

# How Many Likes? Factors Influencing Intention to Visit a Conspicuous Tourism Destination



## Quantos *likes*? Fatores que Influenciam a Intenção de Visitar um Destino Turístico Conspícuo

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to measure the influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), Social Return (SR) and Symbolic Image (SI) on the intention to visit a conspicuous tourist destination. The research had a quantitative approach; thus, data were collected through an online survey and the analysis realized by multiple linear regression. The results revealed that eWOM and SI have no influence on the intention to visit a destination. These findings are not in line with most academic researches, but may be associated with the degree of intangibility of tourism activity and the subjectivity of the individual consumer experience. SR demonstrated a positive influence on the intention to visit a conspicuous destination. Such result is congruent with and reinforces the findings obtained by previous researches on consumer behavior. The main contribution of this study consists in confirming the influence of social media on the intention to visit a tourism destination, in search of visibility, distinction and social prestige. Travel has become a tool for displaying status.



**Keywords:** tourism destination, conspicuous consumption, ewom, social return, symbolic image

## INTRODUCTION

Consumer behavior has undergone significant changes in recent years. Technological influences, increased access to information, the rise of social classes and the need to consolidate the image projected by the individual based on what is consumed, made the awareness of the symbolic value of consumption even more evident during decision-making process (Castells, 1982; McCracken, 1986; Baudrillard, 1998; Cui; Fam; Zhao; Xu; Han, 2019). This value has been studied by several researchers (Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk & Preciado, 2013; Han, Nguyen & Simkin, 2016; Tangsupwattana & Liu, 2018). Leibenstein (1950), in their classification of motivation for the demands for goods and services, which highlights consumption as a factor of social distinction, either by its stimulus or even by its disincentive, any of these attitudes fits the consumer in different social niches.

Reaffirming identity and distinguishing oneself from the mass leads to the search for more specific products and services. The choice of what to consume or not is closely associated with the individual's self-perception and his or her socioeconomic status (Berger & Ward, 2010; Silva; Neto; Grangeiro & Carneiro, 2020). From the moment that elements which are symbolically inherent to an economically higher class are consumed by members of a distinct class, the representation of status is questioned (Veblen, 2007). For this reason, the symbolism of consumption has more influence on the choices of those who consume than the merely functional perceptions of the products offered (Chen, Leask & Phou, 2016).



In the tourism industry, factors such as the economic prosperity of the emerging classes (Ferreira; Graciano; Leal & Costa, 2019) and social media have also altered the consumption behavior of tourists (Jansson, 2018). The search for more authentic experiences and the possibility of sharing these moments as a factor of differentiation from others have contributed to the improvement of individual's social identity, to the directing of choices towards a certain destination and even to influence the traveler's conduct (Boley, Jordan, Kline & Knollenberg, 2018). Deciding on the next vacation trip became more complex and aspects related to the representativeness of the destination and its relation with the image of the people with whom one wishes to equate were included in the process (Correia, Kozak & Reis, 2016; Costa Filho, Fernandes & Rezende, 2019; Ferreira & Costa, 2020).

Individuals' desire to differentiate themselves from others or to be in line with their peers through their travels has already been discussed by Correia et al. (2016), who observed how much the social context interferes with how tourists perceive and experience conspicuous travel. The term conspicuous "relates to socially advertised consumption that makes it possible to sustain or increase the social position of a certain individual" (Correia et al., 2016, p. 739). Veblen (2007) conceptualizes it as a consumption intentionally used to guarantee status. When applying the concept to the context of tourism destinations, the conspicuous destination can be defined as a place capable of guaranteeing its visitors prestige and social visibility, by simply sharing the experiences lived in that environment (Correia & Kozak, 2012).

But it is not enough to differentiate themselves from others, they also need to be in agreement with those to whom they aim to associate their image with. Thus, the Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), understood as a communication process developed between consumers (Gupta & Harris, 2010), has a fundamental role when choosing the destination. EWOM represents an important tool for consumers in search for information. Kim and Lee (2015) emphasize that before making their consumption decisions,



individuals usually consider the opinion of other consumers. In the tourism sector, as an intangible product, the opinion of those who have already tried a particular service gains even more relevance, and the use of social media as a mechanism to encounter content generated by their peers in order to strengthen social relations is also enhanced (Narangajavana; Fiol; Tena; Artola; Garcia, 2017).

In order for these relationships to become closer, their peers must provide the expected positive reinforcement. It is in this context that social return takes place, that is the feedback tourists expect to receive with the sharing of their trip on social media (Boley et al., 2018). Considering that conspicuous consumption represents the purchase or use of a certain service aiming to receive prestige from other individuals, social return would be a way of confirming and identifying whether the destination in question meets the requirements demanded by the group. Moran, Boley, Woosnam, Jordan & Kline (2018) identified that this construct constitutes one of the greatest predictors when choosing the trip's destination.

Another factor that may contribute to the intention to visit a conspicuous destination is the symbolic image of the place. For Correia et al. (2016) the conspicuity of destinations derives from their image. In the tourism field, each touristic region must be seen as a brand and be associated with a certain social image. The greater the congruence between the identity of a particular group and the image projected by a destination, the greater the likelihood that the members of said group will choose to travel to that location (Sirgy & Su, 2000).

The content generated by individuals helps not only in the obtainment of information about the place, but also in identifying the public that frequents it. Thus, it is possible to measure the symbolic image of the destination and the possibility of social return from the visit. An increasingly common concern in a connected society, where a person's image is partially derived and acquired from digital platforms (Boley et al., 2018). Just as people influence, they are



also influenced, and the way others perceive them impacts their consuming behavior.

This research brings an important contribution to the tourism literature, more specifically in the area of tourist consumption behavior for conspicuous destinations. The conspicuity approach in this sector and more precisely applied to the destination is still very recent. Despite the work developed by Phillips and Back (2011) and Correia et al. (2016), there is a need for a greater number of studies, since society has undergone significant transformations and social media have dictated not only the way people relate, but also the way they behave, reaffirm their identity and project their image. Therefore, the objective of this article is to understand how factors such as eWOM, social return and the symbolic image of the place influence the consumer in the intention of visiting a conspicuous destination.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Conspicuous tourism destination**

The discussion of consumption as a factor of differentiating and signaling wealth and status has been going on since the 19th century, more specifically when Veblen released the classic: *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. In this piece, originally published in 1899, the author presents how American society used consumption to distinguish social classes. Individuals used to purchase goods and services to display their income and to obtain social prestige, which defines conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 2007; Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996).

Leibenstein (1950) points out that the relationship between status and consumption has been linked since the middle of the 19th century and, in an unprecedented way, he applies the concept of conspicuity in the formation of demand. The author seeks to understand how conspicuous consumption can interfere in the search for a certain good. He also states that the status can be improved according to the consumption and non-consumption of



individuals. Choosing whether or not to use a particular service actually represents a social positioning.

Man's desire to equate himself with individuals of the same class or even incite the envy of others (Rao & Schaefer, 2013) has aroused the interest of academics. The number of studies that have been carried out addressing this comparative behavior has grown significantly (Zheng et al., 2018). The sharing of values and the desire to fit into a certain social group contributes to the development of equivalent behaviors (Huang & Wang, 2018), which Leibeinstein (1950) identified as the Bandwagon effect, consumption based on the desire to be part of particular group.

Although it is widely studied in the context of marketing (Abraham & Reitman, 2018) conspicuous consumption has been relatively seldom explored in tourism research (Phillips & Back, 2011). Researchers seem to neglect that travel is one of the main ways to show status and that when leaving their daily context, travelers seek to give their experiences visibility. Josiassen and Assaf (2013) identified that consumers classify their travel experiences as public or private according to the social image that the destination could project.

To understand the degree of social visibility that a tourist destination can have, one must take into account the level of symbolism and status that the destination attributes to the individual and its ability to affect the perception of others about the image projected by the visitor (Phillips & Back, 2011). It is important to note that the conspicuous destination is not related to the price of the trip, but to the symbolic value of its image (Correia & Kozak, 2012; Correia et al., 2016). Thus, taking into account the academic literature in the field, the present study adopts the following definition of conspicuous destination: the location where the tourist activity is developed and which has the ability to raise or maintain the status and social prestige of individuals, regardless of price (Phillips & Back, 2011; Correia & Kozak, 2012; Correia et al., 2016).



## Ewom

The way consumers are interrelated and can influence the purchase decision of others has already been widely discussed by the marketing area (Groeger & Buttle, 2014). Word of Mouth (WOM) is one of the most traditional examples of said influence, and can be understood as the informal communication process based on the evaluation of goods and services without the interference of companies (Anderson, 1998). With technological advances and the advent of social media, WOM has spread into the electronic environment, which has been known as Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM). This means that the evaluations have become virtual and have acquired much greater proportions (Ahrens, Coyle, & Strahilevitz, 2013).

For Zhang, Craciun and Shin (2010), the internet has intensified the dissemination of information related to products. Consumers became more attentive and increased their influence over potential customers in the most diverse segments. In this context, Erkan and Evans (2016) affirm that social media enabled a new aspect to eWOM, the discussion about goods and services with their contact network. When consumers share information on virtual platforms regarding their experiences, the influence power over others is stronger, as people tend to put more trust in a message generated by a common consumer (Abrantes et al., 2013).

The level of comprehensiveness of comments and information provided by users, in addition to enabling a communication process, often honest among consumers, also interfere in their behavior (Gupta & Harris, 2010). Before choosing to consume certain services, customers acquired the habit of checking the assessments provided by other individuals and tend to pay attention to the consensus of the information (Kim & Lee, 2015). Regarding intangible activities, these evaluations gain even more meaning, since the identification of the attributes of services can be limited, as is the case of tourism (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008).



Harrigan et al. (2017) identified that people's engagement with social media during their travels has been an increasingly growing trend in the latest years, and has contributed significantly to user content generation. EWOM among consumers has the peculiarity of providing information free from commercial interest, which consequently entails greater credibility to the generated content. Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2008) claim that stimulating eWOM can result in greater commercial activity, given the construct's influence power on consumer behavior.

The influence power of this tool has already been widely studied in other sectors. In tourism, research aimed at measuring eWOM's degree of influence on the destination choice is still recent and restricted to a specific group of researchers (for example, Abubakar et al., 2017, Narangajavana et al., 2017). User generated content through eWOM might indicate a strengthening of social ties, taking into account the equivalence of similar values and consumption patterns (Narangajavana et al., 2017; Avelino, Silva & Leal, 2020).

Therefore, it can be assumed that eWOM not only provides a range of information to other consumers, but can also influence the visit of a given destination. Based on what has been discussed, the first hypothesis was formulated:

H1: EWOM positively influences travelers' intention to visit a conspicuous destination.

### **Social return**

The influence of a group on the consumption behavior of its members has been measured in previous studies. Ajzen (1991) states that the social pressures imposed by the approval or disapproval of certain actions significantly interfere in the attitude of individuals in society. The opinion of people who are close to the individual or the community that he or she wants to join affects this consumer's decision making (Kim et al., 2013) and





consequently directs his or her choices, in the search for similarity in consumption.

The perception and positive reinforcement provided by peers intensifies the relationship of proximity. The feeling of being in compliance with reference groups and the recognition received by its members serve as a stimulus for the purchase. It is important that the individual as a member of a certain group meets the expectations created in this social environment. Observing the person's normative behavior allows the predictability of his or her attitudes regarding the acquisition of goods and services (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1969).

Leibenstein (1950), when developing the concept of the Bandwagon effect, identified the variation in the utilitarian perception of a product based on its demand and the influence that consumers suffer from and exert over their social circle. As an individual in society, the human being is commonly influenced by the environment and tends to acquire a collective identity as a way of combating exclusion (Huang & Wang, 2018; Lira, Santos, Campos & Costa, 2020). And purchasing behavior not only indicates similarities between individuals, but also serves to differentiate groups (Duan & Dholakia, 2017).

The internet has contributed to these interpersonal relationships to be intensified and even to alter the buying attitude of consumers (Duan & Dholakia, 2017; Boley, Jordan & Cline, 2018). The use of social media to display possession and behavior serves as a consumption showroom; and, the visibility of user generated content may even impact their self-perception (Duan & Dholakia, 2017). In the tourism sector, travel experiences have different social values. Depending on their symbolic load, destinations can be classified as public, in which case there is a real interest in sharing them with their peers, or private, the ones that do not motivate social media posting (Boley, Jordan & Cline, 2018). From this perspective, a second hypothesis was formulated:



H2: Social return positively influences travelers' intention to visit a conspicuous destination.

### **Symbolic image**

Consumption as a tool for social distinction or reaffirmation of identity has been commonly researched since the 1980s (Luna-Cortés, 2017). The symbolism involved in a particular purchase and the need for buyers to impress other people are often associated with the relationship between consumption and emotion (Tangsupwattana & Liu, 2018). In tourism, specifically, this association influences the intention to visit certain destinations, since, as customers identify that a given experience reinforces their identity, they usually choose to experience it (Luna-Cortés, 2017).

In the work of Ekinci et al. (2013), it was found that consumer loyalty to a given destination is not only related to its functional aspects, but is also associated with the place's capacity to reinforce the individual's social identity and symbolic lifestyle. The way tourists see themselves or would like to be seen, besides contributing to reinforce their symbolic identity, also legitimizes their participation in certain groups. For such reasons, a place's image becomes one of the central aspects to be analyzed when defining the trip (Moran et al., 2018).

When dealing with the symbolic aspects of a destination's image, the relationship of this image with the individual's self-congruence must be observed (Ahn, Ekinci & Li, 2013), and it can be analyzed under two distinct dimensions. These are real self-congruence, related to the way individuals see themselves; and, the ideal self-congruence, which concerns how individuals would like to be seen by society (Moran et al, 2018).

Although Ekinci et al. (2013) found aspects related to self-congruence as influencing tourists' loyalty to a given destination, Ahn et al. (2013) did not find the same in their study. These authors came to the conclusion that the functional aspects were significantly influential when choosing the trip and that this is due to the possibility of tangibility. Taking into account the

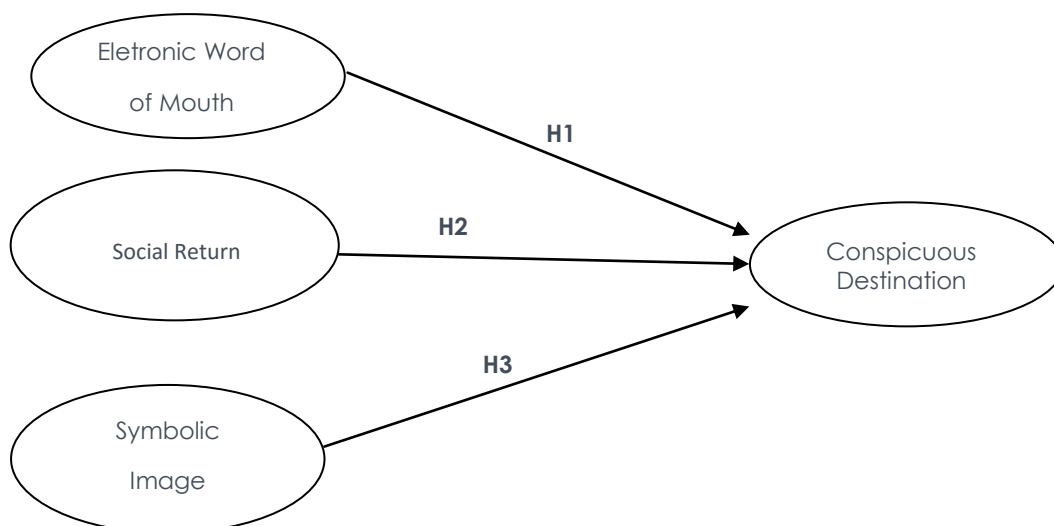


discussions about self-congruence and its influence on the intention to travel to a destination, the third hypothesis was formulated:

H3: A destination's symbolic image and its relation to the tourists' ideal self-congruence positively influence their intention to visit a conspicuous destination.

### Theoretical model proposition

The theoretical model of this research is presented in figure 1. The first construct presented is Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), the second construct is social return and finally symbolic image of a destination. Based on the proposed model, this work suggests that eWOM, social return and the symbolic image of a place are capable of positively influencing tourists' intention to visit a conspicuous tourism destination.



Source: Created by the authors (2020).

Figure 1: Theoretical Model

## METHODOLOGY

This study has the interest of testing previously formulated hypotheses based on the existing theory, for which a quantitative approach was designated. The research is characterized as descriptive and explanatory, as it was intended to describe and subsequently explain the relationships between the variables studied (Babbie, 2007; Malhotra, 2012). Given the study's cross-sectional design, data were collected during a single period of time (Malhotra, 2012).

The population represents the group from which it is desired to obtain significant conclusions for the research (Babbie, 2007). Therefore, it was considered that any and all Brazilians who have the habit of sharing their travels on social media could provide relevant data for the construction of this work. Given the unascertained totality of members in referred universe, together with the time constraints that limit every research, a non-probabilistic sampling was adopted (Malhotra, 2012), using convenience sampling as a technique and snowball as a strategy.

Online survey was the elected procedure for data collection. For its realization, a closed-ended questionnaire was used. The instrument was formulated based on previously validated scales from the literature and which, according to the analysis of this work's authors, allow the measurement of the presented constructs. EWOM was measured from the scale obtained in the study developed by Thourunroje (2014); for social return, the scale created by Boley et al. (2018); and, the destination's symbolic image was calculated from Ahn et al. (2013)'s scale, adapted from Sirgy and Su (2000), specifically the dimension of ideal self-congruence, as it is an investigation about conspicuous behavior, the researchers of this study judged this dimension as the most relevant and capable of providing greater answers to the hypothesis related to this construct. The intention to visit a conspicuous destination was verified by means of a single item prepared by



the authors. All scales were adapted to the context of this research. However, the adaptations did not compromise the measurement of the constructs.

The destination of Porto de Galinhas Beach, located in Ipojuca, a city in the Northeast region of Brazil, was used in the formulation of the questions as a substitute for the term “conspicuous tourist destination” so that there was a greater understanding of the respondents about the attributes that constitute this type of destination. It is believed that Porto de Galinhas beach materialized the term as it is one of the main tourist locations in northeastern Brazil with consolidation on the international stage (Mesquita & Xavier, 2013; Barreto, Albuquerque & Medeiros, 2017) arousing the desire for visitation. In addition, Porto de Galinhas beach, based on the findings of Silva and Durão (2020), is perceived by adjectives as: beautiful, stimulating, attractive and sensational, both by national and international tourists. Silva and Durão (2020) still analyze the e-branding developed by the Destination Management Organization and realize, through their promotional material, that the place is designed as a unique destination. These factors contribute to characterize Porto de Galinhas Beach as a conspicuous destination, since taking into account the aspects reported by Correia and Kozak (2012), it would allow the visitor, when sharing his moments in the locality, visibility and social prestige, to be visiting a single destination.

The questionnaire consisted of 16 items (see Table 1) that aimed to measure the constructs presented in this study; in addition to questions related to the population's socio-demographic profile. The variables were presented in a 7-point Likert scale, in which 1 is the lowest agreement level (totally disagree) and 7 the highest agreement level (totally agree). After its elaboration, it was submitted to a content validation process through the thorough analysis of 10 researchers in the tourism area. After the recommendations of these evaluators, some items were changed and the instrument went through a pre-test with 20 respondents, with characteristics



similar to the population studied and which were not counted in the final sample of this research (Babbie, 2007).

Table 1: Composition of the collection instrument

| Construct/ Author   | Items (variables)   | Code   |
|---|---|--------|
| Eletronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) (Adapted from Thoumrungroje, 2014)         | When I consider new travel destinations, I ask my contacts on the social networking site for advice.                            | EWOM01 |
|   | I usually talk to my contacts on the social networking site before I choose a travel destination.                               | EWOM02 |
|   | I like to get the opinions of my contacts on the social networking site before I choose a travel destination.                   | EWOM03 |
|   | I always ask my contacts on the social networking site about destinations to travel to.   | EWOM04 |
|   | I feel more comfortable choosing travel destinations when I have gotten opinions from my contact on the social networking site. | EWOM05 |
|   | When choosing the travel destination, my contact's opinions on the social networking site are important to me.                  | EWOM06 |
| Social Return from Tourism Scale (SRTS) (Adapted from Boley et al., 2018) | Social media posts of travel to Porto de Galinhas beach make the traveler look cool.  | SRTS01 |
|   | Social media posts of travel to Porto de Galinhas beach make the traveler look more popular.                                    | SRTS02 |
|   | Social media posts of travel to Porto de Galinhas beach make the traveler stand out.  | SRTS03 |
|   | Social media posts of travel to Porto de Galinhas beach make the traveler look unique.  | SRTS04 |
|   | Social media posts of travel to Porto de Galinhas beach make the traveler look savvy.   | SRTS05 |
|   | Social media posts of travel to Porto de Galinhas beach make me envious of the traveler.  | SRTS06 |
| Symbolic Image (IS) (adapted from Ahn et al., 2013)                       | <i>Ideal self-congruence</i>  |        |
|   | The image of the typical visitor of Porto de Galinhas beach is similar to how I would like to be                                | SI01   |
|   | The image of the typical visitor of Porto de Galinhas beach is similar to how I would like to see myself                        | SI02   |
|   | The image of the typical visitor of Porto de Galinhas beach is similar to how I would like others to see me                     | SI03   |
|   | The image of the typical visitor of Porto de Galinhas beach is similar to how I ideally like to be seen by others               | SI04   |



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Source: Created by the authors (2020).

Data collection was carried out between December/2018 and February/2019 by sharing the questionnaire, which had been applied in portuguese, on social media with the request that the respondents, after recording their answers, should share it with their friends and family.

In total, data were collected from 160 respondents. Bearing in mind that the survey was conducted through the Google Forms platform, with all questions flagged as mandatory, there was no need to validate the non-response error. After the end of data collection, the database was extracted to Microsoft Excel, at which time the database was refined, coded and the nominal data were transformed into numeric data. Then, the spreadsheet was imported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), software used for statistical analysis.

After data collection, the analysis procedures occurred as follows: initially, a description of the sample's sociodemographic profile was made using basic descriptive statistics, distributed between percentage, mean and standard deviation. The next stage was devoted to inferences of the results. Before, however, tests of reliability and dimensionality of the data were carried out, in order to guarantee the validation of the collection instrument. To examine the reliability of the items in each construct, Cronbach's alpha was used, with acceptable levels from 0.6.

The dimensionality of the items was assessed by an exploratory factor analysis using tests such as Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity (Hair et al., 2009). Finally, to confirm or refute the hypotheses proposed by the theoretical model, multiple linear regression analysis was carried out.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION



Once the data were collected, the next step was directed to their treatment and investigation, as described in the previous section. Thus, the next topics present the elementary findings of this investigation, discussing them according to the theoretical basis.

### Sociodemographic Profile of the Sample

The first results refer to the outlining of the respondents' sociodemographic profile, taking into account the variables of the instrument that were intended for that purpose. Initially, this profile was determined based on frequency statistics, as presented in Table 2. The findings reveal that the study's sample is predominantly characterized by the female gender (68.1%). In addition, the education of these individuals is, for the most part, divided between the levels of Higher Education (40.6%) and Post-Graduation (45.6%), demonstrating the respondents' overall high level of education.

Furthermore, individuals' annual travel frequency was also measured. Through this variable, it was observed that this frequency is mostly 2 times a year, although the percentages are showing variation between the other options. Finally, the predominant geographic region of residence was the Northeastern of Brazil, a situation that may have been caused by the study's place of origin.

Table 2: Sociodemographic Profile Based in Frequencies

| Annual travel frequency  |       | Level of education (complete)  |       |
|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------------|-------|
| Maximum once a year      | 24.4% | No formal instruction          | 0.6%  |
| Twice a year             | 32.5% | Elementary school              | 0.6%  |
| 3 times a year           | 15.6% | High school                    | 12.5% |
| 4 times a year           | 9.4%  | Undergraduate degree           | 40.6% |
| More than 4 times a year | 18.1% | Postgraduate degree            | 45.6% |
| Gender                   |       | Geographic region of residence |       |
| Female                   | 68.1% | North                          | 3.1%  |
| Male                     | 31.9% | Northeast                      | 74.4% |
| Transgender              | 0%    | Midwest                        | 3.1%  |
| Other                    | 0%    | Southeast                      | 12.5% |





|                   |    |       |      |
|-------------------|----|-------|------|
| Prefernottoanswer | 0% | South | 6.9% |
|-------------------|----|-------|------|

Source: Field Research (2019).

Then, the mean and standard deviation of the remaining sociodemographic variables were measured. Based on the results, it was found that the respondents' average age is around 31 years. The average family monthly income is BRL 5,306.17. Considering that the average number of individuals living in the same household is 2.91 people, the average income per person, that is, the per capita income, resulted in BRL 1,823.42. All of these data are displayed in Table 3, presented below.

Table 3: Sociodemographic Profile Based on Means and Standard Deviation

| Variables                     | Mean         | Std. deviation |
|-------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Age                           | 31,49        | 8,954          |
| Average family monthly income | R\$ 5.306,17 | R\$ 4.466,85   |
| Number of house residents     | 2,91         | 1,135          |

Source: EmpiricalResearch (2019).

Once the sociodemographic profile of the sample that composed this study had been traced, the next step was directed at analyzing the reliability of the variables that composed the collection instrument, in addition to the dimensionality of the data collected. These statistical procedures, carried out through SPSS, are important to ensure methodological rigor in quantitative research, and must precede the performance of multiple linear regression analysis. The next section, therefore, will describe these protocols.

### Reliability and dimensionality of data

Initially, the reliability analysis procedure was performed in each of the constructs (eWOM, social return and symbolic image), in order to verify the effectiveness of the scales in measuring the proposed constructs. Therefore, Cronbach's alpha statistics were used, considering acceptable indexes of at



least 0.7, a parameter established by Hair et al. (2009). Factor analysis, using the KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity, found that the indicators were aligned on single factors, since the constructs measured were one-dimensional. Table 4, presented below, details the values.

Table 4: Summary of data reliability and dimensionality

| Variables | C.F.  | H <sup>2</sup> | KMO   | Bartlett |            |       | V.Exp.* | Cronbach's Alpha |
|-----------|-------|----------------|-------|----------|------------|-------|---------|------------------|
|           |       |                |       | df       | Chi-Square | Sig   |         |                  |
| EWOM02    | 0,907 | 0,822          | 0,879 | 15       | 794,431    | 0,000 | 75,766  | 0,935            |
| EWOM03    | 0,889 | 0,790          |       |          |            |       |         |                  |
| EWOM01    | 0,872 | 0,761          |       |          |            |       |         |                  |
| EWOM05    | 0,860 | 0,740          |       |          |            |       |         |                  |
| EWOM06    | 0,851 | 0,724          |       |          |            |       |         |                  |
| EWOM04    | 0,842 | 0,709          |       |          |            |       |         |                  |
| SRTS03    | 0,926 | 0,858          | 0,860 | 10       | 520,241    | 0,000 | 73,127  | 0,879            |
| SRTS01    | 0,877 | 0,770          |       |          |            |       |         |                  |
| SRTS02    | 0,846 | 0,715          |       |          |            |       |         |                  |
| SRTS05    | 0,821 | 0,674          |       |          |            |       |         |                  |
| SRTS04    | 0,800 | 0,640          |       |          |            |       |         |                  |
| SI03      | 0,943 | 0,900          | 0,815 | 6        | 632,482    | 0,000 | 85,380  | 0,943            |
| SI02      | 0,932 | 0,868          |       |          |            |       |         |                  |
| SI04      | 0,916 | 0,839          |       |          |            |       |         |                  |
| SI01      | 0,898 | 0,807          |       |          |            |       |         |                  |

Source: Empirical research (2019). \* V.Exp. = variance explained.

Based on the results of factor analysis, it was necessary to remove item SRTS06 (namely: social media posts of travel to Porto de Galinhas beach make me envious of the traveler) from the social return construct, given its low factor load (less than 0.5). The other constructs showed adequate values and all the items were maintained on the scales of each construct (eWOM and symbolic image).

### Theoretical model analysis

Once the previous procedures were carried out, the regression was tested. At first, the descriptive statistics of the constructs were verified using

mean and standard deviation, and considering a 7-point Likert scale. As it can be seen in Table 5, the dependent variable of this study, entitled as intention to visit, received a relatively high index, indicating that the sample of this research constitutes a potential demand for conspicuous tourism destinations.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Composite Variables

| Variables          | N   | Mean | S.D.* |
|--------------------|-----|------|-------|
| Intention to visit | 160 | 5,53 | 1,773 |
| eWOM               | 160 | 3,01 | 1,697 |
| Social return      | 160 | 4,33 | 1,642 |
| Symbolic image     | 160 | 3,44 | 2,015 |

Source: Empirical research (2019). \* S.D. = standard deviation

The other variables, however, did not achieve high scores. Social return, for instance, achieved an intermediate result. The descriptive findings also revealed that the study's sample does not seem to relate with eWOM and the symbolic image, since both behavioral attributes received scores below the average of agreement. Table 6, presented as follows, details the multiple regression enter method. From this test, it was found that all elements theoretically assumed as predictor variables (eWOM, social return and symbolic image), indeed exert a statistically significant influence on the intention to visit conspicuous tourist destinations.

Table 6: Multiple Regression

| Modelo | Variables entered                   | Variables removed | Method   |
|--------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|----------|
| 1      | eWOM, Social return, Symbolic image |                   | Backward |

Source: Empirical research (2019).

In sequence, Table 7 summarizes the theoretical model statistically accepted. Once the three independent variables were inserted in model 1, the value of R (0.363) indicates the correlation degree between the predictors and visit intention. This coefficient explains the variation proportion



that the dependent variable suffers from its precedents. In this study, 11.5% of the intention to visit conspicuous tourist destinations is explained by eWOM, social return and symbolic image, a fact verified through the adjusted R square.

Table7: Model Summary

| Model | R     | R square | Adjusted R square | Std. error of the estimate | Durbin-Watson |
|-------|-------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| 1     | 0,363 | 0,132    | 0,115             | 1,668                      | 1,874         |

Source: Empiricalresearch (2019).

Finally, the values of the coefficients were verified, in order to certify whether the proposed hypotheses would be confirmed or refuted. At first, the values of Sig. were observed, with reference standard as  $<0.05$ , to ascertain if the predictors actually influence the dependent variable. The results showed that only social return influences the intention to visit conspicuous tourist destinations, given that the other components (eWOM and symbolic image) had higher rates than the established parameter. Thus, H1 and H3 were immediately rejected. The Beta value of the social return, in turn, shows that this behavioral attribute positively influences the dependent variable, with an index of 0.277. Therefore, H2 could be confirmed.

Table8: Coefficients

| Model           | Unstandardized coefficients |            | Standardized coefficients | T      | Sig.  |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|-------|
|                 | B                           | Std. error | Beta                      |        |       |
| (Constant)      | 3,887                       | 0,389      |                           | 9,980  | 0,000 |
| eWOM            | -0,004                      | 0,087      | -0,004                    | -0,044 | 0,965 |
| 1 Social return | 0,277                       | 0,102      | 0,256                     | 2,721  | 0,007 |
| Symbolicimage   | 0,131                       | 0,084      | 0,149                     | 1,566  | 0,119 |

Source: Empirical research (2019).

H1 was rejected due to the negative influence of eWOM over the intention to visit a conspicuous tourist destination. The construct, which

indicates that sharing information about experiences tends to influence consumer behavior and strengthen social ties according to the equivalence of similar values and consumption patterns (Grupta & Harris, 2010; Abrantes et al. 2013; Narangajavana et al., 2017), proved to be inversely proportional to the intention to visit a conspicuous destination.

The rejection of H1 meets the results obtained by Abubakar et al. (2017). However, it can be better explained based on the findings of Boo and Kim (2013) in a study developed in the context of gastronomy. Boo and Kim (2013) identified that a previous negative eWOM experience has a strong impact on individuals' intentions. Although there is evidence regarding the influence of eWOM as a source of confirming information provided by online advertising of destinations (Chang & Wang, 2019), aspects related to the intangibility of the activity and subjectivity of the individuals' experience must be taken into account.

By nature, conspicuous consumption, represented here through the intention of visiting tourist destinations with such a characteristic, is induced by the desire to express social status (Huang & Wang, 2018). In these cases, once destinations become objects of discussion in eWOM, it is possible that, instead of producing greater credibility for decision making (Narangajavana et al., 2017), the lack of exclusivity of the destination becomes apparent. The need to make others desire consuming the same experience (Rao & Schaefer, 2013) is only possible when the destination is still scarcely explored. Thus, the evaluations of other visitors may not have an effect on demand, as observed by the results of the present study.

H2, otherwise, has been confirmed. It indicates that Social Return, as stipulated by the literature and expected by this study, has a positive influence on a traveler's intention to visit a conspicuous destination. Travel experiences have different social values and, depending on their symbolic load, destinations can be classified as public or private. This classification is linked to the desire to expose on social media what was experienced, in



order to signal ownership and obtain the social return that results from it (Duan & Dholakia, 2017; Boley et al., 2018).

In an increasingly connected society, social media represents an opportunity to reaffirm identity, reinforce the similarity of behavior and thus increase the sense of belonging in a peer group. Oliveira, Araujo & Tam (2020) reinforce this argument by identifying that sharing the trip is closely related to achieving personal goals such as identification. Therefore, the positive feedback that can come from sharing a trip, mainly from peers, influences the intention to visit a specific destination.

Unlike what happens with the eWOM effect, Social Return has shown to have a positive impact on the visit intention. It is possible to infer that, while the evaluations of others about destinations - measured through eWOM (Narangajavana et al., 2017) - discourages interest in destinations, the desire to share locations on social media - expressed by Social Return (Boley et al., 2018) - predicts demand. Hence, it appears that the desire for conspicuity, in the case of destinations, is aroused by the need to share experiences and reaffirm identity on social networks. However, evaluations carried out by others do not positively succeed in a consumer attitude.

Furthermore, symbolic image, similarly to eWOM, does not predict the intention of visiting conspicuous tourist destinations. Since this type of consumption is composed of individuals who wish to express social value, it was expected that the way an individual would like to be seen by society (Moran et al, 2018) would reverberate in the interest of visitation. However, in this case, the utilitarian aspects seem more pertinent to the constitution of the demand. Ahn et al. (2013), for instance, pointed out that the analysis of the destination's functional attributes attenuates the intangibility of tourism and allows consumers to adopt a more conscious choice process, thus reducing the possibility of frustration.

Another factor to be highlighted is related to the validity of the symbol. The findings of Witt (2010) demonstrate that the validation of the



symbolic image by social peers is essentially necessary for there to be an intention to purchase a certain product when it comes to conspicuous consumption. It can be observed in this investigation that the rejection of H1 (eWOM positively influences the intention of travelers to visit a conspicuous destination), demonstrating that the groups of which the respondents are part do not seem to validate the symbolic image of the destination in question, since eWOM would represent non-exclusivity. In addition, the respondents' average age, 31 years, may also have contributed to the rejection. According to Han and Kim (2020) Generation Y, those born between 1981 and 1999, would be more relevant in practical and previous aspects.

In conspicuous consumption, there is a very conscious and defined desire to show purchase power and obtain social prestige (Veblen, 2007). Given such longing, the desire for products, being no different for tourism destinations, may not be a process based on subjective issues, but on rational decision making based on utilitarian attributes, as explored by Ahn et al. (2013). Social return, for example, the only construct to have explained the intention to visit, is useful since it has a well-defined function.

## **CONCLUSION**

In order to assess whether factors such as eWOM, social return and the symbolic image of the place influence consumers' intention to visit a conspicuous destination, this study has reached some conclusions. First, it is important to note that although the use of social media represents a great source of information about destinations and is a widely used tool in travel planning, the experiences posted in these channels by the individuals' networks showed to have no influence on their intention to visit the shared places.

The positive influence of social return on the intention to visit a destination indicates that individuals expect positive reinforcement from their peers when sharing their travel experiences. In this case, the desire to belong and demonstrate behavioral agreement with the members of their social circle



can significantly influence the intention to visit a destination that allows them to maintain their image and increase their social prestige. This fact can be explained by the possibility of generating their own content, arousing admiration among their peers and thus strengthening and reinforcing their participation in a certain group.

Moreover, the symbolic image of a destination related to the individual's ideal self-congruence had a negative influence on the intention to visit a conspicuous destination. Previous studies have already presented divergent discussions regarding the real influence of ideal self-congruence in the choice of destination. This issue may be related to the intangibility of tourism activity, allowing the choice based on the place's functional attributes to seem less frustrating, an argument mentioned by Ahn, Ekince and Li (2013). This study contributes with its findings for the development of future research that seeks some consensus on the influence of a destination's symbolic image and the individual's ideal self-congruence in the intention of visiting a tourism destination.

The main contribution of this research was to discuss the concept of conspicuous tourism destination and to contribute for the clarification of attributes necessary for touristic regions to fit into this concept. In addition, we sought to identify through constructs related to consumer behavior, and never before studied under this conjuncture, their level of influence on the intention of tourists to visit a destination. The study also contributes to the current discussion about the use of social media to obtain status and visibility.

Regarding its academic implications, the study provides evidence which contributes to the debate of existing divergences as to the role of ideal self-congruence and the symbolic image of a destination and predictors that theoretically influence consumer behavior during the planning of their trips. The research also helps to identify criteria that allow a destination to be classified in the category of conspicuous destination based on the literature developed in the scope of tourism.





Concerning practical implications, this research allows DMOs to direct their marketing actions and to be able to restructure what they publish on their media channels taking into account the type of tourists they aim to attract. Furthermore, the respondents' concentration in a certain region of residence may represent a limiting factor, as well as the size of the sample. Future research that aims to reach consensus regarding the ideal self-congruence and the symbolic image of a destination, as well as new studies that increase the debate over factors that classify destinations according to their conspicuity degree and which criteria present greater influence on consumers may bring important evidence and enrich the discussion on such topics.

### **Declaration of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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