

Interactive engagement through travel and tourism social media groups: A social facilitation theory perspective

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Highlights

- Social network services enable synchronous communications, concurrent engagement and facilitate real-time conversations.
- This research explores the content attractiveness and interactive capabilities of social media groups.
- A composite-based structural equations modelling approach confirms the reliability and validity of this study.
- Interactive social media groups affect the subscribers' intentions to revisit them as well as their social facilitation behaviors.

Abstract

This research investigates perceptions about online content attractiveness, interactive engagement and real time conversation capabilities through travel and tourism social media groups. The study hypothesizes that these factors affect the social media subscribers' attitudes toward the destinations' social media groups, their intentions to revisit them, and could even influence their social facilitation behaviors. The data was gathered from 923 Facebook (Meta) subscribers who were members of travel and tourism groups. A partial least squares (PLS) approach was used to reveal the validity and reliability of the chosen constructs. The findings suggest that Facebook subscribers were drawn to those groups that featured aesthetically pleasing content and to the ones that facilitated their engagement. This contribution implies that today's marketers ought to embrace digital transformation processes that are disrupting social network services (SNSs). Content curators are expected to continuously present appealing content in their social media posts, to interact with their followers in a timely manner, and to encourage positive social facilitation behaviors through online and offline channels.

Keywords: online content, social media, interactive engagement, social facilitation, real-time conversation, content attractiveness.

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1. Introduction

Online users including businesses and organizations are increasingly subscribing to different social networks services (SNSs), including Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn, among others. They are creating social media pages and groups to reach larger audiences. SNSs allow them to raise awareness about products, services and causes. They enable them to share online content including textual information, images, videos and hyperlink ([1],[2],[3]).

At the same time, they can use them to engage in two-way conversations with their followers, who may be consumers and prospects. Therefore, social media subscribers are expected to dedicate their time to look after their account, to disseminate promotional content and to respond to online users in a timely manner ([4],[5],[6]). The utilization of SNSs has radically influenced the style of online communications and has altered the relationships among marketplace stakeholders, between the businesses and their consumers as well as among customers and prospects.

For instance, tourism marketers disseminate information about their travel services as well as on their destinations' attractions. They may usually feature a good selection of high-resolution images and videos through the Internet ([7],[8],[9]). Very often, they are including testimonials about tourist experiences ([10]). In many cases, online users are accessing and reading consumer reviews and ratings before choosing which places to visit, to stay or to eat ([11]).

The information that is presented in SNSs can lure social media subscribers to engage in online and offline word-of-mouth publicity with other individuals ([12],[13]). Moreover, the attractiveness and appeal of interactive communications can have an impact on the individuals' attitudes towards destinations and on their intentions to visit destinations ([14],[15],[16]).

Today, a number of tourism businesses and destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are benefiting from the digital transformation of social media. SNSs are connecting social media subscribers (that may include prospective tourists) to interactive websites and to other links that display promotional content and information on various destinations ([17]). They promote tourist attractions, points of interest as well as their amenities. The real time conversation capabilities of the digital media can encourage online users to engage with other online users in public domains ([18],[19]). They could even motivate them to travel and to book their itineraries and hotel accommodation ([20],[21]).

A relevant review from the marketing literature suggests that there are a number of studies that investigated the individuals' perceptions on the use of interactive websites like social media. Many researchers reported that online users are experiencing their dynamic engagement facilities ([22],[23],[24],[25]).

SNSs facilitate instantaneous multi-directional flows of information. They enable interactive communications that are conspicuous with a continuous exchange of information, immediacy, responsiveness and user control functions such as participation and timely feedback ([26],[27]). DMOs and destination marketers are using these media to respond to online users to assist them in their queries, in real-time. They are also utilizing social media to engage in online conversations with prospective tourists and to encourage their followers to share their user-generated content.

Past research explored the online users' perceptions and attitudes on the use of social media for destination marketing ([14],[15]). In many cases, commentators reported that SNSs enable synchronous communications, concurrent engagement and facilitate real-time conversations that are central to the concept of interactivity ([28],[29],[30]), and can affect the individuals' attitudes

([31],[32]) and intentions to use them ([33],[34],[35],[36]). Some academic authors sought to understand their impact on the individuals' intentions and behaviors, including on their word-of-mouth activities ([33],[34],[37]).

In this light, the researchers put forward a research model that hypothesizes that the attractiveness of the online content ([38]) and the interactive capabilities of social media groups ([30]) can have significant effects on the individuals' attitudes ([39]), intentions to use them ([31]) and social facilitation behaviors ([40]). This study differentiates itself from previous theoretical underpinnings. To the best of the authors' knowledge, there are no other studies in academia that have integrated the same measures that were used in this research.

Notwithstanding, for the time being, there are limited studies in academia that shed light on the antecedents of social facilitation behaviors through interactive channels or via offline settings. Therefore, this research addresses this gap in the literature. This contribution clarifies that SNSs that can ultimately foster positive social facilitation behaviors. It adds value to the relevant academic literature that is focused on interactive social media content. In sum, it postulates that social media communications compel subscribers to engage with appealing content (by using a number of emojis to indicate their reactions and/or by cross posting) as well as with other individuals including group administrators and other followers, who are involved in online conversations.

2. The conceptual framework and the formulation of hypotheses

The theory of reasoned action (TRA), the theory of planned behavior (TPB) and the technology acceptance model (TAM), among others, have often been used in different contexts to

explore the individuals' intentional behaviors to use various tourism technologies ([34],[35],[41]; [42]). Generally, these theoretical underpinnings suggest that the persons' beliefs are linked to their actions. For instance, the theory of reasoned action posits that the individuals' positive attitudes as well as the subjective norms and the influences from society, would have an effect on their intentions and motivations to engage in certain behaviors ([43]).

Various studies that relied on TPB or TRA reported that the persons' attitudes and subjective norms are significant antecedents of behavioral intentions to visit destinations ([44],[45]). In a similar vein, TAM, also postulates that the individuals' intentions are influenced by their attitudes.

2.1 Attitudes and intentions

According to TRA, TAM and TPB, the individuals' attitudes are a precursor of their behavioral intentions ([46],[47],[48]). Their attitudes are considered as learned predispositions as persons tend to respond in favorable or unfavorable ways towards given objects. Whilst, positive attitudes can trigger intentional behaviors, negative attitudes could lead individuals to avoid certain activities. Previous research in tourism also reported that the individuals' attitudes may have a positive effect on their intentions to travel ([36]), including during COVID-19 times ([49]).

A recent study reported that the online users' attitudes toward SNSs and social media advertisements predicted their purchase intentions ([50], [51]). Customers may usually have positive attitudes toward co-creating content about their experiences in hotels, through social media [52]. These authors confirmed that their favorable attitudes anticipated their intentions to engage in co-creation behaviors in social media. Other contributions suggested that the individuals' attitudes were found to have a positive influence on their behavioral intentions to

engage with blogs [53] or electronic government services [54] and/or to share information on SNSs [55]. This study hypothesizes:

H1: The online users' attitudes toward online content can affect their intentions to revisit social media groups.

2.2 Social facilitation

Individuals may hold either positive or negative attitudes toward interactive websites like SNSs. Hence, it is very likely that they communicate with others about their online browsing experiences. They may use offline and/or online channels, including social media and review websites to voice their opinions. Related research reported that the individuals' attitudes towards online information is one of the determinants for engaging in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) through social media ([39],[56],[57]).

Previous consumers' transaction experiences and word-of-mouth activities can have an effect on prospective customers' trust and attitudes toward a given review website, thereby they may increase or decrease their chances of revisiting it again in the future [31]. Although individuals may hold favorable attitudes towards the businesses' communications through social media, they may still decide to refrain from making reference to them (with family or friends) or to spread positive word of mouth publicity about them.

Individuals may be facilitated to communicate about businesses or on other issues, in the presence of others ([40],[58]). On the other hand, they may feel inhibited by the same audience ([59]). These arguments are synonymous with the social facilitation phenomenon that is conspicuous in social networks. In plain words, individuals may be intrigued to use emojis in social

media, or to share comments if there are a number of other online followers who are also engaging with the social media page and its posts ([33]).

Relevant theoretical underpinnings reported that social facilitation in service interactions ([60]) and in interactive websites ([61]) can encourage individuals to engage in conversations with others. In sum, the term ‘social facilitation’ suggests that individuals would act differently in the presence of others ([62]). The cocreation of online content is a good example of interactions among customers, service firms and technology, that is usually triggered by positive social facilitation ([52]). Therefore, a responsive audience in social media may attract online users who are willing to share their experiences with others [63]. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: The online users’ attitudes toward online content can affect their social facilitation behaviors.

2.3 Content attractiveness

The design, structure and layout of online content may attract or detract the attention of individuals ([64], [65]). Online users simply decide to switch to other domains if the content does not appeal to them ([66]). For instance, the posts that are disseminated through social media may link subscribers to specific websites with legible content that is easy-to-read and comprehend. These sites may use appropriate fonts and high-contrast buttons that feature clear calls-to-action. These features are meant to enhance the online visitors’ experiences.

This research postulates that the attractiveness of social media posts refers to the degree to which one perceives that their content is visually or aesthetically appealing ([38]). Such posts may elicit positive emotions and may be considered as socially desirable in terms of source

attractiveness and credibility, thereby resulting in a high number of followers ([67]). This argumentation is also synonymous with theoretical underpinnings relating to electronic service quality (eSERVQUAL) ([68]) and/or to electronic retail quality (eTailQ) ([38],[69]), among others.

The administrators of social media groups and/or their influencers may decide to create and disseminate informative updates to lure online followers to like posts, to engage in online conversations, or to share them through their profile ([70],[71]). Source attractiveness can possibly generate considerable attention from the part of the audience, who may be willing to like and accept the communicators' messages ([72]), in the presence of other online users ([33],[40]). This leads to the following hypothesis:

H3: The attractiveness of online content can affect the individuals' social facilitation behaviors.

Different individuals will probably hold varying attitudes and perceptions on the attributes of attractive websites, including images, animations and video clips, that can be shared via social media posts. To date, a few studies relating to the service dominant logic, have explored the effects of attractive content that is featured in social media groups on their subscribers' attitudes and re/visit intentions ([33]). The usefulness of their information can influence their positive attitudes toward online content and can also lead them to purchase travel services ([73]). Previous research indicated that the content that is disseminated through social media by subscribers (i.e. user generated content) and by marketers (i.e. firm created content) were found to positively impact brand attitudes and purchase intentions across different brands ([50],[51]). The attractiveness of

online content including their images and videos may entice online users to revisit them again in the future ([38],[67]). This leads to the following hypotheses:

H4: The attractiveness of online content can affect the individuals' attitudes toward online content.

H5: The attractiveness of online content can affect the individuals' intentions to revisit social media group.

2.4 Real-time conversation

Many academic authors have presented different definitions about the interactivity of websites ([30], [74]). In this case, interactivity refers to the SNSs' features that enable two-way communications, more specifically, to their real-time conversation capabilities among two or more individuals ([21]). This line of reasoning is related to the degree to which online users feel in control to communicate synchronously and reciprocally with one another through interactive media ([75],[76]). The online users' engagement may not be regular and consistent across various digital networks ([77]). They may appreciate different aspects of social media, including their responsiveness, timely feedback and the time required for information retrieval. In fact, interactive websites like SNSs offer simultaneous, synchronous, and a continuous exchange of information. They are responsive to their visitors' needs; hence they may find them useful and helpful ([77]).

Online users may be interested in SNSs as they allow them to engage in interactive communications with other individuals ([43]). A number of studies have shown that there is a positive psychological outcome from using SNSs ([78],[79]). Subscribers may be intrigued to join online conversations that are featured in social media groups because they are attracted by their informative and/or entertaining content. This argumentation leads to the following hypothesis:

H6: The attractiveness of online content can affect the individuals' real-time conversations in social media.

Some interactive posts can trigger positive reactions including two-way communications from social media users ([80], [81]). The 'social support' and the 'sense of community' are two of the main factors that can lead to member satisfaction with regard to their interactive engagement through SNSs ([82],[83]). Individuals can access information through the Internet or via social media and use it in their interactive conversations. They may be facilitated to share online content, because of specific social settings ([72]). A responsive audience in social media may encourage online users to communicate with others [63]. Conversely, the presence of a passive audience could inhibit individuals from sharing their comments or reviews [62]. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H7: The individuals' real-time conversations in social media can affect their social facilitation behaviors.

The online users' satisfaction with SNSs and their fulfilment experiences may motivate them to continue using their technologies ([80]). Many academic researchers reported that the real-time conversation capabilities of social media can have a positive effect on their users' attitudes ([84]). Their two-way communications' attributes may result in significant effects on the individuals' intentions to revisit them again in future ([84],[85]). This leads to the following hypotheses:

H8: The individuals' real-time conversation in social media can affect their attitudes toward online content.

H9: The individuals' real-time conversation in social media can affect their intentions to revisit social media groups.

2.5 Engaging content

Interactive engagement involves an interchange of information and responsiveness between two or more online users, that are not necessarily in real-time ([24],[74],[86]). The individuals' perceptions about the interactivity of websites can be based on their experiences with their processes and features ([30]). The websites' interactivity is related to their media richness ([77]). The authors went on to suggest that the individuals' perceptions about the richness of engaging content is an important antecedent of their perceived usefulness of information. For example, promotional images and videos of tourist attractions can influence the consumers' perceptions about destinations ([87],[88]).

Many companies, including travel and tourism businesses as well as DMOs are increasingly using interactive websites as well as social media groups, as they help them raise awareness about their services ([89]). Marketers create and share attractive content through the digital media, to entertain their visitors, in different contexts ([88]). Hence, they often feature a good selection of images and videos to entice prospective travelers to become familiar with their tourism product or destinations ([90]). Their interactive content should load as quickly as possible. Any delays in the responsiveness of content curators of even a couple of seconds would have a negative effect on the site visitors' likes, comments and shares in social media ([91]), and on their likelihood to be affected by social facilitation. Conversely, online users may decide to switch to an alternative domains or social media groups, if they perceive that the content is not engaging enough for them ([74]). This leads to the following hypotheses:

H10: Engaging content can affect the individuals' real-time conversation in social media.

H11: Engaging content can affect the individuals' social facilitation behaviors.

The engaging content is intended to provide a better online experience ([92]). The individuals' perceptions about engaging content are based on the unique characteristics of online websites including SNSs, in terms of their functionalities, interface, and content. Consumers voluntarily and intentionally engage in online relationships with businesses and brands through social media ([93], [94]). On the other hand, marketers engage with consumers to facilitate relational exchanges to shape consumer behaviors ([95]). An increased engagement with online users through social media sites can have a positive effect on their attitudes as well as on their intentions to use them again in the future ([29]). This leads to the following hypotheses:

H12: Engaging content can affect the individuals' attitudes toward online content.

H13: Engaging content can affect the individuals' intentions to revisit social media groups.

Figure 1 features a graphical illustration of the formulated hypotheses.

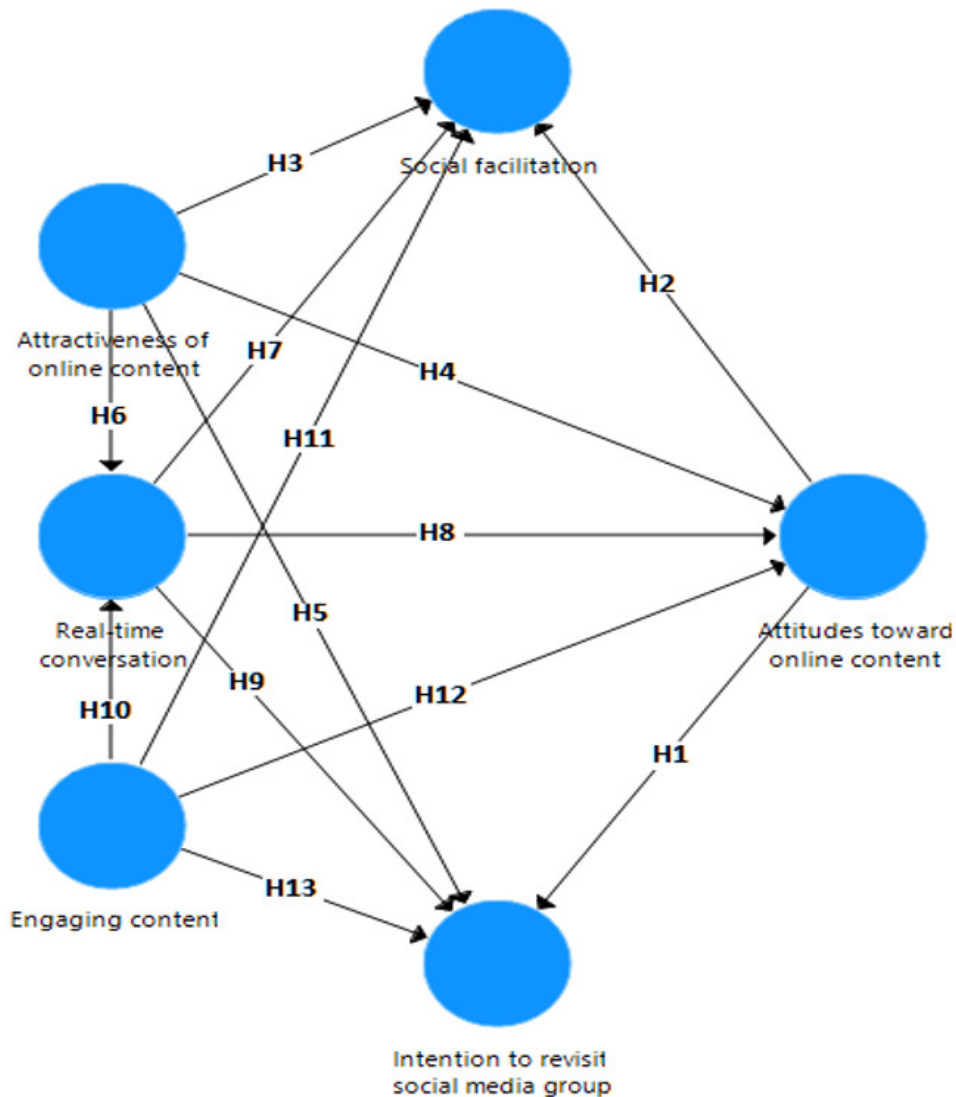


Figure 1. The research model featuring the online users’ interactive engagement with social media pages or groups

3 Methodology

A structured electronic questionnaire was disseminated through three Facebook (Meta) groups that are focused on the marketing of tourist destinations. At the time of this research, there were more than 174,000 subscribers who were following these groups. The targeted respondents

were kindly requested to participate in an academic study that sought to investigate the interactive features of social media groups. The online survey instrument adhered to the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) as the participants' identities remained anonymous and confidential.

The questionnaires' items were presented in a such a way to minimize the effects of common method bias ([96]). The survey was pilot tested with a small group of experienced colleagues, to identify any possible weaknesses in the survey instrument. Although, the survey relied on valid measures that were tried and tested in academia, the questions were adapted to the target audiences who were interested in travel destinations.

The questionnaire featured 18 questions that were drawn from previous empirical studies that were focused on the adoption of digital media in various contexts. The responses were coded on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. They have been used by a number of authors who confirmed their reliability and validity values when they published their findings in rigorous peer-reviewed journals.

Specifically, this research comprised the following constructs: 'attractiveness of online content' ([38]), 'real-time conversation' ([30]), 'engaging content' ([30]), 'attitudes towards online information' ([39],[56]), 'intention to revisit social media groups' ([31], [46]) and 'social facilitation' ([40]). The measures their corresponding items are illustrated in Table 1. The survey included two demographic variables, namely, age and gender that were placed in the latter part of the survey.

Table 1. The survey's measures

Construct	Items
Attractiveness of online content (Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2003)	AOC1 The content of the travel destination's social media groups is visually appealing. AOC2 I like browsing through the images and videos of travel destinations through social media groups. AOC3 I enjoy following the posts of travel destinations in their social media groups.
Real-time conversation (Mc Millan and Hwang, 2002)	RTC1 The travel destinations' social media groups enable two-way communications. RTC2 The travel destinations' social media groups are interactive. RTC3 The travel destinations' social media groups enable interpersonal communications.
Engaging Content (Mc Millan and Hwang, 2002)	ENG1 The travel destinations' social media groups offer a variety of content. ENG2 The travel destinations' social media groups keep my attention. ENG3 The travel destinations' social media groups provide immediate answers to my questions.
Attitudes toward online information (Erkan and Evans, 2016)	ATT1 I check the travel destinations' social media groups before purchasing my itinerary. ATT2 The travel destinations' social media groups are helpful for my decision making. ATT3 The travel destinations' social media groups make me confident about purchasing my tourism products.
Intention to revisit social media page (Che et al., 2015; Ajzen, 1991)	INT1 It is very likely that I will return to the travel destinations' social media groups, sometime in the near future. INT2 I look forward to revisiting the travel destinations' social media groups.
Social facilitation (Calder et al., 2009)	SF1 I bring up things I have seen on social media groups in conversations with many other people. SF2 I talk about the content that is featured in social media groups.

The response rate represented around 5% of the targeted research participants as there were nine hundred thirty-one (931) responses after two weeks since the dissemination of the electronic survey instrument through Google Forms. The researchers discarded 8 questionnaires that had several missing values. As a result, this empirical study is based on nine hundred twenty-three (923) responses. The frequency table reported that there were five hundred twenty-seven females (n=527) and three hundred ninety-six males (n=396) who took part in this research. The respondents were categorized into five (5) age groups (18-28; 29-39; 40-50; 51-61 and over 62 years of age). In sum, the largest group of respondents were between 29 and 39 years of age (n=439), followed by those between 40 and 50 years of age (n=221).

4 Data analysis

4.1 Descriptive statistics

The researchers evaluated the mean (M) scores and the standard deviations (SD). The findings indicated that the research participants agreed with the survey's items, as evidenced by their high attitudinal scores that were above three (3). The highest mean (M) scores were reported for ENG3 (M=3.94), AOC3 (M=3.89) and SF2 (M=3.83). RTC2 recorded the lowest mean score (M=3.15). The standard deviation (SD) values suggested that there were low variances in the participants' responses. SD varied from 0.650 (for ATT3) to 0.993 (for ENG3). Table 2 features the descriptive statistics, as well as the results of the outer loadings, construct reliability and validity of this research model.

Table 2. An assessment of outer loadings, construct reliability and validity

	Items	Mean	SD	Outer Loadings	Alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6				
1	Attractiveness of online content	AOC1	3.74	0.844	0.89	0.863	0.865	0.917	0.786	0.886								
		AOC2	3.532	0.877	0.901													
		AOC3	3.896	0.714	0.867													
2	Attitudes toward online content	ATT1	3.792	0.828	0.849	0.856	0.857	0.912	0.777	0.849	0.881							
		ATT2	3.74	0.78	0.923													
		ATT3	3.688	0.65	0.871													
3	Engaging content	ENG1	3.844	0.869	0.916	0.893	0.894	0.934	0.824	0.82	0.83	0.908						
		ENG2	3.728	0.784	0.917													
		ENG3	3.948	0.993	0.89													
4	Intention to revisit social media page	INT1	3.676	0.973	0.929	0.785	0.819	0.902	0.821	0.81	0.8	0.865	0.906					
		INT2	3.636	0.805	0.882													
5	Real-time conversation	RTC1	3.532	0.749	0.891	0.803	0.86	0.881	0.712	0.751	0.778	0.749	0.721	0.844				
		RTC2	3.156	0.666	0.896													
		RTC3	3.532	0.499	0.734													
6	Social facilitation	SF1	3.728	0.907	0.937	0.854	0.855	0.932	0.872	0.754	0.797	0.807	0.809	0.692	0.934			
		SF2	3.832	0.874	0.931													

Note: The discriminant validity was calculated by using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The square roots of AVE (in bold) were greater than the correlations that were featured in the same column.

4.2 The composite-based analysis of the structured model

A partial least squares (PLS) confirmatory composite analysis was used to assess the validity and reliability of the measures and to evaluate the quality of this structured model ([97]). The PLS algorithm shed light on the results of standardized loadings. It confirmed that the constructs were reliable. Alpha, Rho_A and composite reliability values were higher than the recommended threshold of 0.7. The findings also reported the convergent validity of the constructs. The average variance extracted (AVE) values were well above the 0.5 benchmark. In addition, the results indicated appropriate discriminant validity values. The square root value of AVE was greater than the correlation values among the other variables in the same columns ([98]). The findings confirmed that there were no collinearity issues in this proposed research model as the variance inflation factors (VIFs) did not exceed 3.3. PLS illustrated the model's coefficients of determination (R^2).

A bootstrapping procedure reported the statistical significance of the hypothesized relationships. It reaffirmed the relevance of the path coefficients that were present in this model.

Table 3 features the results from the original sample, the confidence intervals, t-statistics and the significance values (p). Table 4 provides a summary of the accepted/rejected hypotheses.

Table 3. Testing of the Hypotheses

Path Coefficient		Original	Sample	CI Bias Corrected	t-value	p	Decision
		Sample	Mean	[2.5%,97.5%]			
H1	Attitudes toward online content -> Intention to revisit social media group	0.232	0.231	[0.163, 0.294]	7.154	0.000	Supported***
H2	Attitudes toward online content -> Social facilitation	0.068	0.068	[0.001, 0.143]	1.898	0.058	Not Supported.
H3	Attractiveness of online content -> Social facilitation	0.341	0.341	[0.292, 0.399]	11.6	0.000	Supported***
H4	Attractiveness of online content -> Attitudes toward online content	0.464	0.463	[0.396, 0.539]	12.42	0.000	Supported***
H5	Attractiveness of online content -> Intention to revisit social media group	0.164	0.166	[0.104, 0.220]	5.464	0.000	Supported***
H6	Attractiveness of online content -> Real-time conversation	0.517	0.517	[0.444, 0.583]	14.51	0.000	Supported***
H7	Real-time conversation -> Social facilitation	0.059	0.058	[0.013, 0.105]	2.455	0.014	Supported *
H8	Real-time conversation -> Attitudes toward online content	0.144	0.145	[0.101, 0.189]	6.333	0.000	Supported***
H9	Real-time conversation -> Intention to revisit social media group	0.034	0.033	[-0.014, 0.086]	1.329	0.184	Not Supported.
H10	Engaging content -> Real-time conversation	0.324	0.324	[0.258, 0.394]	9.172	0.000	Supported***
H11	Engaging content -> Social facilitation	0.429	0.43	[0.334, 0.509]	9.813	0.000	Supported***
H12	Engaging content -> Attitudes toward online content	0.331	0.332	[0.266, 0.393]	10.52	0.000	Supported***
H13	Engaging content -> Intention to revisit social media group	0.516	0.516	[0.466, 0.562]	21.33	0.000	Supported***

Note: Critical values are: $t < 1.96$; *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Table 4. A summary of accepted/rejected hypotheses

H1	Attitudes toward online content -> Intention to revisit social media page	Supported***
H2	Attitudes toward online content -> Social facilitation	Not Supported.
H3	Attractiveness of online content -> Social facilitation	Supported***
H4	Attractiveness of online content -> Attitudes toward online content	Supported***
H5	Attractiveness of online content -> Intention to revisit social media page	Supported***
H6	Attractiveness of online content -> Real-time conversation	Supported***
H7	Real-time conversation -> Social facilitation	Supported *
H8	Real-time conversation -> Attitudes toward online content	Supported***
H9	Real-time conversation -> Intention to revisit social media page	Not Supported.
H10	Engaging content -> Real-time conversation	Supported***
H11	Engaging content -> Social facilitation	Supported***
H12	Engaging content -> Attitudes toward online content	Supported***
H13	Engaging content -> Intention to revisit social media page	Supported***

Note: Critical values are: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

4.3 Discussion of the results

Generally speaking, the results provide sufficient empirical evidence to support the majority of hypotheses. H1: This study suggests that the individuals' attitudes toward online content have a highly significant effect on their intention to revisit the social media groups ($\beta = 0.232$, $p < 0.001$, $t = 7.154$). H2: The findings indicate that their attitudes towards online content have a negligible effect on social facilitation ($\beta = 0.068$, $p < 0.1$, $t = 1.898$). H3: The empirical evidence confirms a strong direct effect between content attractiveness and social facilitation ($\beta = 0.341$, $p < 0.001$, $t = 11.6$). H4: The results confirm that there is a highly significant effect between the attractiveness of online content and attitudes toward online content ($\beta = 0.464$, $p < 0.001$, $t = 12.42$). H5: The attractiveness of online content is also a precursor of the participants' intentions to revisit the social media page ($\beta = 0.164$, $p < 0.001$, $t = 5.464$). H6: Furthermore, this study reports that the attractiveness of online content has a very high effect on the individuals' real-time conversations through social media ($\beta = 0.517$, $p < 0.001$, $t = 14.51$).

H7: Unlike what was proposed in the literature review, the results suggest that there is a weak relationship between real-time conversations and social facilitation ($\beta = 0.059$, $p < 0.05$, $t = 2.455$). On the other hand, the findings provide sufficient evidence to empirically justify H8, meaning that real-time conversations are a significant precursor of the respondents' attitudes toward online content ($\beta = 0.144$, $p < 0.001$, $t = 6.333$). The empirical evidence is insufficient to support H9 as there is no significant effect between real-time conversation and the online users' intentions to revisit the social media page. H10: However, the findings indicate that there are highly significant relationships between engaging content and real-time conversation ($\beta = 0.324$, $p < 0.001$, $t = 9.172$); H11: between engaging content and social facilitation ($\beta = 0.429$, $p < 0.001$,

t = 9.813); and H12: between engaging content and attitudes toward online content ($\beta = 0.331$, $p < 0.001$, $t = 10.52$). H13: Interestingly, the results confirm that engaging content is a highly significant antecedent of the online users' intentions to revisit the social media page ($\beta = 0.516$, $p < 0.001$, $t = 21.33$).

The research participants' intentions to revisit social media page has the highest level of explanatory power (where $R^2 = 0.794$) in this research model. The results suggest that while their attitudes toward online content ($R^2 = 0.774$) as well as their dispositions for social facilitation ($R^2 = 0.711$) have substantial explanatory power, the findings indicate that real-time conversations have a moderate level of explanatory ($R^2 = 0.647$). Figure 2 illustrates the total effects and the coefficients of determination (R^2) values. Table 5 sheds light on the results of the mediation analyses. Table 6 features a summary of results of the indirect effects within our research model

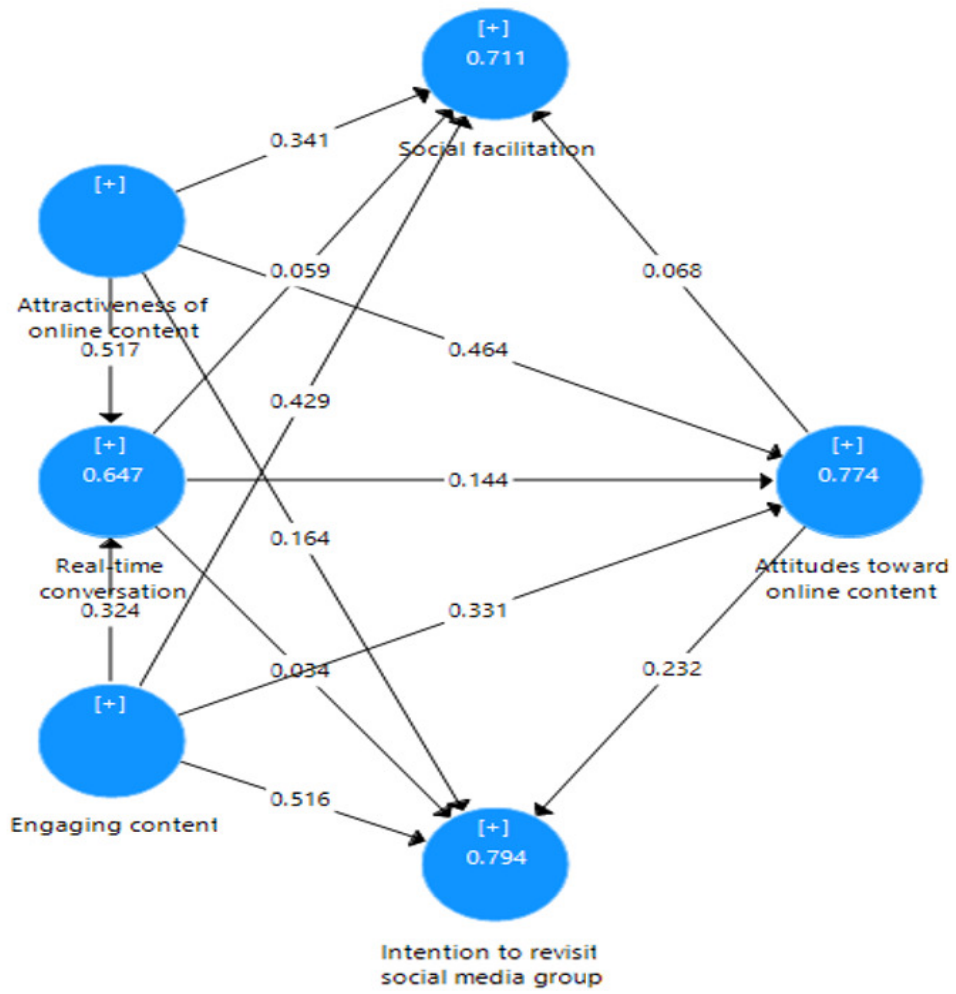


Figure 2. A graphical illustration of the results

Table 5. The Mediated Analyses

							CI Bias Corrected				
	Path Coefficient	Direct	Indirect 1	Indirect 2	Indirect 3	<i>p</i>	Interpretation	Total	[2.5%, 97.5%]	t- value	<i>p</i>
H3	Attractiveness of online content -> Social facilitation	0.341				0.000					
H3a	Attractiveness of online content -> Attitudes toward online content -> Social facilitation		0.032			0.047	Partial mediation				
H3b	Attractiveness of online content -> Real-time conversation -> Social facilitation			0.03		0.016	Partial mediation	0.408	[0.356, 0.467]	13.829	0.000
H3c	Attractiveness of online content -> Real-time conversation -> Attitudes toward online content -> Social facilitation				0.005	0.122	No mediation				
H4	Attractiveness of online content -> Attitudes toward online content	0.464				0.000					
H4a	Attractiveness of online content -> Real-time conversation -> Attitudes toward online content		0.075			0.000	Partial mediation	0.539	[0.477, 0.603]	16.738	0.000
H5	Attractiveness of online content -> Intention to revisit social media page	0.164				0.000					
H5a	Attractiveness of online content -> Real-time conversation -> Intention to revisit social media page		0.017			0.194	No mediation				
H5b	Attractiveness of online content -> Attitudes toward online content -> Intention to revisit social media page			0.108		0.000	Partial mediation	0.306	[0.251, 0.353]	11.894	0.000
H5c	Attractiveness of online content -> Real-time conversation -> Attitudes toward online content -> Intention to revisit social media page				0.017	0.000	Partial mediation				

H7	Real-time conversation -> Social facilitation	0.059		0.014					
H7a	Real-time conversation -> Attitudes toward online content -> Social facilitation		0.01	0.114	No mediation	0.069	[0.021, 0.122]	2.626	0.009
H9	Real-time conversation -> Intention to revisit social media page	0.034		0.184					
H9a	Real-time conversation -> Attitudes toward online content -> Intention to revisit social media page		0.033	0.000	Full mediation	0.067	[0.018, 0.111]	2.779	0.006
H11	Engaging content -> Social facilitation	0.429		0.000					
H11a	Engaging content -> Real-time conversation -> Social facilitation		0.019	0.018	Partial mediation				
H11b	Engaging content -> Attitudes toward online content -> Social facilitation		0.023	0.069	No mediation	0.474	[0.404, 0.532]	14.554	0.000
H11c	Engaging content -> Real-time conversation -> Attitudes toward online content -> Social facilitation			0.003	0.117	No mediation			
H12	Engaging content -> Attitudes toward online content	0.331		0.000					
H12a	Engaging content -> Real-time conversation -> Attitudes toward online content		0.047	0.000	Partial mediation	0.378	[0.304, 0.440]	11.121	0.000
H13	Engaging content -> Intention to revisit social media page	0.516		0.000					
H13a	Engaging content -> Real-time conversation -> Intention to revisit social media page		0.011	0.180	No mediation	0.615	[0.564, 0.664]	24.189	0.000
H13b	Engaging content -> Attitudes toward online content -> Intention to revisit social media page		0.077	0.000	Partial mediation				

H13c	Engaging content -> Real-time conversation -> Attitudes toward online content -> Intention to revisit social media page	0.011	0.000	Partial mediation
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Table 6. A summary of accepted/rejected hypotheses

H1	Attitudes toward online content -> Intention to revisit social media page	Supported***
H2	Attitudes toward online content -> Social facilitation	Not Supported.
H3	Attractiveness of online content -> Social facilitation	Supported***
H4	Attractiveness of online content -> Attitudes toward online content	Supported***
H5	Attractiveness of online content -> Intention to revisit social media page	Supported***
H6	Attractiveness of online content -> Real-time conversation	Supported***
H7	Real-time conversation -> Social facilitation	Supported **
H8	Real-time conversation -> Attitudes toward online content	Supported***
H9	Real-time conversation -> Intention to revisit social media page	Not Supported.
H10	Engaging content -> Real-time conversation	Supported***
H11	Engaging content -> Social facilitation	Supported***
H12	Engaging content -> Attitudes toward online content	Supported***
H13	Engaging content -> Intention to revisit social media page	Supported***

Note: Critical values are: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

5. Conclusions and implications

This study builds on previous academic knowledge on the acceptance and use of social media groups. It relied on valid constructs that were drawn from TRA, TPB and TAM, as the proposed research model comprised “attitudes toward technology” and “behavioral intentions” constructs. However, it integrated them with perceived interactivity constructs, including “real-time conversation” and “engaging” as well as with “content attractiveness” from eTailQ.

This empirical investigation clarifies that the content attractiveness of social media posts as well as their engaging content and real-time conversation capabilities, can have significant effects on social facilitation behaviors of individuals, and on their intentions to revisit social media groups. The findings from this study reiterate the importance of continuously creating relevant content that appeals to social media followers.

Previous research posited that online users should keep their followers engaged through rich media ([77]). Other theoretical underpinnings reported that interactive websites, particularly social media and video sharing platforms, can offer great potential to DMOs to promote tourism and hospitality services ([88]). Internet domains can showcase a wide array of high-res images and video clips to lure online users to book their travel itineraries to visit destinations ([90]). The digital media and mobile applications (app) ought to be as functional and responsive as possible ([99]). They should load quickly without delays to reduce the likelihood of dissatisfied visitors, who can easily switch to another website or app ([74]).

In this case, the results suggest that there are very significant effects between the online users’ perceptions about engaging content and their intentional behaviors to check out the social media pages (on a regular basis); and between their perceptions about engaging content and their social facilitation dispositions to communicate about social media groups through online and

offline channels, in the presence of others. The respondents are appreciating the attractive content, including images or videos, that are disseminated through the social media groups' posts. Moreover, the findings indicate that they hold positive perceptions about the co-creation of user generated content. Evidently, the exchange of information as well as the responsiveness between two or more online users was leading them to revisit the social media groups.

This study is consistent with the relevant literature that sought to explore the online users' perceptions about the websites' interactivity features ([30], [34]). Other researchers maintained that real-time conversations had a positive effect on the online users' attitudes toward engaging websites ([84]). In this case, this argumentation holds for social media groups, as well.

This contribution underlines the importance of posting engaging content including appealing images and videos through social media. It clearly indicates that interactive content as well as the social networks' real-time conversation capabilities can foster positive social facilitation behaviors. Arguably, individuals are interested and intrigued to interact with other online users through popular social media groups in the presence of other members. They are likely to join in online discussions and conversations in prolific social media groups, particularly in those that are regularly disseminating attractive content, and in those that facilitate interactive engagement among their members.

The cocreation of user generated content in social media, blogs and review sites is driven by online audiences. This study confirms that the relevance and attractiveness of social media content can have a positive effect on triggering real-time conversations as well as on social facilitation. This reasoning is consistent with the social facilitation theory ([33],[40],[60],[61]). This research corroborates that while the presence of other individuals can increase the likelihood

of social engagement, a passive audience may inhibit them from sharing their comments about the attractiveness of interactive content.

The findings of this research also yield plausible implications to practitioners. The researchers indicate that social media subscribers are attracted by the online content that is being posted by DMOs and travel marketers. Online users and prospective travelers are increasingly browsing through interactive content including images and videos of travel destinations. The social media groups are offering a variety of multimedia content that is appealing to online users. Very often, they allow their followers to engage in two-way communications, as members can comment on posts and may also interact with other online users, in real-time. This study suggests that the research participants are visiting the social media groups as they considered them as helpful for their decision making, prior to booking their travel itineraries. Apparently, they were intrigued to revisit these groups and were likely to communicate about their content with other people through offline and online channels, as it appealed to them and captured their attention.

Therefore, travel marketers ought to focus on publishing quality content. This increases the chances of their engagement. Prospective travelers are attracted by multi-media features including high-res images with zooming effects and video content; that are adapted for mobile technologies, including tablets and smartphone devices. Travel marketers and DMOs ought to curate their social media group(s) with appealing content to raise awareness about their tourism products. It is in their interest to share relevant and attractive material to increase the number of followers and their engagement. More importantly, they are expected to interact with online users, in a timely manner, to turn them into brand advocates and to encourage social facilitation behaviors.

In sum, this empirical research clarifies that the attractiveness of online content of social media groups, including their images and videos of destinations, as well as their interactive and real-time conversation capabilities are affecting their subscribers' revisit intentions. They are also influencing their social facilitation behaviors - in the presence of others. This study raises awareness on the importance of sharing engaging content and of encouraging interactive discussions among social media subscribers. The researchers contend that content creators can lure individuals to visit and revisit their social media pages/groups to generate leads and conversions. Arguably, the more engagement (e.g. through emojis and shares) and conversations (e.g. comments), the greater the chances of captivating the attention of existing followers and of enticing the curiosity of new ones. For the time being, the social facilitation paradigm is still relatively under-explored in academia, particularly within the travel and tourism marketing literature.

Future researchers are encouraged replicate this study in different contexts. They may adapt the measures that were used in this research, including engaging content, real time conversation and social facilitation constructs, in addition to other popular constructs that are drawn from TRA, TPB and TAM. They may include other constructs in their research models, including those relating to psychological theories that can clarify their motivations to engage with other individuals through such digital channels. Further research could focus on the demographic backgrounds of their respondents to better understand who, why, when and where they are engaging with other users through social media groups. Perhaps, there is scope for other studies to employ different sampling frames and methodologies, including inductive ones, to explore this topic in more depth and breadth.

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