met the 5 stated criteria. Participants who met the criteria were invited to contact the researcher via email or a private message on Facebook with personal information as to where they travelled from (home base) and where their trip took place (to gauge distance) and how long it lasted. Once screened, participants were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix C) agreeing to partake in the two phases of the study: the content analysis and a one-hour, semi-structured interview, allowing the researcher access to their profile pages (by accepting a

'friend' request), and be comfortable with the use of their data in an anonymized, confidential and ethical manner. Participants were informed of the study's ethical clearance by the University of Waterloo's Office of Research Ethics. In total, 8 participants, consisting of young people between the ages of 20-35, with 6 being female and 2 male, were admitted to the study. In qualitative studies, "participants are chosen purposively because of their relevant characteristics and experiences with the phenomenon to be explored" (Daley, 2007, p. 105). Given the qualitative nature of my research that seeks to explore deeper understandings of data, with an emphasis on quality of interpretations and meanings, a sample of 8 participants was deemed a sufficient number to justify thematic saturation (see Section 4.1.4). Furthermore, as Daley (2007) remarks, "…in qualitative research the sampling size is usually restricted by the time consuming nature of interviews and observations" (2007, p. 105).

4.1.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

Content is the basis for new media research and accordingly, consists of the coding of content in the interpretive process. Originally applied to traditional mass media analysis, linguistics, communication studies, cultural and literary studies, sociology and political science (O'Reilly, 2005; Banyai & Glover, 2012), content analysis is a well-established research method in communication and media studies and as its application expands to modern-day communication technologies and new mediums, "there is no reason not to apply it to the internet as well" (Langer & Beckman, 2005, p. 193). Banyai and Glover (2012) elaborated by stating "the ability to modify traditional research methods such as ethnography to an online environment can offer researchers and

destination marketers with valuable data gathered using an established and recognized research method" (p. 275).

Qualitative content analysis can involve different units of analysis, depending on researcher goals, and involves coding words, photos or phrases thematically into either researcher-defined or emergent categories (Smith, 2010) with less of an emphasis on systematic quantification and more a focus on interpreting imbedded meanings of text in a reflexive, iterative process (O'Reilly, 2005). Content analysis involves uncovering the linguistic techniques used by participants, such as descriptive or emotional words, the style of writing, repetition, use of capitalization, metaphors, or comparisons (Bosangit et al., 2012). Banyai and Glover (2012) argue for an interpretivist approach to conducting content analysis, whereby the latent meanings of data in the surrounding environment of text and images can be extrapolated to uncover more personal, subjective, and arguably more meaningful experiences of travellers. A considerable disadvantage to using quantitative content analysis and computerized software to make objective measurements, such as word counts, is that the researcher is at risk of losing perspective of the deeper, subjective meanings of the data and the interrelationships between the units and contextual whole, which could result in a more superficial analysis that misinterprets or ignores altogether aspects of meaning (Banyai & Glover, 2012; Langer & Beckham, 2005).

Once access to participants' Facebook pages were granted, I began the content analysis data collection with a frequency count by quantifying some readily available information for each participant, such as the number of Facebook friends each participant had, the number of trip photos and/or videos posted mid-travel within the acceptable

timeframe and therefore eligible to be used as data, the number of captions from photos

and videos, the range of likes each photo / video generated from friends, the number of

hashtags and emoticons (if any), the number of friend tags and mentions, and location

tags and mentions, the number of photos with comments made by friends, and the

number of photos with replies by participants to comments made by friends. It is

important to note that the content analysis was conducted prior to Facebook expanding its

'like' button options to include numerous emotion-laden icons or 'reactions'; for

example, a heart symbolizing love, a facial emoticon with tears representing sadness, and

a facial emoticon with an exaggerated expression of surprise. The exclusion of these

options may thus be considered a limitation to conducting the study a few years prior to

its publication. (For more study limitations please see Section 6.) I then analyzed the

aforementioned examples within a qualitative lens where appropriate; for example, by

categorizing the tone or impression (positive, negative, neutral) of textual data, such as

captions (usually sentences; i.e. the use of exclamation marks, the use of descriptive or

emotionally-charged words) and hashtags (usually single words or short phrases), and of

image-based data, such as emoticons (i.e. a happy face) and photos/videos. Further, I

made note of commonly used words in captions and hashtags that seemed most

characteristic of the overall tone of the trip, which frequently included 'adventure',

'beautiful', 'awesome,' and 'cool.'

Subsequently, I analyzed the focus of each participant's photos and placed each

photo into its appropriate category organized by type of subject or theme, such as Scenic,

People, Building, Food, Nature, Sign, Attraction and Other. Some categories overlapped

such as a scenic background with people in the forefront, or a building and

sign/attraction, or a nature scene, and in those instances I made note of the combination

for each. In most cases the contextual data given for each photo, such as the resulting

caption or explanation of events, provided evidence as to the intent of the photograph and

therefore its most fitting category. The 'People' category was further dissected by Solo,

or Duo / Group for subject photos, and the 'Other' category included such things as

animals and art. See Table 2 below for a breakdown of photographs, the largest

component of visual data analyzed. The purpose of this table is to differentiate the

various components of image-based data. I chose to separate components in an effort to

accurately depict the attention or focus of participants' visual presentations, which then

influenced the process of generating categories of meaning and eventually themes against

the larger data set. From this data, I then surmised adjectives or descriptors that formed

an overall impression of each participant's Facebook trip presentation. For example,

some initial impressions of participants were 'highly sociable,' 'hedonistic-oriented',

'icon-oriented,' 'playful,' 'active,' and 'reflective.'

Table 2 – Breakdown of photographs as a major component of visual data collected during content analysis

Participant	Number of Photos	Scenic Photos	Scenic Photos with People	People Photos (Solo)	People Photos (Duo / Group)	Building / Food / Nature Photos	Sign / Attraction / 'Other' Photos
Adam	3	2	2	1	1	0	0
Alison	12	11	9	8	2	10	2
Amanda	34	15	8	11	12	6	5
Amy	17	7	4	4	6	4	6
Katelyn	14	8	5	2	6	1	1
Michael	13	3	0	2	0	6	4
Natalie	83	7	0	9	9	5	53
Sophie	15	3	0	5	6	1	1
TOTAL	**191**	**58**	**28**	**43**	**42**	**33**	**72**

In terms of quantity, details of the content analysis that bore relevance to the research objectives are discussed further in Chapter 5; however, the following numbers give perspective on the amount of data the research from the content analysis produced: Photos ranged in number between participants from a low of three, to a high of 83, with an average of 23, totalling 191 photos analyzed across all participants. Meanwhile, the number of captions on photos ranged from a low of one to a high of 75, with an average of 17 and a total of 137 captions analyzed. Captions ranged from a one-word hashtag, to a full sentence or paragraph, but a per-word count of captions was not a unit of analysis deemed important by the researcher for the purpose of this study. Hashtags ranged between participants from a low of zero to a high of 15, and an average of 6 per participant, with a total of 50 hashtags analyzed altogether. See Table 3 for a breakdown of the major components of textual data analyzed, including captions, hashtags, official location tags and informal location mentions (combined in one column), friend tags and informal friend mentions (combined in one column), number of comments by friends, and number of participant replies to comments by friends. The next step in the process of generating themes or patterns of meaning involved expanding the data collection by interviewing participants in a semi-structured interview format to produce further qualitative data and a deeper understanding of meaning.

Table 3 – Components of textual data collected during content analysis

Participant	Captions	Hashtags	Location tags and mentions	Friend tags and mentions	Comments on photos by friends	Replies to friends' comments by participant
Adam	3	0	1	0	4	1
Alison	12	12	31	3	10	2
Amanda	1	0	1	19	10	3
Amy	15	10	19	3	7	1
Katelyn	14	14	19	4	9	3
Michael	13	13	23	1	6	4
Natalie	75	0	83	4	4	1
Sophie	6	1	4	3	3	3
TOTAL	**139**	**50**	**181**	**37**	**53**	**18**

4.1.3 Qualitative Semi-Structured Interviews

To help expand and validate my data according to recommended practices of

qualitative research (Kozinets, 2013; Daley, 2007), the second phase of data collection

consisted of semi-structured interviews with participants, of approximately one hour in

length, to extract contextualized meanings behind the shared posts on Facebook. As

Crotty states, "Ethnographic inquiry in the spirit of symbolic interactionism seeks to

uncover meanings and perceptions on the part of the people participating in the research,

viewing these understandings against the backdrop of the people's overall worldview or

'culture.' In line with this approach, the researcher strives to see things from the

perspective of the participants. It is this that makes sense of the researcher's stated

intention to carry out *unstructured* interviews and to use a *non-directive* form of

questioning within them," (Crotty, p. 7, emphasis in original). It may be argued, however,

that qualitative interviews are never truly unstructured, as the researcher naturally brings

a bias to the process in terms of the type of information sought, guided by the research

questions leading the study. With that awareness in mind, and in order to ensure

consistency between participants, a *semi-structured* interview format was chosen so as to

ensure all participants were asked the same set of basic questions, while remaining open

and considerate of individual differences amongst participants. For instance, some

participants required further probing for detail or expansion, while some needed more

direction or redirecting back to the question at hand. Open-ended questions were asked to

probe underlying motivations or intentions behind decisions to post photos, comments

and other representations of the tourist experience, while exploring the thought processes

behind such decisions and eliciting reflection on the part of the participants (See

Appendix D for Participant Interview Guide).

A total number of 159 pages were transcribed, consisting of approximately 5

hours of transcribed data. As an initial step, my goal was to ensure participants were

comfortable in the setting and willing to openly discuss their relevant Facebook posts in a

friendly and confidential manner with the researcher. Most of the interviews took place in

a private study room at the University of Waterloo with the exception of three that

occurred off campus. While guiding the interaction as researcher, I was mindful of not

leading the participants or displaying judgement. Interviews took a conversational tone

whereby the participants gave the researcher a 'guided tour' of their Facebook tourism-

related content with the researcher taking notes and asking open-ended, semi-structured

questions along the way.

The interviews took place seated in front of a laptop with the participants'

Facebook pages open for viewing and participants were asked to click through the

relevant data, such as trip photos. This virtual 'guided tour' acted as a memory prompt

for the participant and gave visual background to the discussion. The interviews and

'guided tours' enriched and complemented the insights gleaned from the first phase of the

study by contextualizing decision-making, thought processes, unconscious assumptions,

and individual circumstances and constraints, such as limited or unreliable internet

connectivity while travelling, or time factors, for example. (See Chapter 6 for a

discussion on participant limitations.) The interviews also provided an opportunity to

conduct initial member checks with participants based on my own initial findings from

the content analysis portion of the data analysis. To help achieve transparency in research

and validate process-driven work, member checks are a recommended procedure for

conducting qualitative research. They involve "discussing emergent concepts in the data

and asking the participants to clarify and elaborate" (Higgs & McAllister, 2001, p. 38).

The semi-structured interview format allowed for some questions pertaining to individual

differences based on the content analysis, which participants had an opportunity to clarify

or expand upon.

4.1.4 Coding & Generating Themes

According to Charmaz (2006), categories are considered saturated or maximized

"when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new

properties of these core theoretical categories" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 113). The concept of

theoretical saturation will be understood as applied to the goals of this study, which are to generate socially-patterned themes from in-depth analysis of online content and individual interviews that shed light on meanings behind tourist identity ~~construction and~~ representation on Facebook. Theoretical saturation, or as adapted to this study, thematic saturation, is understood through a constant comparative analysis where theories or themes are built through emerging categories and properties of data. The process of constant comparative analysis "involves comparing one instance or aspect of the phenomenon with other recurring aspects of that same phenomenon" (Daley, 2007, p. 103). For example, during the Facebook data analysis, each participant's travel-related content, such as photographs, was compared and contrasted between and within their own material, and was then be compared and contrasted against the larger data set, with similarities and differences noted. The process of building patterns of significance in this study and representing them thematically is outlined below.

The aim of my content analysis was to generate themes, or patterns of meaning found across the data. Analysing the interview transcript content first involved familiarizing myself with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts several times to gain an overall appreciation of the content and form initial impressions. I then revisited the data with fresh eyes to begin the process of open coding by analyzing the transcripts sentence by sentence, highlighting and grouping together sections of text with related meanings, both within and between transcripts. Next, I began the process of sorting the data and discerning patterns by colour-coding categories within and between participant transcripts, organizing codes into salient themes emergent from the data, which were then analyzed against each other and applied to the broader objectives of the study (Mkono,

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2011; Mkono, 2013). Themes where only a minority of participants fit were eliminated. The content analysis from the interview transcript data was then analyzed against and compared to the content analysis conducted during from the Facebook data (for a detailed description of this process see Section 4.1.2). Themes were then merged, elaborated and enriched until they were deemed sufficiently saturated to form a macro-level production of themes. The resulting overarching themes were then fleshed out with prominent examples from the data into an analysis and discussion of embedded sub-themes (see Section 5 below).

Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

The following chapter will bring to light the results from the data collection

analysis and organize results into main themes and sub-themes, as generated by the

coding process. Data from both the content analysis and interview transcripts will be

integrated into a discussion of each theme and sub-theme which will be fleshed out with

examples. Below is a table highlighting each theme and sub-theme to be discussed in

detail below.

Table 4 – Themes and sub-themes from data collection

Theme 1: The Cool Factor: Place (and Self) Representation	Sub-themes: - *Carefully Crafted Content: Deliberate Construction of Photos* - *Considering Audience Expectations: Perpetuating Popular Destination Images* - *Novelty of Experiences*
Theme 2: Situating the Self as Part of a Collective	Sub-themes: - *The Importance of Being Included: The Social Tourist* - *Living on the Edge: Travel as Pushing Boundaries* - *Space for Reflection: Online and Off*
Theme 3: Social Media Etiquette: Mindful Engagement in a Digital Space	Sub-themes: - *Checking in: Facebook as a Central Meeting Place* - *Navigating the Tension Between Entertaining Vs. Annoying Audience* - *Reasoning and Justifying Social (Dis)engagement: The Expectation of Reciprocity* - *Maintaining Image Control and Managing Challenges to Identity*

5.1: The Cool Factor: Place (and Self) Representation

The transcripts and content analysis revealed a desire by participants to represent their trips on Facebook in a way that made them seem special, memorable, and unique to both the individual traveller and amongst their community of friends more widely. An often-used term by participants to explain their choices in representing their trip on Facebook was "cool." Photos that had some sort of subjective 'cool' factor, as determined by the participants, were deemed worthy of sharing on this highly social platform. Aspects of the trip that were either specific to the place or destination, or novel to the participant's own self and life experience were often highlighted through captions and hashtags on photos, and in some cases through status updates. While sharing photos on Facebook throughout a trip, participants remained acutely aware of their audience and specifically of the expectations of their audience in regards to what they may like to see displayed. With this in mind, the data reveals that participants were cognizant of sharing presentations of their trip while travelling to deliver on assumed audience expectations. A thoughtful and oftentimes very deliberate construction of photos, status updates, videos, captions and commentary took place, as revealed through the transcripts. The following three sub-themes, including carefully crafting content, considering audience expectations and presenting a novelty of experiences, help to break down the first overarching theme discussing trip representation, and by extension, self-representation, on Facebook.

5.1.1   Carefully Crafted Content: Deliberate Construction of Photos

Nearly all participants revealed a deliberate thought process behind sharing travel content on Facebook while travelling. Photos were shared often with the intention to

highlight experiences deemed positive, fun or cool in relation to the trip itself, especially

as compared to the more mundane parts of the trip. Sophie, for example, refers to this as

her "highlight reel," which she describes as a purposeful selection of the best portions of

a traveller's experiences, and may extend to sharing everyday experiences as well. As

Sophie put it:

> A good portion of my highlights […] that I feel like I share is like super fun stuff […]
> I [would] never like [post] oh look at all my groceries, look at my dishes. I just had a
> busy weekend but I didn't share anything about the boring stuff. If it's not important
> it's not part of my highlight reel.

Natalie concurs, saying, *"I was trying to showcase all the fun things I was doing as*

opposed to like maybe my actual every day to day life […] I think like I wanted to show

that I was having a great time and trying all of these new things and going to these new

places." Accordingly, representing the self and experiences as "cool" was a top priority

for a number of participants. Furthermore, if an experience or a scene was deemed

interesting to the participant, as Alison rationalizes, friends might think the same way: *"I*

was kind of like oh this is kind of cool; other people might want to see this like right

now." Amy echoed that sentiment when reviewing one of her photos of a trip to the

southern United States: *"So this is just the trees in Savannah. So they're interesting*

because they look cool and that's why I posted them." Additionally, it was important to

participants that there be an alignment between their own self-concept or self-identity and

how they represented themselves as travellers. For instance, Sophie stated, *"…it's*

important to me that people think I'm always having fun because I'm like a fun-loving

personality, I want people to be like man I wanna hang out with that Sophie girl, she's

doing all this cool stuff." Another participant, Adam, acknowledged a similar motivation

behind his posts during an eight-month trip he took to Australia and the South Pacific:

I definitely wanted to show that I had good experiences on my Facebook posts. I definitely wanted to show people that I live a life that is interesting and adventurous and everything that is travelling basically, when you think of long-term travelling.

Participants were candid about the importance of portraying their travel experiences in a manner deemed congruent with their own self-concept or self-identity, and in a way that came across as socially valid or acceptable to their peers on Facebook. The effort expended into constructing and presenting those travel experiences highlights that priority.

From the actual photo-taking at the destination, to the editing and eventual sharing of photos afterwards, much thought was put into capturing and displaying travel experiences. During the photo-taking process, landscapes, subjects and angles were mentioned as part of the overall consideration. When discussing why one sunset photo was selected to share on Facebook over many others taken during the course of a Caribbean vacation, Alison explained: *"Because it had like the whole landscape…I like the fact that it had the beach and the trees and stuff in it, and just the angle of the sun."* Similarly, Amanda justifies her choice of sharing a particular photo of a church based on a preferred perspective: *"…this one I thought it was really neat and it looks way better this way on this angle compared to a different angle".* Michael sees a subject of a photo as holding 'cool factor' potential from the lens of a photographer: *"I saw these rows of different colour purses, I'm like this would be a really cool picture […] I've always been interested in photography,"* he said, looking back at a photo taken in a U.S. department store. But he also relays the frustration of attempting to capture a photo with a particular goal in mind: *"So just walking in I saw the mat, and I'm just like instead of taking a*

picture from the outside I'm just going to take a picture of the mat, but unfortunately I

couldn't get it centred just right." Further, Katelyn recalls being ridiculed by friends

when attempting to set-up an outdoor scene: *"I remember* [my friend] *laughing at me,*

because I was kind of like trying to angle it and get the whole body movements, and

moving over two steps. And she's like, oh my god, the perfect selfie, you know? [laughs]."

Tellingly, participants seem to recognize the vulnerability of sharing photos and personal

travel experiences with their Facebook audience and acknowledge that through the act of

sharing they may open themselves up to potential criticism from peers.

Michael explains the amount of effort put into capturing a restaurant sign that held

meaning for him personally, giving contextual information about his self-identity:

> I'm a big fan of Forrest Gump […] so I saw that and I'm like gotta take a photo of
> Bubba Gump shrimp […]after I took this, we were walking on the Navy Pier, I said
> can we stop for a second. And I went on my phone and I searched up the quote so that
> I could have it right […] now, with this picture it took me forever because I wanted
> all the letters lit up because it flashed back and forth, so what I did was I pressed and
> held the shutter button so it takes a whole bunch of pictures and I picked the closest
> one that had all the letters lit up 'cause I wanted them to all show.

Not only did Michael exercise patience and effort in capturing a restaurant sign the way

he thought it looked best, he also showed integrity by researching and verifying a quote

pertaining to a particular scene of a movie that the sign represents (see Photo 1).

Similarly, when captioning a 'foodie' photo of a Caesar salad, Michael did his due

diligence by verifying the ingredients of the salad from the menu so he could write an

informed caption of the photo on Facebook: *"I took pictures of the menu so that when I*

posted it I could have exactly what it was." Perhaps participants consciously recognize a

link between what is ultimately posted to their Facebook accounts and shared amongst

their circle of friends and what that might say about them personally. For example, if

Michael had misquoted the scene of a famous movie, he may have been called out for it by his friends and faced critique or embarrassment, or had his identity as a fan of the film challenged. His effort into constructing the photo with the correct caption to contextualize the experience minimized the likelihood of facing those potentially negative consequences in this situation.

Caption: "*Navy Pier in Chicago! All I kept thinking of was; "shrimp is the fruit of the sea. You can barbecue it, boil it, broil it, bake it, sauté it. Dey's shrimp kabobs, shrimp creole, shrimp gumbo...." #chicago #forrestgump #bubbagump — at Navy Pier.*"

Photo 1: Michael's portrayal of a restaurant sign.

A frequency count conducted during the content analysis revealed the two most common photo subjects were of people (85 total) and of scenic shots (54 total). The majority of photos fell into one of those two categories, with a significant overlap of people-oriented photos (a mix of group, duo and solo) against scenic backgrounds. Some participants had a preference for certain types of photos over others. "*I like pictures that*

are landscapes but then have people in them at the same time," offers Alison, while Michael states, *"I normally don't like to post pictures of me […] I like scenery and things […] I don't like pictures of myself. I really don't. I'd much rather be behind the camera than in the picture."* Alison, however, argues for the importance of being a subject in your own vacation photos as evidence to friends: "I*t's kind of like, if I'm in the picture you know I was there* [laughs]*."* Much thought was also put into capturing interesting and varied subjects of photos. *"I'm very careful with that I post I think […] I like to have variety […] so this is like mixing things up so it's not the same picture over and over again with a different background,"* said Alison. Friends and fellow travellers of the participants also lent a hand in constructing vacation photos and in helping the participants ultimately decide what to post: *"My friend took two pictures, one of me doing the superman pose, and one of me with my face actually showing. And I looked at them both and I'm like that one just looks cooler,"* explained Michael. Says Amanda, *"My friend took an artsy picture and she said it looked good, so I'm like okay."*

In the photo editing stage, participants who posted their photos directly to Instagram, a photo-sharing app that allows users the option to cross-post directly to Facebook simultaneously, have the option of altering the lighting and after-effects of photos using a choice of Instagram's many filter options. Using a filter on a photo serves to manipulate the original photo's colouring and thus overall effect. One of the only participants to highlight food photos on his trip, Michael expressed dissatisfaction over a photo which didn't make the cut for sharing: *"I had taken a bunch of pictures of [a slice of pizza]. […] that one's, like the plate was all clean and all that. Because I took another of it like half eaten and it didn't look good. It didn't look good at all."* After taking

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several photos of his meal, Michael had determined that a half-eaten slice of pizza was not as visually appealing to his Facebook audience as the whole slice, which was the photo that was ultimately shared. On his pizza slice photo, Michael said,

> We just happened to be in a booth underneath a big lamp […] it sounds stupid to say but the cheese was too bright. So I put a slightly darker filter on it just so that you could see the difference between the cheese and sauce.

The filters on Instagram are often used as a 'fix' for a photo's effect or to accentuate certain attributes of the scene, as Alison explained:

> The lighting was kind of off because I just took it quickly so I was like oh I'll use a filter and fix the lighting and people were actually commenting, they're like oh you're such a brilliant photographer! I'm like yeah, I'm not going to tell you I used a filter, but, I did.

Filters therefore assist the photographer in crafting a certain image or perception of a place, and may enhance a person's self-identity as a capable photographer.

Textual descriptions of photos in the form of captions were commonly used to illustrate content therein for information purposes: "*…I thought captions would be helpful for people that don't know what they're looking at […] They'd be like oh look, flowers. But this one is like flowers at the […] national park,*" says Amy, and in Sophie's case, for storytelling purposes: *"I think this photo because I captioned it, I made it like this is we're going to meet* [a television actor]. *This is important, guys."* Meeting a TV actor at a convention was the purpose of Sophie's trip to a New York City suburb, and she built anticipation for her Facebook audience by captioning photos leading up to the purpose and highlight of her trip. She stated that,

> I think I kind of knew that it was gonna be a pinnacle leading up to the trip for me personally and for Facebook because I had talked it up, like we're leaving to go to see
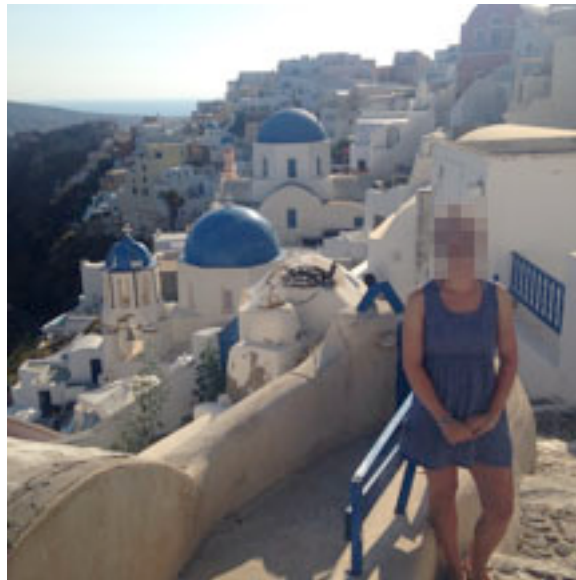
[the actor]; this is amazing, off we go for our road trip. And now we're in New York, this is a great day but it's really all about tomorrow, like you know?

Sophie built anticipation into each element of her travel narrative from just before her and her friend's arrival (*"Two hours to go! Road tripping with* [friend's name] *rocks!"*)*,* to during a party (*"Friday night karaoke* [at hotel]*! Waiting for the party to start!!* [wink emoticon] [friend tag]*")*, to leading up to a city tour *("Union square park Manhattan! Just waiting for Brooklyn tour and pizza* [wink emoticon])*"*, to getting ready to meet the TV stars (*"Chilling by the pool while we wait for* [actor] *and* [actor] *in the ballroom! Haven't seen our photo with* [him] *yet!? Stay tuned Lol")*. Upon reflection, Sophie later reveals: "*[...] it almost feels like I'm trying to tell a story."* Telling a story leading up to a "pinnacle" moment are narrative techniques used to build anticipation and draw excitement towards an experience, while keeping an audience's interest and perceived expectations at the forefront. The next sub-theme will further explore the consideration of an audience when deciding what participants shared on Facebook while travelling.

5.1.2 Considering Audience Expectations: Perpetuating Popular Destination Images

Most participants made reference to sharing photos containing popular or iconic images of the destination they visited. Sharing and therefore perpetuating established iconic destination images, or "postcard moment[s]," as Alison referred to, was seen as typical or obvious tourist behaviour, and in keeping with the expectation of one's Facebook audience. Of her trip to Greece, Alison comments: *"I think this [...] was like the first postcard moment, like I had actually seen it on TV a lot [...] and I was like, now I'm seeing it in real life, you know? Which was pretty cool for me anyways."* (See Photo 2 below). The photo resonated with her Facebook audience as well, with 54 people

expressing their support though 'likes,' making it her highest ranked or perhaps most popular vacation photo from her European vacation in terms of number of 'likes' received. The photo also garnered positive feedback in the form of comments such as *"Omg this is amazing," "Just so beautiful!" All I can say is WOW!!!!"* and *"Such amazing pictures! We are all so jealous here!!"* If part of the reciprocity of sharing trip experiences on Facebook is to garner feedback that (ideally) affirms the intention behind the original post, then Alison's photo of a sun-drenched Greek island, that in her mind was *"exactly how [she] pictured Greece,"* was well received and rewarded in the form of high praise by her Facebook friends, rendering this a successful social exchange.

Caption: *"Santorini, you take my breath away. Literally exactly how I pictured Greece. #greece #santorini"*

54 likes 👍

Photo 2: Alison's "postcard moment."

Participants referred to the importance of not only experiencing quintessential location markers for themselves, but of the importance of sharing them with others, in keeping with audience expectations. Says Amanda of her trip to Amsterdam, on her decision to include a famous sign: *"...of course everybody knows the 'I am Amsterdam' sign, so famous landmarks that people would recognize."* Similarly, Amy decided to pose for a photo in an area in Amsterdam based on its symbolism: *"...We took a picture in Dam Square because that's one of the most iconic places."* When deciding what to ultimately share, she said, *"I choose pictures on what I think is most stereotypically tourist."* She elaborated:

For example, if I'm in Paris […] I see Notre Dame, I see the Eiffel Tower […] I see the Catacombs, and I see Centre Pompidou. […] I'm going to post a picture of the Eiffel Tower, because that's the most stereotypical one. And then I'm going to post a picture of the Notre Dame because that's the second most known one. But I'm probably not going to post a picture of Centre Pompidou because no one knows about that.

In Amy's view, if no one knows about it, it is not worth sharing. Perhaps a deliberate strategy to share the best known or most loved images of a place involves, through association, a desire to link the best qualities of the image with the self. If the Eiffel Tower is considered a quintessential representation of Paris, then perhaps the tourist self standing beside it through association gains a sort of legitimacy. Perhaps being a 'cool' tourist in Amy's mind is by being where everyone expects you to be. In contrast, showcasing unique and lesser-known aspects of a travel destination, as will be discussed in the next sub-theme, may be more important as a 'cool factor' for others.

Along the same vein, participants were careful to balance what the expectations of their audience were of a destination with their own self-identity or self-concept as a

tourist. For example, Alison spoke of her decision to omit certain photos from her trip to Costa Rica based on an assumption that they may be inappropriate for particular groups on Facebook, or may have negative repercussions down the line for her personally. She stated *"...yes, we were at an all-inclusive resort but I would try not to post the drinking side of things [...] just because like I'm not trying to pretend I'm someone I'm not, but on the other hand, employers or educational people do not need to see that..."* Amy also decided to omit a particular photo taken at a European museum based on an assessment of her Facebook audience and the likelihood that the photo would be positively received. She explained, *"…this one had like a talking wall and weird Jewish cartoons. And I'm like you know what? A lot of people on my Facebook aren't Jewish so they're not going to get why this is so weird, so I'm just going to omit that."* In both of the aforementioned examples, participants were able to justify their exclusion of certain photos according to the values or personal interests of their Facebook audience. Ultimately, these values and expectations weighed heavily in their decision of what to share. Amy summarized her assessment process this way: *"I think it just depends if I feel like the majority of people would want to see a picture, I guess."* Amy justified her decision to share a photo of her planting a tree in Europe, during a trip organized by her school, based on her identity as an environmental student and the expectations of her fellow students and travellers: *"I'm in the Faculty of the Environment so I'm gonna take this picture and share it because they'll probably be interested in that."*

On her decision to explore and ultimately include photos representing her experience at a well-known Calgary festival, Katelyn said: *"…so the Calgary Stampede – you always hear about it, see about it, and I got to experience it and it was really fun."*

The Stampede is one of the city's most popular annual events for both tourists and residents alike, and Katelyn acknowledged the importance of not only experiencing this for herself, but of sharing it with her audience based on her remarks. She was conscious of displaying elements in photos she felt best represented Calgary, explaining of her decision to include one particular scenic shot, "*...you have like the Bow River, you have the city skyline, and then in the background you have the mountains.*"

Caption: *"You could say I love this city!! #yyc #citylife #allofthelights #viewuptop #cheers #summer #adventures #birthdayweek #happydays #beauty"*

12 likes 👍

Photo 3: Katelyn in Calgary

Similarly, Michael recalled his decision to include a scenic photo of Chicago as his very first representation of the city: "*…you've got the city right in front of you, you've got the lake on the other side in the distance, and like this is just a perfect picture to encapsulate how excited I am for Chicago,*" he said. Once he began to explore the city,

Michael sought the experience of a typically Chicago food dish, deep dish pizza, and he decided to share it with his Facebook audience due to its status as *"a very Chicago thing,"* as he put it. He also recognized the status of a landmark building in Chicago which he included in his representation of the city: "... *that one is the Sears tower which is the highest building in Chicago."* Michael's awareness of status and association was apparent in his explanation to include a photo of his dining experience at a four-star restaurant owned by a TV star chef. He contextualized the experience as such:

> Now this picture, oh Lord, this was from a restaurant owned by [chef's name] who's one of the master chefs on TV […] I was so excited to go to this bistro […] I found this bistro, I made the reservation, I put down the deposit. So I needed to eat at this place.

For Michael, eating at a highly-rated restaurant which held status as a top dining experience in Chicago was part of his 'cool factor' representation. It was important to Michael that he research and plan this aspect of his trip, and align himself with its status as a tourist 'in the know' about such experiences.

Of her exchange trip to Australia, Natalie acknowledged that displaying stereotypical images and ideas of Australia throughout her journey with her Facebook friends was top of mind, "…*for the most part I feel like I was just showcasing what Australia is to most people,"* she said. *"Most of my pictures showcase that sort of lifestyle, like the beach, laid back, animals, that sort of thing."* She reasoned that her Facebook audience would want to see a photo of her encounter with an insect based on an association between Australia and its "weird creatures":

> So this one here was a picture of one of the huge nasty cockroaches that we saw there […] 'cause everyone when they think about Australia they think about the snakes and the spiders and all the weird creatures that can kill you.

Similarly, she intentionally posted photos of *"typical animals that you think of when you go to Australia [...] I was trying to showcase, you know, the crocodiles and the koalas and dingos and all those kinds of things."* However, according to Natalie, her photos were not only fulfilling the expectations of her audience but were also an authentic and accurate reflection of life in Australia. *"[The lifestyle] is very much like that; all about the beaches, and the water and that sort of thing. And so I think it is a pretty true representation of what the lifestyle there would be like or at least the lifestyle of like someone there on a study abroad exchange,"* she reasoned. However, she also acknowledged the act of deliberately selecting photos to reveal a certain perspective of her trip, while omitting others. *"I'm not sure there's any pictures of me at school. And that's what I was there for,"* she offered. Another participant, Michael, propagated a similar representation of Australia with a status update that said, *"...Today I am chilling on the beach with sunshine, palm trees and bikinis for a view."* The update received a favourable response with a comment that read, "OK ... now I'm jealous […] if it aint [sic] raining its [sic] too cold here..." Here the commenter compared his situation, or home life, with Michael's and expressed jealousy in response, which could be interpreted as confirmation that as evidenced through Facebook, Michael is indeed living a 'cooler' life in that moment than his friend at home.

Through hashtags and other signifiers or markers, some participants invited comparisons of their travel experiences with others. Hashtags on Instagram serve an organizational function that group together all photos labelled with a particular tag (preceded by the hashtag sign) which can then be extracted through a search. Tourists may use this tool on Instagram, and on Facebook by extension, as part of their research

purposes, to discover other tourists' experiences at a destination, and perhaps to compare them with their own. To illustrate, Alison explained that she included the hashtag, "eurotrip," on some of her European vacation photos because of its profile as a popular search term on Instagram and her own habit of searching that hashtag to view similar photos. Comparatively, some tourists follow official tourism accounts on Instagram, such as "Explore Alberta" in the case of Katelyn, and then are able to tag the accounts to their own photos. *"I follow them and they had really cool photos or places that were posted that I had been to, that I was kind of like, look at this one, that's of the same place."* Hashtagging or linking certain accounts to one's own travel presentations allows the tourist to share photos with a larger community of travellers, and invites comparisons with others, thereby perpetuating popular, iconic or stereotypical images of destinations.

5.1.3 Novelty of Experiences

A majority of participants were motivated to seek out and to share novel experiences or aspects of their trips while travelling. Sharing those travel experiences considered unique to one's repertoire of life experience helps enrich and define tourist identity and individual identity more generally, and provides material to build 'cool factor' representation on Facebook. From unique landscapes to culinary adventures, participants frequently highlighted and spoke enthusiastically about experiences they considered distinct from home, or different from their day-to-day lives. Seeking novel experiences was the impetus for Amanda's decision to extend her travels to Iceland. She explained, *"We could've just came home but we decided like nobody goes to Iceland, let's just go try something new."* Travelling to a country that ostensibly "nobody goes to"

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uniquely identifies Amanda, in her eyes, as an off-the-beaten-path tourist. When deciding

what to share with her Facebook audience throughout her trip to Iceland, Amanda said, *"I*

tried to narrow it down to the ones I thought were the coolest. Specifically, I was posting

things that you don't really find here in Ontario […] for example in Iceland we went to a

church, and I've never seen a church that was so big like this…"

Likewise, Michael highlighted unique features of a culinary experience in a

Chicago restaurant. He outlined the special, innovative quality of his *"go to drink"* that

led to his decision to share a photo on Facebook (via Instagram).

> I ordered a whiskey sour 'cause that's like my go to drink. And they delivered
> that. I've never seen a whiskey sour that looks like that before. With froth and
> with like a design on top […] I'm like well this I absolutely have to take a picture.
> That is one of the best ones I've had.

In Michael's view, the quality of the drink, including the appealing visual design, was in

his mind a good reason to capture its photo and share it with his Facebook audience. He

also included the hashtag, "broke," in his caption of a photo of a dish he ordered at the

same restaurant, perhaps to further highlight its exclusivity or novelty.

Caption: *"Dinner and Drinks at* [name] *Bistro. First things first, an incredibly fancy and delicious Whisky Sour* #yumm *[…] — at* [name] *Bistro."*

2 likes 👍

Photo 4: Michael's "go to drink."

Participants often heralded the 'firsts' of their travels: "*First beers in Australia,*" and *"First big bug we've seen,"* captioned Natalie in photos, to *"my first time trying deep dish pizza [...] first time's always good,"* and *"my first photo I took in Chicago,"* emphasized by Michael. Highlighting novelty by making comparisons to home was a common tactic. For example, Amanda included a photo of glacier water in Iceland, claiming, *"You don't get water this blue [at home],"* and underscored the unique quality of a landscape view taken from an airplane: "*...it looks like we're on Mars [...] We were just like so shocked that this existed on Earth."* (See Photo) Similarly, Alison shared a photo of a volcano in Greece with a caption comparing the view to home: *"Climbed a volcano today and the view will never compare to southwestern Ontario…"* Adam also called attention to the unusual experience of being in two different time zones at once

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while travelling in the South Pacific, something most tourists likely cannot claim. He provided a status update that read, *"...I am going to island of [name] in Fiji. The 180th meridian passes through there so the international dateline passes through there. It means I can be in two days at the same time."*

[No caption]

Photo 5: Amanda's depiction of "Mars" in Iceland.

Even for photos of experiences that may not have been evaluated positively, participants used comparisons to home as a benchmark or point of reference, to situate the experience against a more familiar setting and provide context for the evaluation. For example, Amy explained her decision to share a photo of *"a really bad version of the Ontario Science Centre,"* by saying, *"…I think the only reason we shared it is because, wow, this is like the worst science centre we've ever been to [laughs]."* In contrast to including a photo based on differentiation, however, Michael described his decision to

exclude a photo based on a comparison to a similar attraction at home: *"I didn't post any pictures from inside the aquarium, 'cause I was just meh (sic). There was no difference. It was a standard aquarium and I was a little disappointed."* To Michael, the aquarium's lack of distinctiveness made it unworthy of sharing. Overall, sharing novel experiences on Facebook while travelling was a common practice in achieving a 'cool' representation of both the place visited and the self as tourist. The following section will discuss findings and insights from theme one.

Theme 1 Discussion:

This section discusses patterns and disparities in relation to the theme, The Cool Factor: Place (and Self) Representation.

Chronologically, the first identified theme and three underlying sub-themes (Section 5.1) serve as confirmation with the literature that Facebook is indeed a peer-focused, social platform with explicit and implicit expectations for sharing content aimed at keeping audiences engaged and entertained (Coons & Chen, 2014; Good, 2013). The majority of participants spoke of mindfully presenting their travel experiences, while travelling, with conscious consideration as to what their audience, or Facebook friends, might like to see. Whether unique or stereotypical of a destination, travel experiences thought likely to be perceived as 'cool' by peers were deemed worthy of sharing on Facebook while travelling. The importance of presenting a self-image intended to look 'cool' and 'fun' to Facebook friends is congruent with previous studies (Coons & Chen, 2014; Good, 2013). A widely used presentation technique by participants, similarly

supported by the literature, placed the self at the centre of the travelling experience, both in the form of photos and written descriptions such as captions (Belk & Yeh, 2011; Mansson, 2011; Yoo & Ulrike, 2011). Previous research suggests that Facebook users overwhelmingly presented travel experiences from a self-focused view; for example, by sharing personal experiences, as compared to information or facts on the destination or culture, or focusing on locals met along the way. However, a content analysis of photographs from this study revealed a fairly balanced presentation of travel photos with the self as subject, as compared to strictly scenic or other types of photo subjects. Furthermore, out of those self-subject photos, approximately half presented the self among other people, most notably travelling companions or friends made at the destination. Perhaps it is more important for Facebook participants to portray the self socially and collegially among peers than to shine the spotlight strictly on oneself. A possible interacting variable is the typically younger age of participants in this study and the general significance of peer acceptance and being included, to be discussed further in section 5.2.1, which may be more important to this cohort's self-development than to other demographics. It should be noted, however, that photos allotted to the scenic category were at the discretion of the researcher's judgement and may also contain people who were assessed as more peripheral or background than essential to the narrative of that photo. Approximately half of all scenic photos contained people, but were not considered the focal point based on either size (for instance, a long-range or wide-angle photographic perspective interpreted as showcasing the scenery, with perhaps a person for context, or a person looking over a cliff at a vista, suggesting the view as the focal point). Nonetheless, the study revealed a mostly balanced portrayal of the

participants in photos, whether solo, amongst other people, or against scenic backgrounds, and presented a fairly equal amount of strictly scenic photos with no people whatsoever. Perhaps participants were cognizant of this trifold balance: of the general desire to appear social on a social network (i.e. by presenting the self with others), with a tendency to place the self at the centre of the experience (it is experienced through the self after all), and with the motivation to present new and/or different environments from everyday life, a key component in enriching one's self-identity, and by extension, digital identity (see section 5.1.3), and arguably fundamental to the nature and purpose of travelling in the first place.

Both from a visual and linguistic perspective, participants commonly presented travel events and experiences in a temporal or chronological fashion, in keeping with templates and patterns assumed by both Facebook and more widely by society at large (Rettberg, 2009). Facebook's customization of templates, such as organizing posts on one's wall so that newer and therefore perhaps more relevant information is seen first, is an example of a narrative form which helps viewers and/or readers connect events and make sense of information in a sequential manner. Constructing and organizing travel experiences in a chronological manner was a popular narrative technique, albeit not always consciously adopted by participants, some of whom seemed oblivious to sharing images and stories in this form. Perhaps storytelling is an expected way of recalling experiences and such a firmly entrenched presentation method in our culture that we are not even aware of its use. It may also be used as a way to build anticipation and keep a Facebook audience entertained and eager for further news, a primary tool used for expressing sociability on Facebook (Coons & Chen, 2014). Furthermore, it is arguably an

essential and perhaps unavoidable presentation technique for travellers studied in the mid-travel phase of tourism consumption, which this thesis examined, since participants' travel experiences were shared either immediately after they occurred or sometime afterwards, but all within the current context of the trip itself. Careful construction of photos makes use of narrative techniques such as arranging the order of photos, editing photos, applying filters or other enhancing effects, and even the act of selecting those photos to share. The majority of participants explicitly mentioned at least one of the aforementioned mechanisms to put forth an intended image or message, thereby validating previous research findings in this regard.

According to the literature, building a narrative and constructing a story of travel experiences allows each individual to 'perform' a certain type of tourist identity (Paris, 2012; Hyde & Olesen, 2011; Daley, 2007; Desforges, 2000), which may differ according to the audience and the intended objectives of the performer. This performative approach to tourism may help elucidate participant objectives in selecting some aspects of the trip to share over others. Arguably, each participant, whether deliberately or unintentionally, presented a particular tourist identity. For example, one participant, Alison, was explicitly aware of the cultural associations of drinking and partying at all-inclusive resorts, and purposely chose to limit this performative aspect of tourism from her Facebook account of a Costa Rica trip, for fear of appraisal by her academic and work communities. Perhaps the consequences of being judged by this presumably important peer group were calculated into her decision. In contrast, another participant, Adam, accentuated this angle on a trip to Australia (see section 5.2.2) which was generally favourably received by his Facebook friends, perhaps supporting and reinforcing his intended tourist identity

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claim. On a subsequent trip to Europe, Alison displayed a family-oriented identity by featuring photos and writing captions explicitly drawing attention to how happy she was to have her mother accompany her on part of her journey, which interestingly was widely praised through likes and positive comments by her relatives on Facebook. Another participant, Sophie, took on the perspective of an avid fan, sometimes identified as 'fan girl', of a television actor making a promotional appearance at a convention. The purpose for her trip to the United States was to attend this fan convention, and her narration of the trip leading up to their encounter largely contained language suggesting hopeful expectation, with many exclamation points and emoticons suggesting enthusiasm and excitement, perhaps in tune with her friends' expectations of an upcoming celebrity-associated 'brush with fame'. Similarly, Michael effused his trip presentation in Chicago with markers of affluence and social status, such as photos, captions and hashtags of exclusive and expensive food and drink, and luxury goods at a high end department store. Expressing social status is a key component of distinguishing class and taste on Facebook, building cultural capital through association with brands, goods, people or destinations more generally (Coons & Chen, 2014; Good, 2013; Zhao et al., 2008). The trip presentations of both Sophie and Michael coalesce with research pointing to social networking sites as prime platforms to establish social hierarchy and express an identity, or 'cool factor', by virtue of association (Mkono & Tribe, 2017b; Bosangit et al., 2012). Likewise, an important component of pleasing one's Facebook audience that emerged through the findings was a tendency to share iconic photos and highlight stereotypical or extremely popular aspects of the destination, consistent with previous research. A number of participants were cognizant of capturing symbolic images of the place they visited,

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perhaps as much for themselves as for their friends on Facebook, further propagating a 'circle of representation' to these audiences (Mansson, 2011), and critically speaking, perhaps rendering them 'cultural dupes' in the process (Picken, 2014). Delivering on perceived audience expectations also conceivably serves to maintain friendships on a highly social networking site such as Facebook (Coons & Chen, 2014), where being a well-regarded member of the online community involves keeping friends entertained and content fresh.

In summary, participants were mostly mindful of presenting tourist experiences in the mid-travel phase of tourism consumption which aligned with, and underscored, positive aspects of their self-identity. Overall, participants presented a balanced focus in photographs between the self, the socialized self with other people (see section 5.2 below for further discussion), and scenic or other subjects of the destination, deviating slightly from the literature which demonstrates a predominant self-focus. Popular self-presentation narrative techniques, both in visual and linguistic form, included highlighting novel or distinguishing characteristics of a trip, perhaps with a motivation to depict the self similarly, juxtaposed with seeking out, capturing and thereby perpetuating iconic destination images, perhaps with an eye to delivering on audience expectations, generally aligning with previous literature. Content was carefully crafted by engaging in narrative techniques, such as organizing photos and descriptions to tell a story, editing or accentuating photos to create a desired effect, and using the chronological templates embedded within Facebook. Self-representation, via place representation, served to establish a particular sort of tourist identity, one likely to elicit positive feedback from peers on Facebook, and coalescing with previous studies on the performative aspect of

tourism. The next section will contextualize the self as represented socially by participants while travelling.

5.2: Situating the Self as Part of a Collective

The majority of participants described friendship as the foundation of their travels, as revealed through both the content analysis and interview transcripts. Situating the self as part of a collective was a common technique for contextualizing their experiences as tourists. Whether friendship acquired through travelling, as initial motivation for travelling, or as companionship throughout the journey, the self as tourist was typically portrayed in a social context. Expressions of sociability on Facebook included placing the self in photos with other people, in some cases at parties or celebrations, and tagging friends on Facebook or Instagram, thereby linking others' profiles with one's own. The data also revealed an acknowledgment by participants of their role in a larger, more collective consciousness. Participants often reflected, through captions on photographs, or through the interview transcripts, on how their journey as individual tourists fit into a greater mosaic of life experience. Perhaps conversely, in some cases participants also positioned themselves as resisting typical or expected tourist experiences, of pushing their own personal boundaries, oftentimes with a sense of adventure or rebelliousness. The three sub-themes that will be discussed hereafter in

detail are thus: the importance of being included, living on the edge, and space for reflection.

5.2.1: The Importance of Being Included: The Social Tourist

As previously mentioned (see section 5.1.1), a frequency count conducted during the content analysis revealed that the majority of photos presented by participants on Facebook were people-oriented (85 total), with 37 of those photos displaying the participant with at least one other person, or multiple others. Displaying the self in a social context was thus achieved in such a manner. Captions of people-oriented photos often highlighted the nature of the social interaction or the importance of friendship. For instance, Natalie captioned a photo of some friends in a bar saying, *"Australia Day with some lovely friends!"* (see photo 6 below), while Katelyn captioned, *"Much love for this girl!"* for her self-described best friend in Calgary. Hashtags, as micro-containers of meaning, also reflected the nature of friendship and reference groups, such as "#friends," "#coworkers," "#girlsweekend," "#besttravelbuddy," "#travelcouple," and "#friendsmorelikefamily." Participants most frequently used hashtags as a short-form narrative, to spur discussion, or to encapsulate hidden stories, meanings and experiences portrayed or contextualized by the photo. Katelyn described the purpose of hashtags, a view commonly held amongst participants, as such: *"…I did little hashtags because it's our own little meanings […] and our own little stories […] it is a conversation starter."* For instance, Katelyn explained the meaning behind her decision to use two particular hashtags, "noservice," and "realchats," on a photo taken during a road trip in Alberta. She explained,

'No service', because the entire way there we didn't have radio service. None of our phones were working so we couldn't play music off of our phones. So that's kind of like that little hidden thing. A six-hour drive to Jasper with nothing but us, so that's the 'real chats' […] 'cause we just talked.

An outsider to the experience or someone not privy to the details of the adventure would not necessarily feel included in the conversation, and yet, as Katelyn described, hashtags can be used to spark curiosity and conversation surrounding their "hidden" meaning, a practice that is regularly used to encourage questions or comments and social exchanges more generally on social media. Amy mentioned developing captions in the same way. She said, *"I always try to take these kinds of captions and stuff from things that my friends say."* Captioning or hashtagging 'inside' remarks or jokes, or referencing circumstances that were particular to the photo is a method for demonstrating exclusivity and membership with those who were there to experience the moment. Alternatively, they can also be used to distance the traveller(s) from others, such as a Facebook audience, clearly demarking social and tourist boundaries.

In contrast however, a few participants claimed to use hashtags as descriptors or explanations for informational or contextual purposes. *"I'm not that original with my hashtags. Sometimes it's just more like places and things,"* said Alison. Natalie concurred on her use of hashtags, saying, *"I think they were probably pretty descriptive, just like explaining what I was doing […] I just describe what it is as opposed to like inside jokes or things like that."* Similarly, Amanda described her straightforward approach to using hashtags and captions: *"…I just feel like short and sweet. Get to the point,"* she said. Michael likewise used hashtags in a literal, matter-of-fact manner on his photos of Chicago. He explained, *"'Millennium Park' was what was overlooking.*

Hashtag 'Chicago' 'cause that's where I was, and hashtag 'friend' because I was with a friend at the time.'' Captions and hashtags used in this manner can be considered a tool for building a tourist identity. Since Michael demonstrated, through his photos and hashtags, that he was indeed a tourist in Chicago, he arguably places himself as a member of this larger group of tourists, those that have visited this particular city. Regardless of their use, whether or not to ascribe meaning beyond a literal interpretation, captions and other textual accounts of photographs are one such method for describing tourist experiences, situating the tourist self as part of a collective, and creating a tourist identity on social media.

As another method for signifying belongingness, participants frequently used Facebook's friend-tagging tool to formally link other's profiles with their own, and to display their photos on their friends' profiles. Those who posted their trip photos on Instagram directly, linked to their Facebook profiles, also commonly used that medium's tagging function. For photos on both mediums, a total of 39 friend tags were utilized, including an actor tagged through a public profile, with an additional two Facebook friends mentioned in captions, but not formally tagged. The numbers suggest that Facebook and Instagram's tagging function is commonly used as a linkage between profiles, formalizing an association between two or more people, and arguably serving as proof of sociability and friendship as commonly espoused on social media.

Caption: *"Australia Day with some lovely friends! — with* [friend tag] *in* <u>*Gold Coast,*</u>
<u>*Queensland*</u>*."*

2 likes 👍

Photo 6: An expression of sociability by Natalie.

Participants also acknowledged that tagging friends is a common and expected practice,
provided the photo is flattering. *"I think it's assumed if people are in the photo [...] if it's*
a bad photo I would never post it," emphasized Alison. Natalie commented that she
would not be bothered if she missed out on posting some photos with friends because,
"...half the time they're posting the pictures that I would be posting anyway so it's kind
of like well they're going to tag me anyways," she reasoned, while Sophie made a point
of tagging a TV actor she met at a fan convention: *"...I actually do have him on*
Facebook so I was trying to like connect it," she said. The importance of the tagging
function is clear in these comments. Participants recognized the value of being connected

to a social circle, of belonging to a collective group, and of situating the self as a social being while travelling.

Consequently, participants frequently referenced meeting new people and making new friends on their trips, as evidenced through the interview transcripts and content analysis. Natalie referred to making new friends upon her and her friend's arrival in Australia. The new friends proved to be instrumental in providing practical help with settling in and presumably contributed to Natalie's manageability and even enjoyment of the early days of the journey. She explained,

> …they actually came and met us on our very first day in Australia, and they had a car and so they drove us around and like took us to the store […] 'cause there wasn't, like, toilet paper; there wasn't anything in our apartment. So, yeah, that's how we sort of got connected with them.

Similarly, Katelyn referred to new people she had met while working in Calgary, emphasizing the bonding and friendship-forming habits of her new friends. *"So these are my co-workers […] that's why I uploaded that one I think, just because it was a girls' day. We went out, played pool, had some drinks,"* she said. She also referenced her new friendships in relation to a trip to Jasper, Alberta. *"…the girls were going on a crazy road trip so, yeah, that's why I put this one. It was me and [friend name], one of my really good friends […] There was 5 of us."* To Katelyn, a large part of the enjoyment of her trip to Alberta was due to the quality of friendships she formed while travelling, as evidenced by her comments and the highly sociable presentation of her trip. *"I think once I started working […] and started becoming closer with my coworkers, I was like this is really cool, this is a cool experience and a cool place."* Her favourable impression of the destination she visited was heavily influenced by her social experiences. Friendship was

also the motivation behind the trip in the first place. She explained, "*So this is my best friend […] that's the main reason that I moved out there, was to live with her."* Likewise, Amy referenced the closeness of her trip-mates on a school excursion to Europe. She commented, "*...we live in a house altogether with two other people that were also on the trip. We're all on the same trip and all in the same house."* Having her roommates double as schoolmates who also counted as trip-mates gave Amy a solid claim to a familiar and presumably well-structured social group. She also described a sense of connection and bonding with the alumni of her program that had travelled on a similar excursion prior to her own:

> It's interesting because we have a really strong relationship with our alumni because there's so few anyway […] so it's really easy to stay in contact with them and they would tell us about crazy stories that they had with our profs in Amsterdam […] it was really funny 'cause it got us really caught up.

Comparable to Katelyn, Amy's friendship with her reference groups, in this case her roommates and fellow students, and alumni at school, significantly contributed to the enjoyment of her overall trip experience, and factored into the presentation of her trip on Facebook. Even when commenting on a separate trip to Florida where she may not have felt as included based on being an outsider to a family, Amy placed herself parallel to another trip-mate, which gave her a better sense of belonging.

> So for this trip I travelled with my boyfriend and his family over Christmas. So we were in a van and it was his mom, his dad, his sister, himself and then also their family friend Julie [name changed]. And so Julie is also not related so I wasn't the only person that was not related.

On a trip to see an actor promoting a popular TV show at a fan convention, Sophie similarly associated herself as tourist with other fans of the show, including the

friend she travelled with. She said, *"Part of the reason we were there was to go see the [TV show] convention and meet [TV actor]."* In so doing, Sophie and her friend situated themselves socially with the fan culture surrounding the TV show, automatically linking themselves with other fans there for the same purpose, while posting a photo of themselves on Facebook with the actor in question, perhaps as evidence of their belonging in a special social circle. The photo proved to be popular with Sophie's Facebook audience, with one share and 48 likes, the most likes out of her entire trip presentation. The photo also garnered 13 comments, most of which had a similar tone of *"Officially jealous!!"*, *"Super jealous!"* and *"Omg I'm green with envy."* Based on the number of likes and the nature of the comments obtained for this photo, Sophie not only managed to display her celebrity affiliation and sociability as a fan, she also successfully managed to entertain her Facebook audience and cultivate positive, supportive comments in response; a desirable outcome.

As evident from the above examples, tourists, and people more widely, derive a sense of belonging, purpose and identity from group memberships, social circles and collective experiences, the importance of which is commonly depicted on social media. Missing out on such experiences may cause dissonance and is therefore something to avoid, a phenomenon described by Amy.

> Everyone I know right now has FOMO which is fear of missing out. When they see a picture of someone having a great time they're like why wasn't I there? Why wasn't I invited? Am I missing out on life? […] I find that a lot of people, what they post now [are] things that make other people feel FOMO. So they will go and post pictures of themselves having fun and make it look like they're having fun […] everyone's social media makes it look like they have a perfect life […] so people feel depressed when they don't meet that standard. And I think that's a portion that everyone thinks about when they're putting into social media.

Fear of missing out may also extend to the places visited and type of activities a tourist engages in while at a destination. Adam, for example, arrived in Australia with a clear goal of what he wanted to experience. He described his organized approach to travelling as such:

> …when I travelled I had a checkmark mentality. I knew places I wanted to visit. I used Lonely Planet extensively for places to visit and accommodation […] I planned the first 3 weeks of my trip in advance with Lonely Planet, I just went through country to country […] I need this experience, this, this, and this, all the providers with the internet stuff, check, check, done. I'm going to experience this because I want it.

Here, Adam made sure to include himself amongst certain experiences he had researched as being essential to the full appreciation of the destination. Not wanting to miss out on anything motivated Adam to plan well ahead. Amy similarly described her "checkmark mentality" approach with an upcoming trip to Costa Rica:

> I'm going to Costa Rica. I'm going to do the most stereotypical things I can while I'm there. I'm going to go to the rainforest; I'm going to take a picture with a sloth or really stereotypical stuff […] When I was talking to my friend and she says like you're the perfect tourist. I think that just reinforces the kind of things that I'm going to do, where I'm going to take these tourist photos. […] almost like a professional tourist or something.

Amy equates her travel behaviour with that of a "professional tourist," one who can presumably be trusted to experience, capture and then share with others "stereotypical" moments in Costa Rica, thereby perpetuating popular images of the country, while fulfilling Facebook audience expectations, and living up to her friend's appointed "perfect tourist" label. Perhaps, too, a fear of missing out, or FOMO, as described by Amy, is the impetus behind her behaviour.

Despite a yearning to fit in, perhaps conversely, participants also expressed a desire to stand out. The next sub-theme will explore the idea of pushing beyond a comfort zone and presenting expressions of independence, adventure and rebelliousness.

5.2.2: Living on the Edge: Travel as Pushing Boundaries

Perhaps as an anti-thesis to grouping the self with others, participants also frequently highlighted travel experiences which expressed their individuality, a sense of adventure and defiance against the mainstream. Interestingly, each participant's 'edge' varied, reflecting the true nature of individual differences. From a literal definition of sitting on the edge of cliff, to travelling solo, to disregarding responsibilities, to bungee jumping, each participant described their travel experience as pushing boundaries particular to that individual. Hashtags used to showcase photos of this nature included "sponteneityisthespiceoflife," "lifeonthemove," and "livingontheedge." For example, Katelyn described her spontaneous decision to join her friends on a road trip in Alberta, despite being scheduled to work. She explained, "*This day I actually called in sick to work because it was my last weekend and I was like no way […] the girls were going on a crazy road trip […] I kind of called in last minute. But it was worth it.*" Here, Katelyn positions herself as an impulsive traveller willing to evade her work responsibilities for the opportunity of a last-chance adventure.

In a similar vein, Adam distanced himself from the accountability of his finances while on a trip to Australia and the South Pacific. *"I didn't really care how much it cost because I had a big line of credit at my disposal and I thought I'll deal with this later.*

Now I just wanted pleasure, I didn't want to be responsible, I didn't care," he shared. If

'living on the edge' while travelling is equated with living in the moment, perhaps

postponing or ignoring responsibilities altogether is part of the package of spontaneity

and adventure, and part of what it may mean to be an adventurous tourist, as exhibited by

both Katelyn and Adam. Moreover, Adam described a point during his trip to Australia

where he deflected his responsibility to check in with his mother back home. He

explained,

> …when I was in Fiji my mom lost track of me because for a week I wasn't
> replying to her emails […] she bugged me of course on Facebook and my
> friends saw that. It was like talk to your mom, call your mom; I was getting all
> these messages.

In Adam's case, his decision to *"get away from his family,"* as revealed in the interview,

led to him being reprimanded by his Facebook friends for rebelling against his mother in

this particular instance. Although he was able to distance himself from family

obligations, Adam was still accountable, through Facebook, to his friends who had been

following his journey. However, part of Adam's motivation for travelling in the first

place was to detach himself from home and carve out a new aspect of his identity. While

his 8-month long voyage to Australia and the South Pacific helped him achieve that goal,

he also admitted to wrestling with the inevitable contradictions that come from being

away from home for so long.

> I wanted to get away from everything […] I wanted to experience my own
> individuality. Checking back in was a reminder of the world I left behind […] I
> did not want that to be part of my experience. But then another part […] that
> rebellious part, was sort of, I do have to check back in […] It was a bit of a
> struggle to find a balance of how much disconnect I should be in, the state of
> disconnect.

The very act of travelling, which physically removes an individual from the

responsibilities of everyday life, such as family, is perhaps a prime space to sample new

adventures and build experiences which expand dimensions of one's self-identity, aspects

that are often reflected upon later with pride. For example, Natalie made a point of

underscoring a bungee jumping adventure while reviewing her Facebook photos of

Australia and New Zealand in an interview. She said, "*I don't know if you saw my*

pictures of New Zealand where I was like bungee jumping […] that was something that I

was like really proud."

Adventures that tested personal boundaries were less extreme for other

participants. Alison's 'edge' included meeting and interacting with the locals, and other

everyday experiences while in Europe. She said,

> I found this trip, like I really pushed myself outside of my comfort zone a little
> bit. I was in countries where I didn't know the language, didn't know the people
> at all. I heard all kinds of horror stories, which is probably not the best thing to
> hear before you go on a trip, so I was really nervous. So I found I really pushed
> myself. So that's kind of living on the edge, like grasping the moment for now
> and stuff.

Caption: *"Life is pretty darn cool when your (sic) sitting on the edge of the world. #ireland #cliffofmoher #eurotrip #livingontheedge #anyonewanttoswim?"*

44 likes 👍

Photo 7: Alison's "edge" in Ireland.

Photo 7 depicts Alison contemplatively and metaphorically looking over a cliff edge in Ireland. Alison's experience navigating new countries, customs and people in Europe contributed to her growth and development as a person. She shared a reflective status update with her Facebook audience towards the end of her journey to Europe which read: *"Thank you Europe (and everyone along the way) for pushing my comfort zone and providing countless memories."* The update, while addressed to a generalized, non-specific audience, becomes an outward acknowledgement of the self-improvement she felt she acquired throughout her travels, and by virtue of being shared on Facebook, promotes an enhanced self-identity.

Throughout his journey to the South Pacific, Adam also shared a status update with his Facebook audience that surmised the sense of rebelliousness and freedom that characterized his trip overall. He wrote, *"...random decision to go to Bali was the best I ever made. Hooked up with a local girl, puked some local wine, climbed the most beautiful mountain I've ever seen and catching a groove on a party island. And the holiday is not over yet..."* Here, Adam draws attention to the impulsiveness of his actions: his arbitrary decision to go to Bali and his casual regard to sex and drinking, with a hint of more to come. Upon reflection, Adam seemingly struggled to reconcile his behaviour with his current sense of self. "*I mean, I'm 35 and at this age it's kind of like still behaving like a 15, 20-year-old rebellious kid,*" he acknowledged. The contemplative nature of his comment may suggest, however, that his sense of self has evolved since his trip experiences, which were spurred by travelling itself. Thus, a tourist self is one form of inwardly-oriented development that contributes to an overarching self-identity. Along the same lines as Adam, Sophie used her age as a measure to rationalize her inclinations while travelling as rebellious in nature. She explained her experience at an after-party for a celebrity convention: "*The 2 people I went with were like tired at 9:30 so I was like this is the least fun thing […] I would've stayed until 3 in the morning. I'm like yes let's do this; I'm 30 but I do not even care, like I'll just keep going.*" Sophie's plan to stay late at the party, which she positioned as counter to the expected norm for 30-year-olds, can be seen as an expression of 'breaking the rules' and therefore pushing presumed social boundaries while on vacation.

The premise of 'breaking the rules' posed a common thread throughout participants' travel experiences. For example, Katelyn justified her decision to include the hashtag "stolencar" on a photo of a road trip to Jasper, Alberta. She described a story that culminated in a vehicle owned by someone else being available for her road trip and "*...in the meantime, we had taken that vehicle to go to Jasper instead of renting a car. So that was kind of that little 'stolen car,'*" she explained. This particular hashtag is perhaps a humourous wink to her supposed mischievous behaviour and a direct nod to a more complete story hidden behind the remark. Katelyn also gave context to circumstances in a photo where she found herself admiring a waterfall in Alberta up close. She said, "*…we broke the rules and hopped the fence and went down and there was a waterfall here and it streamed into another waterfall that was behind me. But it was just cool [...] we were surrounded by a rock wall all the way around us.*" While Katelyn admits to breaking the rules to see the marvel of nature close-up, she again justified her actions by the uniqueness ('coolness'?) of the experience, captured and shared on Facebook for her friends to experience as well. Reflecting back, Katelyn associated her general tendencies as a tourist with a sense of adventure and freedom, while still highlighting her social self as part of a group experience. "*I think with like looking at the pictures and a lot of the moments of going and exploring, definitely a little bit adventurous and breaking rules and kind of going off on our own.*" She positions her tourist self as social with the plurality of the word choices "our" and earlier, "we," perhaps symbolizing the importance she places on a sense of belonging and sense of self as derived from and linked to social ties. Arguably as well, breaking the rules as part of a group is less likely to be viewed negatively, as the tourist is comforted in the knowledge that h/she did not

act alone. To Katelyn, as well as some other participants, the tourist self and social self are highly associated. Similar to Katelyn, Amanda emphasized her social self by describing her tourist identity alongside the friend she travelled with. She reflected that, "*these pictures to me gives the message that, ok we're active, because [friend name] and I really do like going – this is a crazy mountain we climbed and you're so small out there.*" The comments reflect that even when emphasizing self-growth experiences where travel pushed personal, and in some cases, literal boundaries, participants frequently situated the individual tourist self alongside travel mates, friendships and as part of a collective.

To Amanda, there is a congruency between the type of tourist she identifies as, and the travel photos she shared on Facebook, as though the photos indeed serve as verification of her "active" tourist self. Amanda explained the context behind a photo depicting her "*hanging off the edge of a waterfall*" and how she felt it was a true representation of the type of tourist she identifies as. She shared,

> I think I'm a very outgoing, adventurous person. So, you know, doing this, hanging off the edge of a waterfall […] to me that's better than standing back and taking a picture of the mountains. I'd rather actually be going. And it's interesting 'cause there's a fence here that says do not trespass, but you know, we're kids and we do it anyway.

In Amanda's view, engaging with nature as a tourist and perhaps even taking risks by trespassing surpasses a more passive approach to taking photos from afar, and serves as proof of her "outgoing, adventurous," nature. She also framed her identity and, in doing so, justified her actions as youthful and therefore almost to be expected. See photo 8 below.

[No caption]

3 likes 👍

Photo 8: Amanda's "edge" in Iceland.

Along the same lines as Amanda and Katelyn, Adam likewise shared a status update that

echoed the premise of 'breaking the rules' during his trip to Australia. He wrote,

> Got back from seeing the Red Center of Oz. Climbed Ayers Rock (Uluru) on
> my bday. Now, the aboriginals don't like when you climb their spiritual
> mountain. Well, my dear friends, it's a piece of nature for everyone to enjoy. We
> flipped a coin, heads to go and heads came up. So "fate told us to climb".

In his writing, Adam exhibited the sense of rebelliousness that he acknowledged

characterized his journey overall. He climbed the mountain, in defiance of Aboriginal

wishes, he claimed, albeit softened by 'fate' as determined by a coin toss, and defended

his actions by affirming the collective value of nature for all.

In most cases, when reflecting back upon their trips, participants were able to use

the perception afforded by time and distance to more fully explain, comprehend, or

appreciate their past travel experiences. The next sub-theme will explore how participants used Facebook to express more thoughtful sentiments throughout their trips, to reflect upon their spirituality and connectedness within a larger perspective, and to share contemplative thoughts and feelings prompted by their travels.

5.2.3: Space for Reflection: Online and Off

Many participants used Facebook as a platform to convey introspective or contemplative thoughts about their travels, and some acknowledged the advantage of Facebook as a digital storage space to preserve travel memories that can be re-lived upon later reflection. The nature or tone of the comments most often expressed gratitude, an admiration or appreciation of nature and travel in general, an awareness of the benefits of travel and the growth and learning opportunities it affords, and a bigger-picture perspective which takes into account the collective experience of travelling. Participants expressed these sentiments through captions on photos, hashtags and status updates shared on Facebook throughout their trip, and through interview transcripts post-travel. Katelyn, for instance, commented on a photo depicting her and her travel-mates enjoying a scenic view in Alberta. She said,

> I like this photo because we're all doing our own thing, right? And just taking it all in. And I think that's what's important about going to places like this […] everywhere we went we'd hike […] up the mountain; there would be a lot of laughter, a lot of stories. But as soon as we got somewhere, this is what would happen. We'd all disperse and kind of sit and reflect and have a moment to ourselves. And that happened everywhere we went.

The group she travelled with experienced the view collectively, yet as she explained, everyone took a moment to absorb the moment individually, on their own terms. Although a social experience, perhaps travelling is ultimately a solo exploration, as

tourists each process and infer their own meanings from their experiences. Descriptions of landscapes and nature were frequently the inspiration for these more contemplative moments. Katelyn expanded, "…*it was really, really cloudy the entire day but it's just like that eeriness of the mountain and that moment of kind of reflecting and just appreciating what you have and where you are in the moments that you take.*" Photo 9 below, depicting a mountain under cloudy skies alongside a highway, was captioned by Katelyn: "*Not until we are lost do we begin to find ourselves,*" and was her second-most "liked" photo of her Alberta trip overall, with 39 'likes' received, suggesting the photo resonated with her Facebook audience as well.

Caption: *"Not until we are lost do we begin to find ourselves*
#ourplanetdaily #goprouniverse #lifeonthemove #roadtrips #explorealberta"

39 likes 👍

Photo 9: Katelyn's Alberta road trip.

Katelyn acknowledged a match between the symbolic aspect of the photos she shared and the meaning she derived from the experience at the time. Katelyn's scenic photos, such as the one above and others like it, symbolized particular moments of self-reflection, appreciating the environment, and questioning her life purpose. She shared,

> **…**it sounds weird but spiritual. Not spiritual as in like religious, but like spiritual kind of like self-reflecting and figuring out who I am, what I want in life and my goals or dreams, looking back on the past but also kind of thinking about the future. Because taking these moments, looking at this scenery you kind of reflect on yourself and connect with the environment, I guess.
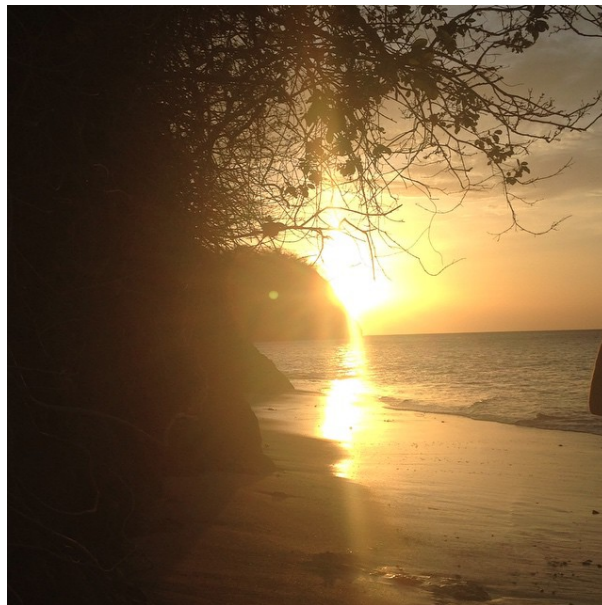
Similarly, Amanda described the context behind a photo of a meal she enjoyed in Europe. To Amanda, the intention was not to showcase the food per se, but to capture a "*perfect moment(s)*" which the food in the photo came to symbolize. She explained,

> …the only reason I posted it was because we, my friend and I, and everybody that I go to school with now loves this [Canadian] DJ, and it was just so strange being away from home for so long and not hearing Canadian music, and we were sitting here eating noodles and the sun just cleared up and this song came on. And it was just like one of those perfect moments.

Here, Amanda described the events preceding the photo being taken which gave the experience meaning for her personally, perhaps also infused with a sense of missing home. However, she placed her 'perfect moment' within a collective context by referring to her friends and schoolmates as fans of the DJ whose song was being played. Thus, this private, reflective moment became a social, shareable experience.

Alison similarly included a thoughtful caption for a photo of a sunset in Costa Rica (see photo 10 below), "*Isn't it wonderful that no matter where you are in the world, we all see the same sun? And they all set just as beautiful.*" The tone of the caption reflects an introspective moment most likely inspired by the experience itself. With her

rhetorical question however, Alison expanded her own experience to include anyone and everyone who has ever pondered the same thought and experienced the same moment of being captivated by the universal beauty of a sunset. The experience transcends culture, nationality, religion, and can be equally appreciated by nearly every human being on the planet, a quality which Alison identified. She therefore linked her own travel experience to a "world(ly)" connection, effectively socializing a private moment.

Caption: *"Isn't it wonderful that no matter where you are in the world, we all see the same sun? And they all set just as beautiful. #costarica #gulfofpapagyao #sunset #nofilter"*

22 likes 👍

Photo 10: Alison's Costa Rican sunset.

Participants commonly expressed a sense of gratitude for the opportunity to travel and share their experiences with others. Adam posted a Facebook status update at the end of his journey to Australia and the South Pacific which read, *"Ok I am home. Huge minus in*

the bank but a priceless plus in my soul. I can honestly say that my dream of seeing the South Pacific, Oz especially, has been fulfilled. Cheers." Adam's "dream," although financially costly, left him with an invaluable, spirit-rejuvenating experience. Alison used the hashtag "dreamcometrue" to encapsulate a similar sentiment on a photo of her overlooking a scenic view in Europe. By sharing these comments and photos with a Facebook audience, the participant allows personally meaningful moments to perhaps gain an added layer of meaning through the invitation of, and eventual contribution of comments or questions by others. Amanda explained her motivation to share her Europe photos with her Facebook audience by rationalizing that some of her peers may not get to enjoy such good fortune in their youth. She said,

> …what an amazing experience, I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to do this. That's why I kind of want to share it, because a lot of people in their lifetime will never get to go to Iceland, or will never see 'I am Amsterdam' [sign]…we're pretty lucky to be 20 and being able to go there, so I think sharing it is kind of fun that way.

In sharing her travel experiences on Facebook, Amanda also differentiates herself as a particular type of tourist compared to her peers, one that has enjoyed the privileged opportunity to explore an 'off the beaten path' destination at a young age.

Furthermore, participants commonly spoke of the benefit of social media as a digital space to store travel photos, and in turn, preserve memories that may easily be accessed to reflect back upon. Sophie and Alison referenced the use of Facebook as an online album that has essentially replaced the need for physical photo albums. *"So I have albums I would love to fill but I never print them off because Facebook has become such a great tool, because unless your Facebook account is magically deactivated, your*

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photos are kind of saved […] it's like this magical thing," Sophie said. Alison concurred,

saying,

> I think with posting on Facebook or Instagram […] it's a new way of -- it's a
> different way of preserving the picture […] we used to print them and put them
> in albums […] hopefully it should be accessible forever […] so it's on there and
> we can scroll back and look.

The assertion that photos on Facebook are *"accessible forever"* reflects a level of

comfort and trust in the medium as a reliable, safe, and everlasting space. Similarly,

Sophie's claim of Facebook as a *"magical thing"* in its ability to permanently house

memories signals a level of respect and admiration for its use in this regard. Part of

Facebook's success may be prescribed to building and maintaining this type of

trustworthy relationship with its users. However, with new social media sites constantly

being developed, the assumption that Facebook will be around indefinitely is perhaps a

risky proposition. Nonetheless, some participants took advantage of the platform's

storage capability by reflecting back upon their photos post-travel. *"I probably look back*

at these pictures once every two weeks," Amanda offered. *"I go on Facebook, I look at*

my profile picture and I read the comments, because a lot of the comments are just like

oh I really miss you, because it was hard to be away for so long, so it's nice to hear those

comments." Amanda's statement reflects the use of Facebook as more than a storage

space for photos and memories; it also points to the site as a place to turn for personal

validation if/when needed. Likewise, Adam heralds the importance of tourists looking

back as a reminder of how far they have come. *"…that is something that I think we as*

humans don't do enough, is we don't appreciate our own daredevil deeds or deeds that

come from passion, don't come from social convention. And we don't go back to those

moments and celebrate them." Travel moments and memories, preserved on Facebook,

are worth reliving and even celebrating, in Adam's view, because they play an essential

role in forming one's self-identity, and are often a point of pride. Reflection also serves a

healthy purpose and may act as a temporary stress reliever, according to Adam. "*…if I*

don't go back to it [Facebook] and my state of mind is caught in […] the 9 to 5 and all

that stuff, then I will be bummed out if somebody criticizes me because I'm not in touch

with that feeling," he said. Periodically checking in with one's Facebook photos, post-

travel, is thus one such component for self-validation, a reminder of the experiences that

comprise one's identity or *"that feeling,"* especially in the face of judgement, uncertainty

or the pressures of everyday life. In this regard, Facebook is a tool to facilitate

reminiscing and socializing, key components of identity formation. The subsequent

section will discuss the results from theme two as they relate to previous literature.

Theme 2 Discussion:

This section discusses parallels and distinctions from past studies in relation to the

theme: Situating the Self as Part of a Collective.

Extending findings outlined in theme one, participants revealed a strong tendency

to portray their tourist identity within a social framework, suggesting the impact of social

relationships on travel experiences and self-identity more widely. Previous literature

supports the notion that a core function and popular self-presentation technique on social

media places the self among peer groups and friendships (Coons & Chen, 2014; Good,

2013; Zhao et al, 2008), albeit implicitly through visual 'evidence' such as photos with

others. While participants relied heavily on visual presentations of sociability, a common practice, infrequently recognized in previous studies, was explicitly conveying connections with others, such as through tagging, or hyperlinking friends' profiles to one's own, and overtly naming friends in captions without tags ('mentions'). All but one participant used multiple tags or friend mentions in their trip presentations to emphasize social links, situate the self socially, and perhaps invite participation in a discussion of the trip itself (see section 5.2.1 for further discussion). An underlying assumption by participants was that tagging in photos is an expected and common practice by friends on Facebook, presumably as long as the photos are flattering however, so as not to challenge or disrupt one's self-construct.

Moreover, hashtags, as mini-narratives or micro-containers of meaning, were utilized to express sociability in the majority of participants' trip profiles. Beyond mere descriptions, hashtags serve to group people together around shared experiences, thereby including the self within a collective. Building on theme one, hashtags may additionally be used as a method of outreach with those who have also perhaps travelled to the same destination or experienced similar adventures, thereby inviting commonality and strengthening social bonds. In this way, the need to feel included is therefore empathically extended to friends who we assume would like to feel the same way. Hashtags contain a URL linking other uses of the same word or expression, automatically creating an alliance with other users. A contrasting interpretation, however, is the use of hashtags as symbols of distinction, to perhaps distance oneself from others, to highlight exclusivity or novelty; a prime 'cool factor' marker used by some participants. Furthermore, this form of condensed narrative is possibly a quick and efficient way to

label trip presentations when on the move, in the mid-travel phase of tourism consumption.

Results from theme two indicative of a socialized tourist identity are perhaps not surprising given the salience of social relationships on identity formation, according to social psychological thought (Sandstrom et al., 2010; Weiten, 2001). Research suggests multiple versions ('performances?') of one's self-concept may exist concurrently, with some emphasized by the 'social actor' over others, depending on the particular setting. Upon later reflection of their trip presentations during the interview portion of data collection, several participants acknowledged sharing photos and status updates which emphasized a certain role or aspect of tourist identity, one removed from everyday life. Whether evading work obligations to join friends on a road trip, ignoring requests from family for updates, staying up late, trespassing, travelling solo for the first time, or partaking in extreme sports, participants expressed a spectrum of independence, individuality and in some cases risk-taking and rebelliousness. In congruence with the literature, tourists typically underscore accomplishments of which they feel proud, a common self-presentation strategy known as self-promotion (Wu & Pearce, 2016; Bosangit et al., 2012). They may also embellish or exaggerate their experiences for greater effect (Weiten, 2001), thereby pushing the boundaries or 'living on the edge' of their own reality.

Further still, a common denominator amongst participants, expressed in transcripts by half of those interviewed, revealed a perception of Facebook as a digital storage space for memories and a place to revisit and recollect travel experiences once home. Indeed, social media platforms such as Facebook have been analyzed from the

perspective of modern-day digital scrapbooks (Good, 2013), where the self is expressed

through digital artefacts that serve as equally representative of the trip and self as material

objects, such as souvenirs (Belk, 2013). Half of all participants acknowledged the value

of Facebook in this regard, and some admitted to going back and reviewing their posts

and comments once in a while, or in one case regularly, with a sense of nostalgia and a

desire to escape the mundane, perhaps reaffirming their digital identities in the process

(Belk, 2013; Belk & Yeh, 2011). The ability to readily access this archived version of the

tourist self may be a welcome break from everyday life and through reflection, a way to

re-live and re-experience the original trip. According to the literature, the passage of time

and acquisition of new experiences may add layers of meaning and understanding to the

original travel narrative, thus re-contextualize the trip itself and evolving our own sense

of self (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Davies, 2007). An interesting

perspective seemingly omitted from social media tourism studies thus far is an

examination of how different one's perception of travel may change weeks, months or

even years after it is experienced. Does one's Facebook posts accurately reflect feelings

towards a destination long after it is visited, or perhaps subsequent to further travel

experiences which may have altered original perceptions? Arguably, sharing to social

media in the mid-travel phase, while travelling, may provide a more impulsive (yet still

deliberate?) perspective of the trip as it is being experienced, or shortly thereafter, but a

deeper understand of that same experience may only be possible with the wisdom

afforded by time.

In summary, results from theme two are mostly in alignment with previous

research on self-presentation tourism strategies that include situating the self socially

among others, and sharing predominately positive characteristics of travel that best reflect the self. These positive reflections may be augmented to support desired outcomes and identity claims, such as belonging to a certain in-group, or the tourist as risk-taker. Future studies may wish to expand on specific features of social media used to achieve these presentation goals, such as hashtagging and hyperlinking (i.e. tagging). In addition, an unexpected finding from the study was the use of digital archives such as Facebook in an introspective or contemplative fashion by participants, as a collection of memories upon which to reflect at a later date.

5.3 Social Media Etiquette: Mindful Engagement in a Digital Space

Participants commonly expressed a keen awareness of the informal rules of social media engagement, and the differences between expected or appropriate usage of social media with respect to two popular mediums: Facebook and Instagram. As revealed through interview transcripts, participants frequently framed their motivation for posting photos, captions, hashtags, or status updates within the context of the unofficial but widely-acknowledged rules of practice in both digital communities. As discussed in the literature review (see section 3.1.3), Facebook (and Instagram by extension), where users gather to share, inform, socialize, comment and generally communicate with other users online, is governed informally by its own set of practices that make up the culture of that community. For example, participants were cognizant of an appropriate daily number of photos to post via Instagram, of the timeliness of posting photos, and of the acceptable limit of hashtags to utilize in a single post before being considered "annoying." They

openly questioned, analyzed and justified their network's engagement, or lack thereof, with their own social media posts, and navigated the appropriate social responses to challenging or negative situations, if applicable, within this space. The three sub-themes of this category are thus: Facebook as a central meeting place, tension between entertaining and annoying an audience, reasoning and justifying social (dis)engagement, and maintaining image control while managing challenges to identity.

5.3.1 Checking in: Facebook as a Central Meeting Place

Many participants referenced using Facebook while travelling with a practical purpose in mind; namely, to inform loved ones of their safe arrival at a destination, and to update family and friends of their whereabouts throughout their journey. This was made evident through status updates and captions explicitly announcing arrivals at destinations or at the start of a new leg of a trip. In this sense, Facebook was commonly utilized as a platform for informational communication and strategic connectivity. Its popularity with different demographics and widespread reach amongst family and friends allows a Facebook user to be able access much of their social network on a single platform. Facebook, as a central meeting place, is therefore a valuable tool for disseminating personal news in that news is far-reaching and instantly delivered, irrespective of time, place or distance, rendering it an ideal platform to use while travelling. Participants were aware of the appropriateness of using Facebook in this context, as is revealed below.

Several participants spoke of connecting primarily with their parents through Facebook while travelling. Natalie claimed her motivation for sharing the first photos of her trip was mainly to reassure her family of her safety. She said, *"With the first few pictures […] I was just like ok this is where I am, mom. I'm ok […] I think one of the main reasons why I posted pictures to begin with is just to keep my family and my friends back home up to date with what was going on."* Amy similarly prioritized communication for informational purposes with her family: *"I'm not on this trip with my parents so that's why I would share photos back and be like hey, I'm not dead."* She elaborated, *"This one was the first one that I took and it was just showing that we'd made it to our hostel safely, we didn't die on the plane."* Michael concurred, describing the context around the first photo he posted after arriving in Chicago: *"I decided to post that picture because after driving for 8 hours I wanted to show people that I had made it."* Natalie, Amy and Michael all emphasized the symbolic significance of the first photo shared as communicating proof of a reassuring message: that of having arrived safely. Additionally, perhaps the photos and status updates served to conveniently call attention to the beginning of their adventures and flag to friends that further posts are forthcoming.

The visual nature of Facebook is well suited to generating travel-related content that in fact serves a double message of communicating practical information (i.e. 'proof', through photos, updates, and geo-tags or location markers), that a traveller arrived safely, while simultaneously presenting experiences that serve as subtext to one's travel personality, identity, values, social groups, and more. Amanda's approach to updating and informing her Facebook network was to let the photo speak for itself. She said, *"I don't write statuses saying, hey guys, I'm safe, on to the next location. But this is kind of*

my way of saying we're having fun, we're doing alright." In this respect, the photo serves

as a visual language or visual status update, as a standalone symbol, without the need for

textual explanation. Conversely, however, because of occasional connectivity or

uploading issues with photos, Adam found it preferable to share textual status updates

while in Australia "*...just to let people know where I am.*" Natalie also chose to write an

arrival status update after her lengthy journey to Australia. She wrote, *"We made it! After*

a very, very, long flight, we've arrived at our apartment in Australia! Still getting settled

in, but with a view of the pool, it's not to (sic) shabby! Let the adventure begin!"

Natalie's update not only provides matter-of-fact information of her arrival, but also

serves to personalize her initial perspective of the experience through the use of multiple

exclamation marks, denoting excitement, a reference to the close proximity of an amenity

she will presumably get to enjoy, and a forward-looking statement that reflects positivity

and optimism. Thus, in this single status update, Natalie has exemplified several themes

or sub-themes previously discussed: placing herself in a social context (though the use of

the pluralized "we" in "*We made it!*" and abbreviated pluralized "we've" in "*we've*

arrived"; presenting a novel experience (the launching point of her adventure in

Australia, after enduring a very long flight); and emphasizing the 'cool factor' thus far

(her view of the pool, and on a larger scale, her own apartment in a new country). Alison

similarly captioned a photo of her first day in Dublin: *"So I woke up in Dublin today. And*

my it's beautiful!" The caption serves two purposes: one, as the first photo posted, it

shares the practical purpose of locating Alison and announcing her whereabouts, and two,

it succinctly highlights her positive first impression of the city. Alison's inclusion of the

hashtag "eurotrip" also suggests that this is the start of a longer journey with more European destinations to come.

Additionally, Natalie emphasized her dependence on and almost exclusive use of Facebook to stay in touch with family and friends. She commented, "*Facebook was for sure the only real way that I was keeping up to date with people other than, you know, Skyping my parents or my friends or things like that.*" Natalie's comment suggests a reliance on Facebook, and social media more generally, for sharing information, experiences and stories while travelling with a wider network. Although half of all participants had used Instagram as the initial platform on which they posted photos (4 out of 8 participants), it is interesting to note that all initial Instagram users had additionally used the app's cross-posting function to simultaneously post their travel photos to Facebook. Consequently, while Instagram may be gaining ground as a newer, more popular social media platform (see section 3.1.3), which is especially well-suited to sharing travel photos because of its dedicated emphasis on photos, participants have not lost confidence in the long-standing Facebook network, perhaps because of its deep penetration amongst both family and friend groups, justifying its relevancy in this study.

In this sub-theme, participants have demonstrated their deliberate and mindful engagement with Facebook as a central meeting place for checking in and updating family and friends throughout their travels. Arguably some subtext can be read into this otherwise fairly utilitarian purpose of Facebook, such as initiating a narrative of the trip and building anticipation for their Facebook audience. However, almost all participants regarded Facebook as a useful and convenient tool with a large outreach amongst family

and friends. The next sub-theme will explore how participants negotiated the tension between amusing versus irritating their Facebook audiences.

5.3.2 Navigating the Tension Between Entertaining vs. Annoying Audience

Participants commonly conveyed an understanding of the informal rules or general guidelines governing the social media landscape, as revealed through the interview transcripts. Accordingly, these informal rules or assumptions influenced their engagement and guided their behaviour on social media sites, as revealed through the content analysis. Behaviour on Facebook and Instagram was thus contextualized within the presumed etiquette standards for each respective platform, and consequently influenced participants' trip presentations on these sites. Considerations included the timeliness of sharing trip photos, such as the appropriate number of photos shared in a given time period, or the maximum number of photos that should be shared at a time, and the acceptable amount of hashtags used per photo. Participants frequently spoke of navigating the balance between keeping their Facebook network updated and entertained throughout their trip, and at the same time avoiding overwhelming or annoying their network by over-sharing. Tone and content of written text was an important consideration as well. Participants were conscious of not wanting to come off as though they were boasting about their experiences. Amanda, for example, relayed a particular time during her trip to Turkey where she pondered the point at which sharing becomes "bragging":

> *It's a little tricky to balance between bragging and sharing, because when I was in Turkey we had a week off where we went to a resort… But I mean, everyone else is in exam season at home. So they're like oh I have an exam tomorrow,*

and I'm like oh well I'm at the resort. It's kind of tricky to post your pictures and say like look at my life compared to yours right now.

Not wanting to show off or perhaps more accurately, not wanting to appear as though one is showing off may be an emotionally intelligent self-management tool on Facebook. In order to successfully engage on the platform, a user must be socially cognizant and abide by the etiquette guiding the behaviour of the community. Perhaps the question extends to: what does it mean to be a "successful" member of social media? In the case of Facebook and Instagram, the goal may be to have positive interactions with peers, to socialize appropriately (i.e. by posting supportive comments), to share relevant (i.e. timely) material, such as opinions on current news stories or recent vacation photos, and in the case of Amanda's comment, to be mindful of how one's current situation may compare or contrast with a peer network. The key perhaps is to be selective about sharing, for instance, by only posting the most important, personally meaningful experiences that resonated with the tourist and best reflect their values, identity or personality. Amanda hinted at this thought process when she said, "*I think that's really hard to balance […] I don't really like taking pictures of 'look at this beautiful hotel we stayed at; my bed is 10 times better than your bed at home.' I don't really like that.*" The comment reflects a need to put forethought into which experiences are deemed worthy of sharing, and which experiences best represent the tourist sharing them.

On the contrary however, upon arrival to her hotel room in New York, Sophie posted just that; a photo of her hotel room's bed, perhaps symbolizing the value she places on comfort or luxury. The photo, according to Sophie, along with several others from the same trip, was inadvertently posted with several duplicates. When asked why

she didn't delete the duplicate photos afterwards, Sophie responded, *"Not important. Maybe I don't even think about it I guess."* Sophie's example demonstrates a less orchestrated or carefully managed profile, at least compared to other participants. In her view, it was not of importance to consider whether having duplicate photos of her trip may be an annoyance to her Facebook friends.

[No caption]

Photo 11: Sophie's hotel bed.

In contrast, Alison pondered a relatively small detail of presenting her Europe trip on Instagram: the number of hashtags captioned with a photo. She reflected, *"Sometimes I'm like oh are people going to get annoyed because there's so many hashtags in this? Maybe I should delete one, and maybe I shouldn't hashtag that one or something."* Alison's comment reflects an orientation towards pleasing her Facebook audience while

being cognizant of the impression she puts forward. Likewise, Katelyn feared looking

"silly" for posting photos on Instagram at a certain point after her trip to Calgary. She

said, "*It was more or less like oh yeah, that happened a week ago, I probably should have*

shared it, but now it's a week later, right? It looks silly to post something so much later."

Katelyn's self-imposed time limit to sharing photos after the fact prevented her from

sharing more of her trip photos on social media, a point she later regretted: "*There's*

definitely a lot more that I could have posted and part of me wishes that I did post them.

But I just didn't want to go over my limit, like oh, Katelyn's out in Calgary, look at all

her pictures." Katelyn's comment suggests a sense of mindfulness about not only the

timeliness of the posts, but also the amount. In comparison to Facebook, Instagram's

focus is on sharing the now, the "insta," and therefore it may seem irrelevant or

inconsequential to share photos at a later point in time. At the time this study was

conducted, Instagram only allowed the uploading of one photo at a time, therefore

potentially limiting the total number of photos that could be shared instantaneously.

However, subsequent changes in early 2017 allowed users to post up to 10 photos in a

swipeable 'carousel' format, expanding sharing options within a single post. During the

data collection phase of this thesis, Instagram's one-photo per post limitation encouraged

more selectivity and therefore potentially weeded out over-sharing, and was also a key

point of distinction from Facebook, which allows an unlimited number of photos to be

uploaded into an album at once. It could be argued that although Instagram has expanded

its posting options to include these 'mini-albums', and had perhaps been perceived

previously as too restrictive, it nonetheless allows users less freedom than Facebook's

unlimited album option. Amanda showed she was attuned to the difference between the

two platforms by saying, *"The ones that I like better I post on Instagram, and these ones, I post more of them on Facebook."* Her comment reflects an appreciation for the selectiveness required of Instagram, which arguably values quality over quantity, and shows an awareness of the differences between the two sites.

Breaking these informal "rules" of Instagram, when applicable at the time of the study, for example by posting multiple photos at once, may be considered in violation of the etiquette governing the medium. Natalie admitted to being bothered by this practice, saying, *"Even some people that I follow, if they do that I'm like ok this is a little bit annoying."* Being mindful of the appropriate amount of engagement on Instagram extends to Natalie's own behaviour as well. *"If I'm out doing something with my friends and we take a bunch of pictures, then you can only really post one...so I think I am a little bit more selective in that,"* she said. In contrast, the perception of Facebook is of an appropriate space to share multiple photos simultaneously, as facilitated by the ability to post photos into an online album. Natalie used this tool to share photos on Facebook from her trip to Australia. *"I just submitted the whole lot,"* she remarked. Natalie's more casual approach to posting photos, perhaps similar in manner to Sophie, contrasts with Amanda's wariness of posting too many. Amanda commented, *"Sometimes it's annoying when you upload so many pictures and people are like ok whatever."* In her view, selectively sharing a more diverse display of photos may better attract the attention of one's Facebook audience. She reasoned, *"I don't think people would go through 50 of the same pictures."* Amanda also conveyed a message of not wanting to overwhelm her network across the two platforms, Facebook and Instagram. While some participants cross-linked their photos from the original posts on Instagram to Facebook, Amanda

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decided to keep her two accounts separate, reasoning that, "*If they see it on Instagram,*
they don't need to see it on Facebook, because I pretty much have mutual friends. So
they'll see it one way or the other." Amanda's comment can be extrapolated to reflect her
strong regard for the experience of the user on the other end. Not wanting to annoy or
overwhelm her social media audience, and by extension, being mindful of how she
navigates the space, was a top consideration for her and other participants. The next sub-
theme will explore how participants made sense of interactions on Facebook such as
comments, questions, likes, and other types of engagement from their network. A lack of
engagement, as appropriate in some cases, will also be investigated from the participant's
perspective.

5.3.3 Reasoning and Justifying social (dis)engagement: The expectation of reciprocity

A common thread amongst participants was an awareness and understanding of
the reciprocal nature of social engagement on Facebook. Through discussions,
participants justified their behaviour online in relation to that of their Facebook network.
Behaviour in this sense can be defined as activity or interactions with other users through
comments, or by number of likes, for instance. The reverse also seemed to prove true in
that, in some cases, participants explained their lack of activity as a type of mirroring
effect to their network's lack of engagement with their posts. For example, throughout
her trip to Europe, Amanda had posted photos into an online album on Facebook, which
overall received little feedback in the form of comments or likes from her Facebook
friends. She explained, "*I don't really engage in Facebook, so it's kind of like you get*
what you give, so I'm not upset about it and it doesn't really make a difference to me."

Amanda's lack of investment (i.e. time, effort) in Facebook, in her view, justified the lack of response by her network, which subsequently averted any emotional investment she may have attached to sharing her trip experience on that site. Her trip photos on Instagram, however, received a greater level of engagement by her followers there, which she reasoned was a result of her greater involvement and usage of Instagram. She said,

> *I'm definitely on Instagram. I comment a lot and I like a lot, and I think that's kind of why […] your name pops up on the newsfeed, whereas here* [on Facebook], *if I'm not commenting my name doesn't pop up as often. But on Instagram, that's why I get more likes or comments, and the comments are funnier here because the captions are funnier and the pictures are funnier. Whereas* [Facebook] *is just like, here go look at all these pictures kind of thing.*

From Amanda's perspective, putting time and effort into producing quality posts on Instagram, which may contain more thoughtful (i.e. humorous) captions, generates in return a more rewarding experience for her followers, who tend to 'like' and comment more frequently. Her personal investment in creating quality posts on Instagram pays off in this respect. Meanwhile, Amanda's lack of presence on Facebook, as discernable to her network by Facebook's newsfeed which highlights users' activity, would prove that Amanda has a lower profile on the site, perhaps therefore discouraging her friends from interacting with her on this platform. Her comment also reiterates the point made in the previous sub-theme (see section 5.3.2) that Facebook may be considered a place to unload a larger quantity of trip photos, whereas Instagram tends to focus on displaying a select few, prioritizing quality over quantity.

Unlike Amanda, Alison received a higher level of engagement with her trip photos on Facebook through comments and likes. However, she revealed that unless she perceives the comment as inviting a conversation, she does not usually respond. "*Unless*

people bring up a point and they want to argue or something, it's kind of like, oh cool. Good to know [...] Sometimes it seems pointless to me to respond. If that sounds rude I don't mean to." Along the same lines, Amanda claimed that while she doesn't feel the need to 'like' every single comment, she will choose to acknowledge certain comments with a 'like' if they stand out as original. For example, she said of a comment on her profile page, *"This one really made me laugh; I thought that was hilarious so I liked that one. That stands out a little bit."* Although Facebook is a social platform with a certain degree of social exchange or reciprocity expected, Alison and Amanda choose to be more discriminating in replying to comments posted by others. Further, Alison's aforementioned remark acknowledges that by choosing not to respond in some cases, she may be infringing on the widely understood rules or guidelines concerning etiquette on Facebook. Another participant, Natalie, claimed that her decision to respond to comments on her Facebook photos would depend on the type of relationship she had with the commenter. For instance, she said, *"Close friends or family, I would probably be more apt to respond, or if it was asking a question. If they asked a question, even if they didn't tag me then I think I would probably do it* [respond].*"* Echoing Alison's earlier statement, Natalie recognized that a question is considered an explicit invitation to converse, and that failing to reciprocate with a follow-up might be considered a social misstep. In addition, Natalie claimed that circumstances may play a role in whether she responds to comments, specifically time and context. *"If I was just sitting around doing nothing and I had time to respond to it then I would. But if I got the notification and I was in school or I was at the beach or doing something else then it would probably slip my mind and I'd just not respond to it,"* she reasoned.

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Another participant, Sophie, found that 'liking' each comment her friends left on her Facebook photos was an effective strategy in communicating reciprocity. She explained,

> *I want them to know that I acknowledge they made a nice comment, but especially when it gets a lot of feedback like this, I don't always want to – I don't have time or think to respond to everybody. So I want them to know that I saw it, I appreciate it, even if I'm not saying thank you directly […] 'like, like, like, like', you guys are awesome.*

Sophie's strategy of using Facebook's 'like' button as a form of acknowledging her friends' comments is a reasonable middle ground, she assumed, between taking the time or making the effort to leave a reply on a comment, and not responding to the comment at all. The 'like' button in this sense serves as an easier or more convenient tool to communicate acknowledgment or reciprocity. To Michael, however, taking the time to reply to each comment on his trip photos was considered common courtesy. He explained, "*I always comment if someone comments on mine […] I feel like it's good manners. So anytime someone comments, if I'm able to I will usually comment after it, so they know that I've read it and I'm acknowledging them.*" As compared to simply hitting the 'like' button, Michael felt socially obliged to put time and effort into a written response acknowledging the person's comment. He argued, "*I feel that it's a more personal touch.*" Perhaps Michael turns to Facebook comparably more than some other participants for the fulfillment of his social needs. Thus, personally replying to each comment is in keeping with his values in this regard. The aforementioned examples have demonstrated some variety in how participants manage comments of their trip photos on Facebook. Whether a personalized written reply to comments, a 'like' as a form of

acknowledgement, or more selective responses, a common thread among participants was an understanding that a certain amount of social engagement is expected to sustain relationships on a social network.

<u>Reasoning and justifying expressions of support:</u>

During the interview portion of the data collection process, participants had the opportunity to dissect particular comments, 'likes', and other activity by their friends in response to their Facebook trip presentations, with the goal of analyzing the behaviour of their friends' expressions of support and engagement, or in some cases, lack of feedback and disengagement. Starting with the former, participants often justified their friends' activity on their Facebook pages by contextualizing their relationship to that particular person, such as the social circle or peer group they share, as well as the quality of the friendship or how far back the relationship extended. Sophie, for example, noticed a pattern with the comments left on her trip photos: "*I find that it's very women-heavy, the comments. I have a lot of guy friends but it's always very women-heavy who are complimenting and saying nice things,*" she observed. Are females more likely to give compliments than males? In Sophie's view, they are, but perhaps the question extends to: Do females feel socially obligated to give compliments, for example, to be more polite or cordial than males? Do females have a different etiquette protocol? Or do females simply

notice and find compliments or feel more comfortable giving them? These issues may be beyond the scope of this study but pose thought-provoking questions on gender differences and corresponding communication on Facebook. Sophie elaborated on her female-heavy observation, saying, "*The people who say things like 'Oh Sophie, you look beautiful' are never like my closest friends; they're always kind of like my outer circle of girlfriends [...] I would call some of them more acquaintances [...] I would say my top 3 girlfriends never post anything positive.*" Sophie pondered whether acquaintances or her 'outer circle' of friends may have been trying to boost the friendship with flattering statements in an attempt to gain closeness or improve the quality of the relationship. Further, perhaps closer friendships use other approaches to communicate supportive comments, such as in-person or through mobile text messaging, and don't feel the need to 'publicly' express those comments on a social networking site. In contrast however, Amanda believed her best or "better" friends would be more likely to express their support of her photos through 'likes' on Facebook. She said, "*When you post a picture you kind of know who's going to be liking it. ...my best friend, I would know she's going to like most of my pictures, or some of my better friends who I know are on Facebook more often than the average person, you kind of expect them that they're going to like.*" Through her comment, Amanda makes a link between the closeness of a relationship and the likelihood of support as expressed through 'likes' on Facebook. In addition, a third correlating factor, she presumed, is the amount of time a person spends on the site; the longer or more frequent the visits, the greater likelihood Amanda's posts would be seen, and if a closer relationship is in place, the greater likelihood she would receive 'likes' from that particular friend. Another interfering variable in this case is Facebook's

algorithm for populating an account's newsfeed. The greater the interaction between two friends (in the form of comments, replies, or likes, for instance), the more likely content from each of the two friend's profiles will populate the newsfeed of the other's. A comment by Sophie, who revealed she compared the number of 'likes' her photos received to that of her friend's photos who accompanied her to New York, supported Amanda's thought process that the more active your network is on Facebook, the more likely they are to engage with your posts. Sophie stated, *"I compared the number of likes I got to the number of likes she got. But my friends tend to be more active on Facebook, like I have a more active friend base."* In her view, Sophie justifiably received more engagement on her photos simply because the audience was there.

Along similar lines, Alison had made the observation that many of the supportive comments she received on her Europe trip photos were from family members, which she reasoned was because her mother decided to spontaneously join her on her trip to Europe, thus taking her network by surprise. Presumably Alison and her mother share numerous family members as contacts or Facebook 'friends', so it is likely that within this circle their photos together were circulated widely (via Facebook's newsfeed function). The first photo shared of Alison and her mother together in Europe (see Photo 12) garnered 48 likes, and at 11 comments, it was Alison's most commented-on photo of her trip overall, with statements ranging from, *"That was a fantastic decision,"* to *"So happy for you both,"* to *"You two are so adorable."* Alison observed, *"There's more family members that hadn't liked the other ones but liked this one…"* presumably because of the additional family, her mother, in the photo.

Caption: *"The most spontaneous decision of our lives, my mama decided to come and your* [sic] *Italy with me. Couldn't be more excited to see this beautiful country with another one of my favourite people. #colosseo #italy #mamaandme #wheninrome — with* [tagged name]."

48 likes 👍

Photo 12: Alison and her mother in Europe.

Moreover, Alison justified the high number of 'likes' that the first Europe photo she posted while travelling received: "*I think this one was the first one so a lot of people were kind of excited. They're like oh she's there, she made it; good.*" Referring back to sub-theme one of theme three (see section 5.3.1), the photo may have served a dual purpose of announcing her safe arrival while locating Alison on her journey. Furthermore, tying into sub-theme three of theme one, as the first posted photo of the trip, the photo also positioned Alison in a novel destination, generating 'cool factor' status as bestowed by her network based on the high number of likes it received (see section 5.1.3).

Similarly, Amy positioned her relationship to her former co-workers as probable cause for some of the likes she received on a photo of her visiting a museum in the United States. She explained, *"I used to work in a [...] museum which is why I went to visit it in the first place. So that's why I shared this picture and that's probably why some of my co-workers liked it."* To Amy, there was a logical connection and therefore straightforward explanation as to why the photo was supported amongst this particular peer group of former co-workers. Likewise, Amy explained her connection with her faculty at school as the probable reason she received a high number of 'likes' on a photo of her planting trees in Europe (see Photo 13 below). She explained, *"...because everyone is in [the Faculty of] Environment so that's probably why, because they're probably like, wow, tree planting! You're saving the environment* (laughs)."

[No caption]

60 likes 👍

Photo 13: Amy tree planting in Europe.

Participants sometimes used a Facebook friend's background to explain supportive comments or likes on their profiles. For instance, Amy considered one particular friend's supportive comment of a photo of her in Scotland as natural given her Scottish background. She said, "*She's actually part Scottish. So she's been to Scotland before so she really enjoyed all of my Scotland photos because she's like wow this is great, this is my heritage.*" Along the same lines, Michael reasoned that a friend who is active on Facebook for work "*because it's part of her job,*" could be expected to express her support to Michael's posts. "*She has Facebook open while she's doing all the work […] so if you post something she will almost more than likely like it or comment on it,*" he said. Similarly, Amy anticipated a particular friend's support of her Facebook posts based on the probability that he would come across it. She shared, "*[He] works […] with me but he's like a social media guy, so I would expect him to kind of see it.*" One participant, Amanda, analyzed the content of her more popular photos and made inferences based on that analysis. For instance, she compared and contrasted the similarities between photos 14 and 15, below, to explain the difference in 'likes' she received. She specified, "*I personally think that this picture with just the animal* [photo 16] *is better from a photography point of view. But because my friend is in it, I think that Facebook is more attracted to that one* [photo 15]."

[No captions]

4 likes 👍 [photo 15]

Photo 14 [above] vs. Photo 15 [below]: Amanda's comparison between photos in Iceland.

Amanda reasoned that photos of people tend to generate more activity on Facebook

because *"it's more exciting when there's faces that you recognize."* Data from the

content analysis portion of the research confirms this is true. The majority of participants, six out of eight, received the highest number of likes for photos with people therein. Out of those six, four of the participants received the most likes for photos combining a scenic view or landscape (i.e. waterfalls, beach) with a person or people in the foreground. Only two participants received the most likes for scenic photos without people.

Generally speaking, Amanda noticed that her friends tend to engage with photos based on the subject matter or the content, rather than the quality of the photo. "*I think that the ones where it's actually me and my friend do get more likes or comments,*" she noticed. In the aforementioned example, her Facebook audience was more *"attracted,"* in her words, to the person photographed with the animal, even though the lighting, clarity, angle or other features of the photo with the animal alone rendered it a superior quality photograph in her mind. Similar to the animal-only versus person-with-animal comparison, Amanda reasoned that a photo of a crater in Iceland with one person in the foreground (photo 16) as opposed to a photo of just the crater (photo 17) was comparatively more popular as judged by the level of audience engagement. She explained, "*This is a crater, and none* [number of likes], *but then this one with a friend is the exact same place, but one she's in it, one she's not, and this one has 7* [number of likes]."

[No captions]

9 likes 👍 [photo 16]

Photo 16 [above] vs. Photo 17 [below]: Amanda's comparison between photos of a crater in Iceland.

Perhaps the presence of a person acts to humanize or add warmth to an otherwise barren

landscape, effectively personalizing the place. The inclusion of a human subject may also

help to contextualize the landscape relative to size or space, and is perhaps therefore more visually appealing to a visually-sensitive Facebook audience.

Similarly, a couple of participants contemplated whether the particular placement of a photo on Facebook, either embedded within an album, or posted as a standalone shot, affected the number of people who saw it on Facebook and therefore potentially the number of 'likes' it received. For example, Amanda posted a photo of herself in Europe as her profile picture, and judging by the number of likes and comments it received it was by far her most popular photo out of her trip, with 206 likes and 12 comments. Interestingly, the photo had been posted singularly as a profile picture and excluded from Amanda's Europe album on Facebook, perhaps serving to highlight its selectiveness. "*It's just strange that if I were to put that in the album, I would never get that much attention drawn to that one picture,*" Amanda considered. She reasoned that, "*When you make an album, you know there's so many* [photos]; *people go through one or two, but if you do a cover photo or a profile picture it makes a huge difference in the amount of people that see it.*" Amanda's comment expresses a keen awareness of the positioning or placement of a photo for a certain effect (i.e. more attention which presumably generates more likes). Another participant echoed that sentiment. "*Maybe people get bored toward the end,*" Alison pondered, regarding the fewer likes she received on photos placed towards the end of her Europe album. Perhaps her Facebook audience became less interested or less engaged, or simply more familiarized with the photos as they went on. The initial appeal generated from its novelty had perhaps worn off. Moreover, Natalie had observed that some of her trip photos that were posted as single photos outside of an

album had received more engagement from her Facebook audience. She wondered if Facebook's newsfeed-generating function may play a role. *"So I guess these ones have a few more comments now that I'm looking at it, and likes, which is interesting,"* she said, *"I wonder if that's because it's easier for people to just do that* [hit the 'like' button], *because this one picture would've just like popped up on their newsfeed as opposed to the whole album to flip through."* Conversely however, Natalie also made an observation that very few of the individual photos she posted within her Australia album received engagement from her Facebook audience. Instead, the album overall received a high number of 'likes', relative to individual photos within the album. The album received 18 likes in total, while the highest number of likes on an individual photo was 6. Natalie pondered the potential reason behind this fact. *"I don't know if that's like laziness on other people's parts […] I had one friend, I remember this vividly […] she was like I wanted to like all of the pictures so I just liked the album instead."* Perhaps Natalie's friend found it to be more efficient, time-wise, to simply hit the 'like' button once at the bottom of the album, versus scrolling through each individual photo and liking certain ones in particular. Another potential reason could be that she truly liked all photos and therefore found it difficult to discriminate between them by bestowing 'likes' upon some and not others. Whatever her friend's ultimate motivation, variations of activity in response to trip photos posted on Facebook were correspondingly justified differently by participants, taking into consideration such factors as context of relationships, backgrounds of friends, or placement of photos.

Furthermore, participants also varied in their assessment of the emotional impact or overall influence that supportive activity with their posts had on them personally.

Natalie, for example, made the connection between the personal importance of a particular photo and her emotional investment in the outcome of sharing that photo. *"I think that when it's something that I'm more proud of or excited about, then it maybe is a little bit more important to me,"* she said. Katelyn, in contrast, downplayed the importance of supportive comments and likes and the impact of a lack of commentary or potential negative feedback, but recognized the activity on her posts as noteworthy. She explained,

> *In a sense it doesn't change me, it's not boosting my ego, it's not heartbreaking [...] It's just something that, you do take a moment and stop and you're kind of like [...] so many people liked this photo. So it's just more of a thing that if you are keeping track of it, you start asking questions.*

For Katelyn, the feedback she received for sharing her trip experiences with friends on Facebook, whether positive or otherwise, is irrespective of her self-identity. Though the feedback might inspire curiosity, Katelyn maintains that it does not alter her intrinsic sense of self. Conversely, perhaps, some participants divulged a purposeful intention to seek validation from others through their Facebook posts. Adam explained the motivation behind providing status updates at various points throughout his journey to Australia and the South Pacific. He said, *"Sometimes it's validation I want to get from other people when I post it on Facebook…Sometimes it's just to let people know where I am."* According to Adam, his motivation is underpinned by two needs. The first is a practical and utilitarian use of Facebook to announce to his network his whereabouts (see also section 5.3.1); the second is a need to feel validated through the social support of his Facebook friends. Presumably, the more purposeful the intention behind sharing a post

(i.e. to feel "validation" or praise through likes), the stronger the effect that support, or lack thereof, might have on that individual. Sophie also confessed to seeking a sort of validation or social support on Facebook from her closer friends in particular. This mindset echoes Amanda's earlier comment that the closer the friendship, the more likely expressions of support might be anticipated. Her closest friends, Sophie felt, were the ones whose support was of particular importance. *"I feel like I seek out validation from them,"* she explained. *"I feel like we're the ones that are supposed to support each other* […] *especially as an only child, we seek out validation from the people who are closest to us because we don't have that sister or brother to be like you suck but I actually love you a lot* [laughs]*."* Sophie justified her validation-seeking on Facebook by the social behaviours patterned in her childhood. Children without siblings ostensibly place extra effort on making and maintaining friendships as a source of social support that might otherwise be missing through sibling relationships. Sophie's aforementioned comments suggest that Facebook is largely a source of social support for her, and that the supportive comments and likes she receives by sharing her trip experiences may be just as valid and meaningful as those received offline. A few participants recognized the importance of feeling validated, supported and uplifted by positive engagement on Facebook. Regarding a specific solo photo (a 'selfie') of Sophie on her trip, Sophie claimed, *"I posted a picture of me, like just me, and a lot of people liked it and there was like a lot of really nice comments. So that made a big difference to me; that was a really big deal. […] The picture itself now is more special. It's my profile photo now. It got a lot of great attention."* As she said, the support Sophie received on her selfie made the photo appear extra special in her eyes and helped boost its status to profile picture. *"I really appreciate*

it," she said of the positive reaction, *"I feel great in this photo, I'm glad everyone loves it."* A clear connection between the positive reinforcement of a photo on Facebook and one's self-esteem was also recognized by Amy and Michael. Amy said of a selfie taken in Florida, *"This one had a lot of reaction to it; a lot of people liked it and there's a lot of comments. And I was like, you know what? That's nice. It makes me feel a bit more confident because it is a picture of myself."* Here, Amy differentiates between a scenery or group photo taken on her trip, where there may be more variables or more reasons to 'like' a photo, with the likes received on a close-up photo of herself. Presumably the support received on a selfie, as in the case with Sophie as well, is directly tied to the sole participant in the photo and is therefore personally flattering. Michael, similarly, acknowledged a direct link between his feelings and the number of comments on a photo taken by him: *"The more people comment, the happier I get,"* he claimed. Amanda remarked that she would read the comments left on her Facebook as a way to stay connected and emotionally uplifted while she was away in Europe for a few months. *"I go on Facebook, I look at my profile picture and I read the comments, because a lot of the comments are just like oh I really miss you, because it was hard to be away for so long, so it's nice to hear those comments,"* she said. Several participants had identified that the likes, comments and general engagement with their trip posts on Facebook positively impacted their feelings and sense of self, particularly in instances where the participant was the sole subject in a photo.

Interpreting a lack of feedback / disengagement:

The previous section discussed participants' reasoning and justification of social engagement and feedback on their trip photos as conveyed through text and other symbols on Facebook. The meaning, understanding and explanations that participants place behind these expressions of support within the context of the etiquette or social norms of Facebook have been explored. In addition, the influence of positive engagement on participants' feelings and self-esteem has been recognized. In contrast, however, participants were also given an opportunity to rationalize those instances where there may have been a lack of feedback or a perceived level of disengagement of their trip experiences by their network. Beginning where we left off last, Sophie not only expressed an explicit desire for social support through likes and comments on her New York City photos, she confessed she would re-post a photo at a later point if she felt it didn't receive adequate attention after the initial post.

> *So if it didn't get any feedback I have a feeling I might have re-shared. Like, if you missed it, guys, look how cool I am meeting* [actor's name]. *I'd be like [...] check it out [...] look how awesome this was. I'd probably be like, 'Oh my God, I can't believe this was yesterday.' I'll probably re-share now that I'm thinking about it* [laughs].

Sophie's comment suggests an unabashed motivation to place the self in a certain light and to draw her network's attention. Referring back to theme one, sub-theme one (section 5.1), Sophie's 'cool factor' status is self-bestowed and constructed for her Facebook audience by virtue of her having met a TV actor at a fan convention ("*look how cool I am*") in what was an exciting or novel opportunity ("*look how awesome this was*"). By

re-sharing her photo, Sophie would have a second chance to present a particular impression for her Facebook network, and may catch the attention of friends who may have missed it after the first share, presenting an additional opportunity to feel validated, supported and praised. Another participant, Michael, confessed to feeling negatively affected by a lack of engagement with his posts, but in the same sentence declared it would not affect him. *"There are times where I post something and I get a like or not [...] and I'm a little upset, but I post it for me, I don't post it for other people. If people comment, great; if not, doesn't matter."* Michael's remark suggests a conflict between seeking out and enjoying the social support he receives from his Facebook friends, and protecting his ego in instances where it may not occur. "*Even if nobody commented I really like how it looks,*" he said of some of his Chicago photos where there was a lack of comments. Alison, however, took an opposing view, stating that sharing personal content that doesn't entice reaction is essentially meaningless. She stated, "*I think it's almost - not really embarrassing - but it's kind of like oh no one really cares so why should I fill out my profile with something that no one cares about."* In Alison's view, sharing for the sake of sharing is perhaps not as personally fulfilling without some acknowledgment or reciprocity (i.e. active engagement) attached. Is a sense of validation possible simply from having trip experiences to share in the first place, independent of feedback? After all, as Michael relayed, many users of Facebook are only passively engaged with content, for example by scrolling through their newsfeed, as opposed to actively liking and commenting on photos or status updates. "*I think people especially on social media love to see what other people are doing; they're very curious. They might not comment but people like to look. So [...] I might as well just post and let people see what I'm doing,*"

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he said. For Michael, knowing that there is an audience via Facebook, whether passively

or actively engaged, is a valid reason for sharing on the network. The underlying

assumption is that even if support is not explicitly expressed (i.e. in the form of likes and

comments), there are people at minimum who are reflexively viewing the content. Both

Adam and Natalie took the stance that sharing trip experiences on Facebook is not

necessarily tied to explicit social rewards, such as likes. *"I wouldn't be at length*

disappointed," Adam said, on receiving a lack of engagement with his posts, while

Natalie declared, "*I'm not one of those people who posts on like social media just to get*

the likes. It's more about me sharing my experiences with the people who are really

interested in that."

A lack of engagement with posts may be attributed to several factors. Several

participants contemplated whether the timing of posts might influence the number of

people who see them. Alison considered,

> *I sometimes wonder, oh is it the timing? Should I post it at a different time of day?*
> *Like, are more people on Facebook at 2:00? And the fact that I posted it in the*
> *evening, it got missed. By the time people go on at 5:00 there's other things that*
> *have taken – so yours gets like – oh, now I have to look at 4 pictures, I don't*
> *really care anymore, you know?*

Michael also observed that timing plays a role in how many people are likely to come

across a Facebook post. His reasoning is that people tend to be busier during the day,

reducing their level of activity on the site at that time. *"I've found if you post something*

in the morning or in the evening you'll get more stuff [likes, comments]. *During the day*

some people are at work. Most people are probably busy. Unless it's a long weekend,

then people will comment," he noticed. Amanda had contemplated whether some of the

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photographic content she posted during her trip to Europe may be of interest to an older

audience and therefore ignored by her younger Facebook friends. In particular, landscape

and scenery photos in Iceland, Amanda observed, were some of her least popular photos,

in terms of level of engagement. She hypothesized,

> *The landscape would be tailored toward an older audience but I don't have adults*
> *on my Facebook […] all my friends, they don't really care about that stuff, which*
> *is also why I usually don't post these kinds of pictures because people don't really*
> *find them interesting.*

According to Amanda, age may play a factor in the type of content people engage with.

As a comparison, Amanda noted that a fun-themed photo with her and her friend sitting

in an oversized shoe in Amsterdam generated 14 likes and two comments (see photo 18

below).

[No caption]

14 likes 👍

Photo 18: Amanda and a friend sitting in a shoe.

Amanda remarked, *"It's an iconic Amsterdam thing. Everybody takes a picture with the shoe or buys shoes or whatever."* Echoing the premise behind Theme One (see section 5.1), by deciding to share and therefore perpetuate this "iconic" Amsterdam image, Amanda prioritizes the expectations of her audience by delivering content that is recognizable and symbolic of the destination she visited.

This sub-theme has explored the ways in which participants mindfully navigate Facebook as a social space designed to encourage interaction and engagement between users. Communicating with others requires the use of social tools provided by Facebook for the purpose of interaction, such as the 'like' button underneath a photo to demonstrate support, emoticons as symbols of expression, or text fields for comments under status updates, for example. By sharing their trip experiences on Facebook, participants generally anticipate and appreciate positive feedback from their friends as a form of reciprocity and in keeping with the norms of social behaviour on that site. This sub-theme has demonstrated the many ways in which participants rationalize and justify the expressions of support and engagement that they receive from other users after sharing their trip experiences on Facebook. Conversely, in cases where there was a perceived lack of reciprocity or a certain level of disengagement with their posts, participants were given the opportunity to explore the potential reasons and causes. The next and last-subtheme will explore instances where participants may have received negative (anti-

social?) feedback or encountered challenges to their trip or identity presentations on Facebook.

5.3.4 Maintaining Image Control and Managing Challenges to Identity

Several participants spoke of minimizing the potential damage from unflattering or challenging comments by Facebook friends on their trip presentations. Most concurred that negative comments are generally avoided in keeping with the social norms of the online community, but if placed in a situation where their image, identity or representation was disputed, a certain response may be appropriate. Possible management of this scenario, posed in most cases hypothetically, included downplaying potential conflict by treating the comment as a joke, disregarding it, and most commonly, deleting it altogether.

According to one participant, Amy, carefully selecting Facebook contacts may be one way to prevent misunderstandings or grievances. She explained,

> *I think it depends on your friend base. I don't think many of my friends would do that in the sense that I'm very selective with my friends. So I feel like they all […] know what kind of person I am and that I'm usually kind of weird and make weird jokes […] I think that if they playfully challenged me […] I would just try to shrug it off, I wouldn't really do anything about it.*

In Amy's view, choosing Facebook friends wisely, such as those who understand one's character, quirks or humour, is a good starting strategy to mitigate potential clashes that may develop over the course of a friendship. One's social circle on Facebook is also an extension of one's image, whether perceived through quantity (i.e. number of friends) or quality (friends who best reflect the person's profile, for example). The underlying

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assumption purports that the more understanding and respect that exists between Facebook friends, the less likely they are to be victimized in this sense. Amy would in most cases "*shrug it off*," in recognition of the good-natured intent behind being "*playfully challenged.*" Alison similarly would use an avoidance strategy in handling potential challenges from Facebook friends. "*Probably just ignore it,*" she said, "*I hate conflict, so I'd be like okay, that's your thoughts, your ideas; let's move on.*" In Alison's example, not feeding into negativity or controversy is an appropriate management tactic for someone who identifies as avoiding confrontation. By staying true to her values in this regard, Alison's gains the advantage by effectively controlling her online image to suit her self-identity. Amanda echoed Amy's abovementioned remark that the more one's Facebook network reflects the values, personality or humour of the Facebook user, the better chance for common ground or understanding between friends. She said of her trip to Europe, "*People do comment on the pictures saying 'don't ever come home', like joking obviously [...] I just think it's funny. I'm a very sarcastic person and so are my friends.*" In an example of a misunderstanding stemming from cultural differences, Amanda relayed an example of an incident where her roommate misinterpreted a sarcastic comment on a trip photo by one of Amanda's Facebook friends. She explained,

> *Somebody posted on my Facebook when I was still in Turkey and they said, 'Looks like you're not having a fun time at all,' but sarcastic obviously. But my roommate is Turkish so she didn't really understand the sarcasm. She's like, 'Are you ok, do you want to go home?' I'm like no that means I'm having the best time ever.*

To Amanda, the sarcasm embedded in her friend's comment was apparent given the familiarization between the two parties, but differences stemming from culture or a lack of context may have caused a misinterpretation of the content by her roommate.

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The most frequently mentioned strategy for managing unflattering or challenging comments was to delete the comment in question, participants revealed. Generally speaking, participants believed that their Facebook profile, including content sourced from photos or status updates and other modes of self-expression, should be a reflection of their personality, self-identity and individuality. Challenges from others, such as comments that do not align with one's self-presentation, pose a threat to one's social identity on Facebook. By removing these types of comments participants are able to filter their profile and maintain control over the presentation put forth. Amanda stated, "*I know that I had an amazing time and my pictures prove it in my eyes* […] *So if somebody were to say negative things I would probably just delete it and move on.*" Amanda's photos intended to showcase her trip the way she experienced it, and accordingly, any comments to the contrary might be perceived as a challenge to that presentation. Along the same lines, Sophie interpreted some of her friends' comments in a different manner than they might have been intended, and this, she felt, was sufficient cause to remove them. "*I do have like a couple of my friend's husbands who [...] think they're funny but they're definitely not. So sometimes they'll say something really just dumb, and I'm like I wanna leave it on but you're just not making the cut. Delete* [laughs]*.*" As Sophie says, Facebook users "*have the final say*" or complete content control over their profile. Katelyn concurred with the above two comments, saying,

> *I would just take the comment down or just be like well good for you, you just embarrassed yourself over social media. To me, it doesn't really phase me. Of course I would be taken back by it, of course I would kind of look at that person differently or be like who are you to judge me? Part of me would be like screw you* [laughs].

Though contradictory in tone ("*it doesn't really phase me*" versus "*I would be taken back by it*"), Katelyn essentially mimics the thought process aforementioned, albeit she uses stronger language to describe it. Her statement also expresses anger and even disgust at that type of behaviour, and perhaps unveils more honesty as it unfolds. Building on the last few examples, Alison explained a propensity to not only delete unflattering or challenging comments, but further, to delete photos entirely if they failed to receive feedback. "*There has been times,*" she explained, "*…where I've deleted pictures that haven't got that much reaction.*" In Alison's view, challenges to her self-presentation could come from the perception of being ignored by her Facebook friends. To manage this potentially awkward scenario and the resulting vulnerability or embarrassment that may ensue, Alison has in the past chosen to remove instances where it may pose a threat to her online identity in order to mitigate the potential social harm of looking unpopular. Interestingly, this image control technique contrasts with that of Sophie, who in theme three, subtheme three (see section 5.3.3), shared her inclination to re-post a photo at a later time if it did not receive any feedback.

Whether through downplaying potential negativity from a comment by treating it as a joke, disregarding or ignoring it, or deleting it completely, participants each rationalized the most likely approach they would take to minimize challenges to their trip presentations and retain control of their tourist identity. By first interpreting the comment and analyzing the context, the relationship to the friend who made the comment, and the perceived level of impact, participants then determined the most appropriate course of action to manage any ensuing damage to their tourist identity and tourism presentations

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on Facebook. The subsequent section will delve into a discussion of theme three as it relates to the literature review.

Theme 3 Discussion:

This section will weave the results from theme three, Social Media Etiquette: Mindful Engagement in a Digital Space, within the sociological perspective used to frame this thesis; that of symbolic interactionism.

Results from theme three demonstrate participants are mindfully engaged in the use of Facebook as a social space inherent with its own set of social norms, informal rules and expectations that guide behaviour through communication. From keeping family and friends informed, finding the right balance between sharing and over-sharing, assessing and responding to feedback, and managing identity claims, participants were cognizant of navigating Facebook in a manner deemed socially appropriate by the online community and in keeping with their intended presentation goals.

According to the literature, Facebook is a widely used and accessible platform to share information on a global scale (Coons & Chen, 2014; Hannam et. al, 2014), the convenience of which was noted by several participants who lauded the advantage of reaching a large portion of their network simultaneously. Additionally, this utilitarian use of Facebook seemingly serves an underlying purpose of welcoming the audience along on the travel journey, inviting friends and family to live vicariously through the tourist's experiences and enabling access to social support for the tourist along the way (Hannam et al., 2014; Kim & Tussyadiah, 2013). The social nature of Facebook suggests a certain

level of engagement and interaction between participants and their friends, preferably positive, is expected to maintain sociability. Participants felt justified in using different communication tools to express reciprocity; for example, by using a text box to reply directly to comments and questions, or 'liking' comments and questions to demonstrate courtesy or attentiveness, both examples of building sociability on Facebook (Coons & Chen, 2014). Within the confines of this study, constructing and maintaining a particular tourist identity through trip presentations is arguably the larger goal at work through Facebook communication in this context. Signs and symbols, both in written and visual form, becomes more salient in digital environments as calculated aspects of performing identity and managing impressions (Belk, 2013; Robinson, 2007; Schau & Gilly, 2003). It is perhaps not surprising then that participants acknowledged a keen awareness of how their trip presentation and tourist identity claims were received by their audience. Participants were cognizant of the nature and tone of comments and number of likes on photos and status updates, for example, to gauge the overall sentient of responses, and reacted positively to self-affirming feedback while minimizing or otherwise justifying a less favourable response, or lack thereof.

Results from theme three can be deciphered through the lens of symbolic interactionism, which views all meaning as socially constructed and continuously developed in a collaborative, iterative process (Sandstrom et al., 2010; Suljak, 2010; Zhao et al., 2008; Crotty, 2003; Goffman, 1959). A literal application of the perspective to the results would see the tourist use symbols in the form of text and photos, for instance, to put forth an intended identity and impression of experiences, which are then received and assessed by Facebook friends in the form of interaction (i.e. comments,
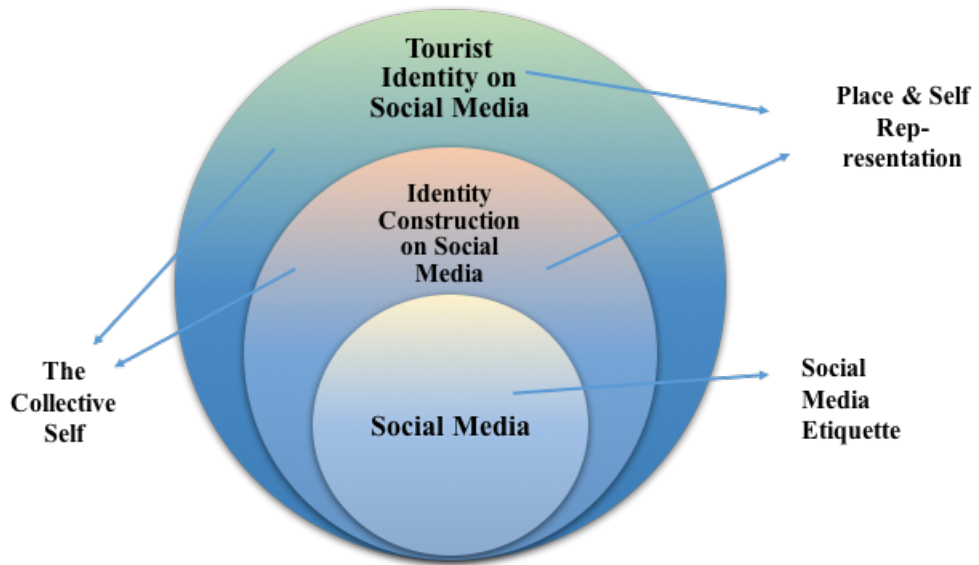
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likes). Feedback is then incorporated into this co-construction of identity and judged as either supporting and therefore validating intended identity claims, as is the preference, or calling those claims into question, thereby challenging the presentation, which then must be managed accordingly. A couple of participants spoke of deliberately seeking validation through their posts, and several more acknowledged feeling confident about themselves if likes and positive or encouraging comments were attained. According to Goffman (1959), part of the task of managing impressions involves securing support from others that reaffirms our desired self-image; in the case of this study, by posting socially acceptable or expected performances. As evidenced by the results, this may include a "*perfect tourist*" or "*professional tourist*" who sets out with a "*checkmark mentality*" to capture "*postcard moments*" that effectively perpetuate popular destination images and feed audience expectations (see section 5.2.1), or perhaps an off-the-beaten-path presentation, which emphasizes novelty and risk-taking (see sections 5.1.3 and 5.2.2 respectively). Some presentations or performances may be jeopardized, however, if judgements fail to fall in line with our intended identity claims, thus causing a cyclical process of re-assessing and perhaps altering original claims. For example, one participant claimed she would re-share posts if they failed to generate any response, in the hopes of spurring attention later on, whereas another said she would delete posts lacking in feedback, so as to avoid potential embarrassment, and presumably, preserve a desired image. According to Zhao (2005) and Robinson (2007), the feedback loop is collaborative and perpetual as we constantly see ourselves mirrored back to us through other people's reactions; thus, our sense of self is socially filtered and co-constructed.

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Nuances of this principle of symbolic interactionism as exemplified by participant responses included interacting variables such as the closeness of the relationship between the tourist and the commenter, membership in social or peer groups where identity is strongly attached, and a perception of engagement levels and therefore expected reciprocity on Facebook. For instance, one participant claimed *"you get what you give"* on Facebook, implying a match between the amount of effort put into constructing a trip presentation or level of engagement with the site more generally, and the corresponding feedback by one's audience. Several participants referred to expected comments or likes by friends due to their higher levels of usage and connectivity on the site. Similarly, a couple of participants identified as group members where comments from other members were assumed and perhaps given higher regard. Furthermore, a couple of participants also referred to presumed responses from 'best friends', indicating the closeness of relationship is a factor in how responses are regarded. Presumably the stronger the quality of the relationship, and the stronger identification as members of in-groups, the deeper felt the response will be, and the more likely it will be included in a re-assessment of identity claims. In addition, perhaps more focus is placed on reactions from mutual friend groups or people who move in the same social circles, as their sphere of influence is wider may have greater ramifications for identity.

Results from theme three indicate an alignment with the underpinnings of symbolic interactionist thought. The last two sub-themes in particular, reasoning and justifying social (dis)engagement, and managing challenges to identity and image control, draw parallels with the sociological perspective and with literature on the social construction of meaning. The first two sub-themes: Facebook as a central meeting place,

and navigating the tension between entertaining versus annoying an audience, support previous research underscoring the importance of Facebook as a highly accessible, convenient and widespread communication platform, the nature of sociability on Facebook, and presenting favourable presentations that deliver on audience expectations. Generally speaking, participants consciously navigated the social landscape of Facebook through the social norms, informal rules and assumptions inherent in that digital community. Participants analyzed their audience's engagement with their trip presentations, or lack thereof, filtered through the aforementioned guidelines directing communication on the site. Figure 3 below demonstrates how each theme fits within the main constructs of the literature review. For instance, theme one's place and self-representation can be regarded as a product of identity construction and presentation on social media, and specifically tourist identity construction and presentation on social media. Theme two's premise of the collective self can similarly be regarded as a product of identity presentation, as well as tourist identity in particular. Meanwhile, the foundation for theme three's focus on social media etiquette is that of social media.

Figure 3: The interrelationship between the three main constructs of the literature review interspersed with the three main themes.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In the span of a few short years, social media technologies have effectively changed the way users communicate with one another (Kang, Tang & Fiore, 2014), opening up new avenues of exploration into user-generated data capable of offering rich insights into the personal experiences of tourists. The use of social media by tourists has typically been researched across the travel life cycle with particular emphasis on the pre-travel phase (i.e. planning, booking) and post-travel phase (i.e. updates, reviews). However, as this thesis has demonstrated, a sizeable gap in the tourism literature exists within the scarcity of research in the mid-travel, en route, experiential phase of tourism consumption (Mkono & Markwell, 2014; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2013), especially with the ever-present use of mobile technology (Hannam et al, 2014; Paris, 2012), presenting researchers with a valuable opportunity to glean understanding into tourist behaviour as it is being experienced and shared in 'real-time'. Facebook was chosen as the social networking site to explore and uncover tip presentations mid-travel due to its emphasis on sharing and sociability, its popularity as the most utilized social networking platform, and its lack of academic focus as a primary research site into tourist behaviour (refer to Table 1). As argued in this thesis, as a digital community and culture, Facebook has its own set of informal rules, norms and expectations guiding the behaviour of its members, and implicit ideals for what it means to be a member in good social standing on the social networking site. The sociological perspective chosen to frame the methodology for this thesis is symbolic interactionism, the foundation of which views meaning as socially constructed, represented and interpreted through socially-filtered symbols and

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expressions of communication (Sandstrom et al., 2010; DePutter, 2007; Crotty, 2003). With an emphasis on the co-creation of performances through the use of symbols representative of meaning, such as photos and captions, and the re-processing of original meanings via reactions to those performances, symbolic interactionism was perceived as a suitable framework to shed light on the research objectives of this study. The subsequent section will review each research objective and summarize the findings most appropriate to each one.

6.1. Results in Light of Research Objectives & Opportunities for Future Research

The aim of this study was to explore how tourists present and manage impressions of the self as tourist, on Facebook, while travelling. The three research objectives outlined below can best be supported by findings from each of the three themes, respectively. A discussion of possible future research directions is also included with findings for each objective, with an eye to moving the research agenda forward.

1). To explore how tourists present travel experiences on Facebook, while travelling, using digital photos, videos, emoticons or text.

Generally speaking, participants leaned heavily towards sharing visual components of their trip, with the use of digital photos accented through captions as the primary narrative technique. Participants deliberately presented mid-travel tourist experiences which highlighted positive aspects ('cool', 'fun') of their self-identity, ever conscious of leaving lasting peer-approved impressions on Facebook. The most popular self-presentation methods included sharing novel, distinct or exclusive aspects of the trip, perhaps in an attempt to align place representation with self-representation, and consciously considering audience expectations by capturing and sharing iconic destination images. Overall, participants presented a balanced tale of the self in relation to other people and objects (i.e. attractions), somewhat departing from previous research which demonstrates a highly self-focused presentation. The Millennial cohort studied for this thesis arguably places priority on peer acceptance and belonging, a key component in self-development in this stage of life. Further studies may wish to examine the travel subject photos of different age groups to see if a self-focused and social presentation is dominant throughout the life course.

2). To examine how tourists present an identity on Facebook (a 'tourist' identity) through their travel experiences.

Overall, participants presented tourist experiences, and by extension, a tourist identity, within a highly social context. This was achieved through situating the self among others in photos, and by making reference to others through the use of social linking tools embedded within Facebook, such as tagging (i.e. hyperlinking) other

profiles to one's own, informally mentioning other people's names in captions and status updates, and using hashtags as small-scale social narratives. Future studies may wish to expand on specific features of social media used to achieve these social presentations, such as hyperlinking and hashtagging. Although a relativity new social media tool, an in-depth discussion of hashtags as carriers of content ripe for analysis is lacking in the academic literature at this point. Future studies may wish to examine their use as it applies to narrative construction of trip presentations, both in the post-travel and mid-travel phase. Furthermore, participants revealed a propensity to regard Facebook as a digital archive where memories are safely stored and available for reminiscence at a later point. Future research could take a longitudinal view on past social media trip presentations and interrogate whether travellers' perceptions of those experiences change over time. An interesting perspective seemingly omitted from social media tourism studies thus far is an examination of how different one's perception of travel may change weeks, months or even years after it is experienced.

3). To investigate how tourists interpret and manage impressions of the self as tourist on Facebook.

Generally speaking, participants navigated Facebook with conscious consideration of an assumed social etiquette guiding interactions within that particular digital community. Participants justified their audience's (dis)engagement with their trip presentations in alignment with the principles of symbolic interactionism. For instance, depending on the intended identity goals and the relationship of the commenter to the

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participant, feedback was either regarded as challenging, which therefore caused a re-assessment and modification of original performance goals, or labelled as supportive and predictable and therefore unproblematic, or disregarded altogether. Future studies may wish to extend this research further by examining ways in which tourist identity is readjusted or skewed in response to feedback interpreted as out of line with intended identify claims or performance goals. For instance, what steps are deemed necessary to adjust or correct performance goals and how soon should they occur? Does sharing travel experiences while on the go, in the mid-travel phase, hinder the chances or lessen the likelihood of performance goals being achieved, perhaps due to time constraints? Does the speed of posts overshadow the importance of accuracy?

The next section will discuss limitations which may be considered to have impacted the research conducted. It will also discuss the benefits for those partaking in the study, as well as benefits from a business perspective to tourism marketers, in particular. Lastly, a discussion on the study's research contribution to the academic community will be offered.

6.2 Limitations, Benefits and Contributions of Study

A noteworthy limitation of this study is the gap in time between the data collection, analysis and discussion in relation to the literature. For instance, the two-step data collection process, consisting of qualitative interviews and content analysis, and the initial interpretation of data, along with the generation of themes and sub-themes took place in summer 2015. Due to personal researcher circumstances causing a delay in my

studies, the data was then re-examined, discussed in relation to my then-updated literature review, and re-examined as deemed necessary in early 2018. In the almost three-year time-gap Facebook made two changes in particular which may have added to or altered the results of the study by allowing for more options for participants to share their travel experiences. The first is the introduction of 'reactions', an extension of the 'like' button as explained in Section 3.1.3; the second is the introduction of Facebook Live, which allows users to livestream videos on the site, thus potentially expanding the options for sharing tourism-related experiences as they happen in the mid-travel phase of tourism consumption. Not having the opportunity to capture and include these extraneous tools for sharing tourism experiences, which may have provided subsequent data deemed relevant and valuable, may be considered incongruent with timely research expected at completion and therefore a drawback to the study.

Furthermore, time constraints prevented the inclusion of more participants in this study; however, 8 research cases have arguably produced sufficient qualitative data to discern patterns of meaning and generate themes from the content analysis. A subsequent potential limitation includes my inexperience conducting research of this magnitude as a novice researcher and Masters-level graduate student. Being mindful of remaining open to the data and not imposing judgements, and being transparent where subjectivity may have taken place while practicing active reflexivity, helped mitigate any risks in this regard.

Benefits to participants included an opportunity to reflect on their tourism experiences and become more self-aware of the thought processes behind their decisions to share aspects of their travel journeys. The chance for introspection may help crystallize

travel experiences, thereby mediating the original experience, enriching reflection, sparking new insights, solidifying memories, adding layers of meaning, or changing perceptions altogether (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009).

Findings from the study may have practical benefit for tourism businesses and industry stakeholders in two ways. First, marketers are increasingly using customization techniques to target prospective customers (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011). Understanding what is important to a tourist's identity and what elements of identity are expressed as tourists' travel allows for the opportunity to tailor communications by matching specifics of the product or service with identity, which may serve to strengthen the likelihood of personal association and engagement with the tourism brand in question. This 'real-time' sharing of experiences, collected and evaluated by social media managers, provides valuable data for strategizing future or repeat business. Second, in understanding what type of messages are being communicated while travelling in real time, marketers can instantly react and respond; for example, by either reinforcing positive tourism experiences, such as recognizing and rewarding favourable comments with a company 'like', response or incentive to return, or addressing or correcting negative tourism experiences, such as by offering an apology or in-lieu-of service. This also serves to mediate the tourist's experience while travelling, for example, by proactively containing and preventing negative word of mouth from spreading too far, too wide.

Findings from my study benefit the academic community by contributing to the under-researched 'mid-travel' phase of consumption as expressed on a social networking site. As outlined in Table 1 (see Section 3.1.1), a substantial gap in knowledge exists in the mid-travel phase of tourism, and with the increasing use of mobile technologies and access to wifi connectivity, filling this knowledge gap should be a priority of researchers. It is hoped that this study contributes some valuable insight in this regard, and sparks further curiosity by researchers. In evaluating a piece of ethnography, Richardson (2000) proposes 5 criteria that give merit to the more artistic, creative aspects of conducting research on people's lives. According to Richardson (2000), ethnographic researchers, should: make a *substantive contribution* to knowledge by elevating our understanding of social life, and by grounding the work in a human-world perspective; ensure their work is of *aesthetic merit*, in that the text is shaped and presented artistically and with complexities embedded; demonstrate *reflexivity* to contextualize judgements and accountability; *impact* the reader emotionally or inspire intellectual curiosity, and pose a call to action or a new practice and *express a reality* or credible account of an embodied lived experience (Richardson, 2000). It is with these criteria in mind that I invite evaluation of this thesis to ensure it leaves a thorough and useful contribution to academic knowledge.

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Appendix A: Recruitment and Information Letter

May 22, 2015

Hello,

My name is Helen Sarah Cohen and I am an M.A. student working under the supervision of Dr. Karla Boluk in the Tourism Policy & Planning program of the Recreation and Leisure Studies Department at the University of Waterloo. I am interested in recruiting participants to be part of my thesis study on the use of Facebook in representing travel experiences.

Participants for the study will be qualified based on the following 5 criteria:

1.   University of Waterloo undergraduate or graduate students (who are unknown to the researcher).

2.   Active users of Facebook, loosely defined by 'regular visits and posts.'

3.   Those who have travelled at least once for pleasure within the last 6 months.

4.   Those who have shared information and/or experiences from their travels with friends

on Facebook, such as photos, videos, posts, and/or dialogue centred around photos or comments of the trip more generally.

5.   Those who have shared and posted travel information to Facebook *during* their vacation or trip, while the trip was underway. (Please note: Postings can be verified on Facebook according to a date-time stamp which should correspond with stated travelling time).

This study requires your consent to participate in two phases:

1). The first phase of the study is allowing myself, as the researcher, to access your Facebook page by accepting my 'Friend' request. I will access your Facebook page to conduct a content analysis of any posted travel-related information going back a maximum of six months. Travel-related content to be analyzed includes images, such as photographs, videos and emoticons, and text, such as posts, comments, and captions. For example, when analyzing travel-related photographs I will be looking at characteristics such as the setting, the subject matter, the landscape, buildings, people, etc. When analyzing travel-related text I will look at characteristics like choice of words, intonation, structure of sentences, etc.

Please note that confidentiality will be of the highest concern. I will only access your Facebook page on a password-protected computer, with access through Facebook via confidential login information. During the course of the study it may be necessary to consult with the supervisor of this thesis project, Dr. Karla Boluk, however, only myself and Dr. Boluk will have access to your Facebook page. Participants will be given

pseudonyms throughout the entire study and data will be retained for a minimum of one year after the completion of my M.A. program, after which it will be destroyed.

2). The second phase of the study will involve a one-hour face-to-face interview to be conducted at the University of Waterloo in June. Interviews will involve open-ended questions in relation to specific photos you have posted on Facebook to represent your trip and the personal and perceived meaning of the photos etc. Interviews will be held in a private study room at one of UW's school libraries. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate the accurate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Alternatively, if you wish to opt out of having the interview recorded you are free to do so. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you wish. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide is considered confidential and the transcript will only be shared with my thesis supervisor.

Participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences by advising the student researcher. There are no known risks to you as a participant in this study. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission, direct quotations assigned to pseudonyms may be used. Travel-related content posted on your Facebook page, regardless of author, may be used in the study in a confidential manner, with pseudonyms assigned. Facebook 'friends' who comment on your travel-related content, such as on

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photos, will be sent a private message in an effort to inform them of my research. Their comments will be anonymized and used as data. Therefore, there may be a limit to the extent that confidentiality can be provided.

With your permission, photographs may be used as data in the study, and any identifying information will be removed through the blurring of faces and any potential identifiers or markers such as logos on clothing. The date stamp and location stamp on your photos will also be blurred. Please be aware, however, that the use of photos, even with faces blurred, does increase the likelihood that you may be identified. Participants will be given the opportunity to approve the use of each particular photo being considered in the study, and will have the right to request that particular images not be used. Each aspect of the consent process is your choice. Please ensure that as a participant, you have the right to refuse participation or withdraw consent at any point.

Data collected during this study will be retained for a minimum of one year in a secure location.

In appreciation of your time commitment and trust, each participant will receive in-kind remuneration in the form of a small travel-related gift upon completing the interview portion of the study, worth about $20.

Your participation will help further the body of knowledge on tourist representation on social media. It will also help inform tourism professionals, including marketers, about the type of

travel-related information that is shared on a social networking site and why it is important to tourists.

I would like to assure you that the study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or questions resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin, Director, Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567, ext. 36005 or Maureen.Nummelin@uwaterloo.ca

If you meet the previously mentioned criteria and are comfortable with your information being accessed and analyzed in a confidential manner, you are invited to send a private Facebook message to Helen Sarah Cohen with the following information:

1.   The location of your last leisure-related trip (taken within the past 6 months).

2.   The length of time your trip lasted.

Eligible participants will be chosen on a first come, first served basis. I will then send a confirmation message indicating that you have been selected to participate, and provide you with further information. If you have any questions regarding this study, I can also be reached by email at hscohen@uwaterloo.ca or phone at 1-416-305-3477, or you can contact my supervisor, Dr. Karla Boluk, at 1-519-888-4567, ext. 34045 or kboluk@uwaterloo.ca

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Helen Sarah Cohen

M.A. Candidate, Tourism Policy & Planning

University of Waterloo

Appendix B: Recruitment Slides

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

August 6, 2015

Helen Sarah Cohen
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
University of Waterloo
Waterloo, ON

<u>Consent of Participation</u>

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Helen Sarah Cohen and Dr. Karla Boluk in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo.

- I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

- I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

- I am aware that I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty by advising the researchers of this decision.

This project has been reviewed, and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin, Director, Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567, ext. 36005 or Maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

☐YES ☐NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

☐YES ☐NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

☐YES ☐NO

I agree to the use of photos from my Facebook page in any resulting publication or thesis with the understanding that my face, other people's faces, and other identifying features of any individuals in the photos will be blurred.

☐YES ☐NO

I agree to allow the researcher to message my friends via Facebook who have commented on my Facebook page.

☐YES ☐NO

_____
Print Name

_____
Signature of Participant

_____
Dated at Waterloo, Ontario

_____
Witnessed

Appendix D: Participant Interview Guide

What did you decide to post what you did?

Why were these (photos, videos, posts) selected over others?

What do they represent to you?

What do you think of the comments or reactions (or lack thereof) generated by your

posts?

Do other people's comments or reactions change what they mean to you? If so, how and

why?

What do they mean to you personally?

What might they say about you or your identity as a tourist?

Why did you decide to share them?

Why did you decide to share them while on your trip?

Appendix E: Appreciation Letter

UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

September 5, 2016

University of Waterloo

Dear Name:

I would like to thank you for your participation in the study entitled *Exploring Presentations of the Self: Tourist Identity and Representation on Facebook*. Your participation will contribute to expanding our understanding on the underresearched area of 'real time' tourist representation on social media.

Please remember that any data pertaining to you as an individual participant will be kept confidential. If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or would like a summary of the results, please provide your email address, and when the study is completed, anticipated by August, 2015, I will send you the information. In the meantime, if you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me by email or phone as noted below.

As with all University of Waterloo projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin, the Director,

Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005 or

maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca.

Please accept this gift as a small token of my appreciation. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Helen Sarah Cohen

M.A. Candidate, Tourism Policy and Planning

University of Waterloo

hscohen@uwaterloo.ca