The impact of culture on the use of social media in travel destination search

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyze the relation between culture , social media and travel destination to better comprehend how they are linked and how they might influence one another . So the main question of the paper is : " How does culture impact the use of social media in travel destination search ?" Chaimaa Bendahou. The tourist decision process is complex and multifaceted tourism products are typically high-involvement products which generate substantial information search activity before consumers commit to a final choice . The information search in the area of social media is very different then what is was before due to the different information sources available This information search operation is evidently affected by culture , the question is how? To answer this question we will start by presenting the background and context of the study along with the factors that motivated the choice of this theme and it's implication on the theoretical and managerial level .Then we will present the problem of the research and the research questions followed by an overview of the literature concerning travel decision making , the use of social media in choosing a travel destination and the role of culture. And finally the paper puts forth a research model to examine the cultural influence on social networking and its influence on travel destination choice.

Keywords: *culture , social media and travel destination*

1. Introduction

Since its first introduction in the early nineties the internet has created a dramatic shift in every aspect of daily life, especially in consumer behavior . Information has become more accessible, making consumers more aware of the different options of products and services available and easily comparing prices to make the ultimate choice . The internet has indeed put the power in the hands of the consumer , and what made the consumers even more powerful is social media.

Social media have not only transformed the research and purchase consideration phase, but it also provides shoppers a platform to advocate for the products and services they love. Advocacy has always existed, but social networking has made this stage even more critical, amplifying the size of the audience reached (Swedowsky, 2009). The internet has become one of the most important communication channels in the world and growing internet usage is motivating some changes in the consumer purchasing process (Casalo et al.,2007). Consumers are increasingly turning to social networks in order to get information on which to base their decisions (Kozinets, 2002).

Social media took the communication and interaction process to a new different level . It created a new way of consumption due to the greater availability of information from different sources : blogs , podcasts, videos , in addition to the information shared on Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and other social media sites . Consumers use these sources to share ideas about different products, services or brands and contact other consumers, who are seen as more objective information sources (Kozinets, 2002). This consumer-generated-media can be defined as any positive or negative statement about a product or service made by potential, actual, or former customers, which is available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet (Stauss, 2000).

The intensive use of social media has deeply influenced not only the shopping experience but also culture . Technology is, to a considerable extent, socially and culturally constructed (Schwarz and Thompson, 1990) and cannot be separated from human beings (Hendriks and Zouridis, 1999). Culture influences lifestyle, and lifestyle influences the way individuals communicate and interact with new media technologies (Brandtzæg, 2010). Online social networks have become a cultural phenomenon. Social networks, such as Facebook and twitter have witnessed a rapid growth in their membership, and with the increase in popularity of social networking websites, it is safe to say that the world is becoming ''smaller'' and people are now interconnected more than ever creating a new culture of "sharing".

Since Culture shapes behavior, it shapes the way people think and act and it also impacts the way people use the internet and social media for both communication and decision making . One of the most important and time consuming decisions the consumers makes is choosing a travel destination . Tourism products are typically high-involvement products which generate substantial information search before consumers commit to a final choice (Thill,1992) . How do consumers conduct the search is directly influenced by their culture . According to Money & Crotts (2003) cultural factors do influence tourists' decision-making process in several aspects such as information search or travel purchase behavior . The aim of this article is to understand how do cultural factors influence the consumer's use of social media in one of the most important decision making tasks : Choosing a travel destination .

we will start by presenting the background and context of the study along with the factors that motivated the choice of this theme and its implications on the theoretical and managerial level .Then we will present the research problem and the research question followed by an overview of the literature concerning travel decision making , the use of social media in choosing a travel

destination and the role of culture. And finally the paper puts forth a research model to examine the cultural influence on social networking and its influence on travel destination choice .

2. Context and implications of the study :

Recent studies have tackled the issue of social media use around a variety of contexts including consumer behavior and more specifically travel decision making . Musser et al (2007) along with Jacobsen and Munar (2013) investigated the impact of the Web2.0 on the tourists' information search process . Others like Tseng and Morrison (2014) have been more interested in the Electronic Word Of Mouth or travel blogs as a means of destination image formation . However none have directly related this process to culture .

Although several studies on tourists information search for destination choice have been conducted there is little theoretical and empirical work available that includes culture and it's possible impacts on the use of social media in the destination choice process. The process of choosing a travel destination is very complex with many influencing factors. Understanding the role culture plays in social media use in travel destination search is a fundamental issue from both an academic and destination management point of view since most previous studies analyzing travel decisions concentrate either on the outcome of the destination choice following a microeconomic input-output approach (e.g Papatheodorou,2001;Seddighi & Theocharous, 2002) or on internal and external influencing factors .Almost none have integrated the three variables : culture , social media and travel destination into one study . This study can also help marketers develop culture specific strategies to increase the destinations' success in the tourism market .

The central question of this research is :

"How does culture impact the use of social media in travel destination choice ?"

To answer this question we need to explore the previous research that has been done before and present the main and important theories concerning travel destination , social media and culture.

3. Literature review

Travel destination choice

With a long planning period and high personal involvement . Destination choice is a core decision in the travel decision-making process and on the highest hierarchical order of the three kinds of travel decisions (core, secondary and en route decisions(Fesenmaier & Jeng ,2000) . According to Dellaert, Etterma , and Lindh (1998), tourists' decisions are complex decisions in which the choices for different elements are interrelated and evolve in a decision process over time . The tourist's decision making process is complex and multifaceted and comprises a number of elements : whether to travel , where to travel and what to do , when to

travel , with whom to travel , how long to stay and how much to spend (Dellaert, Ettema,& Lindh, 1998; Hyde, 2008; Seddighi & Theocharous, 2002; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989; Woodside & MacDonald, 1994). Let's start by where to travel and what is meant by a " destination" :

The concept of destination

Before stating the different models and the theoretical background concerning the travel destination we should first start by defining what is a destination . Tourism literature often leaves undefined what is meant by "destination"(Pearce,2014) ,From a tourism marketing perspective a destination is assumed to consist of a named geographical location . However it can also refer to a particular set of activities that constitute a particular tourism experience (cf. Pearce,2014). Other researchers viewed destination as a product or a brand (Kozak,2002 ; Mclntoch & Goeldner , 1990 ;Yoon & Uysal, 2005) . Van Raaij (1986) considered the travel destination as a product that is both "given" and "man-made" .   The " given" part concerns natural features of tourist destinations such as climate , scenery, beaches, mountains, historic culture buildings and so forth . Whereas the "man-made" part refers to features such as hotels , package tours, transportation facilities . Kim(1998:340) stated that ***"A destination can be viewed as a uniquely complex product of the tourism industry comprising, among other factors, an area's climate, infrastructure and superstructure, services, and natural and cultural attributes. Despite this complexity, it is nevertheless a product"***. Another interesting definition was given by Buhalis(2000) ;   he viewed destination as a specific geographical region which is understood by its visitors as a unique entity, with a political and legislative framework for tourism marketing and planning; destinations offer an amalgam of tourism products and services , which are subsumed under the brand name of destination . The conceptualization of destination choice in terms of the choice of a geographical location has received significant attention in the tourism literature . Indeed , there is a wealth of research examining specific aspects of why and how a tourist chooses a particular holiday destination location . The research has addressed aspects such as destination image *(Baloglu & McCleary,1999; Hong, Kim & Lee, 2006)*, destination loyalty and attachment *(Alegre & Cladera, 2006; Hong, Lee, Lee, & Jang, 2009)*, the role of hedonic experience, novelty and fantasy *(Bello & Etzel, 1985; King, 2002)*, cognitive distance *(Nicolau & Mas, 2006),* behavioral intentions *(Lam & Hsu, 2006), and the effects* of destination attributes on destination choice *(Ewing & Haider, 1999; Huybers, 2003; Morley, 1994).*

Travel motivations :

Understanding what elements or factors influence people's choice of a travel destination is of a paramount importance . Nationality , culture, age , income , gender , motivations , etc., are all factors that affect the choice of a travel destination . One of the most important factors and that has been an interesting area of research in tourism literature for decades is travel motivations . As motivation is a dynamic concept , it may vary from one destination to another , from one market segment to another , as well as from one decision making process to the next (Uysal & Hagan, 1993) .

A plethora of studies has investigated how different types of travel motivations affect travel destination selection (Crompton, 1979 ; Cha, McCleary,& Uysal, 1995 ;Yoon& Uysal , 2005 ; Keating & Kriz, 2008; Kim ,2008) . However the most popular typology for understanding travel motivation is the "push" and "pull" model by Crompton (1979) .

The push motivations explain the desire to travel while the pull motivations explain the actual choice of destination .Crompton drew seven socio-psychological or "push" motivations : escape, self-exploration, relaxation , prestige, regression, kinship-enhancement and social interaction ,and two cultural or "pull" motivations : novelty and education. Uysal and Jurowski (1994) summarized internal (push) and external (pull) motivators to travel. Internal motivators include desire for escape, rest, relaxation, prestige, health and fitness, adventure, and social interaction. External motivators were based on attractiveness of the destination, including tangible resources (beaches, recreational activities, and cultural attractions), and travelers' perceptions and expectations (novelty, benefit expectations, and marketing image). In more recent studies, researchers have added shopping as a motivational characteristic of the destination (Hanqin & Lam,1999; Sirakaya, Uysal, & Yoshioka, 2003). Oh, Uysal, and Weaver (1995) noted good shopping was considered as a pull item, an attribute of the destination. There are still other important factors such as destination image, food, and safety. Milman and Pizam (1995) pointed out that destination image is the visual or mental impression of a place held by the general public . These motivations have been further examined with regards to culture (You, O'Leary, Morrison, & Hong, 2000; Zhang et al., 2004; Kao, Patterson, Scott, & Li, 2008; Rittichainuwat, 2008). You et al. (2000) compared UK pleasure travelers with Japanese pleasure travelers, and found that UK travelers rated enhancing knowledge, visiting friends and relatives, being together as a family, finding excitement, and experiencing a new and different lifestyle higher than their Japanese counterparts. Japanese pleasure travelers, meanwhile, viewed relaxation as more important than travelers from the UK .

Destination choice :

The travel destination choice process has been conceptualized in the literature from four different perspectives . First , destination choice has been viewed as a cognitive process involving perception of stimuli, associating stimuli with needs, evaluating alternatives, and assessing whether expectations have been met (Assael 1984). Second, it has been perceived as a reasoned action determined by attitude about the action and by the influence of social groups (Ajzen and Fishbein; 1980) . Third, it has been viewed as an economic activity, where an alternative is selected that maximizes utility (Harris, Driver and Bergersen; 1985). Fourth, it has been perceived as leisure participation which is embedded in perceived competence and results in seeking destination attributes that are believed to offer optimal arousal (Iso-Aloha ; 1980) Extensive, complex and risky decisions, such as the purchase of a tourism service, occur in stages. While passing through these stages, the decision-maker is influenced by both functional and emotional elements (Mansfeld, 1992). For instance, the price of the tickets or the hotel and other relative costs might be considered a functional element, while promotional messages, family and friend influences, act as emotional elements. There are many elements

that integrate and contribute in the destination choice process. To further understand and explain how this process occurs both ''behavioral'' and ''choice-set'' approaches have been adopted .

Behavioral approaches suggest that tourists are motivated by a number of factors to collect information about different alternatives, that can potentially meet their needs . The future tourist assesses and eliminates these alternatives to reach a final decision (Mansfeld , 1992). Behavioral models, in general, assume that tourists are utilitarian decision-makers who can evaluate outside information to which they are exposed, search for additional information to make better decisions, create alternatives in their minds and make a final choice from those alternatives. The main purpose of behavioral models is to identify the decision stages the individual goes through and illustrate this process by identifying all the inside and outside factors that might influence this processes. On the other hand we have Choice-set models. These models attempt to illustrate the same process in a different way, while implicitly accepting the main assumptions of the behavioral models. The destination choice model (Crompton, 1992) examines the decision process and suggests that decisions are sequential in nature and are comprised of sets .

Set model :

Most of the studies on tourism and tourist's choices address the destination choice as the key element in the travel decision-making process . The decision making process is influenced by a number of internal and external variables (Tzu-kuang Hsu, Yi-Fan Tsai , Herg-Huey Wu, 2008) .

Sirakaya and woodside(2005) provided a comprehensive qualitative review of the tourist decision-making literature . Where they integrated the main conceptual and empirical work that has been reported in the tourism literature . According to their analysis, the destination choice set model developed by Um and Crompton (1990)is simpler and more theoretically and methodologically sound than other models in tourism decision search . This theory is most relevant for decisions that entail extensive information search , evaluation of alternatives , a certain level of perceived risk and high personal involvement (Spiggle & Sewall, 1987), criteria met by the destination choice process . According to the set theory , choosing a travel destination is a multistage process where numerous alternative destinations are reduced successively in a funnel-like manner (Sirakaya & woodside, 2005 ; Um and Crompton , 1990; Woodside &Lysonski,1989) .

Choice-set models have received substantial attention in the tourism decision-making literature because of their practical use for destination marketers . According to the theory , a potential traveler first develops a set of destinations from his/her early consideration or awareness set . The destinations are chosen from a large number of destination alternatives, comprising of all destinations available , which is also known as the "total set" . The number of alternatives is then reduced to shape his/her late consideration or evoked set . Finally , one resort is selected from the evoked set as the final choice (Sirakaya& woodside ;2004).
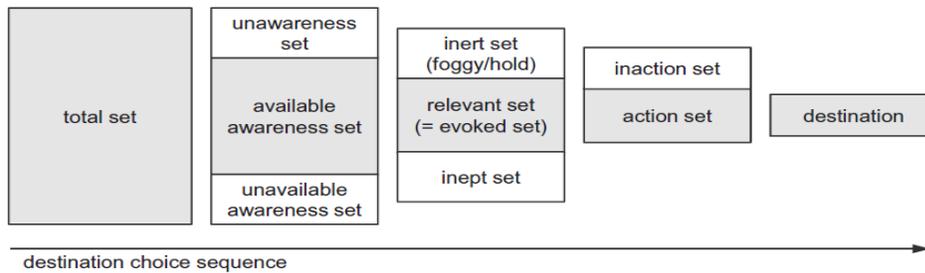
Fig 1: Choice Set Model Sirakaya & Woodside

The choice set approach in the destination choice process was initiated as an alternative and more practical perspective to behavioral approaches, which were generally criticized as being too complex and difficult to test empirically . Rather than being strong theoretical exercises, choice-set research seeks to bring to light more applicable results to destination choice behaviors (Sirakaya & woodside; 2004)

The first attempt to conceptualize choice sets for leisure travel was done by Woodside and Sherrel (1977) who introduced the " awareness-available" and the "awareness-unavailable" sets instead of a complete awareness set . The available set included the destinations , which the traveler believes he or she has the ability to visit during some period (i.e., a year) . Furthermore , they proposed that determining the available sets might be more reasonable because of the large number of destinations in the awareness set . Whereas Um and Crompton's approach which is considered much simpler asserts that destination selection is a three stage process including first the composition of awareness set, the evoked set , and the final destination selection, where the latter is a condensed form of the former . The awareness set of destinations in the potential traveler's mind is formed through passive information from the outside environment , whereas the evoked set emerges with the active information searching from internal sources including past experience , media , family, friends and others . The active choice process starts after the awareness set is developed with the influence of internal inputs that comprise the socio-psychological set of the traveler (i.e motives , values, attitudes). At this point , situational constraints play an important role before the traveler creates his / her evoked set .

The set theory is one of the most important theories in tourism decision making literature it has never the less been criticized . One criticism that can be levied against the choice set theory is that it may tend to be deterministic in nature (Ben-Akiva & Bruno; 1995) . It is true that the traditional choice set approach has been widely adopted in tourism and marketing and continues to be a useful method for pragmatic market research purposes. However , the idea that consumers at one point in time construct a list of destinations and start pruning this list to a manageable size in isolation from further market influences is an assumption that my not reflect reality (Hyde,2008; Prentice,2006). The limitation of that assumption is also pertinent given that consumers can go online almost any time to search for helpful information (Oppewal, Huybers, Crouch ; 2014), Where they may encounter or search new alternatives any time during

this process .Moreover, alternative selection and consideration set formation can also relate to attribute consideration , with different attributes possibly playing a different role at different stages of the decision process (Rewtrakunphaiboon& Oppewal,2008) . Finding new alternatives at any time during the process is made more and more easy due to the increasing use of social media . At this stage the most important question is : How does social media impact the travel destination search process ?

The role of social media in travel destination search :

Graham (2005) states that social media are anything where users can participate, create, and share content. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) distinguish the following social media: blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds. Social media also include forums, ratings, reviews, social networking sites, micro-blogging sites, pod-casts and video-casts and photo sharing sites (FPRM, 2009). In the last years, social media functionality was commonly incorporated into mobile applications. It is not the unique function of web anymore; Smartphones are becoming the most important social media devices.
The early research on travel destination choice is based on the assumption that potential travelers had limited knowledge about the attributes of a destination which they have not previously visited (Um and Crompton ,1990). Nowadays with the extensive use of internet the travel destination research process had dramatically changed .New technologies and social media created a deep shift in people's lives . Individuals are now more connected they have more access to information, everything they need or want to know is just a click away. This abundance of information has an impact on the tourists' information search process .

Information search is a crucial phase in the tourist's travel destination choice process. There are a number of sources from which the tourist can gather information ; these sources can be both external and internal . Internal information is usually gathered from the latent cognitive system (e.g, Hansen, 1972) ; repeat visitors to a place may not always wish to collect additional information from external sources as they can rely on past experiences, while external information search seems typical for newcomers to a destination (Fodness &Munar , 1997). External search consists not only of collecting information from the marketplace but also from a variety of more or less independent or unbiased sources such as news media , guidebooks and acquaintances .

Another important source of external information is the internet or the information and communication technologies that have a considerable and increasing impact on several tourism aspects . From the supply of products to information search processes and consumption patterns (Jacobsen & Munar; 2011) . Tourism experiences and their preparations are progressively transformed by advances in communication technologies especially the social media sites .

The social media phenomenon such as facebook , Instagram or twitter and their possible influence on tourism resulted in diverse scholarly contributions , which are still predominantly of an exploratory character . For instance , it is indicated that there has been an increased use

of electronic word-of-mouth and other internet sources in tourist decision-making processes and travel purchase intentions in the first decade of the twenty-first century (Huang et al.,2010; Litvin et al., 2008) . Research has shown that individuals who use online travel services are more inclined to maintain positive attitudes Towards internet sources and thus use them more intensively (Morrison et al.,2001) they also have access to and make use of the immense amount of tourism information available through the internet. Particularly younger tourists who make intensive use of internet-based networks and they have thus been called the "Net Genaration"(Jacobsen & Munar ,2012) .

In consumer behaviour literature it is known that consumers engage in information search prior to purchase decisions in order to minimize risks . This search is particularly crucial in complex decisions like travel destination choice where the risks are high .Risk reduction is considered particularly crucial to non-routinized and extensive decisions regarding acquirement of expensive and complex products (such as holidays or travel), when people are strongly involved this decision making processes .There are different types of risks : monetary (wasting money), functional(not meeting requirements), physical(causing personal illness or injury), social(unfashionable or low status) and psychological (damaging self-esteem or engendering guilt) (Soloman,1992) .Roehl and Fesenmair(1992) found that psychological and time risks along with satisfaction and financial risks are the most frequent risks associated with pleasure travel . A typical assertion is that people will expand research efforts for as long as alleged benefits exceed perceived costs (Fodness & Murray, 1999, p225) . For that reason studies have suggested that electronic social media such as Facebook may be beneficial as a risk reduction and virtual selection mechanism , as consumers then assist each other in effectively making sense of information available on the web (Brogan & Smith, 2009; Qualman,2009) .

Social media have taken tourism and travel experiences to a new level. They enable visitors to communicate with not only the destinations but also with visitors who have recently visited that same destination . Using social media tourists can gather information first-hand from other tourists and make decisions about the travel. Information gathering is possible through blogging, experience sharing; story writing that can be published on personal internet site of other people who have experienced the destination, so that the information is based on opinion and perceived authentic experience (Kiralova & Pavliceka ; 2014).

To better explain how the explosion of social media use has effected the travel decision choice process we need to put this phenomena in the appropriate theoretical context that describes the complex and dynamic relationships between social media use and decision making .

A number of models attempted to explain the social networking phenomena from different aspects one of these models is the Curran & Lennon model

Curran & Lennon (2011) developed a model explaining social networking behaviors based on users' antecedent beliefs about social networks and their attitudes toward social networks. They identify five antecedent beliefs, briefly described below.

- *Ease of use* :Does using social networks require effort on the part of the user?

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- *Usefulness* :Do social networks improve the way users complete networking tasks?
- *Enjoyment* : Are social networks fun, pleasurable, or entertaining?
- *Social influence* : Does social influence contribute to the use of social networks?
- *Drama* : Do emotional interactions on social networks affect users?

The model was developed by Curran and Lennon (2011) to provide a framework for examining factors influencing consumer usage of social networks. They drew upon the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen 1975), Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen 1991), and Composite Model of Attitude Behavior Relations (Eagly & Chaiken 1996). This model illustrates how beliefs are expected to influence a user's attitude toward a social network and how that attitude is expected to influence the user's intentions to engage in different social networking behaviors.

The use of social media for information search purposes differs according to many elements one of which is culture . According to Money & Crotts (2003) cultural factors influence tourist's decision making processes in several aspects such as information search or travel purchase behavior . That is why studying the impact of culture on social media use in travel destination search is of a paramount importance .

Culture and travel destination search :

As the title of Graig , Greene, and Douglas (2005) indicates, "Culture matters". It has a profound influence on all aspects of consumers behavior. Researchers are increasingly recognizing the role of culture as a source of variation in many phenomena of central importance to consumer research including travel destination choice .

According to Shavitt et al (2008,p1103) culture includes " shared elements that provide standards for perceiving , believing, evaluating, communicating and acting among those who share a language a historical period and a geographical location" . Markus and Kitayama (2010, p. 422) further contend that "***the word culture is a stand-in for a similarly untidy and expansive set of material and symbolic concepts … that give form and direction to behavior [and that] culture is located in the world, in patterns of ideas, practices, institutions, products, and artifacts.***" These widely accepted definitions incorporate factors that are both external to people, such as societal values or similar cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1991, 2001; Schwartz, 1992; Soares, Farhangmehr, & Shoham, 2006), social practices (Nisbett & Masuda, 2003), and artifacts (Craig & Douglas, 2006), and internal, such as an independent/ interdependent self-construal or other traits (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), including the overlooked aspect of language (Ambady & Bharucha, 2009; Ross, Xun, & Wilson, 2002; Sen, Burmeister, & Ghosh, 2004).

Culture conditions the individuals' perception and cognition by providing a set of values , life expectations and needs (Kastanakis & Voyer; 2013). It shapes how people think and react crafting their life views and philosophies . cultural values provide broad guidelines for

acceptable ways of behaving and acting in particular situations (Feather, 1995) . They influence how we interact and socialize with other members of the society (Rokeach,1973), as well as the valences we attach to different life situations (Feather, 1995), and they are a powerful force shaping our motivations lifestyles, and product choices(Tse et al .,1989)

Technology is to a considerable extent socially and culturally constructed (Schwarz and Thompson, 1990) and cannot be separated from human beings (Hendriks and Zouridis, 1999). Culture influences lifestyle, and lifestyle influences the way individuals communicate and interact with new media technologies (Brandtzæg, 2010). Online social networks have become a cultural phenomenon. Social networks, such as Facebook and Myspace have witnessed a rapid growth in their membership, and with the increase in popularity of social networking websites, it is safe to say that the world is becoming ''smaller'' and people are now inter-connected more than ever.

The most important research on culture and its impact on different aspects of daily life was done by Hall (1976), Hofstede(1980, 1991), and Trompennars (1994), they all provide evidence that cultural values differ significantly across cultures and countries . Our research will be based upon Hofstede's cultural dimensions .

Hofstede's cultural dimensions :

Several scholars discuss the choice of dimensions most appropriate for conceptualizing and operationalizing culture(Bond, 1987; Clark, 1990; Dorfman and Howell, 1988;Hofstede, 1984, 1991; Inkeles and Levinson, 1969; Keillor and Hult, 1999; Schwartz, 1994; Smith et al., 1996; Steenkamp,2001). However, Hofstede's framework is the most widely used national cultural framework in psychology, sociology, marketing, or management studies (Sondergaard, 1994; Steenkamp,2001). Hofstede used 116,000 questionnaires from over 60,000 respondents in seventy countries in his empirical study(Hofstede, 1984, 1991, 2001). He created five dimensions, assigned indexes on each to all nations, and linked the dimensions with demographic, geographic, economic, and political aspects of a society (Kale and Barnes, 1992), a feature unmatched by other frameworks. It is the most comprehensive and robust in terms of the number of national cultures samples (Smith et al., 1996). Moreover, the framework is useful in formulating hypotheses for comparative cross-cultural studies.
Consequently, Hofstede's operationalization of cultures (1984) is the norm used in international marketing studies (Dawar et al., 1996; Engel et al., 1995; Samiee and Jeong, 1994; Sivakumar and Nakata, 2001; Sondergaard, 1994).

Hofstede's cultural dimensions are as follow :
> *Individualism–collectivism*
Individualism–collectivism describes the relationships individuals have in each culture. In individualistic societies, individuals look after themselves and their immediate family only whereas in collectivistic cultures, individuals belong to groups that look after them in exchange for loyalty.

➢ *Uncertainty avoidance*

Uncertainty avoidance refers to "The extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity and try to avoid these situations" (Hofstede, 1991: 113). This dimension deals with the need for well-defined rules for prescribed behavior.

➢ *Power distance*

This dimension reflects the consequences of power inequality and authority relations in society. It influences hierarchy and dependence relationships in the family and organizational contexts.

➢ *Masculinity–femininity*

Dominant values in masculine countries are achievement and success and in feminine countries are caring for others and quality of life.

In our research we will focus only on three dimensions that are : Individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance and Masculinity- femininity .

4. Research Model :

Our research model will be based upon three major theories : The Set theory , the Curran& Lennon Model and Hofsted's cultural dimentions . Through this model we are trying to explain the dynamic relationship between social media and travel destination choice process and the moderating role of culture .
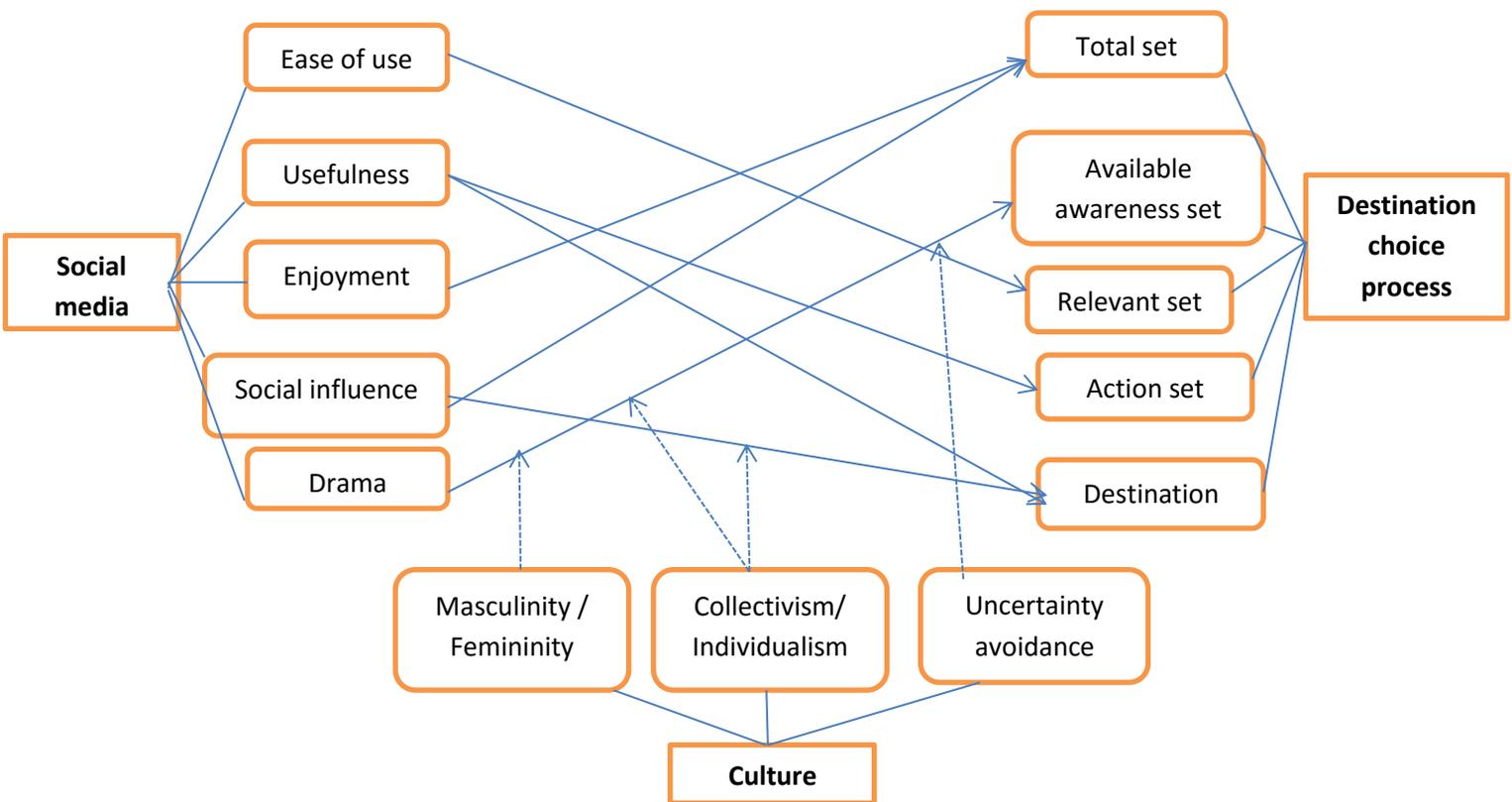

Fig2 : Research model explaining the relation between social media and travel destination choice process and the

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Limitations and discussion :

This model represents only a preliminary design of the study where we try to link the different variables we are working with in order to have a more clear and comprehensive view of the research . However this model still needs to contextualized according to the Moroccan community . The three theories we are working with; the set theory , the Curran and Lennon model and Hofstede's cultural dimensions have not been tested in the Moroccan context so to make this research more meaningful this model needs to be tested in the Moroccan context and modified accordingly .

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