

The role of social media in the tourism industry in Austria (How does Austria implement the social media to attract tourists?)

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Affidavit

I hereby affirm that this Bachelor's Thesis represents my own written work and that I have used no sources and aids other than those indicated. All passages quoted from publications or paraphrased from these sources are properly cited and attributed.

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Abstract

Since the late 1990s and early 2000, the growth of the internet has consistently supported the globe of social media in society. In line with this, different social media platforms have over several hundred million active users. Importantly, the growth of social media has created new opportunities for businesses to enhance their marketing activities by using the social media platforms to reach out to their target consumers among the population of social media users. Among the industries that are quickly turning to social media to enhance their marketing activities is the tourism sector. Despite its contribution of close to 25 percent to the global GDP, there is little research and studies that have been conducted in the past to establish how social media impacts this industry. Speaking from this perspective, this study will conduct a research on the role of social media in the tourism industry in Austria. In order to achieve its aims, the study adopted a hybrid approach to collection and analysis of data, which involves the use of both qualitative and quantitative approach to research. Therefore, the study will first carry out literature analysis before conducting a survey using a questionnaire. The researcher will conduct this survey on campus mainly among students and staff. This is as a result of financial and time constraint that is associated with this study. Importantly, after collecting data, the researcher will organize and analyze it using statistical tools that are provided by the online survey tool, www.surveymonkey.com. Preliminary result indicates that there is a growing reliance on social media as a critical source of travel information for both existing and potential tourists. Similarly, apart from the convenience that these tools provide, other factors such as trustworthiness, reliability and dependability of the social media played an instrumental role in encouraging users to depend on it as a source of travel information. The study recommends that there is a need for tourist destinations to seek to create a positive brand image not only offline but also on social media platforms in order to gain approval of these technology-savvy tourists and as a result, remain competitive in the tourism industry.

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List of Abbreviations

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

CRS – Computer Reservation System

GDS – Global Distribution System

IBM – International Business Machines Corporation

JSTOR – Journal Storage

1 INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. In reference to Pforr and Hosie (2009), the tourism industry is the largest in the world with a significant annual growth rate of approximately 25 percent. In this regard, Alsos, Eide and Madsen (2014) observe that the growth rate of the tourism industry in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries has exceeded the growth rate of their GDP. Importantly, the ability of this industry to achieve such tremendous growth is based on the fact that it has the ability to offer new products and experiences. Importantly, it is critical to observe that apart from its tremendous economic growth, the tourism industry also experiences a high rate of competition among firms. As a result, businesses that operate in the industry, they need to rely on innovation to not only reduce the prices of their products and services but also offer new, high-quality products that can attract the attention of the target customers (Alsos, Eide & Madsen, 2014). Importantly, there is a need to observe that for firms to adapt to the transformations in the market, they need to transform the way they operate as well as focus on developing new products. Apart from companies, individual countries need to position themselves in a particular way in order to gain the status of a leading tourist destination. In their analysis, Kotler and Gertner (2002) observe that each country needs to refine itself into a brand to be able to not only attract tourists into its market but also differentiate itself on a global scale. In this case, by marketing itself as a brand, a country can focus on promoting products, services and experiences that better attract tourists rather than using a general approach to tourism marketing.

One of the countries that continue to gain attention as one of Europe's leading tourist destination is Austria. Situated in Central Europe, Austria has a comparative advantage in tourism, with higher tourism exports than imports (Tönnis, 2007). Arguably, whereas countries such as Bulgaria, Spain, France and even Italy have coastal strips that have boosted their ability to attract tourists, Austria has no coast. On the contrary, the country depends heavily on its natural habitat to attract tourists from different parts of the globe. Importantly, statistics reveal that by 2014, travel and tourism contributed approximately 4.8 percent to this country's GDP, which is approximately €15.9 billion (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2015). This

was expected to rise to €16.3 billion in 2015, which represents a 2 percent rise. With this in mind, it is essential to note that tourism plays an instrumental role in Austria's economy. The achievement of Austria in competing against countries such as Bulgaria, France and Spain as far as tourism is concerned is influenced by different factors among them the use of technology in marketing itself as a brand. This thesis will therefore, examine the role of social media in the tourism industry in Austria.

1.1 Background of the problem

Since the 1960s, technology has been instrumental in transforming the travel and tourism industry. In reference to Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier (2015), the tourism industry has always been confronted with significant development of technology that poses both opportunities and challenges (p. 244). Furthermore, Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier (2015) observe that some of the technologies that have been instrumental in supporting the development of the tourism industry include Computer Reservation Systems (CRSs) in the 1960s, the Global Distribution Systems (GDSs) in the 1980s and the internet in the early 1990s (p. 244). In this regard, through the use of different technological innovations, the tourism industry is continuously going through a revolution, which allows both the suppliers and consumers of tourism products and/or service to have a new experience.

In particular, the increasing accessibility of tourism consumers to technologies such as the internet and social media provide both suppliers and consumers of tourism products and/or services to connect with each at different levels way before the tourists arrive at their destination. According to Huang, Backman, Backman and Chang (2016), the existence of technology provides an opportunity for tourists to explore different destinations, understand the quality of such destination, evaluate whether they have the products, facilities and service they need, and even determine whether such places are worthy visiting. In this regard, rather than going through a tedious process of assessing the facilities, products and facilities of a given region, such consumers rely on the internet to evaluate the place and make informed choices on whether it is worthy visiting or not. Furthermore, there is a need to observe that since suppliers of tourism products and service can offer exaggerate the value of their destinations, tourism have a way of falling into such a trap. In this case, tourists can review the comments and responses of other tourists

who have visited such destinations on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. This implies that technology can play a central role in helping tourists make informed choices on the destinations they desire to visit.

Despite the increasing role of technology in promoting tourism activities in different destinations across the globe, there is little research that has been conducted in the past to establish whether it add any value to the growth of tourism. In particular, there is little research and studies that has been conducted in the past to determine how tourist destinations use the social media to reach out to customers. In addition, there is little research to determine the effectiveness of social media as a tool to capture the attention of tourists from different parts of the globe. This is particularly the case considering the fact that tourists are divided into different demographic categories. Moreover, there is a need to determine whether certain social media are better than others in reaching out to different types of customers on the market. Getting insights on these aspects is critical to understand how specific tourist destinations use technology to attract the attention of customers from different parts of the globe.

1.2 Purpose and Rationale of the Study

There are three main critical issues that this study will address as far as the role of social media in the tourism industry in Austria is concerned. To begin with, the study will evaluate how both existing and potential tourists use social media platforms to make travel decisions. In this case, the study will seek to understand how travelers utilize different forms of social media to research and plan their travel activities.

Similarly, whereas tourism businesses may use different technologies to enhance their marketing activities, this does not necessarily mean that it will gain competitive advantage in the market. Speaking from this point of view, this study will evaluate the factors that contribute to reliance on social media when engaged in travel research and planning.

Finally, the study will seek to make recommendations on how Austria can improve on its use of social media to enhance its tourism industry. In particular, the study will focus on how Austria can develop itself into a brand and market itself using social

media. In addition, the study will make recommendations on the most appropriate types of social media to use in marketing its products in different markets across the globe.

1.3 Research Questions

In order to achieve its objectives, there are a number of research questions that this study will seek to answer. These questions will define the scope of this study and define what will be covered and what will not be covered. These include:

1. How does existing and potential tourists use social media when making their travel arrangements?
2. What are some of the main factors that contribute to the increased reliance on social media as the source of tourism information among travelers?
3. What are some of the popular social media platforms that users rely on to access travel information? What social media tools are more effective in marketing the tourism industry?

1.4 Methodology

To arrive at research findings that truly answer the research questions and as a result, meet the objectives of the study, there is a need to utilize a specific methodology. Speaking from this point of view, this research will first analyze the past research and study findings on how social media has been used in the past in tourism marketing. Similarly, the research will use primary data to either affirm or dispute the secondary research findings. In this case, the study will carry out a survey to collect primary data. This data will be organized and analyzed using different statistical tools to determine whether it supports or opposes the secondary research findings.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will evaluate how social media influences the tourism industry in different tourism destinations across the globe, and in particular, how different markets across the globe are relying on it as a critical tool to attract tourists. In reference to Leung, Law, van Hoof and Buhalis (2012), the role of social media continues to attract the attention of researchers, scholars and policymakers among other stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality industry due to its “mega trend” as a critical decision making tool for tourists (p. 3). In line with this, the section of this study will evaluate past research and study findings by reviewing literature on the role of social media in the tourism industry, with an inclinations towards gaining insights on how different destinations rely on social media to influence the decision making process of tourists who are looking for exotic destinations to visit.

2.1 The rise of social media popularity

Since the 1950s, there are numerous technologies that have been developed and implemented in society. Among the greatest technologies that have gone through significant transformation during this period is the internet. Researchers and scholars agree that the internet has had significant impact on the tourism sector (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010, p. 179). In this regard, the internet has influenced how tourists search, review and even book their desired destinations. Importantly, one of the greatest aspects of technology that has a significant impact on tourism is social media. Whereas in the past tourists depended on the word of mouth, magazines, newspapers and even in some cases television advert to highlight different destinations that they could visit, this has since changed. On the contrary, there is an increasing reliance on social media to provide such information. In reference to Scaife (2014), for many people, apart from being a substitute for the spoken word, social media has replaced the written word (p. xxxiii). This implies that social media is increasingly becoming a trustworthy source of information for different people across the globe.

Statistics reveal that by 2014, social media platform such as Twitter recorded almost 500 million tweets per day, which on average is 5,700 tweets per second (Scaife, 2014, p. xxxiii). Similarly, Facebook statistics by December 2013 reveals that on a

monthly basis, it had 1.23 billion active users, with 945 million of these users actively using their mobile devices. Furthermore, an analysis of Instagram reveals that this social media platform had 150 million people by the end of 2013, which represented a 15 percent increase in the number of users within a period of two months, which LinkedIn, a social media platform that mainly seeks to link jobs seekers and employers had close to 277 million members by the end of 2013 (Scaife, 2014, p. xxxiii). Speaking from this point of view, there is a need to observe that different social media platform continue to experience a significant rise in their users. Furthermore, these platforms were not limited only to a particular geographical location. On the contrary, social media has the power to transcend borders and reach even the remotest locations on earth as long as such locations had access to an internet connection. As a result of their ability to reach a wider array of audience from different geographical locations, marketers are increasingly relying on social media as a critical tool to reach out to their target consumers. From a demand perspective, there is a need to note that consumers too are increasingly relying on social media to find the products and/or services they need. In line with this, the tourism industry has not been left behind as far as using social media as a tool to communicate and interact between tourists and the different players in the sector. In this case, whereas tourist destinations have increased their presence on different social media platform, tourists too rely on these platforms to identify, evaluate and connect with the destinations they desire to visit.

2.2 Impact of social media on consumers' decision making process

Before reviewing literature on how social media influences the tourists' decisions to visit a particular destination, there is a need to evaluate how social media influence consumer behavior as far as their decision making is concerned. To begin with, researchers and scholars agree that the social media has a significant impact on the level of trust among consumers when making their purchase decisions (Hajli, 2014; Deloitte Digital, 2015). According to Hajli (2014), the continuous interaction of consumers on social media through online communities, mainstream social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and online communities play an instrumental role in helping them either establish or reject trust in a product and/or service provider. In this case, most consumers across the globe who regularly use

social media often value the information that other users post on these platforms about brands and their products and/or services. This implies that consumers are likely to increase their trust in a particular brand, product or service if it has positive reviews on social media and vice versa. Deloitte Digital (2015) further affirms this in the argument that social media platforms are important sources of information to consumers and as a result, whenever a product, service or brand has positive reviews from social media users, the perceived risk of purchasing such a product or services reduces significantly, and the level of trust in the brand increases. In a research conducted by Kataria (2017), it emerged that 53 percent of the respondents who were interviewed noted that before purchasing any product, they first checked the user reviews on social media. This included checking comparing prices, trends, optional brands and product features among others. In this case, consumers not only read review of products and services on social media platforms but also asked their peers what they think about the products and services they are interested in.

Apart from searching for information through the social media platform, most consumers are influenced to purchase products not because they want to make a purchase, but rather because they have seen these products with their peers. In other words, social media platforms play an important role in helping promote impulse buying on the market. Researchers and scholars observe that most consumers with social media accounts have a high likelihood of purchasing products from a particular brand because their peers own such products (Mikalef, Giannakos & Pateli, 2013). In reference to Mikalef, Giannakos and Pateli (2013), social media plays an instrumental role in helping consumers discover new trends with ease, thus influencing most of them to make impulse purchases. In this case, as compared to other forms of media such as the magazines and television and radio advertising, trends that are posted on social media reach a wider audience with ease within a short time, thus making some of the consumers who were yet to plan to purchase the product or service in question to make an impulse purchase with the hope that they will not be left out of the new trend. This is further emphasized by Zhang, Hu and Zhao (2014) who argue that social interactions on social media platforms are critical consumer-generated stimuli that have a great influence on their impulse buying behavior, particular in an online shopping environment.

Apart from providing information to consumers and indirectly influencing them to engage in impulse buying behavior, there is a need to observe that social media also plays as a critical role in impacting the need for recognition of consumers. In reference to Counts and Gamon (2012), social media users are bombarded by pictures and messages from their friends and other users, who portray themselves as happy and in full control of their lives. Importantly a significant portion of these “happy messages” by social media often indirectly market products and services to other users. For instance, when one users posts pictures of him/herself with a model of a smartphone, or in a particular destination on a vacation, other users are also likely to admire such products or experiences. Therefore, the only way to take such “experiences of happiness” from a virtual social media world in to the really world is actually through personally making a choice to purchase the product. In his analysis of human needs using his Maslow Hierarchy of Needs model, Maslow observes that one of the critical needs of human beings is self-esteem (Egan, 2014). In this case, Egan (2014) observes that one of the ways that consumers on the market can promote their self-esteem need is engaging in activities that will earn them recognition. Therefore, social media plays an instrumental role in encouraging users to seek to be recognized based on different factors such as engaging in leisure activities or fashion trends. This implies that as these users seek recognition on social media platforms, they are forced to make critical purchase decisions.

2.3 Social media and tourism marketing

The tourism industry across the globe is increasingly relying on social media an important tool for interacting with potential tourists from different parts of the globe. In consistent with this, researchers, scholars and industry players in the tourism sector agree that social media has brought a revolution in different aspects of this industry (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). Among the areas that have experienced a significant impact because of social media include travel research, customer service and travel agencies among others.

2.3.1 Transformation of travel research

Information is one of the most important resources that tourists, both actual and potential, rely on to make information choices about their preferred destination. In

reference to Munar and Jacobsen (2013), there is a significant transformation of consumption patterns, distribution mechanism and creative processes of travel content due to the advances in electronic social media and the internet. To begin with, research and studies reveal that the development of the internet and social media platforms has transformed the way tourism content is created, not only by destinations but also by consumers in this industry, that is, the tourists (Lim, Chung & Weaver, 2012; Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). Whereas in the past, most content on tourism was created from the perspective of tourist destinations, which used this content to market their products and services, social media has created a platform to create such content from the consumers' perspective.

According to Lim, Chung and Weaver (2012), tourists develop and share consumer-generated content, which is a mixture of opinions, facts, experiences, sentiments and impression, and in some cases even rumor, and as a result, such content has the power to shape and influence an audience of potential tourists. This is further affirmed by Munar and Jacobsen (2013) who observe that unlike in the past where information on tourist destination was stored and shared through family life stories such as photo albums and autobiographies, the existence of social media technologies and platforms has created an avenue for tourists to easily digitize and share information and knowledge regarding different tourists destinations. Importantly, unlike information and knowledge that was shared by destinations, which focused on marketing them to potential tourists, the information and knowledge shared by tourists via social media platforms and technologies focus on enlightening potential tourists should they choose to visit the destination in question, and as a result, help them make informed choices in advance. Furthermore, since such information does not intend to promote these destinations, there is a need to observe that most potential tourists have a high likelihood of perceiving it as trustworthy.

In addition to this, there is a need to note that the digital content that tourists share on social media platforms on different destinations comes in different forms. Ráthonyi (2013) and Molz (2012) observe that this content can be shared as audio, video, text or images or even a combination of two or more of these forms. The flexibility of different forms of digital content that tourists can share on social media

after visiting a particular destination means that the content they generate is highly shareable and influential as far as the purchase decisions of tourists is concerned. Importantly, Xiang and Gretzel (2010) observes that these use of different forms of media to share travel experiences in different destination offer an enhanced experience to the target audience. In this case, potential tourists can taste the experience of a destination even before making travel arrangements to such a place.

Apart from the creation of this content, social media play an instrumental role in the distribution and consumption patterns of this content. Researchers and scholars agree that whereas social media has created an opportunity for tourists and other interested parties in the sector to share content, there is a need to observe that this content follows a particular pattern (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013; Barker et al., 2012). In their analysis on the impact of social media on the tourism sector, Barker et al. (2012) observe that whereas some content is shared as simple posts on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, other content is shared on sophisticated social media platforms such as review forums and blog posts. In addition, some researchers note that in while in most cases the travel content that is shared on these social media platforms can be accessed by anyone, in some cases, such content is restricted to members only (Li, 2016). For instance, while most blogs and forums allow unrestricted access to content, social media such as Facebook has created a way whereby users can restrict the content they share only to their close friends and family acquaintances. In addition, social media such as Facebook allow users to form groups that allow only members to access the content they share on a daily basis (Martin, 2013). Speaking from this point of view, there is a need to observe that the consumption of travel content that is shared on social media platforms depends heavily on whether it is restricted on not. If such content is not restricted, a large audience of potential tourists would have an opportunity to access it and vice versa.

2.3.2 Enhanced customer service

Another area in the tourism sector that has experienced significant impact of social media is customer service. Researchers, scholars and business analysts argue that in the 21st century, social media has helped enhance the relationship between customers and businesses and organizations (Baird and Parasnis, 2011). In line with

this, businesses and organizations are increasingly exploring how best to utilize social media to achieve closeness to both their existing and potential customers. This is emphasized Baird and Parasnis (2011) who observe that the “IBM 2010 CEO Study” reveal that getting closer to customers is the top most priority for most CEOs across the globe. Therefore, since most of the potential tourists use social media almost on a daily basis, most tourist destinations have increased their engagement of their target consumers through different social media platforms with an aim of enhancing their customer service. Sashi (2012) further affirms that customer engagement has developed consistently with the evolution of the internet and the emergence of different social media platforms and technologies. Among the tools that most tourist destinations rely on in order to engage with potential tourists include blogs, virtual worlds such as second Life, video sites such as YouTube, wikis and social networking sites.

Importantly, researchers and scholars observe that social media has helped tip the power in favor of the consumers as opposed to empowering large companies and organizations (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013; Bernadas & Minchella, 2016). In line with this, different players in the tourism and hospitality industry carefully monitor the comments and posts that are made on social media concerning their businesses as a way of safeguarding their reputation against the potential tourists who have experienced significant growth in their power as far as customer care is concerned. According to Hays, Page and Buhalis (2013), one of the trends that has been witnessed in the relationship between customers and providers of different products and/or services in the tourism industry is the fact that as the popularity of the social media grows, the customers continue to gain significant power while the authority of providers in the tourism industry declines. Bernadas and Minchella (2016) further affirm this in the argument that social media gives the consumer the power to express his feelings with respect to all sorts of issues, products, services and experiences. Speaking from this point of view, the change in power dynamics as far as the relationship between destinations and consumers are concerned has helped improve the power of both tourists and potential tourists while undermining the power of destination marketers. With this in mind, the consumers are significantly empowered, thus transforming the way they relate with destination marketers. Similarly, as mentioned earlier, social media is a critical tool that tourists and

potential tourists rely on to access information on their preferred destinations. In reference to Miryala (2015), social media has created a platform for customer care representatives to deal with more informed customers. Apart from accessing information that others provide on different destinations, these destinations too provide critical information to potential tourists regarding what they offer. Therefore, these customers are well informed making it easier for customer care representatives at different destinations to serve them better.

2.4 Travel Planning

Every year, there are millions of tourists who travel to different destinations across the globe. In line with this, there has been a significant increase in research regarding how these tourists plan and manage their travels to these destinations, and in particular, how they use social media to manage their travel plans. In reference to Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012), the number of people who rely on social media to search for ideas regarding different tourism activities has increased considerably. In this regard, these researchers acknowledge the role of social media in helping potential tourists identify their preferred destination as well as determine the activities they would like to engage in advance. Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012) argue that travelers who use social media in managing their travel plans often rely on different platforms to search for information on factors such as accommodation, food, and security among other factors. In this regard, the social media helps these travelers determine in advance their likely experience if or when they visit a particular destination.

In another study, Li (2016) established that outbound tourists had a higher chance of using social media in the planning of their travel outside their country of origin. In particular, Li (2016) observes that apart from using social media as a critical source of information regarding particular destinations, tourists often rely on this platform in order to evaluate the experiences of people who have visited these destinations before. As a result, through the analysis of these experiences, tourists are able to make informed choices regarding the places they can visit and the ones they need to avoid at all cost. Li (2016) further notes that most tourists who use social media in their travel planning activities also look out for information on factors such as travel tips and discounts that different destinations offer at any particular time. Note that

as mentioned earlier, most destinations across the globe currently use social media platforms as a way to market their products and/or services (Sashi 2012). Whereas their aim is to enhance their marketing activities, their use of these platforms provides tourists with sufficient information to help them enhance their travel plans. For instance, Li (2016) notes that social media helps tourists determine the best time of the year to visit particular destinations, the prices they expect to pay for different services, and as a result, an estimate amount they are likely to spend during their visit.

Similarly, Pike (2016) observes that 85 percent of leisure travelers rely on the internet to plan their travel. In this regard, Pike (2016) argues that the modern travel consumers are technology savvy. In particular, this researcher notes a number of element that feature extensively in the travel plans of these types of tourists as far as social media use is concerned. To begin with, Pike (2016) argues that these travelers utilize social media and the internet in general to optimize their itinerary with the aim of determining the best mix of quality and price. In this case, through social media, travelers are able to determine factors such as prices and the quality of different destinations, and as a result, identify those that offer the best quality at affordable prices. Similarly, Pike (2016) reiterate that most modern travelers use social media to take advantage of the existing short-term offers that destinations market through social media and other online channels. Arguably, since tourist destinations have found out that social media help them reach out to a large number of potential tourists with ease using social media, they often exploit this platform to advertise short-term offers. As a result of this, travelers can easily spot these offers on their social media timelines, thus enabling them to enhance their travel plans. In addition, Pike (2015) emphasize the fact that through the use of social media in their travel plans, tourists can be able to predict different travel constraints such as comfort, security and scheduling. In this regard, tourists can predict what to expect from particular destinations based on their analysis of posts and comments of experiences from tourists who have visited these places before. Moreover, tourists can adjust their goals and expectations to meet the realities on different destinations across the globe.

In the same line of thought, Minazzi (2014) argues that travel planning arises from an internal need to gain a new experience from travelling to a particular destination. Importantly this internal need can arise because of either internal or external stimuli, or both. Therefore, Minazzi (2014) reiterates that tourists focus on satisfying such a need by focusing on identifying the destination that has a high potential of better satisfying such a need. In line with this, social media plays a critical role in helping travelers identify tourist goods and/or services that can satisfy such need. For instance, Minazzi (2014) observes that through the analysis of other travelers experiences on social medial platforms, a person can easily gauge whether the destination he/she has identified has the potential to meet the internal need to travel.

2.5 Trustworthy, Reliability and Dependability of Social Media

There are a number of factors that have featured in different research and study findings regarding the impact of social media on the tourism sector. These include trustworthiness, reliability and dependability of social media in travel research and planning. In reference to Munar and Jacobsen (2013), past research and study findings reveal that travelers have varied level of trust towards different types of social media. In this regard, Munar and Jacobsen (2013) argue that travelers had a high level of trust towards review websites such as Hotels.com and TripAdvisor as compared to microblogging social media sites. The high level of trust in review websites emanated from the fact that such sites maintains a high level of anonymity and as a result, people who posted reviews on them concerning their experience were not likely to exaggerate their experience as compared to people who used social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Furthermore, review websites have a mechanism of rating different review aspects such as level of satisfaction, quality of service, and level of prices among other factors (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). Therefore, such reviews tend to provide a clear picture concerning the quality and other aspects of the destination as compared to sites such as Twitter and Facebook.

Apart from trustworthiness, other aspects that researchers and scholars have studied in the past with respect to the impact of social media on tourism include dependability and reliability. In this respect, one of the questions that researchers consider regards whether travel consumers perceive social media as a dependable

and reliable tool when engaging in travel research and planning (Uysal, Perdue & Sirgy, 2012). Speaking from this point of view, Uysal, Perdue and Sirgy (2012) observe that most travelers perceive social media as a reliable tool in providing an array of information that could help them research and plan their travel. This is particular the case considering the fact that the information they access through social media in most cases is currently and truly reflect the current status of the destination(s) they are interested in. Similarly, some researchers argue that social media is dependable as far as travel research and planning is concerned (Uysal, Perdue & Sirgy, 2012). In this case, social media users can easily find critical information concerning their desired destination on social media platforms with ease. While this is the case, these researchers noted that the dependability of social media as critical tools in travel research and planning depended entirely on individual platforms. For instance, blogging and reviews sites indicate a high level of dependability as compared to microblogging sites such as Twitter and Facebook.

2.6 Conclusion and Gaps in research

In conclusion, social media has a significant impact on the tourism industry. To begin with, the number of social media users continues to rise at a significant rate. Importantly, there is a need to observe that the number of people who use social media to conduct research on different tourist destinations is rising. This is as a result of the fact that most of these users think that social media provide an accurate description of these destinations with regard to factors such as the products, services and experiences they offer to their customers. As such, social media plays a critical role in helping potential tourists make informed choices about the destinations they would like to visit. In addition, social media continues to transform the way tourists destinations interact with tourists as far as customer service is concerned. In this case, due to the power that customers continue to gain due to the rising popularity of social media, the marketers of different destinations have been forced to either focus on satisfying these customers or risk losing them to competitors. Furthermore, social media helps acts as a platform upon which most individuals conduct their research and engage in planning their travel activities.

Despite the growing research on the role of social media in the tourism industry, there are still areas that researchers and scholars are yet to adequately cover. To

begin with, whereas research and studies reveal that there are rising cases of social media users engaging in impulse buying because of exposure to stimuli on this platform, there is no research that has been conducted in the past to establish whether social media users engage in impulse buying in the tourism industry. Note that since there is a correlation between impulse buying and social media use in general, there is a need to establish whether such a relationship between exists in the tourism sector.

Similarly, there is no consistent data that indicates the number of people who use social media in travel research and planning. Arguably, most travelers would acknowledge that social media plays an instrumental role in helping them research on a particular destination. However, from a research perspective, there are gaps that reveal the number of people who are influenced by social media to travel to different destinations across the globe. In addition to this, little research has been conducted to evaluate how different demographic groups use social media in their travel research and planning activities. For instance, in order for destinations to effectively use social media to market their products and/or service, they will need to understand how different demographic groups use this platform in their travel research and planning.

3 METHODOLOGY CHAPTER

This chapter will highlight the methodology that this study relied on to collect, organize and analyze data, and the present of the research findings, and the justification for this approach. In line with this, the chapter points out how the chosen research approaches and methods were utilized to help address the research questions and as a result, attain the goals of the project. In addition, the chapter will also shed light on the ethical concerns and the challenges or rather limitations that emerged while carrying out the research. Lastly, the chapter will also consider the validity and reliability of the collected data thus determining the validity of the research findings.

3.1 Research Approach

When carrying out research, there are two main research approaches that are often recommended. In line with this, a researcher can either adopt an inductive or deductive approach to research. An inductive approach to research begins the research process with an evaluation of a previously research phenomena from a different perspective. According to Thomas (2006), an inductive approach to research is mainly concerned with the derivation of themes, concepts or models from readings of raw data through the interpretations that the researcher makes from this data. On the other hand, deductive approach to research is concerned with testing the theory in any particular research. In this case, deductive analysis tests whether the collected data is consistent with previous theories, assumptions and hypothesis that had been identified by the researcher (Thomas, 2006). Importantly, inductive reasoning begins by addressing individual phenomena before making a general inference, while deductive reasoning begins by addressing the general phenomenon before making an inference on the individual phenomenon. In this case, in an inductive approach, if a hypothesis is true for a single element in a particular class, then the hypothesis is true for the rest of the class. On the other hand, in a deductive scenario, if the hypothesis is true for the whole class, then it is true for individual elements in the class.

Speaking this point of view, this study relied on deductive approach to conduct its research. One of the major reasons for using deductive reasoning is the fact that this

approach provided a platform upon which findings from past research and studies could be evaluated regarding the impact of social media on tourism through literature analysis. In line with this regard, the study will either support or reject the findings from past research and studies on the subject. Similarly, there is a need to mention that this research chose deductive reasoning since this approach does not require much time as compared to inductive reasoning when conducting research. Note that this study is my thesis research and as a result, I had limited time and resources to conduct it, thus the need to adopt an approach that could enable me to conduct research within the shortest time possible.

Similarly, this study had to determine on whether to use qualitative or quantitative approach to collect data. Researchers and scholars observe that quantitative research concentrates on collecting data that can be represented in numerical form while qualitative research relies on data that cannot be represented in a numerical form (Keele, 2010). For this research, I used a hybrid of both quantitative and qualitative research to collect and analyze data. In this case, I used qualitative research to collect and analyze data from past research findings through a process of literature review. Similarly, I collected quantitative data, which played a critical role in either affirming or rejecting the past observations regarding the role of social media in the tourism industry.

3.2 Sampling of Data

In any study, a researcher only needs to identify a few elements from the larger population that are a true representation of such a population. This is as a result of the fact that it is time and resource consuming to make contact with and utilize every element of the population to provide data for the research. In most cases, the population is extremely large, thus making it impossible to pick every element in it to provide data for the research. Therefore, this study will only identify a small sample that is a true representation of the larger population. To achieve this, this study sought to use a flexible sampling technique that provided a platform upon which accurate data could be collected taking into account the limited time and resources. Among the sampling techniques options that were available to me were probability and nonprobability sampling techniques. In reference to Kothari (2004), probability sampling is a sampling technique in which every element has an equal

chance of being chosen as a representative of the larger population. On the other hand, nonprobability sampling is a technique whereby the researcher does not know in advance which element will be selected as a true representative of the larger population and as such, elements are only selected based on their availability. Most research and studies often prefer to use nonprobability rather than probability sampling technique. This is due to the complexity and technicalities of the probability sampling technique. With this mind, I opted to use nonprobability sampling technique to identify sample elements from the population. Importantly, since my study only identified sample elements that could be accessed easily, and as such, I relied on convenience sampling, which is a subset of nonprobability sampling.

3.2.1 Population, Sample Frame and size

After identifying the research approach and the data sampling techniques that the researcher intends to use, the next step is to identify the population, the sample frame and the sample size. This is particularly important since selecting a sample size from a wrong population who result in invalid data. Speaking from this point of view, this study targeted a population of people who have social media account(s). These were accessed via the university's online social community on Facebook. Importantly, these target population was located in Austria at the time of conducting the research. Similarly, this study identified people who had used social media before to plan their travel as the sample frame. Note that researchers define the sample frame as the sample unit that had been set aside from the larger population, which can be name of numbered (Evans & Rooney, 2008). Therefore, the sample for that provided data for this study was drawn from people who had used social media before in one way or the one to research and plan their travel. Note that an analysis of this sample could help shed more light on the role of social media in the tourism industry in Austria.

3.3 Data Collection

Researchers and scholars identify two different types of data that can be used to achieve the objectives of any study namely primary and secondary data (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006). A researcher can use either primary or secondary data in their studies, or both. For this study, I used both primary and secondary data.

3.3.1 Secondary data collection

The first type of data that this study collected was the secondary data. In line with this, the study sought to establish that research and studies that have been conducted in the past on the role of social media in the tourism industry. As such, the study sought to establish the research that has been conducted on the subject, the existing findings as well as the gaps in research. Therefore, the findings from the analysis of literature on the subject helped create a foundation for this research. Among the sources that I used to collect this data include credible websites, scholarly journal databases such as Journal Storage (JSTOR), Science Direct and EBSCO, Emerald, as well as books mainly from Google books.

3.3.2 Collecting Primary Data

This study collected primary data too. There are different data collection methods that researchers can rely on to collect primary data. For this study, I used a survey as my approach to collecting this data. In particular, I developed a questionnaire with closed-ended questions. My choice of a survey and the use of a questionnaire were motivated by the fact that it is easier to administer especially in a study that has limited time and resources. Speaking from this perspective, I administered the questionnaire via email. I targeted 120 respondents. Importantly, I easily accessed these respondents from the university's online social community on Facebook, and relied on the online tool, Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com), to develop the questionnaire, which made it easier for me to send the questionnaire to the respondents via email. Importantly, to enhance the validity and as such the reliability of the data collected, I strictly adhered to the standards of creating, testing and sending out questionnaires to respondents.

3.4 Analysis of the collected data

After receiving the duly filled questionnaires, I organized the collected data. I eliminated all questionnaires that were not duly filled and rendered them invalid. I also used Survey Monkey tools such as excel sheets to organize the collected data into descriptive statistics. In addition, I used these tools to create graphs to make it easier to analyze the collected data.

3.5 Challenges, limitations and ethical concerns

There are various limitations that this study encountered. To begin with, I had limited time and resources to conduct the research. This therefore means that I only focused on collecting data from the student population as opposed to collecting such data from tourists in places such as tourist sites, restaurants and hotels, skiing resorts and beaches among others. Note that conducting research in these regions could have strengthened the validity and reliability of the data collected and as such, my findings. Therefore, as it is, my study findings can only be used as overview of the role of social media in the tourism sector and thus, a platform for further research.

Similarly, this study was faced with a number of ethical concerns among the misuse of the collected data, anonymity, privacy and confidentiality. To begin with, the collection of primary research gave access to more than 100 emails of students from my campus. Therefore, to avoid interfering with these students' privacy, I first requested them to participate in the research. For those who agreed, I only send out a maximum of two email reminders for them to fill out the questionnaire and send it back to me. Furthermore, I did not use their email address for any other purpose apart from this study, and did not divulge their contact information to third parties in order to maintain confidentiality. In addition, I did not mention the names of the participants in the duly filled questionnaires as a way of ensuring anonymity of the respondents. Lastly, to avoid misuse of the collected data, I only used it for the purpose of this study.

4 RESEARCH FINDINGS CHAPTER

This chapter highlights the findings from the primary research. The collected data will be presented in different forms in this chapter, mainly in percentages as well as graphically.

4.1 Primary research findings

This study administered one questionnaire to the target respondents. The questionnaire contained closed-ended questions and as a result, the respondents were not required to explain in details the choices they made with respect to their responses to the questionnaire. Importantly, out of the 120 targeted respondents, only 104 managed to return back duly filled questionnaires.

4.1.1 Results

To begin with, this study sought to establish whether the target respondents used social media. In line with this, the study sought to know whether the respondents had used Facebook and/or Twitter in the last six months. The choice of these platforms was influenced by the fact that they are among the most popular social media platforms not only in Austria but also in other parts of the globe. Speaking from this point of view, the researcher established that in the last six months, 97.12 percent of respondents had used either Facebook or Twitter, or both social media platforms (Figure 1). On the other hand, 2.88 percent of these respondents had neither used Facebook nor Twitter social media platforms in the last six months. The study did not inquire on whether they had used any other social media platform in the last six months other than the popular platforms, that is, Facebook and Twitter.

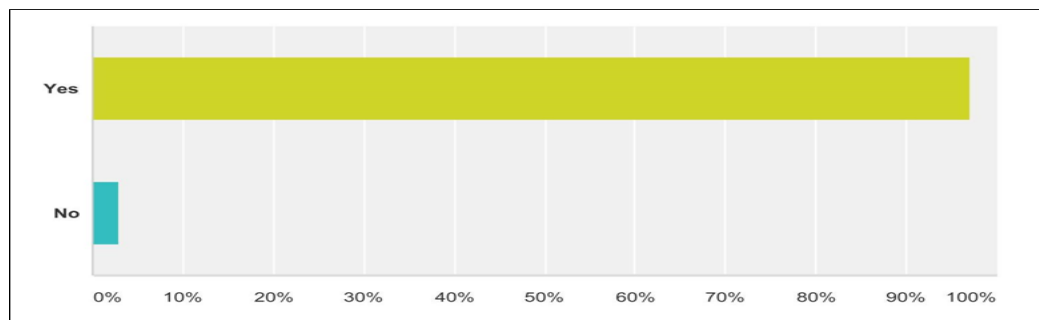


Figure 1: Use of Facebook or Twitter in the past six months

The second issue that this study sought to establish is whether the respondents had use social media platforms to search for travel-related information within the last twelve months. In this case, the researcher sought to establish whether social media played any role in helping the respondents search for travel information such as destination, accommodation and transportation. Importantly, the time period that was evaluated was twelve month since most people across the globe engage in tourism travel at least once per year. In line with this, the study established that 87.5 percent of the respondents had searched for travel information using social media platforms, mainly Facebook and Twitter (Figure 2). On the other hand, 12.5 percent of these respondents had not used social media platforms in search for travel-related information over the last twelve years. Importantly, there is a need to note that the study did not inquire from the respondents who had not used social media to search for travel related information using social media on whether they had engaged in tourism travel over the last twelve months. Therefore, the research did not establish whether their lack of use of social media to search for travel-related information was as a result of the fact that they did not engage in any form of tourism travel, or whether they used other means to search for such information.

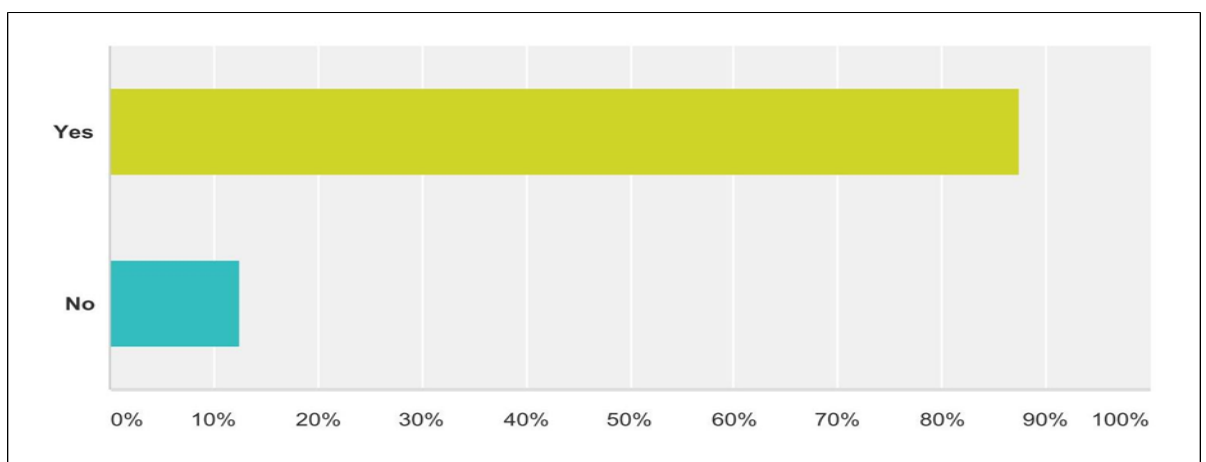


Figure 2: Used social media to search for travel-related information within 12 months

The next issue that the study sought to establish was the impact of social media on travel plans of the respondents. With this in mind, the first issue that this study sought to address regards whether social media platforms helped improve the travel plans of the respondents. Note that to determine whether social media had a significant impact on the tourism sector, there was a need to determine its impact

on the travel plans of the respondents. 18.27 percent and 28.85 percent of the respondents strongly agree and moderately agree respectively that social media helped improve their travel plans (Figure 3). 26.92 percent slight agree on whether social media improves their travel plans. On the other hand, whereas 12.5 percent of these respondents were indecisive on the issue, 13.46 percent of these respondents had varying levels of disagreement that social media improved their travel plans. Importantly, the study did not ask the respondents regarding how social media improved or did not improve their travel plans.

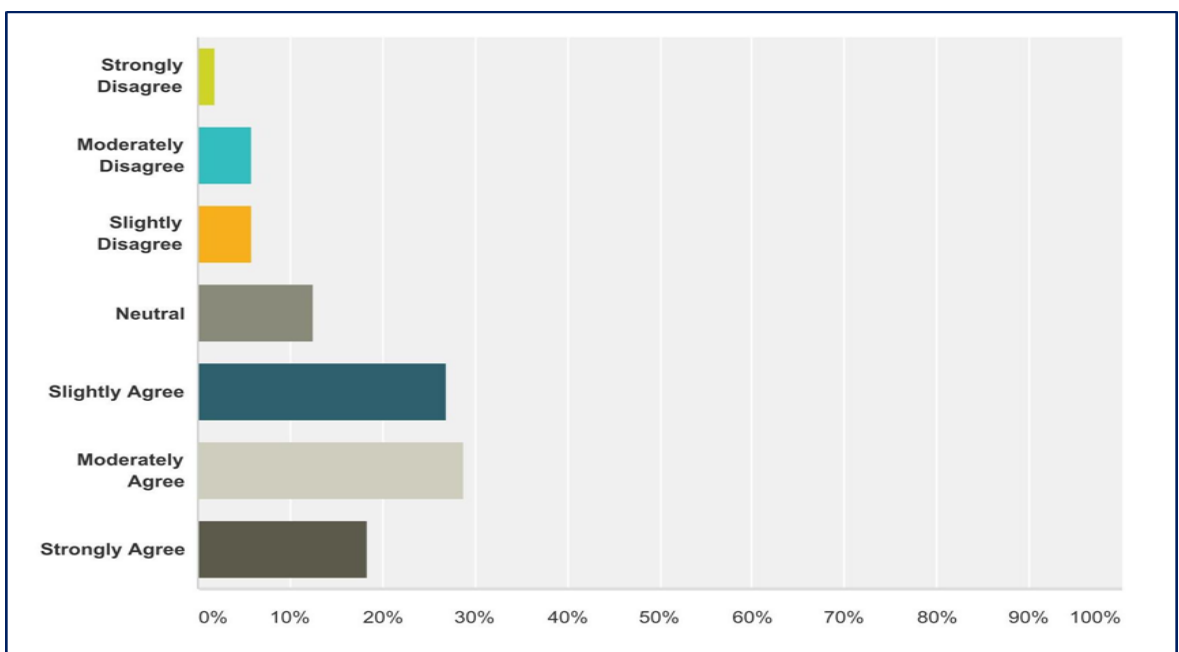


Figure 3: Social media platforms help improve travel plans

Similarly, another issue that the study sought to establish was whether social media had any impact on efficiency with regard to travel plans. In this case, the researcher sought to understand whether using social media helps the respondents to plan their more efficiently. In response, 73.08 percent of the respondents had varying levels of agreement that social media helped them plan their trips efficiently while 16.35 percent of these respondents argued had varying levels of disagreement that social media helps them plan their trips more efficiently (Figure 4). Furthermore, there is a need to observe that 10.58 percent of these respondents were unable to decide whether social media had an impact as far as efficiency in travel plan is concerned. Note that the study did not try to find out whether the respondents who

were unable to decide whether social media helped improve their efficiency when engaged in travel plans actually used social media in planning their travel or not.

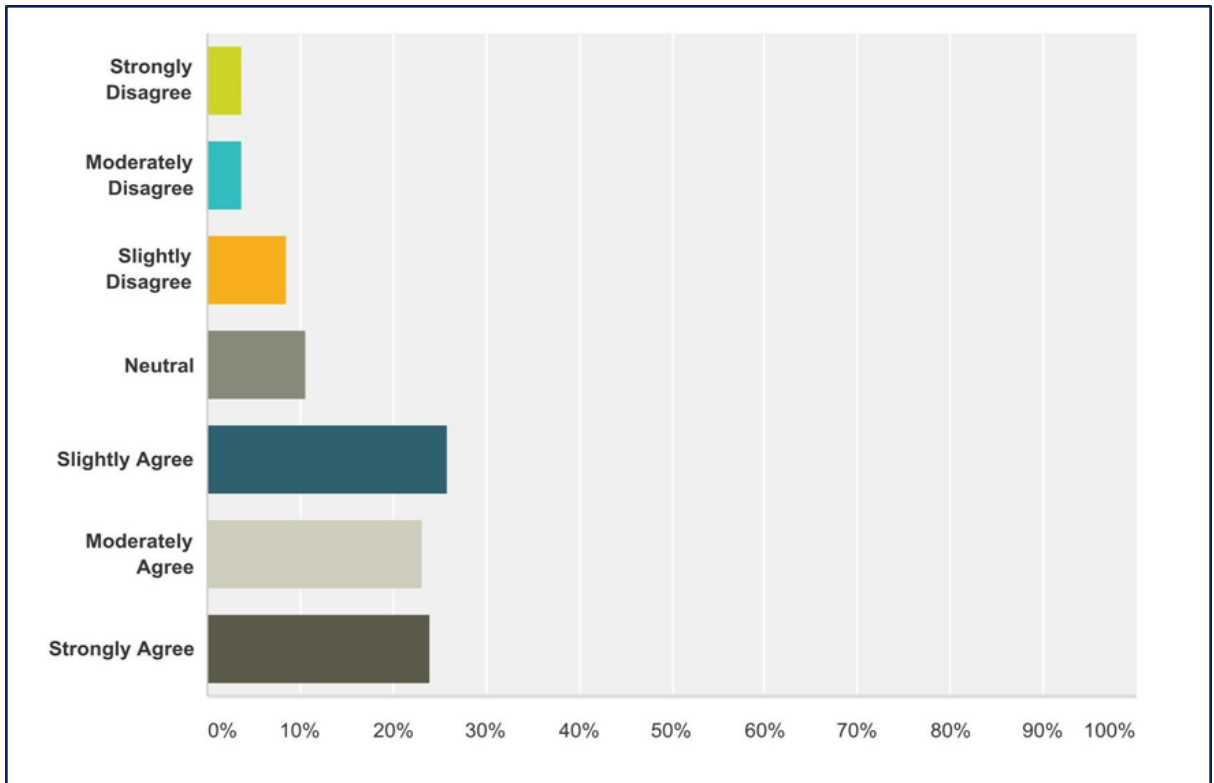


Figure 4: Social media platforms help plan trips more efficiently

Another issue that this study considered regards how easy it is to use social media to make travel plans. Note that one of the factors that motivate people to use different tools in their planning activities is the ease with which such tools can be used. Therefore, the study strived to establish whether social media platforms make travel planning easier. The research findings reveal that 70.87 percent of the respondents had varying levels of agreement, while 14.53 percent of these respondents had varying level of disagreement that social media platforms make travel planning easier (Figure 5). 13.59 percent of these respondents were unable to decide whether social medial made travel planning easier or not. Importantly, the study did seek to establish the social media platform that makes travel planning easier, especially between Facebook and Twitter, since they were widely considered in when conducting the survey.

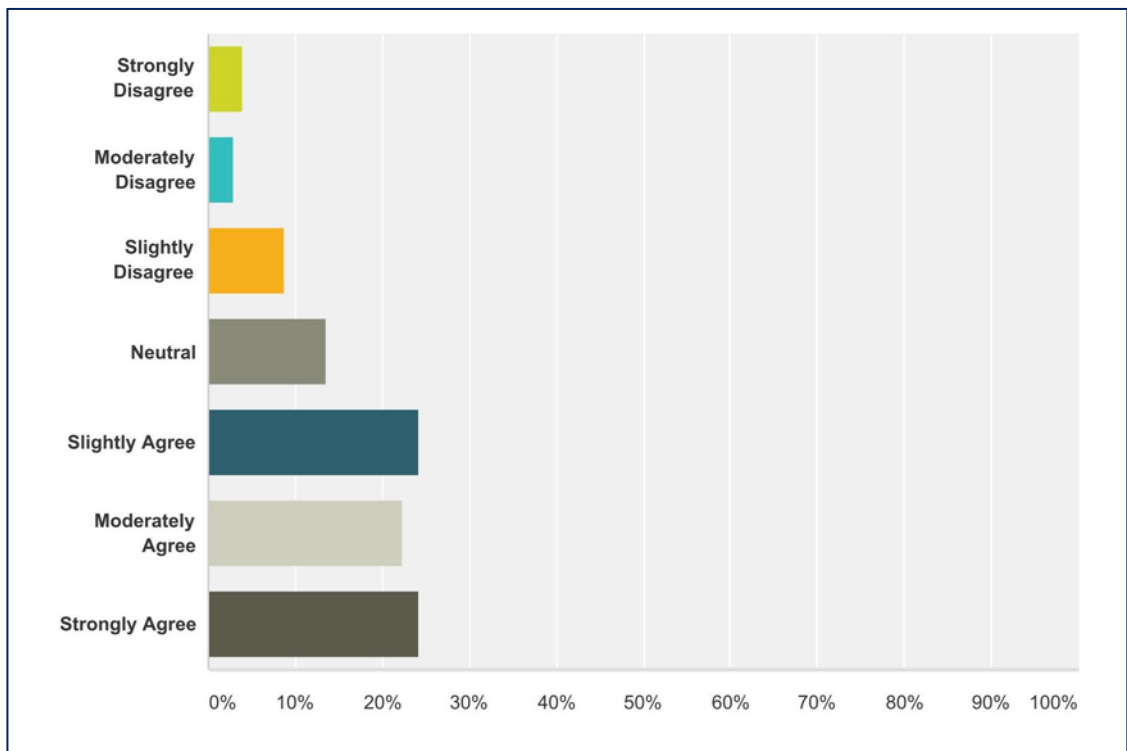


Figure 5: Social media platforms make travel planning easier

Similarly, the study sought to determine how social media influence the decision making processes when the respondents are engaged in travel plans. With this in mind, the study asked the respondents to report on whether social media platforms make it easier for them to reach travel related decisions. 19.23 percent and 26.92 percent of the respondents strongly and moderately agreed that social media make it easier for them to reach travel related decisions (Figure 6). 18.27 percent slight agree, while another 18.27 percent disagree that social media makes it easier for them to make travel-related decisions. 17.31 percent of these respondents were indecisive on whether social media makes it easier for them to make travel decisions.

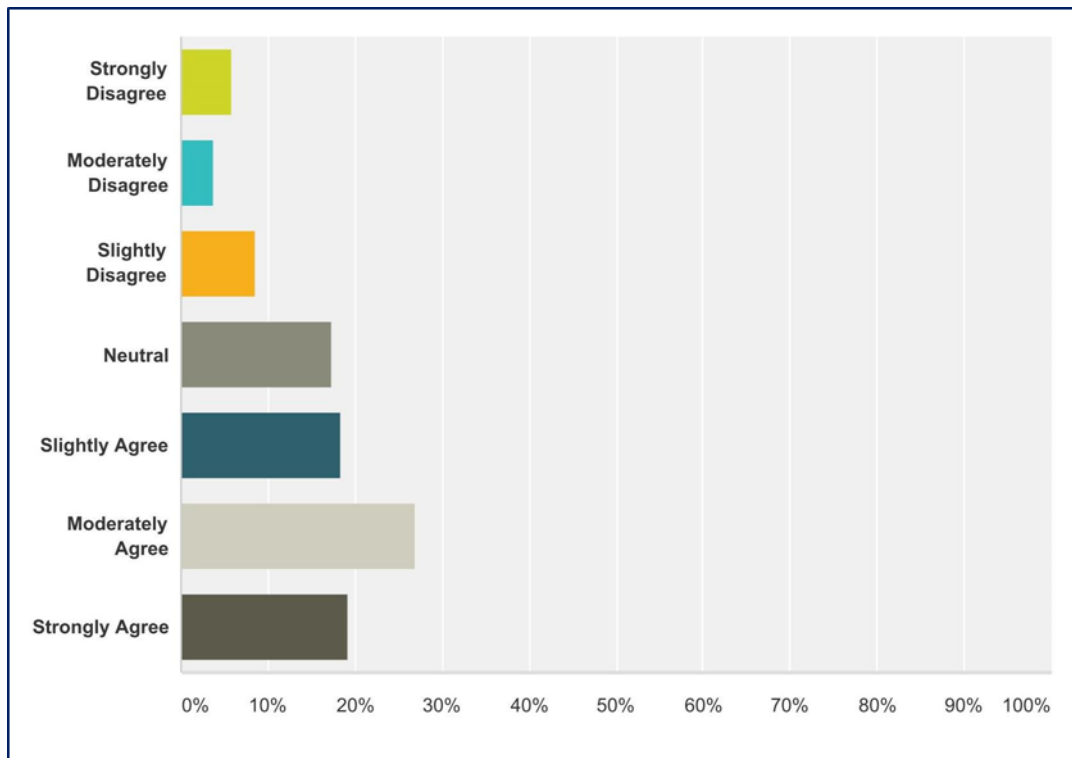


Figure 6: Social media platforms make it easier to reach travel-related decisions

This study too focused on gaining insights on why the respondents were using social media in their travel planning activities. In line with this, the study asked the respondents whether they find social media platforms useful when engaged in travel planning. 28.85 percent slightly and strongly agreed that social media is useful in travel planning (Figure 7). Similarly, 26.92 percent and 5.77 percent of the respondents moderately agree and were indecisive respectively that social media platforms are useful in travel planning. On the other hand, 9.61 percent of the respondents have a varying level of disagreement on the usefulness of social media in travel planning.

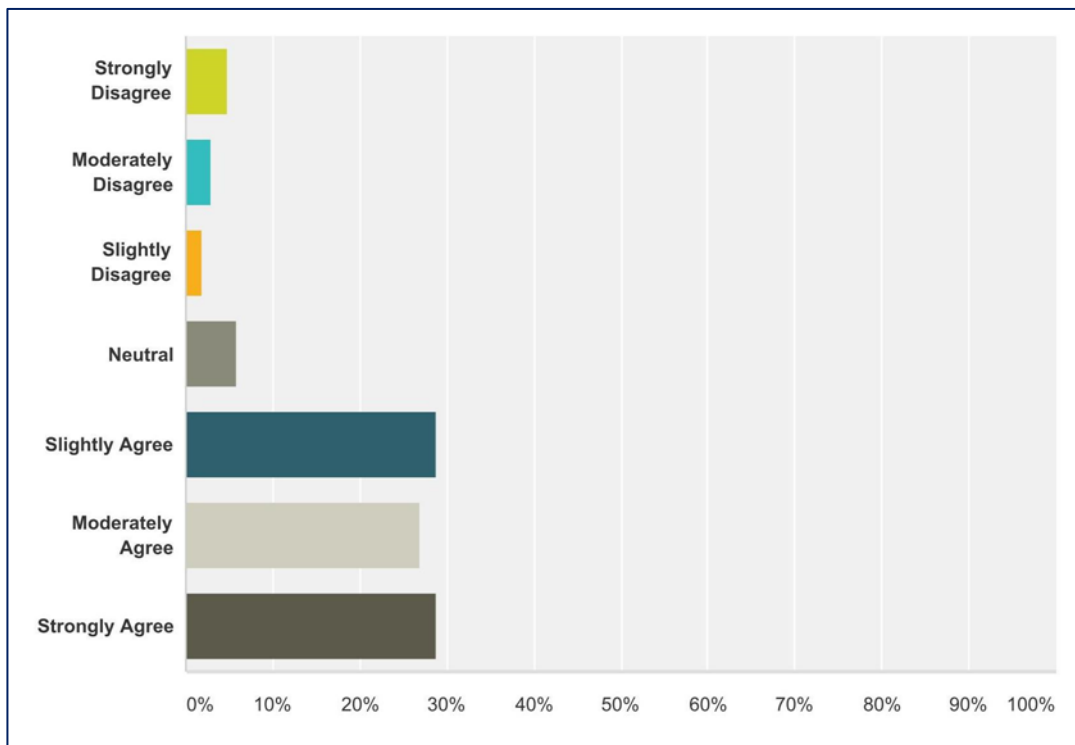


Figure 7: Social media platforms are useful for travel planning

Apart from the usefulness of social media in helping with travel planning, the study also sought to know whether this platform could be easily used in the travel planning activities. In with this, the researcher asked the respondents whether it was easy to learn to use social media platforms. Speaking from this perspective, 39.81 percent and 27.18 percent of the respondents strongly and moderately agreed respectively that it is easy to learn how to use social media platforms (Figure 8). Similarly, 14.56 percent slightly agreed that one could easily learn to use social media. On the other hand, 7.77 percent of the respondents were unable to establish whether it was easy to learn to use social media or not. Furthermore, 10.68 of the respondents disagreed that it was easy to learn to use social media.

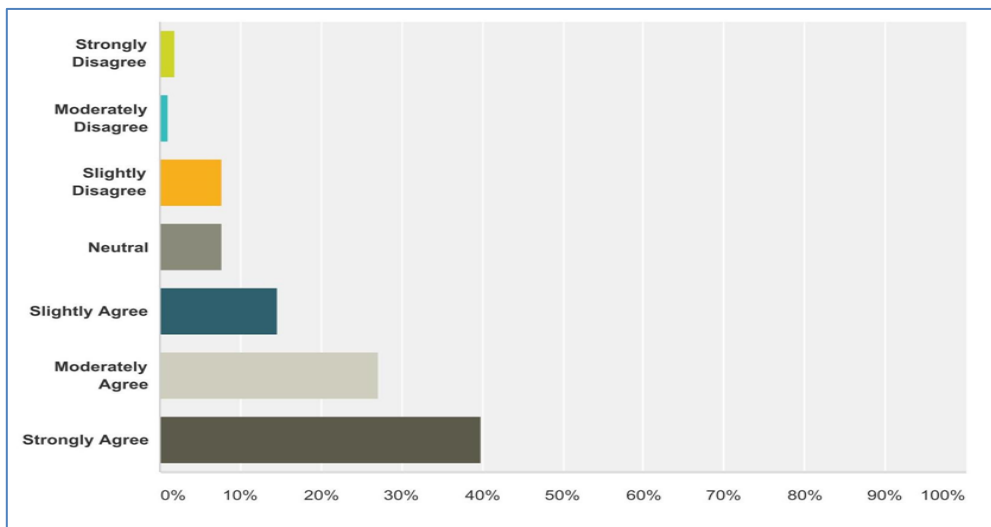


Figure 8: Social media platforms are easy to learn to use

To gain further insights on how easy it is to use social media platforms, the study asked respondents to indicate whether they found social media easy to use. 41.35 percent and 26.92 percent of the respondents strongly and moderately agree that they find social media generally easy to use (Figure 9). Similarly, while 13.46 percent of these respondents slightly agree that social media is easy to use, 7.69 percent and 10.58 percent were either undecided or disagree that social media is easy to use.

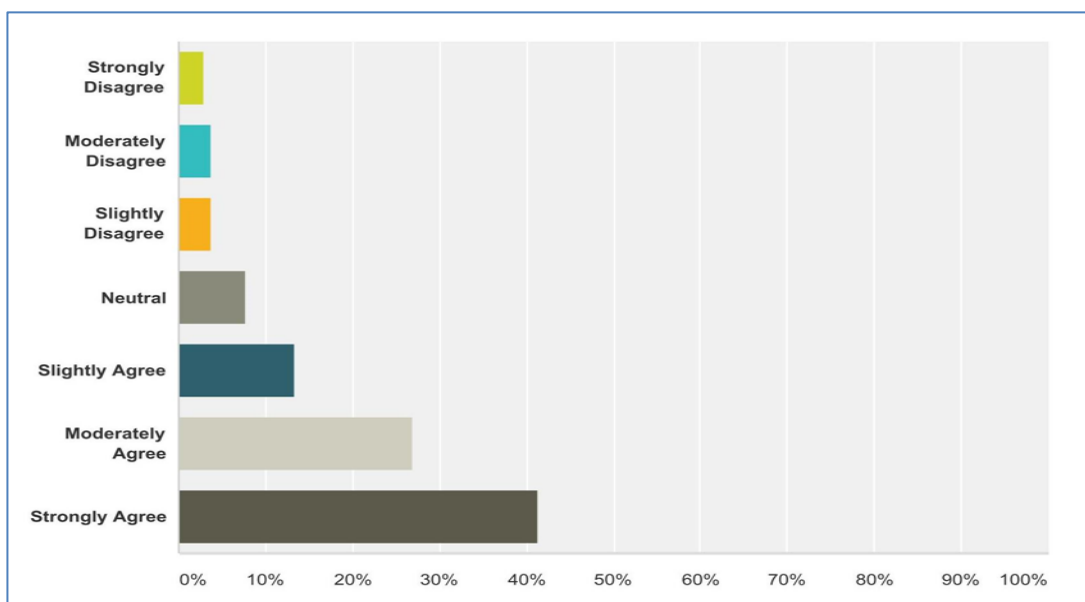


Figure 9: Social media platforms are generally easy to use

The study also sought to gain insights on the likelihood of the respondents using social media to search for travel-related information. Speaking from this perspective, the study asked the respondents whether they were reluctant to visit social media in search of travel information. The results indicate that 4.81 percent, 8.65 percent and 14.42 percent strongly, moderately and slightly agree that they were reluctant to visit social media for travel information (Figure 10). On the other hand, 18.27 percent, 17.31 percent and 16.35 percent slightly, moderately and strongly disagree that they were reluctant to visit social media platforms in search of travel information. 20.19 percent of these respondents were undecided on whether they were reluctant to visit social media websites for travel information or not.

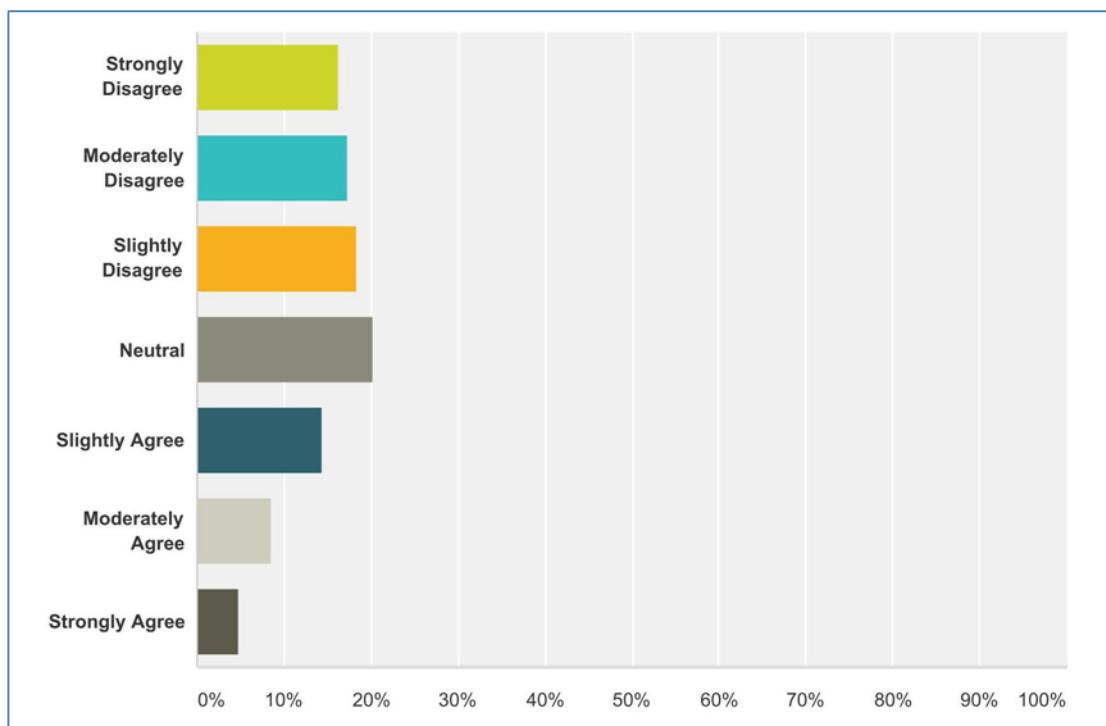


Figure 10: Reluctant to seek for travel information from social media platforms

The respondents were also required to respond on whether they would like to use advice from social media platforms, particular with regard to their travel plans. This question intended to help gain insight on whether the respondents relied on social media platforms to make their travel plans. 10.78 percent, 21.57 percent and 27.45 percent of these respondents strongly, moderately and slightly agree respectively that they would wish to use advice from social media to plan their travel (Figure 11). On the other hand, 4.9 percent, 6.86 percent and 1.96 percent slightly, moderately and

strongly disagree that they would wish to use advice from social media platform with respect to travel planning. Similarly, 26.47 percent of these respondents were indifferent on whether they would wish to use advice from social media platforms or not.

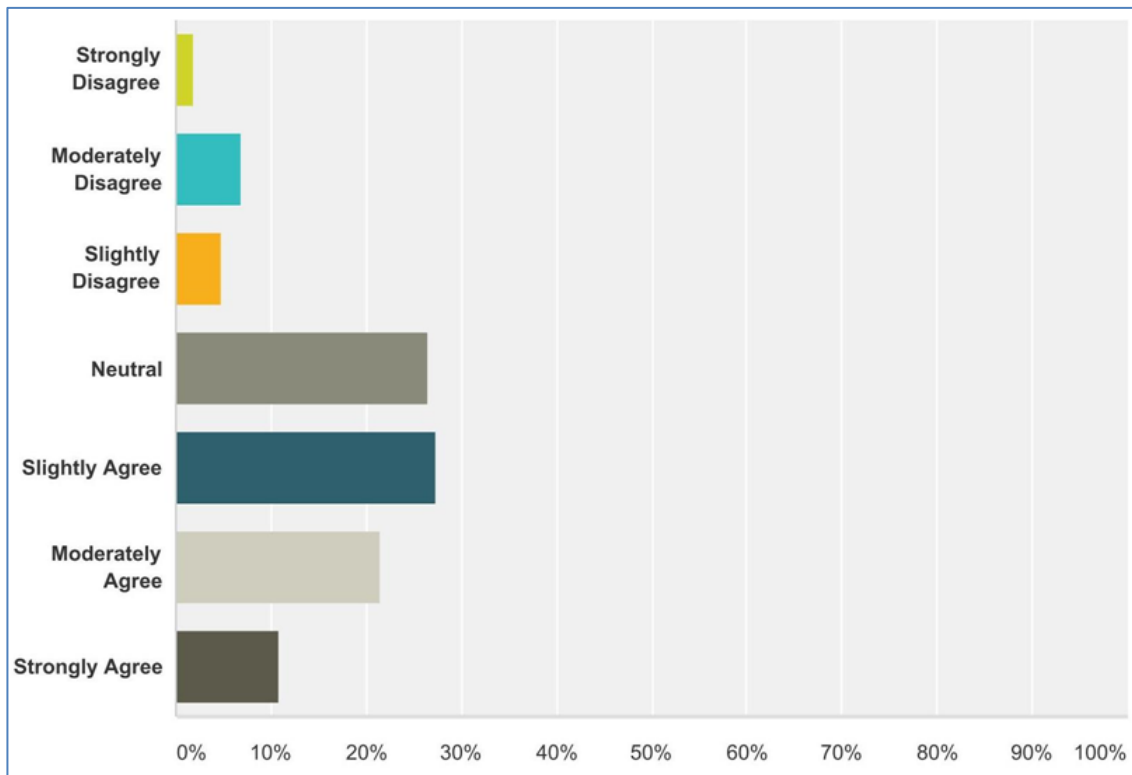


Figure 11: Would like to use advice from social medial platforms

Whereas the respondents may have used social media platforms in the past to plan their travel, this does not imply that they would still use this platform in future to plan their travel activities. Therefore, this study sought to know whether these respondents were likely to use social media content to plan their future trips. 15.38 percent, 26.92 percent and 23.08 percent strongly, moderately and slight agree respectively that they are likely to use social media content to help them plan their trip in future (Figure 12). Similarly, 11.54 percent, 4.81 percent and 5.77 percent of the respondents slightly, moderately and strong disagree that they were likely to rely on social media content to plan their trips in future. 12.5 percent of these respondents were undecided on whether they could use social media content to plan their future trips.

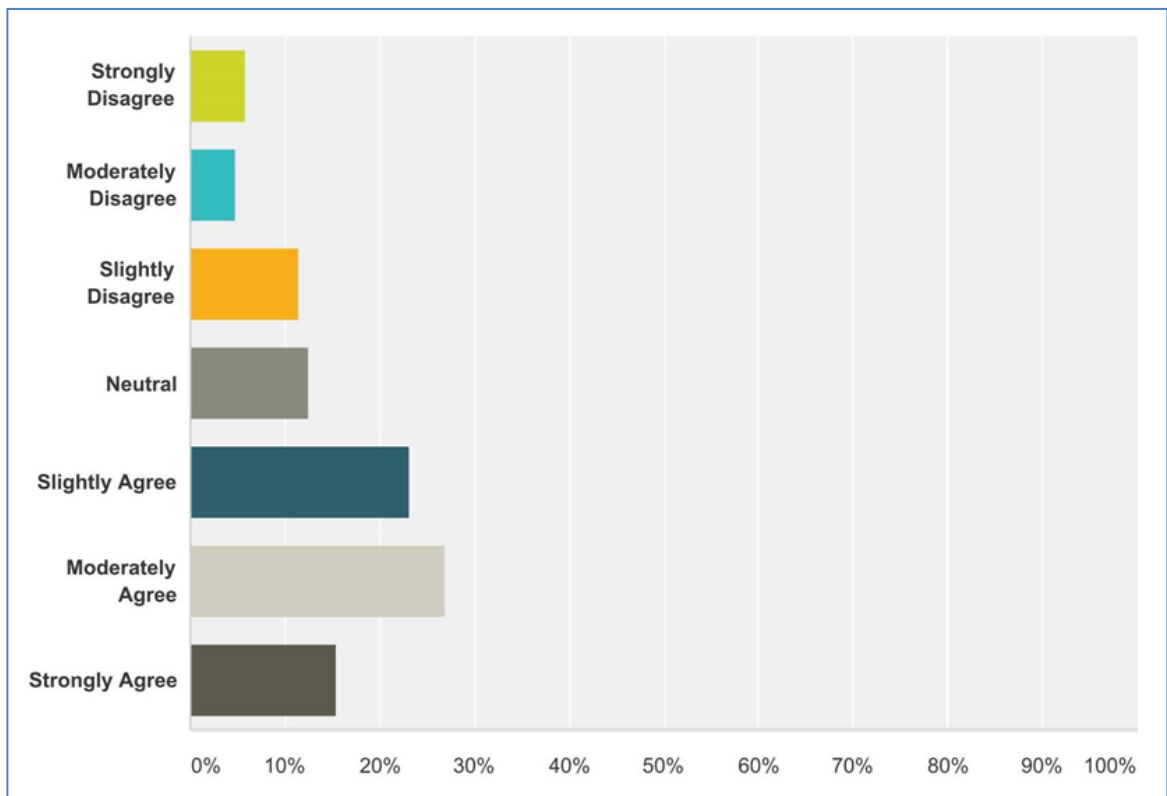


Figure 12: Plans to use content on social media platforms to plan future trips

Another aspect that was explored was whether the respondents were likely to make changes to part of or the whole trip after using content from social media platforms. Speaking from this point of view, the study asked the respondents whether they make changes to all or parts of the existing travel plans after using the content of the social media platforms. 7.84 percent, 19.61 percent and 24.51 percent of the respondents strongly, moderately and slight agree respectively that they usually make changes to all or parts of the existing travel plans after review of content from social media websites. 10.78 percent, 10.78 percent and 9.8 percent of the respondents slightly, moderately and strongly disagree respectively that they usually make changes to their existing travel plans after consuming content from social media platforms. Similarly, 16.67 percent of the respondents were indifferent concerning this issue.

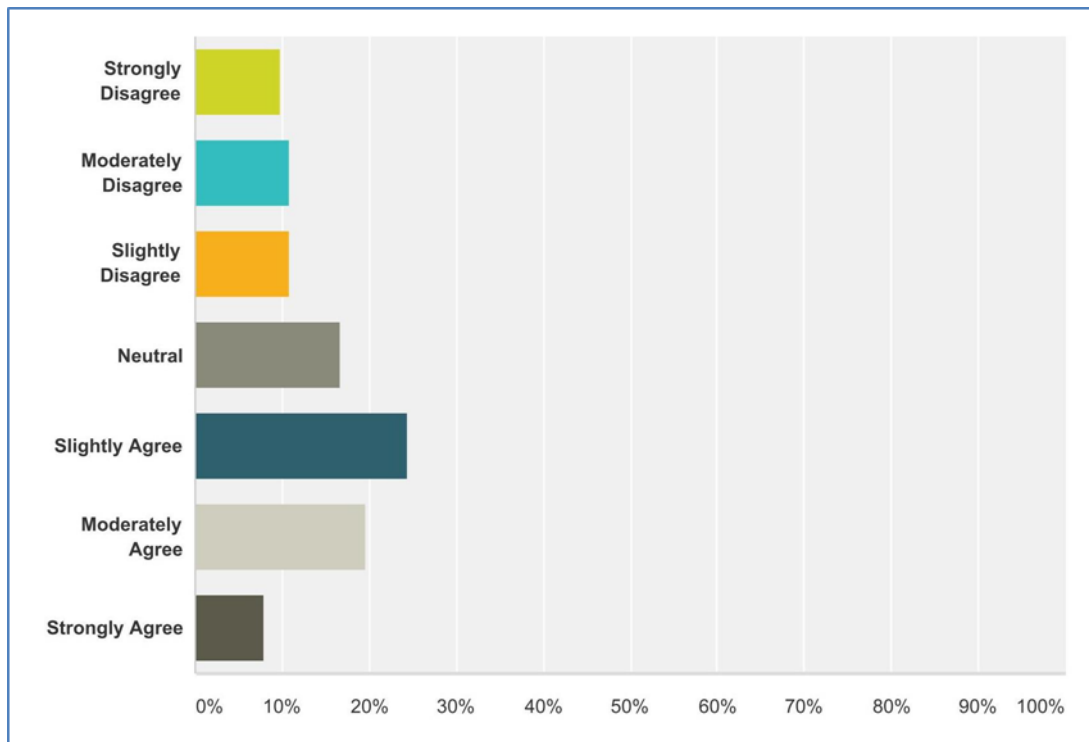


Figure 13: Review part of, or the whole travel plans after using social media platform content

The study also whether the respondents had any plans to use social media content in their travel planning process. Note that the aim of this question was to establish whether the respondents attach any importance of social media when making their travel plans, and as a result, would use its content to help them in their travel planning process. 11.65 percent, 32.04 percent and 26.21 percent of the respondents strongly, moderately and slightly agree respectively that they intend to use social media content for travel planning (Figure 14). 6.8 percent, 2.91 percent and 4.85 percent of the respondents slightly, moderately and strongly disagree respectively that they intend to use social media content for travel planning. 15.53 percent of these respondents were neutral as far as using social media content for travel planning.

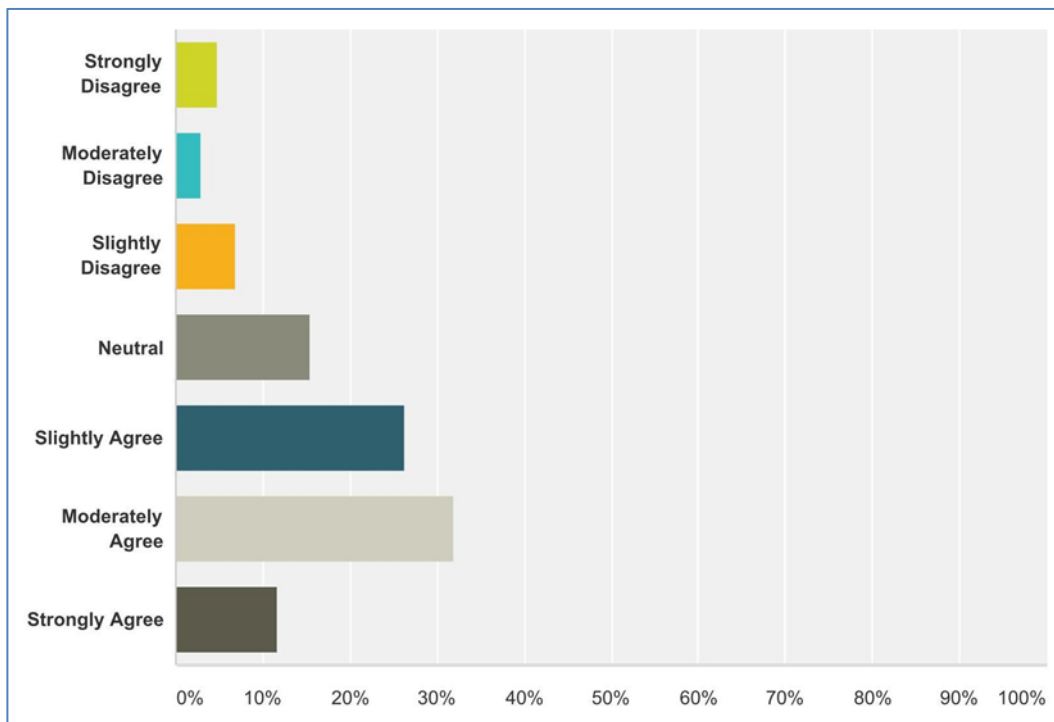


Figure 14: Intent to use social media content for travel planning

This study sought to establish why the respondents who used social media platforms in their travel search and planning relied on these platforms as a source of information. Therefore, the study asked the respondents on whether they thought that social media was a dependable source of travel information. 4.81 percent, 18.27 percent and 35.58 percent of the respondents strongly, moderately and slightly agree respectively that social media is dependable as far as searching for travel information is concerned (Figure 15). On the other hand, 12.5 percent, 4.81 percent and 0.96 percent of the respondents disagree respectively that social media is a dependable source of travel information. Similarly, 23.08 percent of the respondents were unable to report on whether social media is dependable or not for travel information.

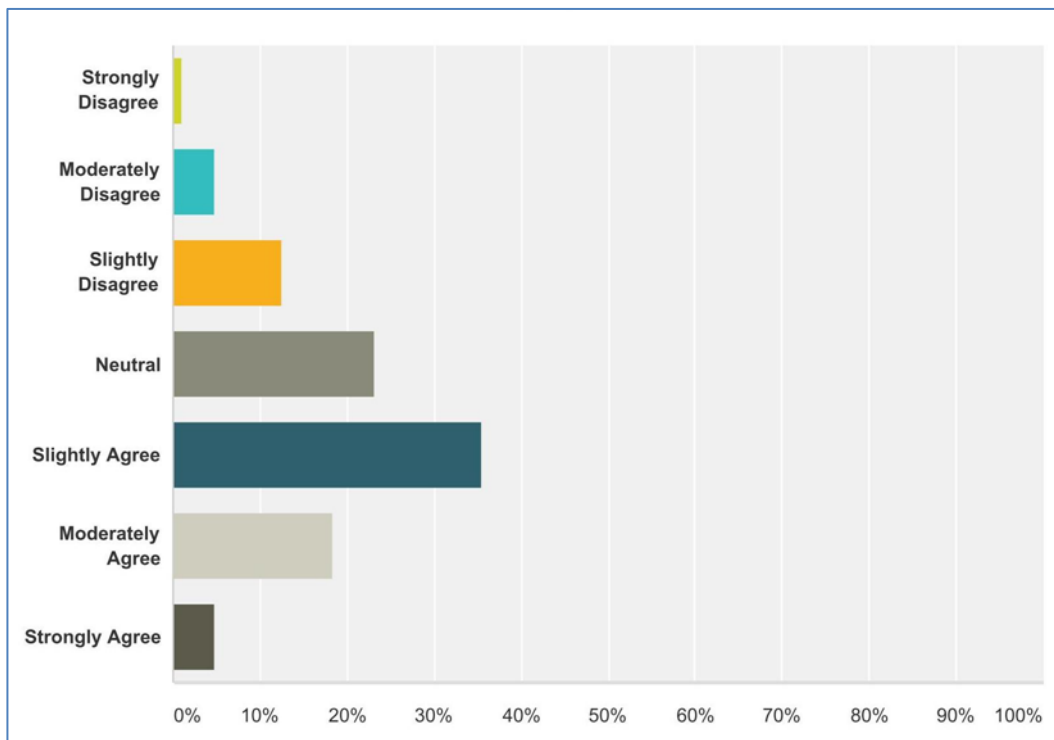


Figure 15: Social media platforms are dependable

The study also sought to establish whether the social media platforms provided honest travel information. In this case, the study aimed at understanding whether the travel information accessed through these platforms was honest. 3.88 percent, 20.39 percent and 27.18 percent of the respondents strongly, moderately and slightly agree respectively that social media travel information is accurate. On the other hand 14.56 percent, 7.77 percent and 1.94 percent of these respondents slightly, moderately and strongly disagree respectively that social media travel information is honest. In addition, 24.27 percent of these respondents were undecided on whether such information is honest or not.

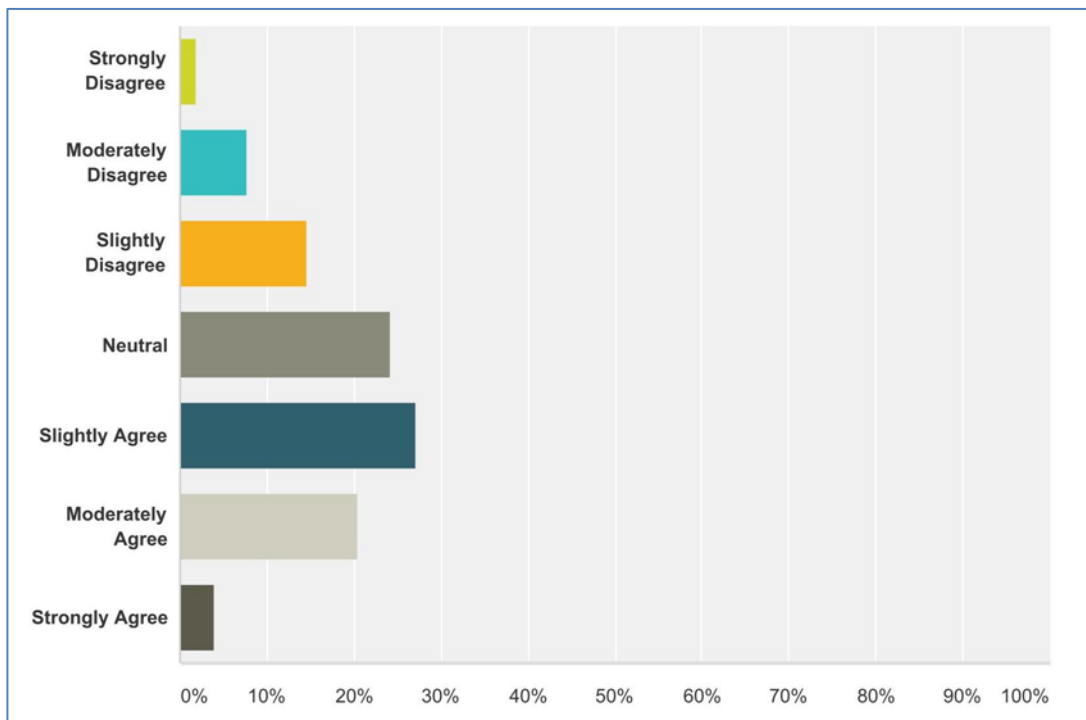


Figure 16: Social media travel information is honest

There is also a need to observe that for users to consistently use information from a particular source, such information must be reliable. Speaking from this point of view, this study sought to establish whether social media travel information is reliable. In line with this, 2.88 percent, 17.31 percent and 27.88 percent strongly, moderately and slightly agree respectively that travel information from social media is reliable (Figure 17). On the other hand, 16.35 percent, 5.77 percent and 1.92 percent slightly, moderately and strongly disagree respectively that social media travel information is reliable. Similarly, 27.88 percent of the respondents were unable to report on whether this data is reliable or not.

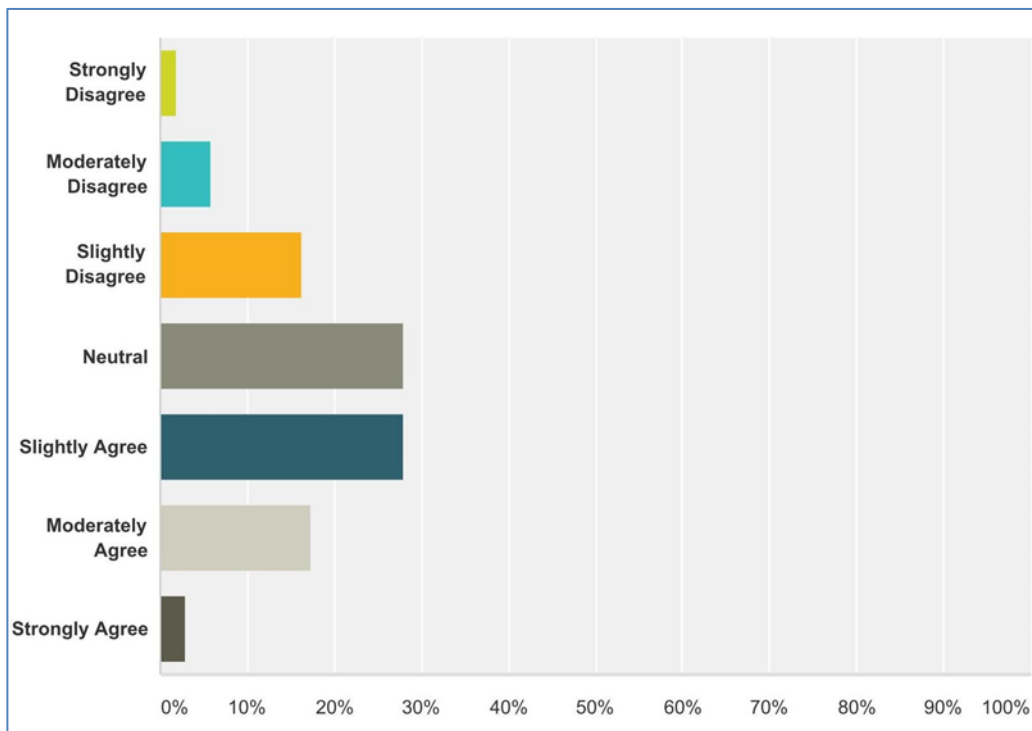


Figure 17: Social media travel information is reliable

In addition, the study sought to determine whether the social media posts on travel were sincere. In response, 10.68 percent, 12.62 percent and 33.01 percent strongly, moderately and slightly agree respectively that travel information from social media platforms was sincere. On the other hand, 9.71 percent, 5.83 percent and 3.88 percent slightly, moderately and strongly disagree respectively that social media travel information is sincere (Figure 18). Note that almost a quarter of these respondents, that is 24.27 percent, were unable to respond on whether they thought that travel information from social media is sincere or not. Importantly, the study did not require the respondents to highlight factors that made them think that travel information from social media platforms was sincere or not.

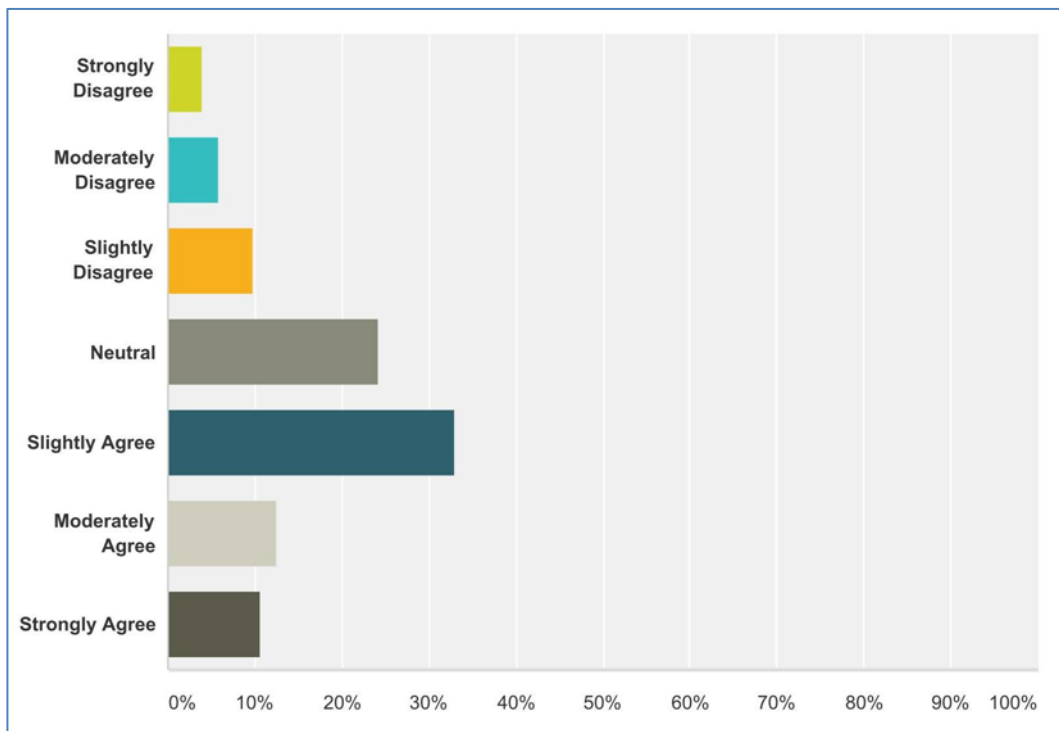


Figure 18: Social media travel information is sincere

Another element that was considered regards whether travel information from social media platforms is trustworthy. In this case, the study wanted to determine whether people who were planning to travel could find the information that had been posted by other users trustworthy. Speaking from this point of view, 2.88 percent, 7.69 percent and 16.35 percent of the respondents strongly, moderately and slightly agree respectively that social media travel information was trustworthy (Figure 19). On the contrary, 3.85 percent, 7.69 percent and 19.23 percent of these respondents slightly, moderately and strongly disagree respectively that social media travel information is trustworthy. Furthermore, 19.23 percent of these respondents were undecided on whether such information was trustworthy or not.

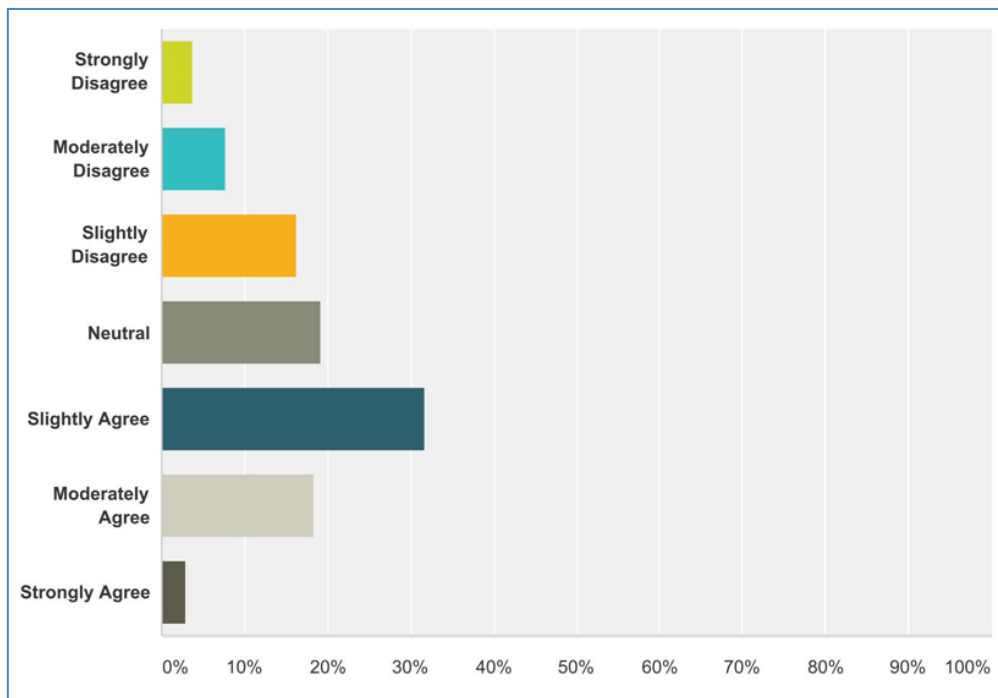


Figure 19: Social media travel information is trustworthy

In order to further affirm whether the respondents has recently used social media platforms in their travel research and planning, the study sought to determine whether they were tourists in Austria at the time of the conducting the survey. Therefore, when asked to respond whether they were tourists in Austria, 15.38 percent reported that they were tourists at the time of conducting the primary research, while 84.62 percent noted that they were not tourists at that particular time (Figure 20).

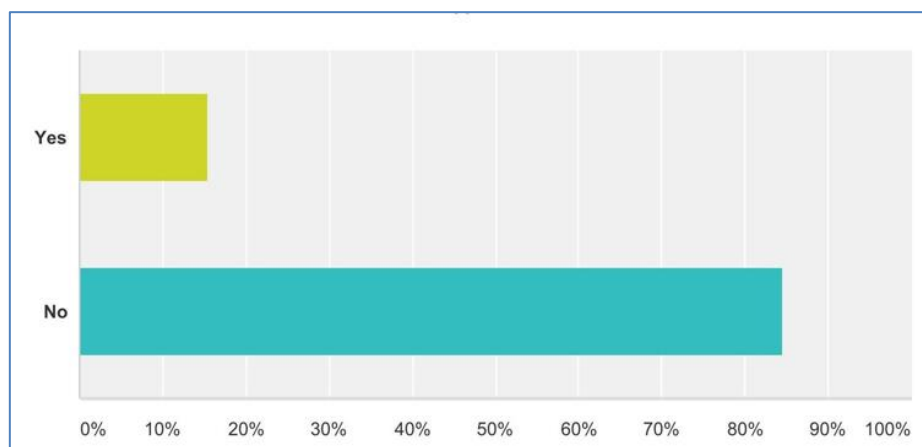


Figure 20: Are you a tourist in Austria?

Similarly, in order to determine the usage of social media platforms in travel research and planning between men and women, the study sought to establish the ratio of male to female among the respondents. Therefore, the study asked the respondents to record their gender. In line with this, 57.28 percent of respondents were female while 42.72 percent were male (Figure 21).

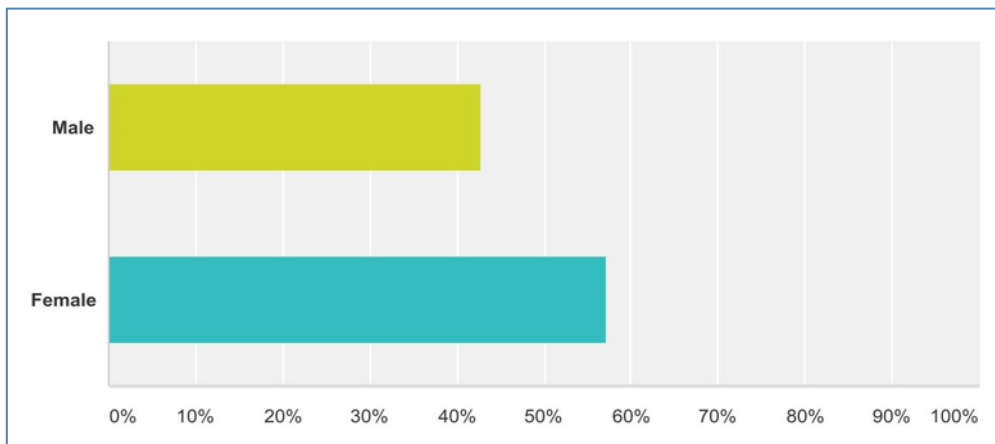


Figure 21: Gender

Similarly, the study sought to determine where age had any impact with respect to usage of social media in travel research and planning. In this case, respondents were requested to record their estimate age. Notably, 72.12 percent recorded their age as between 16 and 25 years, while 22.12 percent of these respondents were between 25 and 50 years (Figure 22).

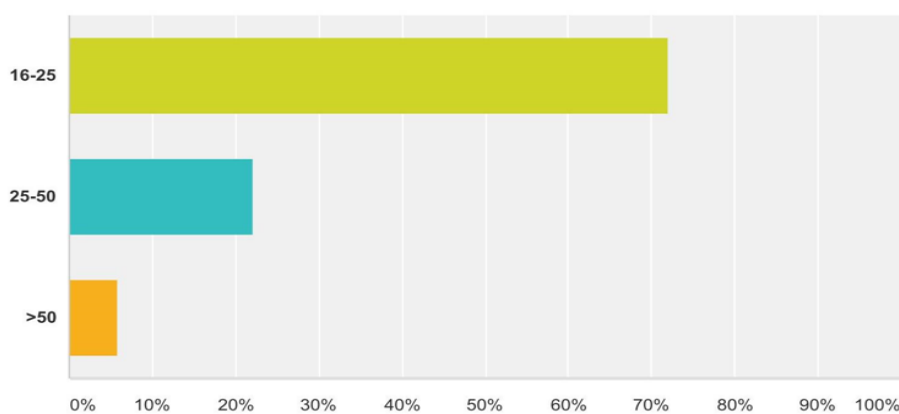


Figure 22: Age

Similarly, the study sought to determine the social media platforms that the respondents subscribed to. To achieve this, the study asked the respondents whether they were members of any social networking platform. With this in mind, 91.35 percent of the respondents noted that they were members of social networking platforms while 8.65 percent of these respondents were not members of any social networking platform (Figure 23).

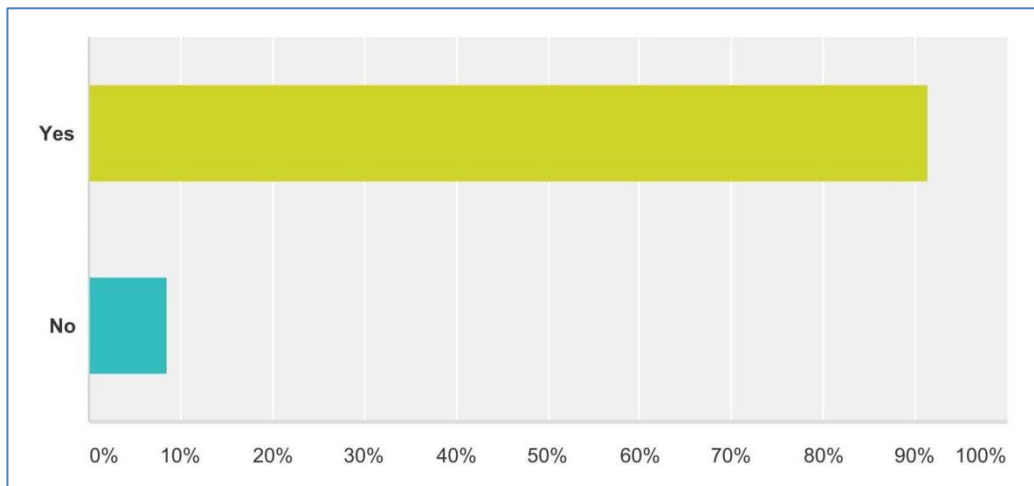


Figure 23: Are you members of any social networking platform?

After establishing whether the respondents were members of any social networking platform, the study asked the respondents the specific platform that they had subscribed to. 93.27 percent subscribed to Facebook, 37.5 percent to Google+, while 35.58 percent had subscribed to Twitter (Figure 24). Similarly, 12.5 percent were members of Flickr while 51.92 percent were members of other social media platforms not mentioned above. On the other hand, 2.88 percent were not members of any social media platform. Importantly, from the statistics on the social media platforms that the respondents subscribed to, there is a need to observe that most of them subscribed to more than one platform.

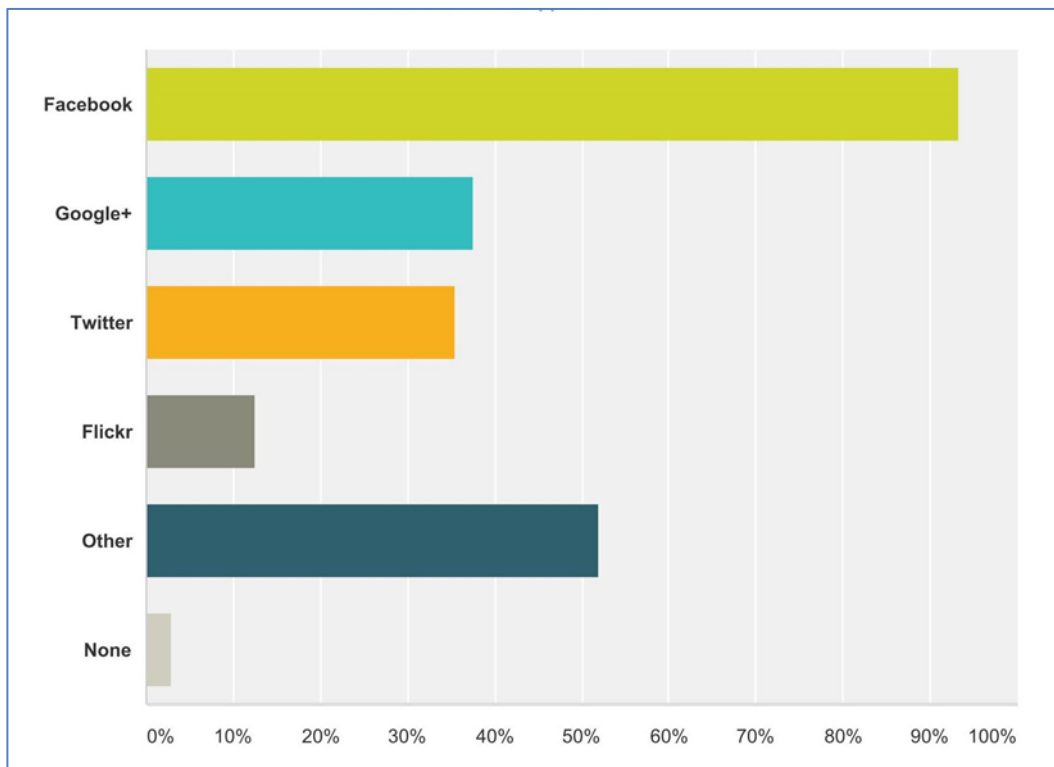


Figure 24: Social media platform that members subscribe to

Similarly, the study inquired about the source information about the respondents' desired destinations. In this case, the study aimed at finding out whether the social media platforms were the only source of information about the respondents' destinations, or whether there were other sources. Speaking from this point of view, 76.92 percent of the respondents noted that social media platforms and/or websites were the major source of information for their destinations (Figure 25). Similarly, 33.65 percent and 55.77 percent of the respondents noted that tourism agencies and word of mouth respectively were their major source of their destinations' information. In addition, 36.54 percent of these respondents noted that they used other sources to acquire information about their destinations. One of the critical issues about research question is the fact that most respondents used more than one source to acquire information on their destinations.

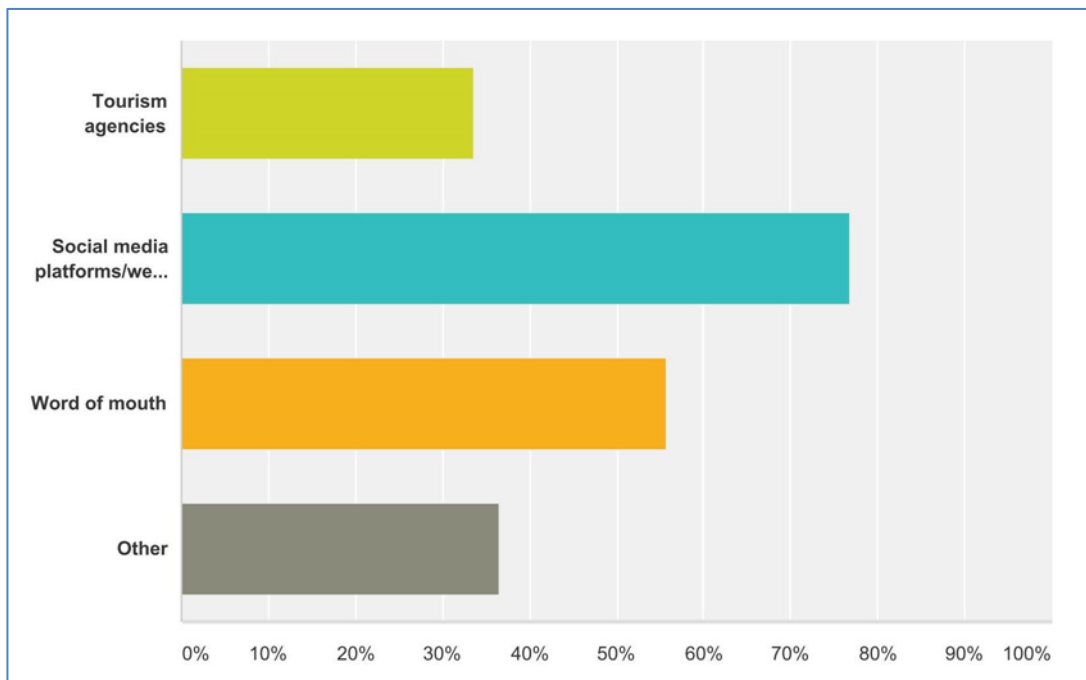


Figure 25: Source of travel research and planning information

The study sought to find out whether the respondents had used any Austrian tourist websites to research and plan their trip. In line with this, the study wanted to determine whether Austrian websites played an instrumental role in marketing this region as a tourist destination apart from the social media platforms and websites. Speaking from this point of view, 45.63 percent of the respondents noted that they had used Austrian tourist websites while 54.37 percent of these respondents noted that they had not used such websites (Figure 26). Importantly, there is a need to observe that the study did not ask the exact activity that these respondents had used Austrian tourist websites for. In other words, the study did not ask the respondents whether they had used these websites to search and plan their trip, or whether to book for services such as accommodation. Furthermore, the study did not ask the respondents whether these websites were more provide quality travel information than social media platforms.

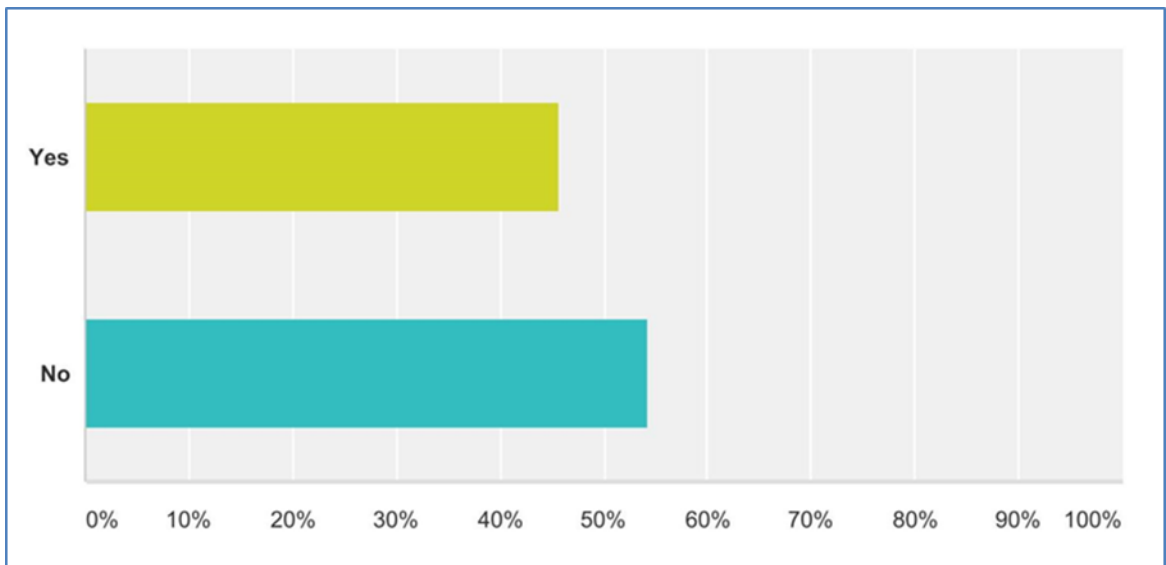


Figure 26: Use of Austrian websites to decide the trip

Similarly, the study sought to establish the level of influence of social media on the respondents' travel decisions. In this regard, the study wanted to know whether social media had any impact on the respondents' travel decisions. In line with this, 16.5 percent of the respondents had a higher influence on their travel decisions (Figure 27). Similarly, 65.05 percent of the respondents noted that social media had a moderate influence on their travel decisions, while 18.45 percent of the respondents were unable to determine whether social media had any influence on their travel decisions.

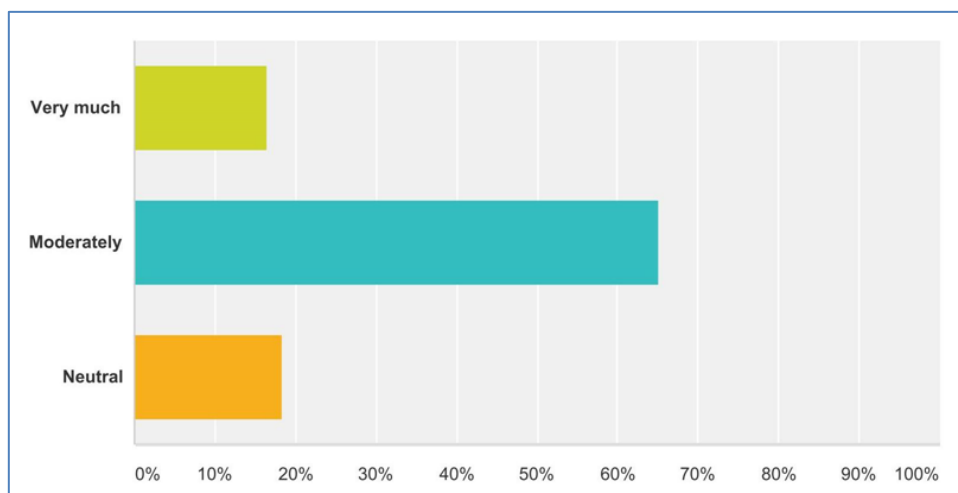


Figure 27: Influence of social media platforms on travel decisions

In the same line of thought, the study required the respondents to rate the importance of reviews of destinations on their travel search and planning activities. In this case, this study aimed at finding out how tourism review websites influenced the decisions of the respondents when making travel plans. Notably, 35.58 percent of the respondents noted that reviews on destinations were very important during their travel research and planning activities (Figure 28). Similarly, 48.08 percent of these respondents reported that reviews had moderate importance when making their travel decisions. Lastly, 16.35 percent of the respondents were unable to determine the level of importance of reviews on their travel decisions.

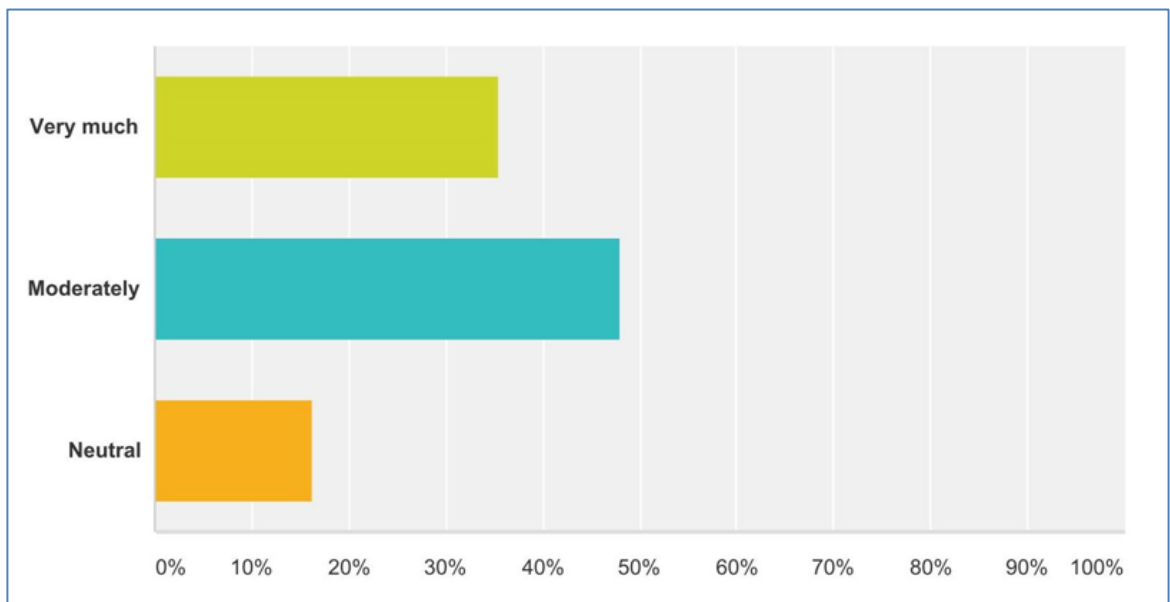


Figure 28: Importance of reviews

In the same line of thought, the study sought to know the main platforms and/or websites where respondents sought for reviews on different destinations. Arguably, 39.42 percent of the respondents relied on TripAdvisor to access reviews on different destinations not only in Austria but also in other parts of the globe, which 30.77 percent of these respondents relied on Booking.com as their sources of destinations' reviews (Figure 29). Similarly, 1.92 percent of the respondents depended on Responsibletravel.com as the source of their reviews, while 16.35 percent relied on Online social communities. On the other hand, 11.54 percent of these respondents depended on other sources to access reviews on different destinations in Austria and other parts of the globe. Importantly, the study did not

ask the respondents to highlight whether they used more than one source to evaluate reviews on the destinations of their choice.

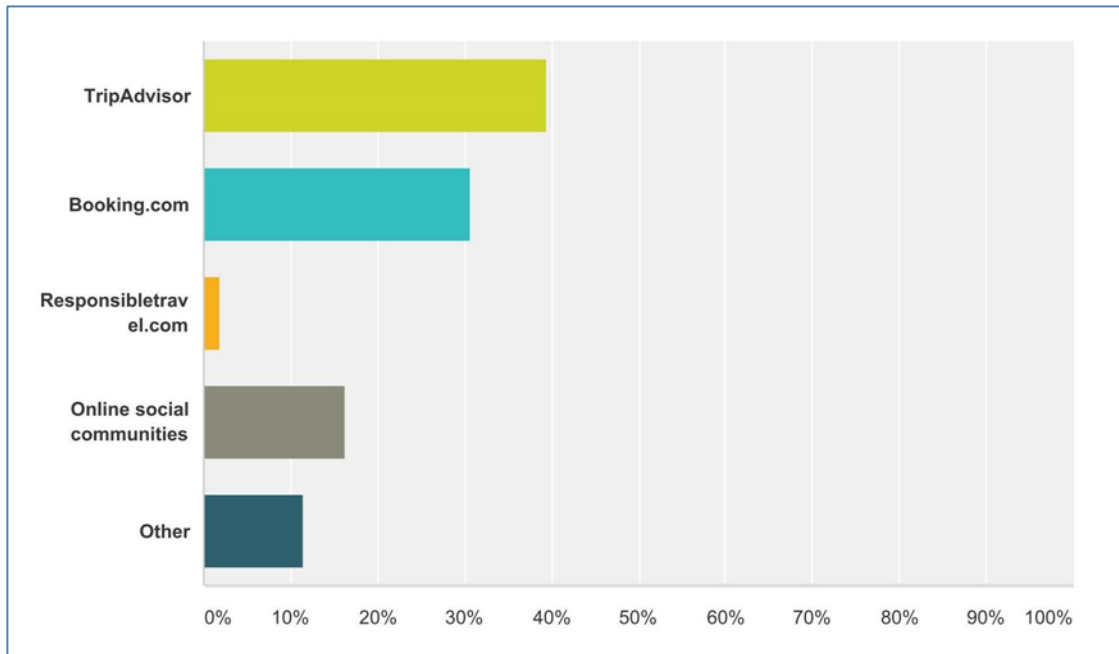


Figure 29: Sources of destinations' reviews

5 RESEARCH DISCUSSION CHAPTER

This chapter will compare and contrast the primary and secondary research findings and as a result, will seek to establish the relationship between these findings. Preliminary research findings from the primary research findings reveal that social media play an important role in providing tourists as well as potential tourists with critical information that help them in travel research and planning. Therefore, this paper compares these findings with the secondary research findings to establish whether there is an agreement between the two forms of data findings.

5.1 Popularity in the use of social media

To begin with, the study examined the number of users on social media regularly. Notably, this was necessary as a way of establishing whether in the first place people used social media on a regular basis. Speaking from this view, the secondary research established that by 2014 the popular social media websites, Facebook had 1.23 billion active users while Twitter recorded 5,700 per second (Scaife, 2014, p. xxxiii). Speaking from this point of view, the secondary research findings promote the fact that the number of active users on most popular social media platforms is significantly high. Furthermore, these findings point to the fact that there are other emerging social media platforms that continue to gain popularity across the globe, thus increasing the population of active users who use social media regularly.

The secondary research findings were affirmed by the primary research findings. Notably, the primary research established that 97.12 percent of the respondents who were interviewed through a survey questionnaire had used social media, and in particular, either Facebook or Twitter, or both, in the last six months. In line with this, there is a significant agreement between the primary and secondary research findings that most people in society use social media on a regular basis. Whereas this is the case, this study did not seek to find out the population of users of social media in Austria. This implies that whereas the findings point out that 97.12 percent of the respondents used social media on a regular basis, this does not necessarily imply that 97.12 percent of the population in Austria used social media on a regular basis (Figure 30). On the contrary, low figures could be obtained if the same research was conducted somewhere else. However, comparing the secondary and the

primary research findings, these differences will be minimal if the same research was carried out somewhere else.

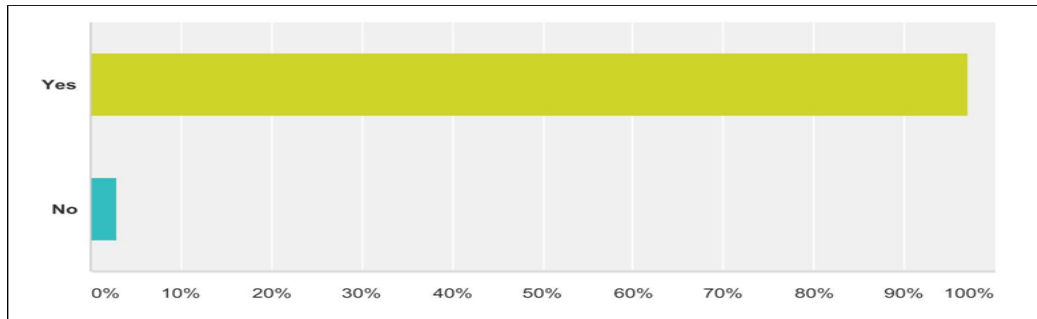


Figure 30: Use of Facebook or Twitter in the past six months

Apart from seeking to establish the number of users on social media, the study also sought to determine the number of social media users who utilize this platform to search for information on different destinations across the globe, as well as plan their travel. The findings from both secondary and primary research reveal that more than half of the population often search for information from social media platforms when purchasing products. In line with this, primary research findings specifically indicated that 87.5 percent of the respondents use social media platforms to seek for information on their preferred travel destinations (Figure 31). However, the secondary research findings indicate that 53 percent of the respondents considered the information from social media when making critical purchase decisions (Kataria, 2017). Therefore, whereas both primary and secondary research findings agree that social media provide consumers with critical information when making purchases, there is a significant difference between these research findings because of the fact that whereas the primary research focused on tourism consumers, the secondary research findings focused on consumers in general. Therefore, it was difficult to establish whether the majority of the respondents in the secondary research findings were travel consumers, or whether they were consumers of other products on the market, considering the fact that most businesses from different industries have increased their presence on social, especially in cases where such businesses engaged in retail activities.

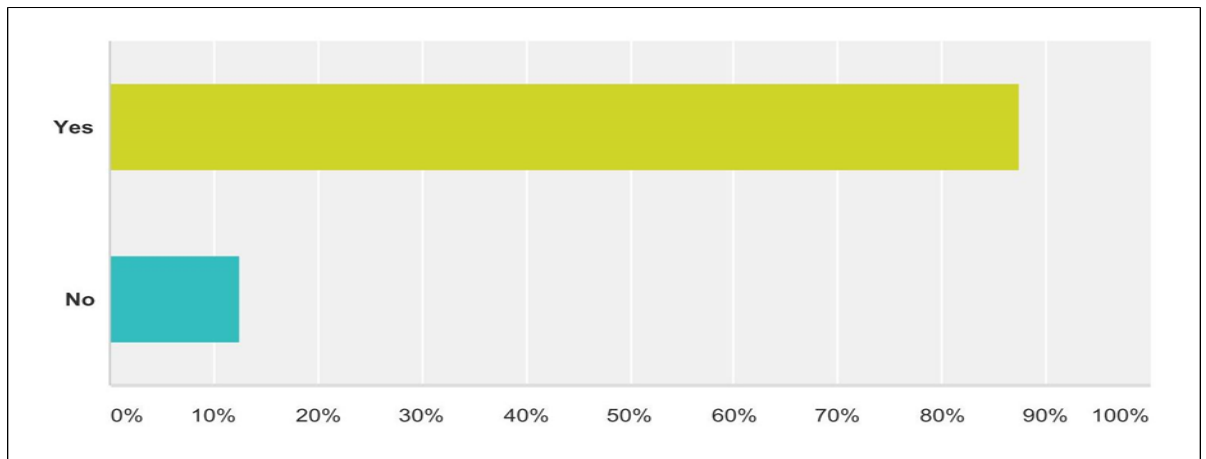


Figure 31: Used social media to search for travel-related information within 12 months

5.2 Influence of social media on users' decision making process

Apart from examining the popularity in the use of social media and as well as how it plays an instrumental role in providing critical information and data for consumers, the study narrowed down and examined how social media influences the decision-making processes of the larger population in general, as well as how it influences travelers' decisions. To begin with, the secondary research findings indicate that most social media users perceived this platform as a critical source of information for consumers (Deloitte Digital, 2015). This is particularly the case in scenario where these consumers are concerned with factors such as quality and better prices. This implies that if a product and/or service received positive reviews on social media platforms, consumers were likely to purchase it and vice versa. This means that the decisions of consumers who used social media platforms was significantly enhanced because of accessing "extra" and unbiased information about their target product and/or service on these platforms.

These secondary research findings were affirmed by the primary research findings, which indicate that a significant number of travel consumers relied on social media to access information that enhanced their travel plans. In line with this, 74.04 percent of the respondents in the primary research noted that social media had a significant impact as far as improving their travel plans is concerned (Figure 32). Whereas this is the case, there is a need to observe that the respondents did not have a uniform perception regarding the way social media improves their travel

plans. On the contrary, whereas 18.27 percent of these respondents noted that social media had a strong impact as far as improving their travel plan, 28.85 percent and 26.92 percent reported moderate and low impact respectively of social media on their travel plans. Whereas this is the case, the study did not follow up to establish the factors in social media that help enhance the impact of these platforms on the respondents' travel plans. In the case, the study did not consider whether the respondents who report that social media had either low or no impact at all on their travel plans had other sources of travel information that were better than social media platforms.

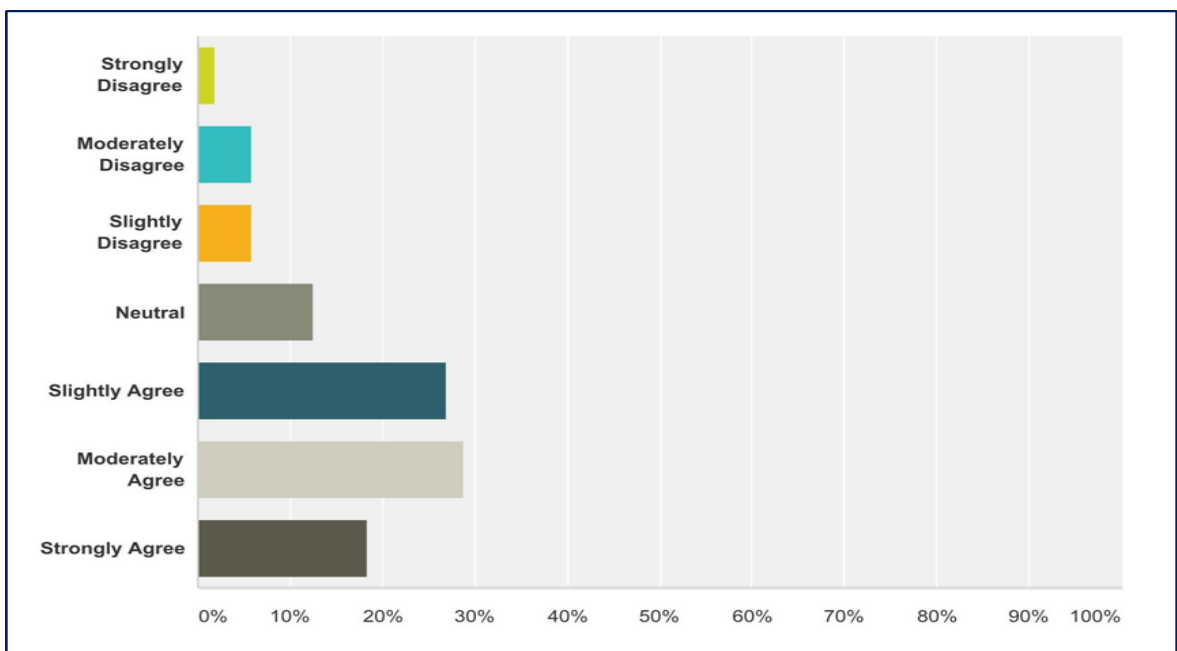


Figure 32: Social media platforms help improve travel plans

One of the questions that future research and studies could consider regards whether the factors such as peer pressure on social media is one of the factors that contributed to a significant percentage of respondents arguing that social media platforms enhanced their travel plans. Note that the secondary research findings indicate that social media consumers were greatly influenced by the posts that other social media users had posted on their timelines concerning products and/or services they had purchased in the recent past (Mikalef, Giannakos & Pateli, 2013). Therefore, to be at par with their peers, other social media users also purchased similar products with the hope of enjoying a similar experience as their peers. This is

irrespective of the fact that these users may or may not have had the plan the product and/or service in question. From the primary research findings, a significant number of respondents noted that they use social media makes the planning of their trips easier and efficient, and as a result, they were able to reach travel decisions easily. Note that there is a significant relationship between the primary and secondary research findings in this case in the sense that the respondents did not find it difficult to rely on the information that is posted on social media concerning different products and services, in this case travel destinations, since such information had been posted by their peers. Furthermore, since there was a significant level of peer pressure from their peers through their posts on social media, these respondents were able to make quick decisions since they usually thought that since their peers made the same decisions and had a great experience, they too could make similar decisions and expect not to go wrong in any way. This implies that whereas these respondents noted that social media made the planning of their trips easier and efficient, they were simply responding to peer pressure and their inability to resist impulse buying and as such, they only replicated the decisions that had been made earlier by their peers.

5.3 Social media and tourism

This study also explored the use of social media in the tourism industry both in its primary and secondary research. In line with this, the secondary research findings established that different destinations across the globe were turning to social media in order to communicate with both existing and potential tourists (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). While this is the case, the study found out that tourism consumers were the major producers of tourism content (Lim, Chung & Weaver, 2012; Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). This made it easier for consumers to access such content because in most cases, it was shared by their peers. In addition, the secondary research findings reveal that the content that social media users shared on these platforms came in an array of phone, mainly words and pictures. In some cases, these users provide even videos of the destinations they had visited before as well as short posts about their experiences. This means that the audience who had access to such content found it easier to filter out the content that they needed when making travel decisions.

Note that the primary research too reported similar findings. To begin with, the primary research indicated that 84.62 percent of the respondents found the travel content that was shared on social media platform useful for their planning activities. In line with this, these findings concur with the secondary research findings that affirm the increase role of social media in providing travel information to existing and potential tourists. Similarly, 81.55 percent of the respondents noted that they found it easier to learn how to use social media platforms (Figure 33). This is consistent with the secondary research findings that indicate that social media users found it easier to share the content on social media after visiting a particular destination. Moreover, due to its increasing role in tourism, the primary research established that users were likely to rely on this platform to search for travel information, and it to plan their travel to different destinations across the globe. Speaking from this point of view, there is a need to observe that both the primary and secondary research findings agree that social media content plays an instrumental role in helping user search for travel information as well as plan their visits to different destinations across the globe. This importance is affirmed in the respondents' willingness to use social media to plan for their future visits to their preferred destinations.

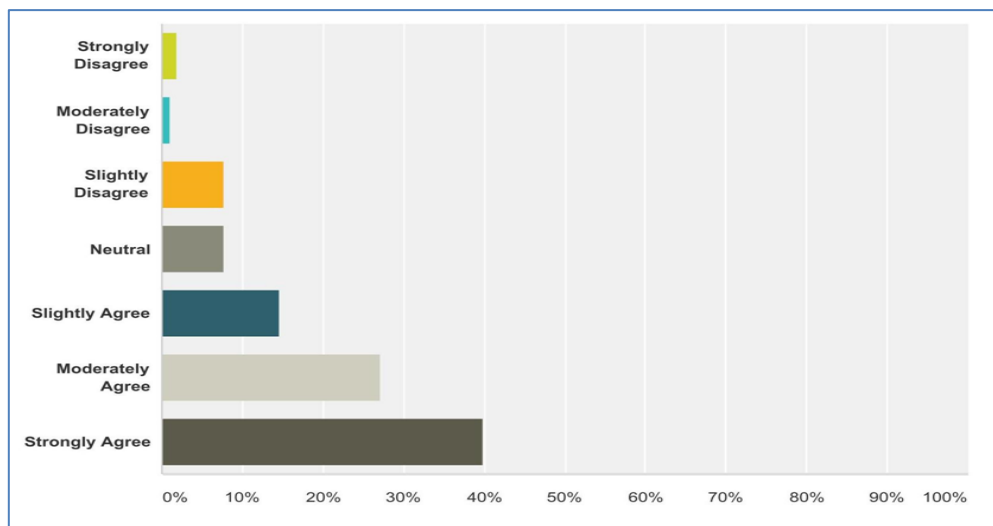


Figure 33: Social media platforms are easy to learn to use

5.4 Factors that enhance social media as a travel research and planning tool

This study also examined the range of factors that attract the attention of tourism consumers as far as making of their critical travel decisions is concerned. Speaking from point of view, the study identified a range of factors including dependability, honest, reliability, sincere and trustworthy as critical factors that contribute to the increased usage of social media platforms in travel planning.

5.4.1 Dependability

To begin with, one of the factors that both the primary and secondary research findings sought to establish was whether social media is dependable. In other words, the study wanted to establish whether the users could easily access the information they needed through social media when planning their travel. Speaking from this point of view, there is a need to note that both the primary and secondary research findings point to the fact that social media platforms are dependable mediums that could help users' access travel information (Uysal, Perdue & Sirgy, 2012). From the primary research findings, it was established that 58.66 percent of the respondents had varying levels of agreement that social media was a dependable platform from which travelers can draw significant information concerning a particular destination (Figure 34). Despite the agreement between primary and secondary data that social media platforms are dependable sources of travel information, those who supported its dependability were slightly above 50 percent of the total number of respondents. On the contrary, 41.34 percent were unable to determine whether the platform was dependable, or completely disagree that social media platforms are dependable. Furthermore, there is a need to conduct further research to establish the factors that made these respondents think that social media was dependable.

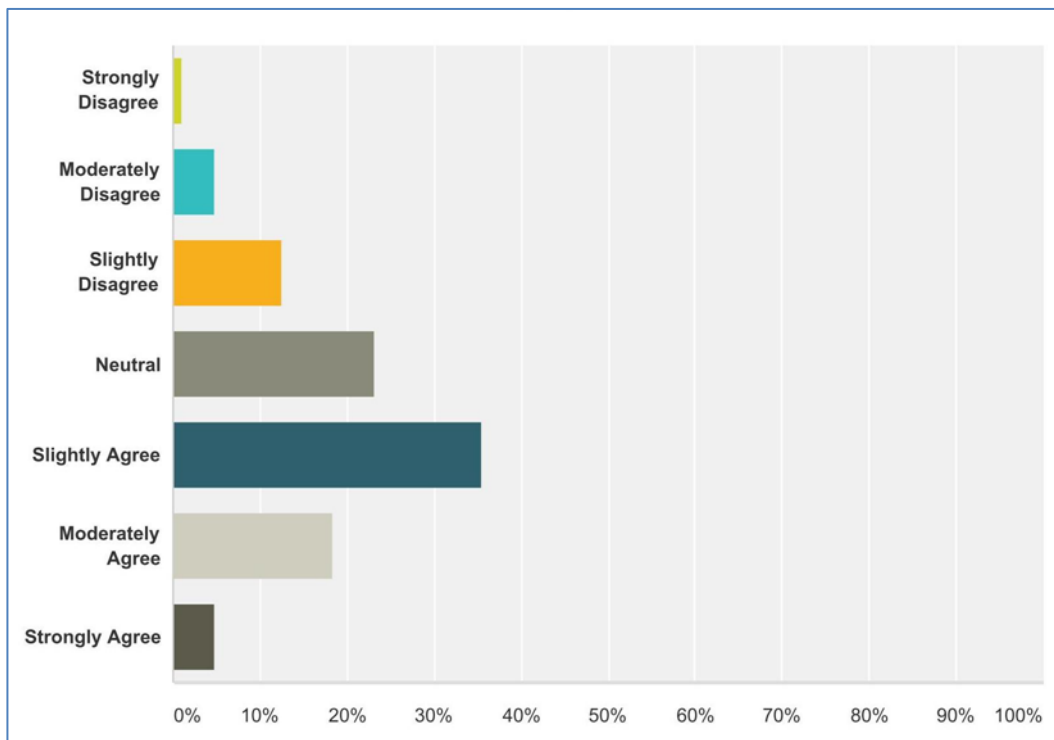


Figure 34: Social media platforms are dependable

5.4.2 They are honest

Another aspect that both the primary and secondary research found out that plays a critical role in promoting the continued use of social media platform in travel research and planning is honesty. In this regard, the secondary research findings reveal that people who used social media platforms as a source of information to help them in their planning of their visits to different destinations thought that the travelers who had posted their posts, comments, pictures and videos on these platforms were honest in every way since they had nothing to gain by posting dishonest information. This is affirmed by the primary research findings that indicate that 51.45 percent of the respondents who participated in the survey think that the users who posts different information concerning destinations were honest, as compared to only 24.27 percent who think social media platforms' information on different destination is not honest (Figure 35). Importantly, despite the significant agreement between primary and secondary research that social media websites are honest as far as information on tourism destinations is concerned, there is a need to note that the study did not ask the respondents to highlight why they thought these platforms are honest. Furthermore, due to limited time, the study did not consider

where the growing penetration of fake news on social media platforms had affected different industries, and in particular, the tourism industry. This means that to make a conclusive judgment on whether social media platforms are honest, there is a need to consider the above issues in future research and studies.

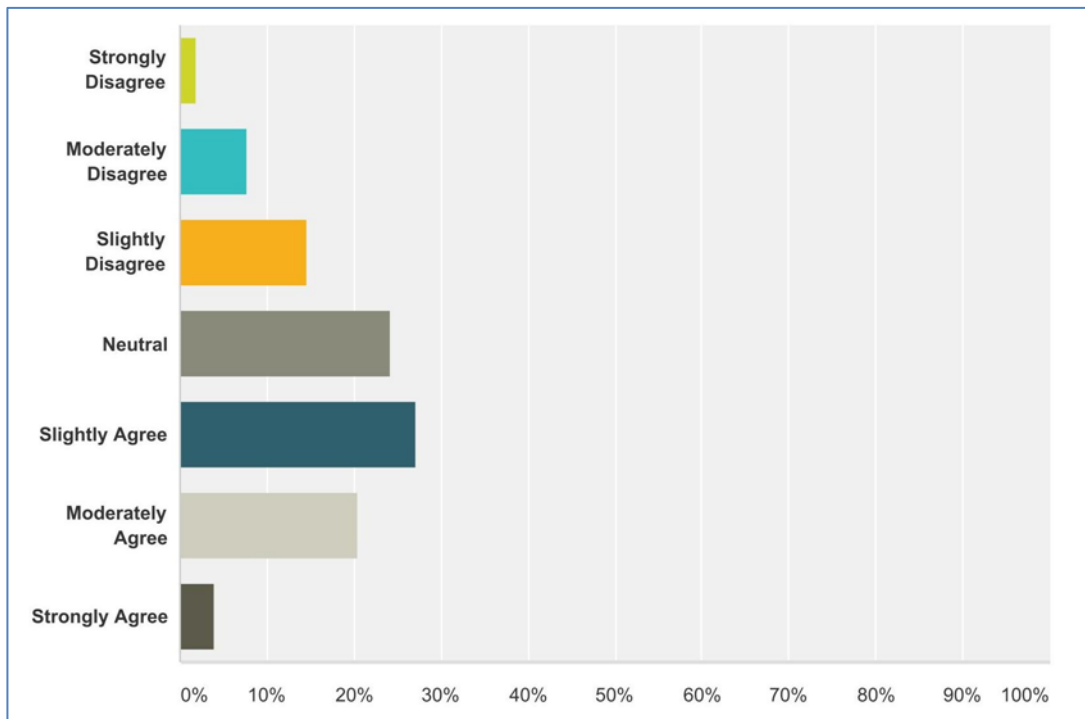


Figure 35: Social media travel information is honest

5.4.3 They are reliable

This study further established that a significant number of people consider social media platforms as reliable sources of information for travel research and planning. In their analysis, Uysal, Perdue and Sirgy (2012) argue that travel information on social media is easily accessible to the public whenever and wherever they need. In line with this, these researchers were inclined toward the fact that since whatever one posts on their social media timelines is consumed by the general public with ease, these platforms were reliable sources of information on different destinations across the globe. Their observations are affirmed by the primary research findings that reveal that 48.07 percent perceive these platforms as reliable sources of information, while only 24.4 percent perceive it as unreliable (Figure 36). Whereas this is the case, there is a need to observe that slightly above 25 percent of these

users were unable to determine whether these platforms were reliable sources of travel information. This could be attributed to the fact that they had either sparingly used these platforms in the travel research, or they had not used these platforms at all in travel planning activities. Furthermore, whereas there is a claim that anyone can access information on social media, there are numerous cases whereas accessibility to such information is restricted to only a small circle of friend of the person posting it, or such information can only be obtained at a small fee in the case of travel subscription blogs and websites.

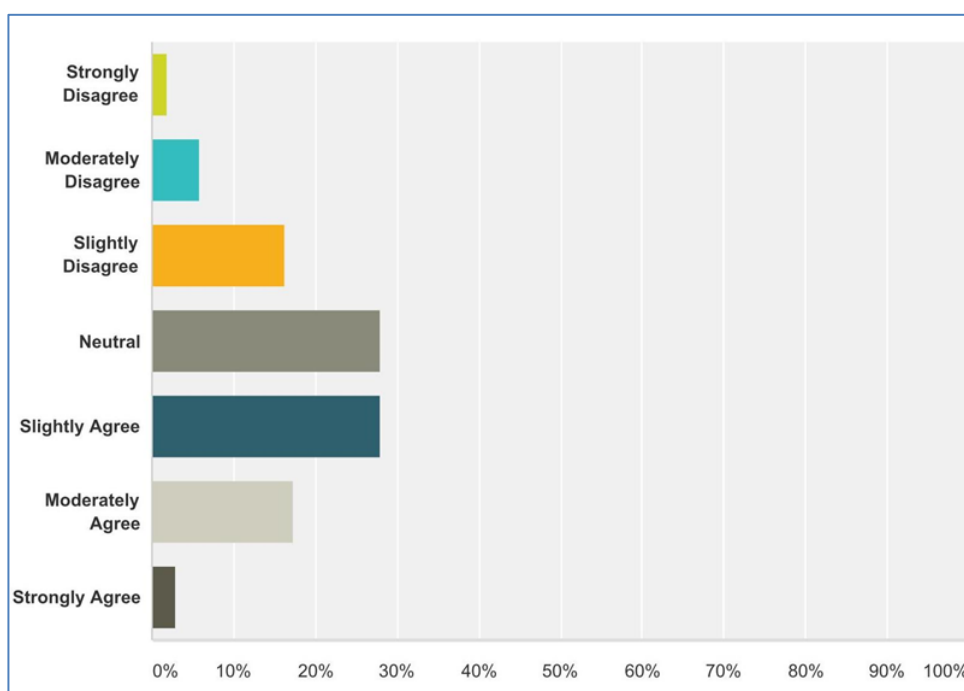


Figure 36: Social media travel information is reliable

5.4.4 They are trustworthy and sincere

Trustworthiness and sincerity of the information found on social media platforms was also examined in this research. Speaking from this point of view, the secondary research findings were inclined towards concluding that the information on destinations that is posted on social media was since. This is particularly the case considering the fact that social media users backed up this information with evidence such as photographs and videos that they took visiting the destination in question (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). Munar and Jacobsen (2013) further observe that most social media users considered the information posted in forms of reviews

on websites such as TripAdvisor to be 100% sincere and as a result, trustworthy. These perceptions towards social media as far as trustworthiness and sincerity are concerned are echoed by the primary research findings whereby 52.88 percent of the respondents noted that they had some level of trust on social media travel information (Figure 37). While this is the case, it is important to note that the level of trust in social media platforms as sources of information was low considering the fact that out of the 52.88 percent of respondents who reported that they had trust in these platforms as sources of travel information, 58.62 percent slightly agree that social media was a trustworthy source of travel information. On the other hand, only 18.97 percent of these respondents thought that social media was a trustworthy source of travel information. Speaking from this point of view, whereas both the primary and secondary research findings agree that social media is a trustworthy source of travel information, the level of trustworthiness of these platforms is significantly low. This could be attributed to the fact that despite users sharing sincere information, this was only based on personal experience as opposed to scientific research. Therefore, the accuracy of the shared information was based on personal feeling as opposed to findings from objective research or study, thus undermining the overall level of trust in the platform.

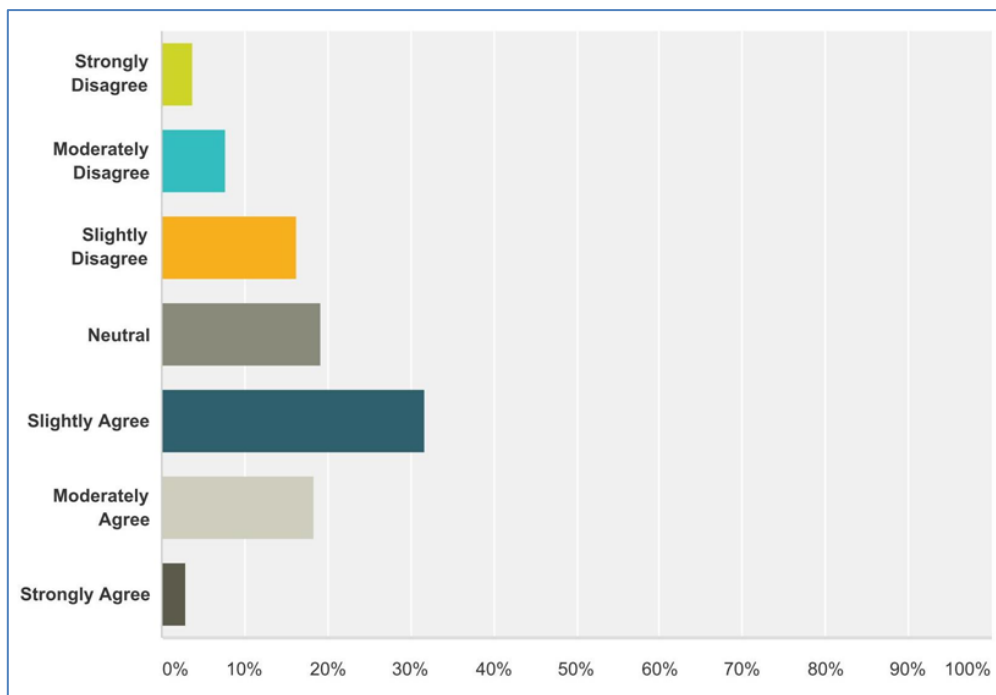


Figure 37: Social media travel information is trustworthy

5.5 Popular social media usage trends in the tourism sector

This study considered social media usage trends in the tourism sector. To begin with, there is a need to observe that women were more likely to use social media to search for travel information on their preferred destinations as compared to men. Arguably, this could be attributed to the fact that women were more comprehensive when making critical decisions such as when purchasing products and/or service, while men, who were goal oriented only narrowed down easily to what they wanted to purchase without necessarily relying on extensive information. This is affirmed in the study by Benko and Pelster (2013), which affirmed that women were likely to seek for more information when making a purchase decision as compared to men. This explains the high usage of social media among women in search of travel information as compared to men.

Similarly, this study established that the younger generation of tourists was likely to use social media platforms in seeking for travel information as compared to the older generation. In the survey, only 5.77 percent were above 50 years. In the same line of thought, only 8.65 percent of the respondents noted that they were not members of any social networking site. Whereas this is the case, the study did not attempt to establish whether the 5.77 percent of the older people who participated in this study were the same one without social media accounts. Therefore, while the secondary research findings reveal that people between the age of 16 and 25 years recorded a high usage of social media, as compared to people above 45 years, the inability of this study to link social media usage and age undermines the conclusion that the older generation did not consider the social media platforms as critical sources of travel information. Therefore, there is a need for a further study to establish the link between age and the search for travel information on social media platforms.

This study further noted that certain social media platforms were more popular and as such, commanded a significant number of users as compared to others. The secondary research findings indicated that Facebook has the leading population of active users followed by Twitter (Scaife, 2014). Whereas this is the case, the primary research findings indicate that Google+ has a huge following as compared to Twitter. Furthermore, review websites such as TripAdvisor and Booking.com played an

instrumental role in providing travel information as compared to mainstream social media such as Facebook and Twitter. However, there is a need to establish the contribution of each platform toward the tourism industry.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the tourism industry is one of the largest industries in the world that extensively utilizes social media to not only promote the brand of its array of industry players but also reach out to its target consumers. In line with this, contrary to the past where businesses that engaged in tourism activities were the only source of travel information, the development of the internet and social media platforms has created an environment whereby social media users produce equally important content about the destinations they have visited before. This implies that tourist destinations no longer have control over the content in the public domain concerning the quality and price of its products and/or services among other factors. Speaking from this perspective, this study established a number of factors concerning the tourists' use of social media in their travel research and planning.

To begin with, the study established that social media plays an instrumental role in improving the process of travel plans among its users. In particular, social media platforms provided their users with critical information and data that helped them make critical decisions concerning the destinations they intended to visit. This also includes the optimization of destinations in order to establish the best combinations of destinations that tourists can visit at affordable prices. Furthermore, the social media users reported that since these platforms were easy to learn to use, it was not only easier to search of contents on these platforms but it was also easier for users to share the content they had concerning different destinations. Importantly, the study identified a number of factors that contributes to the increasing use of social media platforms as critical sources of travel information for these users. Among these include dependability, reliability, honesty, sincerity and trustworthiness of these platforms. With this in mind, there are a number of recommendations this study made as far as the role of social media in the tourism sector is concerned.

To begin with, this study recommends that tourist destinations need to create a brand image that is trustworthy not only on the physical premises but also on social media platforms. In this regard, these destinations need to constantly improve their actual products and/or services. Similarly, they need to constantly engage social media users to create a positive among these users. As a result, both the existing

and potential tourists will share positive content on these destinations and as such, improve their profile on the market as destinations of choice.

Similarly, there is a need for the destinations to create a rapport with their target consumers through creation of a platform where such destinations and their target consumers perceive each other as equals. This will create an opportunity for destinations to share their content with the target consumers with ease. Furthermore, creating such a relationship will help these destinations to learn about their strengths and weaknesses, thus creating room for improvement. In addition, these destinations will be able to address the complaints that arise from consumers who have visited them before, thus enabling them to maintain a positive brand image on social media.

Lastly, there are a number of areas that need further studies. To begin with, there is a need to conduct further studies to establish the link between age/gender and the use of social media as critical sources of information when consumers are engaged in travel research and planning. This will help the destinations to develop appropriate content to target different consumer demographics. In addition, there is a need to conduct a study to determine the kind of information that consumers search when engaged in travel research and planning. This will help enhance the destinations' ability to develop appropriate content that meets the needs of these consumers even before they make the travel to the destination(s) of their choice.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

The role of social media in the tourism industry in Austria (How does Austria implement the social media to attract tourists?)

This questionnaire helped collect the much needed data in order to respond to the topic “The role of social media in the tourism industry in Austria (How does Austria implement the social media to attract tourists?)”

1. Have you used Facebook or Twitter within the past 6 months?

Answer Choices	Responses
YES	
NO	
TOTAL	

2. Have you used social media platforms to search for travel related information (accommodation, destination, transportation, etc.) within the last 12 months?

Answer Choices	Responses
YES	
NO	

TOTAL	
--------------	--

3. Social media platforms help me improve my travel plans.

Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	
Moderately Disagree	
Slightly Disagree	
Neutral	
Slightly Agree	
Moderately Agree	
Strongly Agree	
TOTAL	

4. Social media platforms help me to plan my trips more efficiently.

Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	
Moderately Disagree	

Slightly Disagree	
Neutral	
Slightly Agree	
Moderately Agree	
Strongly Agree	
TOTAL	

5. Social media platforms make my travel planning easier.

Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	
Moderately Disagree	
Slightly Disagree	
Neutral	
Slightly Agree	
Moderately Agree	
Strongly Agree	
TOTAL	

6. Social media platforms make it easier for me to reach travel related decisions.

Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	
Moderately Disagree	
Slightly Disagree	
Neutral	
Slightly Agree	
Moderately Agree	
Strongly Agree	
TOTAL	

7. Overall, I find social media platforms useful for travel planning.

Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	
Moderately Disagree	
Slightly Disagree	

Neutral	
Slightly Agree	
Moderately Agree	
Strongly Agree	
TOTAL	

8. It is easy to learn how to use social media platforms.

Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	
Moderately Disagree	
Slightly Disagree	
Neutral	
Slightly Agree	
Moderately Agree	
Strongly Agree	
TOTAL	

9. Overall, I find social media platforms easy to use.

Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	
Moderately Disagree	
Slightly Disagree	
Neutral	
Slightly Agree	
Moderately Agree	
Strongly Agree	
TOTAL	

10. I hesitate to visit social media platforms for travel information.

Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	
Moderately Disagree	
Slightly Disagree	
Neutral	
Slightly Agree	

Moderately Agree	
Strongly Agree	
TOTAL	

11. I wish to use advice from social media platforms.

Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	
Moderately Disagree	
Slightly Disagree	
Neutral	
Slightly Agree	
Moderately Agree	
Strongly Agree	
TOTAL	

12. I expect to use the content of social media platforms to plan my future trips.

Answer Choices	Responses

Strongly Disagree	
Moderately Disagree	
Slightly Disagree	
Neutral	
Slightly Agree	
Moderately Agree	
Strongly Agree	
TOTAL	

13. I make changes to all or parts of existing travel plans after using the content of social media platforms.

Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	
Moderately Disagree	
Slightly Disagree	
Neutral	
Slightly Agree	

Moderately Agree	
Strongly Agree	
TOTAL	

14. I intend to use the content of social media platforms for my travel planning process.

Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	
Moderately Disagree	
Slightly Disagree	
Neutral	
Slightly Agree	
Moderately Agree	
Strongly Agree	
TOTAL	

15. They are dependable.

Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	
Moderately Disagree	
Slightly Disagree	
Neutral	
Slightly Agree	
Moderately Agree	
Strongly Agree	
TOTAL	

16. They are honest.

Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	
Moderately Disagree	
Slightly Disagree	
Neutral	
Slightly Agree	

Moderately Agree	
Strongly Agree	
TOTAL	

17. They are reliable.

Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	
Moderately Disagree	
Slightly Disagree	
Neutral	
Slightly Agree	
Moderately Agree	
Strongly Agree	
TOTAL	

18. They are sincere.

Answer Choices	Responses

Strongly Disagree	
Moderately Disagree	
Slightly Disagree	
Neutral	
Slightly Agree	
Moderately Agree	
Strongly Agree	
TOTAL	

19. They are trustworthy.

Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	
Moderately Disagree	
Slightly Disagree	
Neutral	
Slightly Agree	
Moderately Agree	

Strongly Agree	
TOTAL	

20. Are you a tourist here in Austria?

Answer Choices	Responses
YES	
NO	
TOTAL	

21. What is your gender?

Answer Choices	Responses
Male	
Female	
TOTAL	

22. What is your age?

Answer Choices	Responses

16 – 25	
25 – 50	
>50	
TOTAL	

23. Are you a member of a social networking platform?

Answer Choices	Responses
YES	
NO	
TOTAL	

24. Which social media platforms do you use?

Answer Choices	Responses
Facebook	
Google+	
Twitter	
Flickr	

Other	
None	
TOTAL	

25. Where did you find information about your destination?

Answer Choices	Responses
Tourism agencies	
Social media platforms/websites	
Word of mouth	
Other	
TOTAL	

26. Did you use Austrian tourist websites decide on your trip?

Answer Choices	Responses
YES	
NO	
TOTAL	

27. How much did the social media platforms influence your travel decision?

Answer Choices	Responses
Very much	
Moderately	
Neutral	
TOTAL	

28. How important are reviews to you?

Answer Choices	Responses
Very much	
Moderately	
Neutral	
TOTAL	

29. Where do you read destination reviews?

Answer Choices	Responses
TripAdvisor	

Booking.com	
Responsibletravel.com	
Online social communities	
Other	
TOTAL	

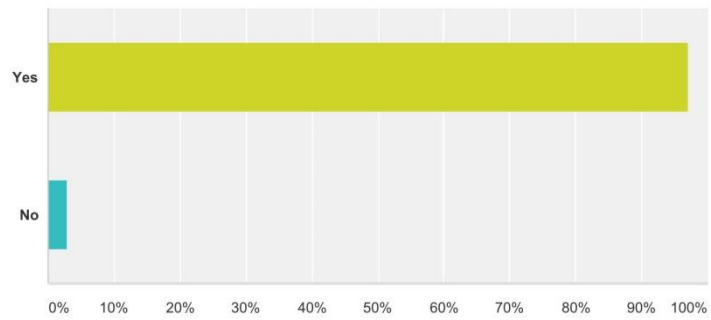
Appendix 2: Questionnaire Results

Social Media in Austrian Tourism Industry

SurveyMonkey

Q1 Have you used Facebook or Twitter within the past 6 months?

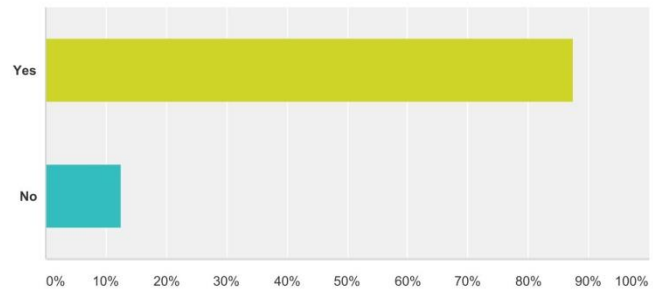
Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	97.12% 101
No	2.88% 3
Total	104

Q2 Have you used social media platforms to search for travel related information (accommodation, destination, transportation, etc.) within the last 12 months?

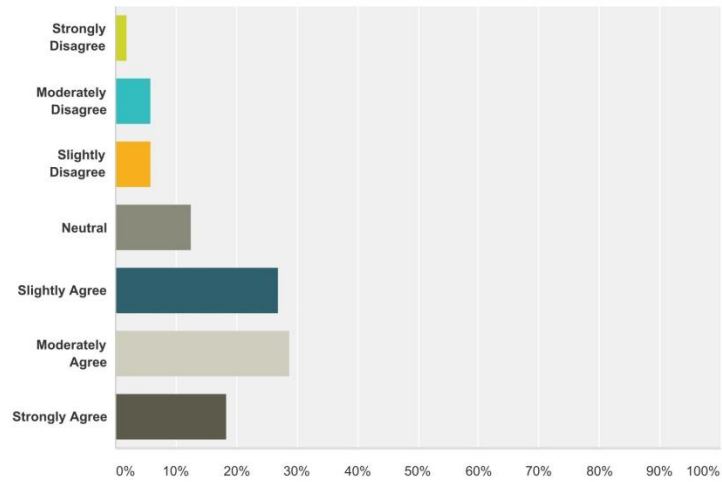
Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	87.50%	91
No	12.50%	13
Total		104

Q3 Social media platforms help me improve my travel plans.

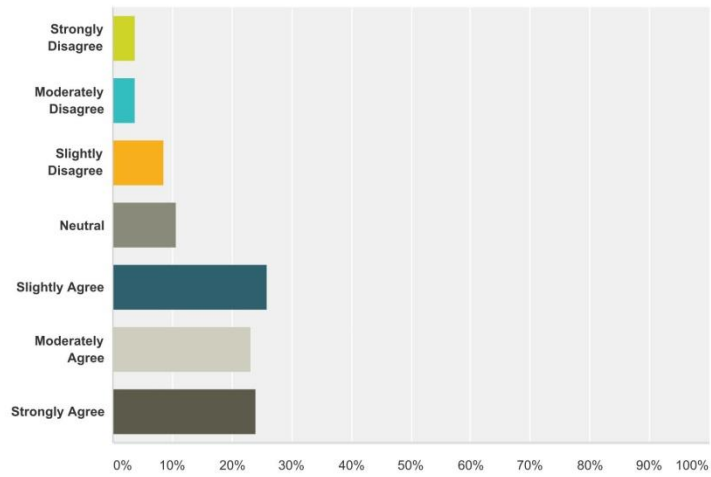
Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	1.92%	2
Moderately Disagree	5.77%	6
Slightly Disagree	5.77%	6
Neutral	12.50%	13
Slightly Agree	26.92%	28
Moderately Agree	28.85%	30
Strongly Agree	18.27%	19
Total		104

Q4 Social media platforms help me to plan my trips more efficiently.

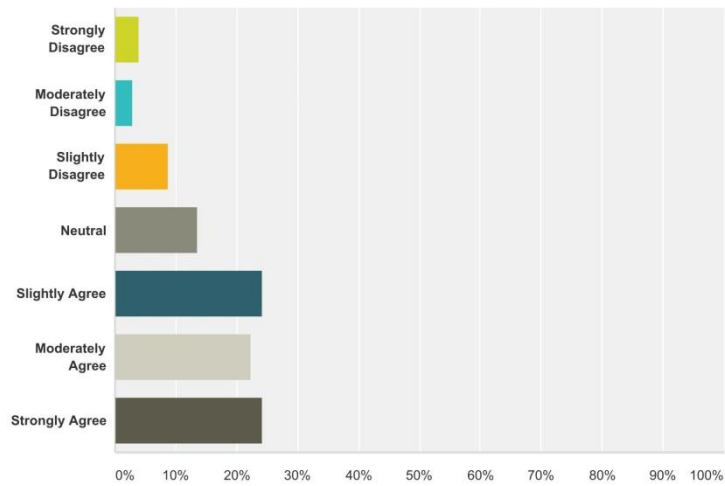
Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	3.85% 4
Moderately Disagree	3.85% 4
Slightly Disagree	8.65% 9
Neutral	10.58% 11
Slightly Agree	25.96% 27
Moderately Agree	23.08% 24
Strongly Agree	24.04% 25
Total	104

Q5 Social media platforms make my travel planning easier.

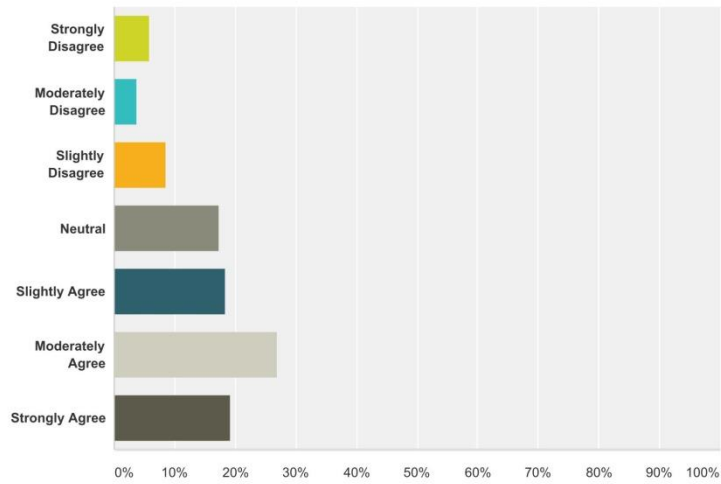
Answered: 103 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	3.88%	4
Moderately Disagree	2.91%	3
Slightly Disagree	8.74%	9
Neutral	13.59%	14
Slightly Agree	24.27%	25
Moderately Agree	22.33%	23
Strongly Agree	24.27%	25
Total		103

Q6 Social media platforms make it easier for me to reach travel related decisions.

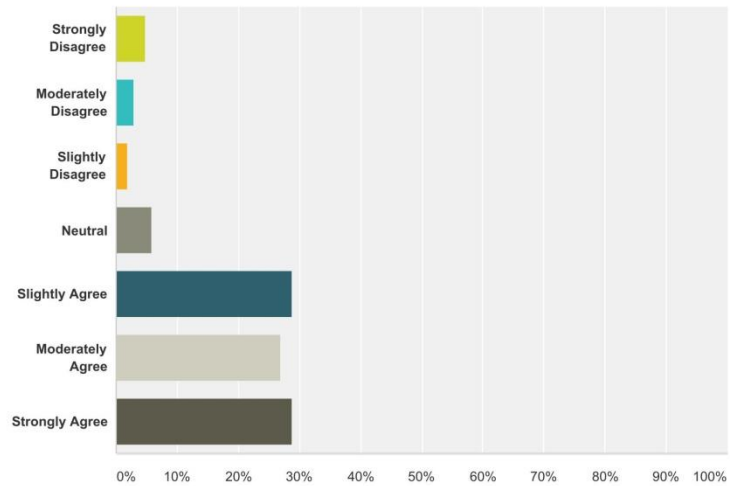
Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	5.77% 6
Moderately Disagree	3.85% 4
Slightly Disagree	8.65% 9
Neutral	17.31% 18
Slightly Agree	18.27% 19
Moderately Agree	26.92% 28
Strongly Agree	19.23% 20
Total	104

Q7 Overall, I find social media platforms useful for travel planning.

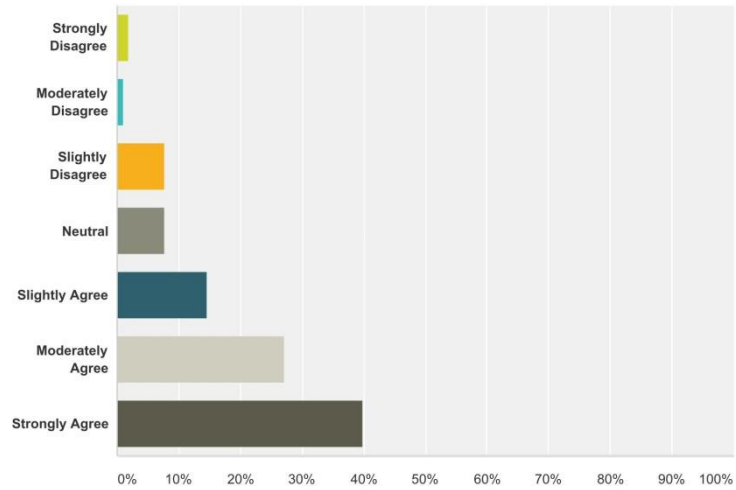
Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	4.81%	5
Moderately Disagree	2.88%	3
Slightly Disagree	1.92%	2
Neutral	5.77%	6
Slightly Agree	28.85%	30
Moderately Agree	26.92%	28
Strongly Agree	28.85%	30
Total		104

Q8 It is easy to learn how to use social media platforms.

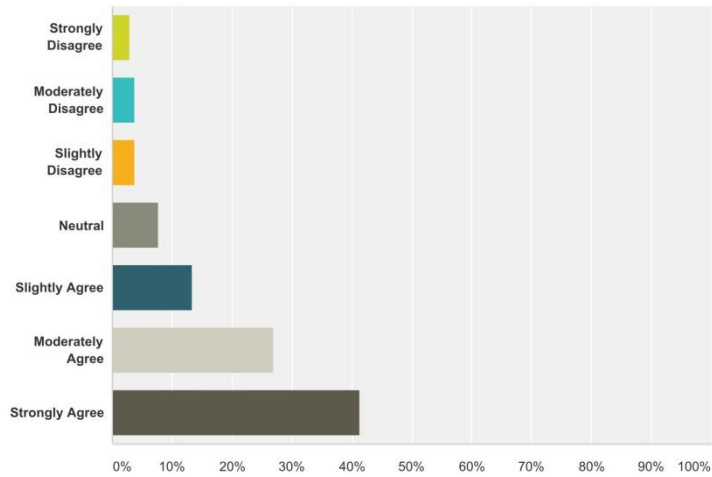
Answered: 103 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Strongly Disagree	1.94%	2
Moderately Disagree	0.97%	1
Slightly Disagree	7.77%	8
Neutral	7.77%	8
Slightly Agree	14.56%	15
Moderately Agree	27.18%	28
Strongly Agree	39.81%	41
Total		103

Q9 Overall, I find social media platforms easy to use.

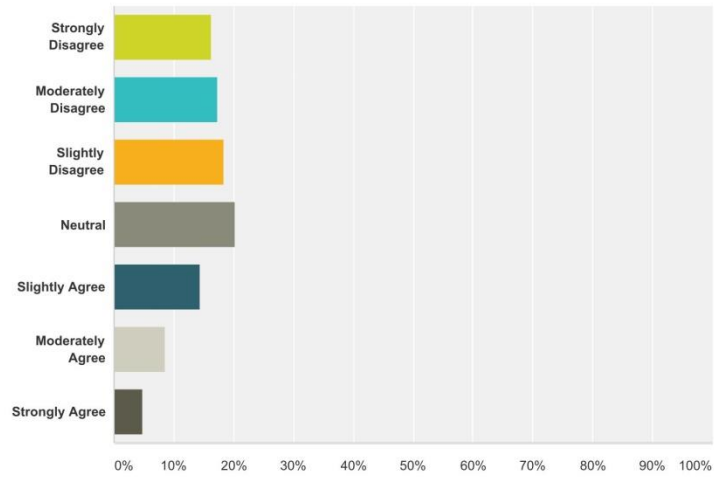
Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	2.88%	3
Moderately Disagree	3.85%	4
Slightly Disagree	3.85%	4
Neutral	7.69%	8
Slightly Agree	13.46%	14
Moderately Agree	26.92%	28
Strongly Agree	41.35%	43
Total		104

Q10 I hesitate to visit social media platforms for travel information.

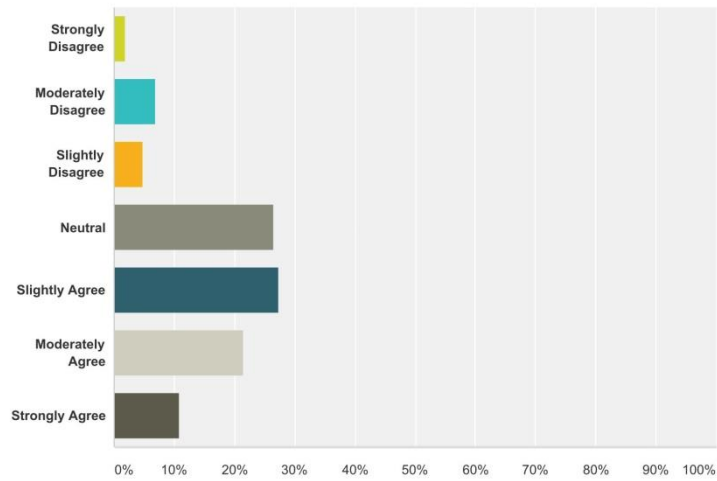
Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	16.35% 17
Moderately Disagree	17.31% 18
Slightly Disagree	18.27% 19
Neutral	20.19% 21
Slightly Agree	14.42% 15
Moderately Agree	8.65% 9
Strongly Agree	4.81% 5
Total	104

Q11 I wish to use advice from social media platforms.

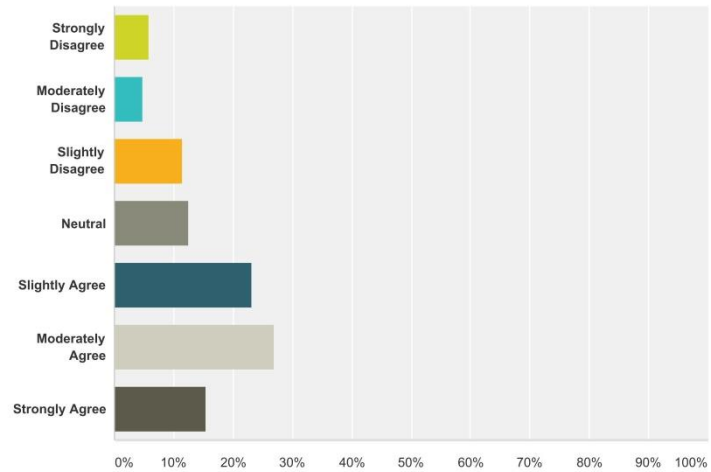
Answered: 102 Skipped: 2



Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	1.96% 2
Moderately Disagree	6.86% 7
Slightly Disagree	4.90% 5
Neutral	26.47% 27
Slightly Agree	27.45% 28
Moderately Agree	21.57% 22
Strongly Agree	10.78% 11
Total	102

Q12 I expect to use the content of social media platforms to plan my future trips.

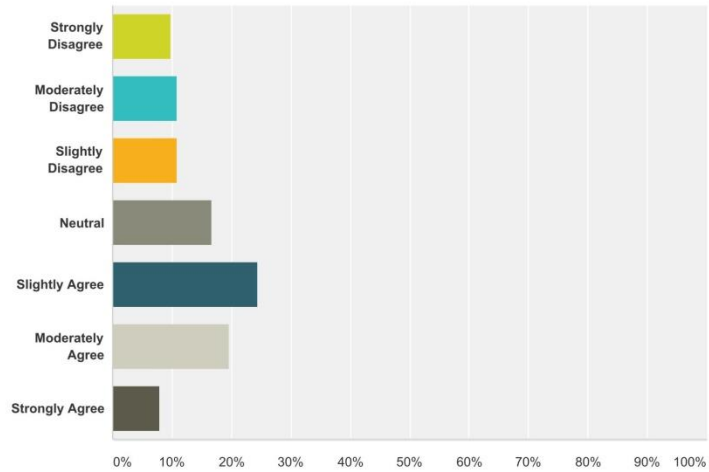
Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	5.77%	6
Moderately Disagree	4.81%	5
Slightly Disagree	11.54%	12
Neutral	12.50%	13
Slightly Agree	23.08%	24
Moderately Agree	26.92%	28
Strongly Agree	15.38%	16
Total		104

Q13 I make changes to all or parts of existing travel plans after using the content of social media platforms.

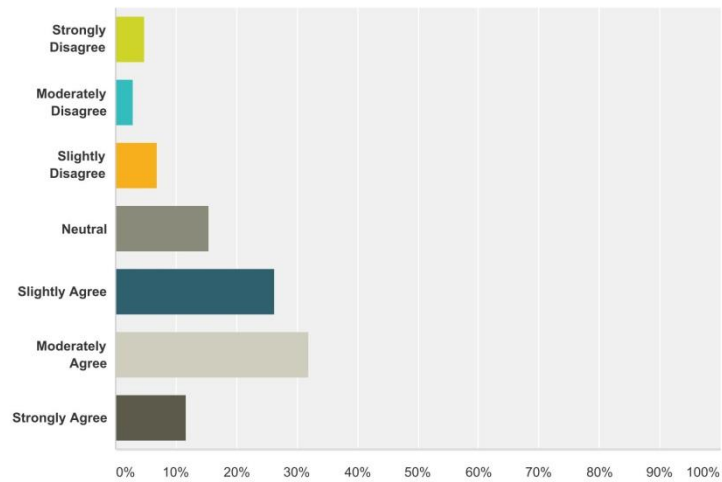
Answered: 102 Skipped: 2



Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	9.80%	10
Moderately Disagree	10.78%	11
Slightly Disagree	10.78%	11
Neutral	16.67%	17
Slightly Agree	24.51%	25
Moderately Agree	19.61%	20
Strongly Agree	7.84%	8
Total		102

Q14 I intend to use the content of social media platforms for my travel planning process.

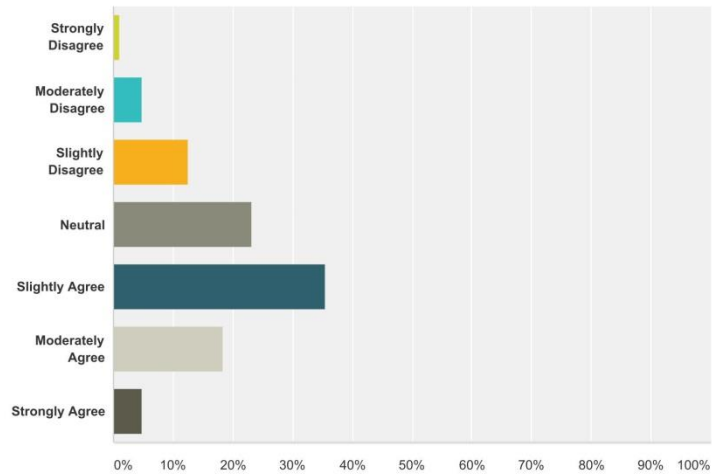
Answered: 103 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	4.85% 5
Moderately Disagree	2.91% 3
Slightly Disagree	6.80% 7
Neutral	15.53% 16
Slightly Agree	26.21% 27
Moderately Agree	32.04% 33
Strongly Agree	11.65% 12
Total	103

Q15 They are dependable.

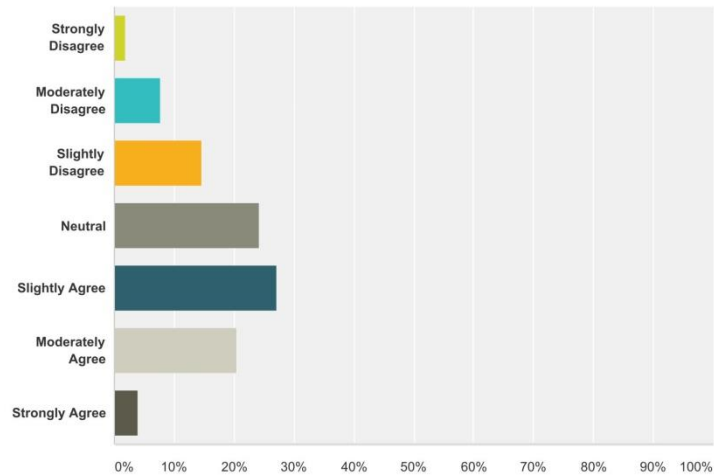
Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	0.96%	1
Moderately Disagree	4.81%	5
Slightly Disagree	12.50%	13
Neutral	23.08%	24
Slightly Agree	35.58%	37
Moderately Agree	18.27%	19
Strongly Agree	4.81%	5
Total		104

Q16 They are honest.

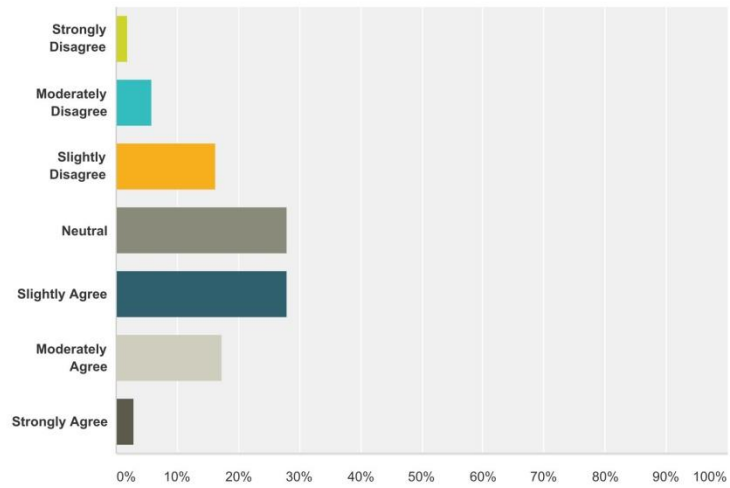
Answered: 103 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	1.94%	2
Moderately Disagree	7.77%	8
Slightly Disagree	14.56%	15
Neutral	24.27%	25
Slightly Agree	27.18%	28
Moderately Agree	20.39%	21
Strongly Agree	3.88%	4
Total		103

Q17 They are reliable.

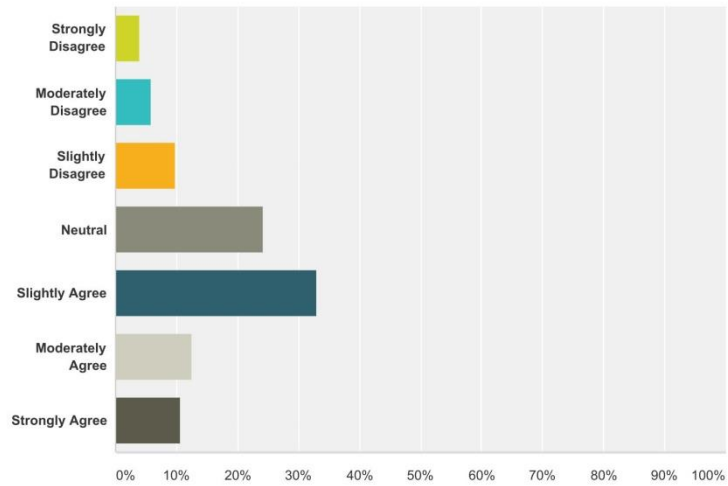
Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	1.92%	2
Moderately Disagree	5.77%	6
Slightly Disagree	16.35%	17
Neutral	27.88%	29
Slightly Agree	27.88%	29
Moderately Agree	17.31%	18
Strongly Agree	2.88%	3
Total		104

Q18 They are sincere.

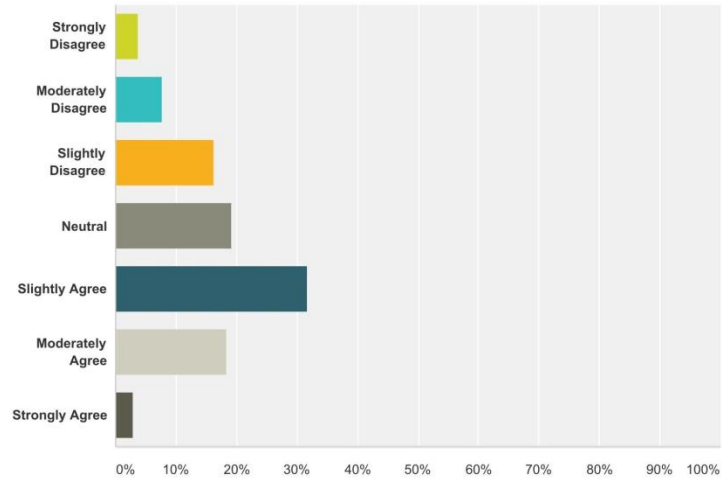
Answered: 103 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	3.88%	4
Moderately Disagree	5.83%	6
Slightly Disagree	9.71%	10
Neutral	24.27%	25
Slightly Agree	33.01%	34
Moderately Agree	12.62%	13
Strongly Agree	10.68%	11
Total		103

Q19 They are trustworthy.

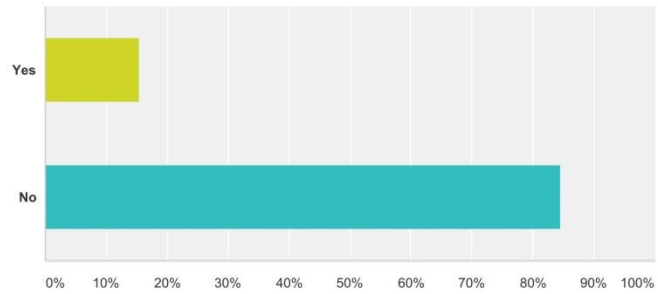
Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Strongly Disagree	3.85%	4
Moderately Disagree	7.69%	8
Slightly Disagree	16.35%	17
Neutral	19.23%	20
Slightly Agree	31.73%	33
Moderately Agree	18.27%	19
Strongly Agree	2.88%	3
Total		104

Q20 Are you a tourist here in Austria?

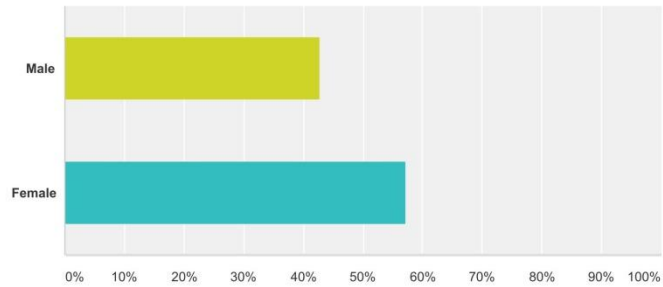
Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	15.38%	16
No	84.62%	88
Total		104

Q21 What is your gender?

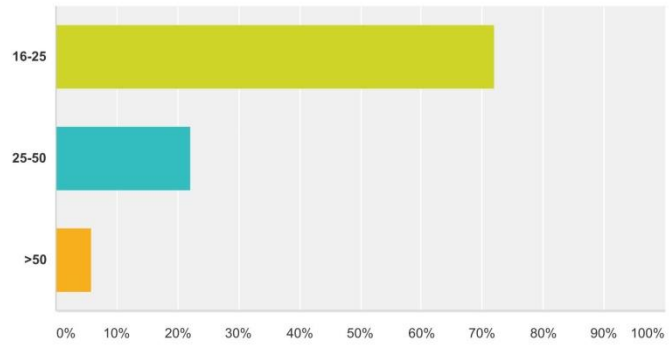
Answered: 103 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses	
Male	42.72%	44
Female	57.28%	59
Total		103

Q22 What is your age?

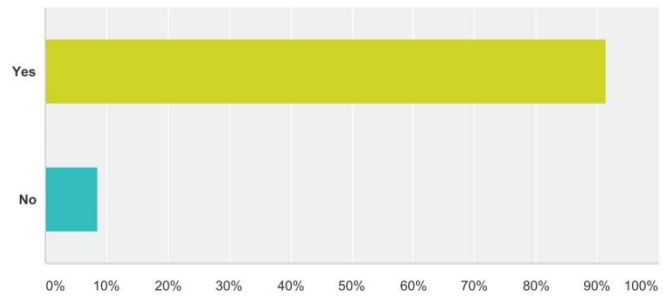
Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
16-25	72.12%	75
25-50	22.12%	23
>50	5.77%	6
Total		104

Q23 Are you a member of a social networking platform?

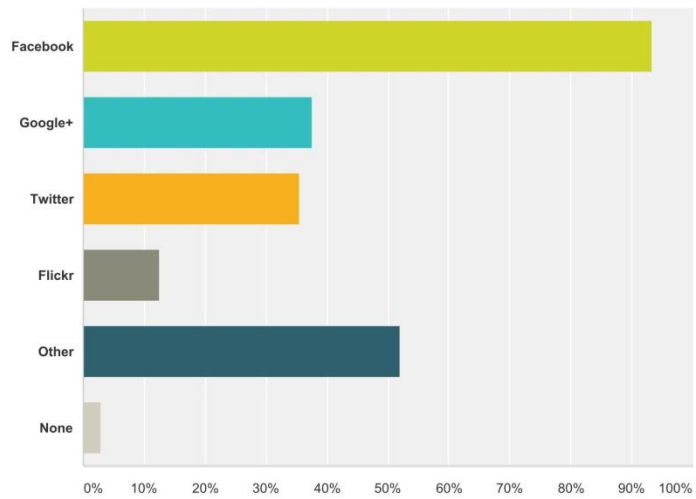
Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	91.35% 95
No	8.65% 9
Total	104

Q24 Which social media platforms do you use?

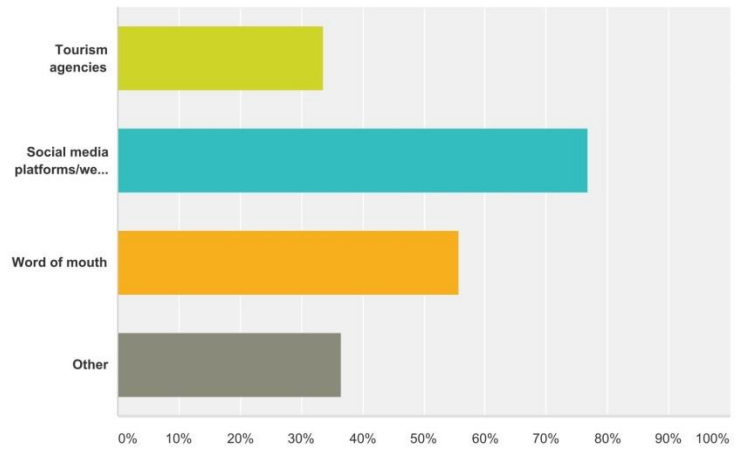
Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Facebook	93.27%	97
Google+	37.50%	39
Twitter	35.58%	37
Flickr	12.50%	13
Other	51.92%	54
None	2.88%	3
Total Respondents: 104		

Q25 Where did you find information about your destination?

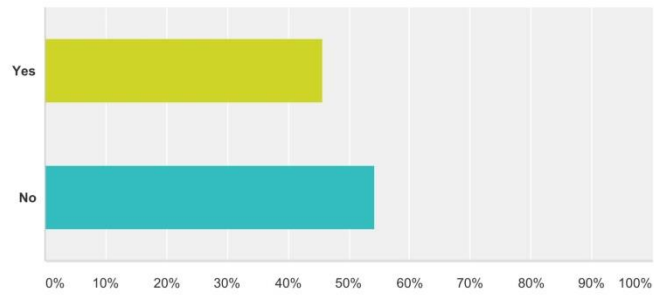
Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Tourism agencies	33.65%	35
Social media platforms/websites	76.92%	80
Word of mouth	55.77%	58
Other	36.54%	38
Total Respondents: 104		

**Q26 Did you use Austrian tourist websites
 decide on your trip?**

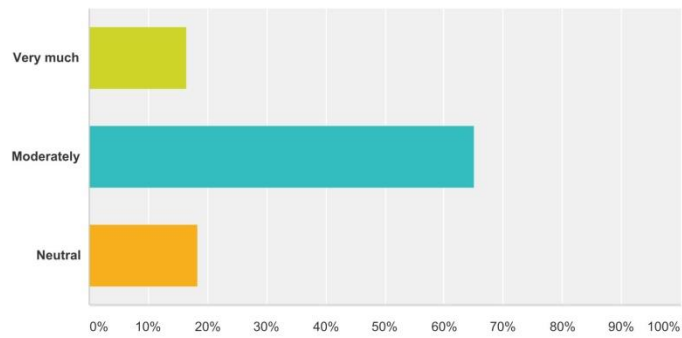
Answered: 103 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	45.63%	47
No	54.37%	56
Total		103

Q27 How much did the social media platforms influence your travel decision?

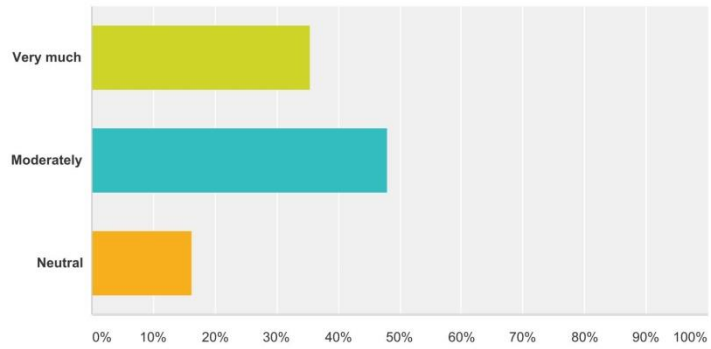
Answered: 103 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses
Very much	16.50% 17
Moderately	65.05% 67
Neutral	18.45% 19
Total	103

Q28 How important are reviews to you?

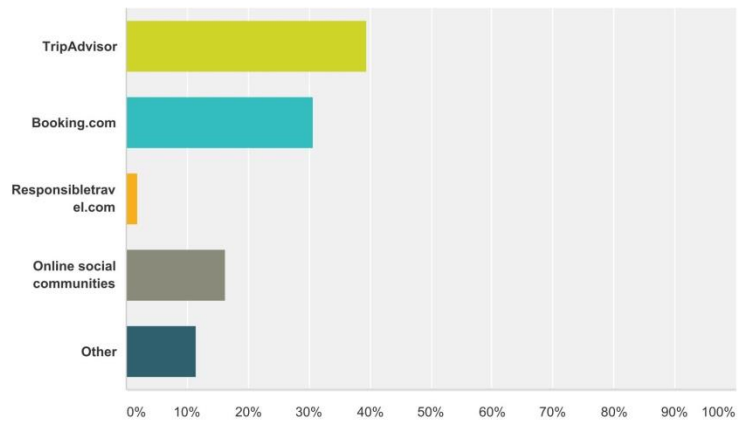
Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Very much	35.58% 37
Moderately	48.08% 50
Neutral	16.35% 17
Total	104

Q29 Where do you read destination reviews?

Answered: 104 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
TripAdvisor	39.42%	41
Booking.com	30.77%	32
Responsibletravel.com	1.92%	2
Online social communities	16.35%	17
Other	11.54%	12
Total		104