Digital-Free Tourism

Subjects: Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism

Contributor: Mahmoud Saleh , Thowayeb Hassan , Amany Salem

Digital-free tourism (DFT) has recently attracted tourism service providers' attention for its benefits in terms of enhancing tourists' experiences and well-being at destinations. DFT refers to tourists who are likely to voluntarily avoid digital devices and the Internet on holiday, or travel to destinations without network signals. DFT has advantages for tourists in increasing well-being, mental health, and social networking during their journeys. DFT also has a benefit for tourism marketers in that they can consider it as a new tourism approach.

digital-free tourism   tourism digitalization   tourist experience   locus of control

tourist attribution   attribution   destination management   digital detox   social media

1. Introduction

The number of tourists has significantly increased because individuals have more holidays with more disposable income [1]. The increasing number of tourists helps increase revenues for tourism destinations and provides thousands of jobs [1]. According to UNWTO [1], the number of tourists increased to 1.4 billion in 2018 with USD 1.7 trillion. It is also expected to reach 1.8 billion by 2030 because of rapid digital transformations [2]. Digital transformation and technology play a crucial role in forming consumer intentions, attitudes, purchasing behavior, and satisfaction, especially in the tourism industry [3]. Moreover, they enhance service providers' marketing campaigns to attract consumers [4]. Thus, the increasing number of tourists has led many tourism service providers to use digital transformation advantages to attract the highest number of tourists throughout their marketing campaigns. Digital marketing allows tourism service providers to customize marketing campaigns to sell services and directly present information to tourists through websites [5].

So, tourists utilize digital tourism platforms due to their benefits in terms of booking and comparing different alternatives [3]. Digitalization in the tourism industry drives tourists to represent themselves as encountering actors negotiating and seeking better experiences [6]. Thus, tourism service providers utilize many digital tools such as mobile applications, websites, and social media to enhance consumer service, attracting new consumers to increase revenues [3]. Tourists use all these digital tools, mobile applications, and social media to improve their experience during holidays [4].

The importance of digital transformation for both tourism service providers and tourists is mainly related to seeking alternative information [7], building brand reputations [3], and enhancing tourists' experiences at destinations [8]. However, digital technologies and/or social media negatively impact tourists' well-being and mental health. For

instance, the "e-lineation" concept has been proposed to show tourists' negative life experiences, including superficiality, meaninglessness, dropping social norms, and self-isolation during holidays [9]. Thus, tourists find motivation to unplug from social media and digital technology during holidays because of the destructive feelings and dark traits associated with using these technologies, such as detachment from social and physical surroundings, diminished recovery, and lack of wellness balance during holidays [10].

Therefore, tourism scholars have developed a new phenomenon that describes the tendency to get rid of technologies during holidays, namely "digital-free tourism" (DFT), which refers to minimal access to, and the absence of, communication technologies and information during vacations [11]. DFT influences tourists to improve their health and personal growth by driving them to get off-line [10]. Tourism researchers have found that some tourists do not take their smartphones with them during their journeys [9] to avoid dark psychological traits when using mobile phones and any digital technologies during holidays [4]. This tendency is called "digital detox"; it introduces the idea of avoiding any virtual world on holidays by decreasing people's habitual usage of social media and electronic devices [11].

Tourism destination managers have found that tourists' tendencies to experience DFT holidays bring more revenues to tourism destinations that encourage this type of experience [4][9][10]. However, there is a prominent gap in studies of tourists' self-control—namely, their locus of control (internal vs. external.) while encountering these DFT holidays. Locus of control (LOC) theory refers to the extent to which people believe that they can control events' outcomes in their daily lives [12]. Individuals could have an internal LOC, or an external LOC. Internal LOC refers to the people who assign the responsibility of events' outcomes to their ability to control them. In contrast, an external LOC refers to the people who assign the responsibility of events' consequences to causes beyond their control or external factors such as luck and fate [13]. Individuals' locus of control could influence tourists to make different decisions [12][14] because it is a consistent predictor of a tourist's attitude, emotion, and tendencies to adopt technologies [15].

Therefore, it is crucial to pay more attention to studying tourists' LOCs during experiencing digital-free tourism holidays. By employing the locus of control theory to understand tourists' DFT holidays, tourism managers will find the potentials and/or the obstacles that help improve DFT experiences.

2. Digital Significance for Tourists during Holidays

The Internet and globalization are two important impulses behind the importance of individual uses of digital technologies [5]. Within this context, digital technologies advocates claim that such technologies boosts service providers and consumers' collaboration, communication and sharing, and improves information gathering [16]. The digital environment offers a wide range of data covering ratings, customer reviews, tags, blogs, social interactions, and consumers' responses to marketing activities. These data are beneficial both for service providers in terms of understanding online consumer attitudes to develop professional marketing strategies and for consumers in terms of measuring the effectiveness of services features and choosing between competitors [17]. That is why consumers could find more alternatives in the online environment than offline customers when collecting information [16].

In the tourism context, during holidays, tourists are likely to perceive information about services online more than offline because price sensitivity is lower online than offline, and brand names and brand equity have a more substantial influence online than offline [18]. Existing literature reveals that digital experiences not only influence tourists' mental processes and enhance online purchasing behaviors and decision making [5][6][9][19], but also help tourists during their holidays to check for alternative solutions to any problem and share their experiences with their friends [19][20]. Tourists assume that the tourism service providers' existence (vs. not) on digital platforms is in indication of its existence (vs. absence) in the tourism market [9]. This is especially the case for millennial tourists. Millennial tourists are technologically savvy and have the ability to check the Internet and use social media for a long time [21]. According to Zhuang et al. [22], millennial tourists tend to use digital technologies more than other tourists during holidays; moreover, they are more likely to be affected by technological and digital tourism campaigns.

A study by Cuomo et al. [6] found that tourists who are enthusiastic about visiting destinations are more likely to be disappointed if they find a lack of digital presence in these destinations on social media, because it helps tourists to enhance their experiences in tourist destinations [3]. A recent study by Hassan et al. [23] found that travelers' engagement in technology utilization during holidays is one of the more mainstream activities in tourism destinations. They also emphasized that digital platforms play a dominant role in facilitating tourists' trip itineraries. A digital presence in holidays plays a dominant role as an information platform that can be used to attain an overview of current issues and to clarify the connections between tourism service providers and tourists to build up the destination's image [11]. For instance, search engine queries, Google Trends, and extensive social data provide more profound insights that help tourists to enhance their experiences during holidays [20][24].

However, many studies have shed light on the dark traits associated with using digital technologies during holidays with their adverse impacts on tourists' physical health, especially psychological well-being [11]. A large addiction to digital technology causes fear of missing out (FoMO), caused by smartphone addiction and nomophobia (the panic of not using a mobile phone) [4]. These fears and terrors lead to several mental health issues (e.g., low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and technostress) [21]. This encourages tourists to voluntarily avoid digital technology usage during holidays, which researchers call digital-free tourism. The next section will synthesize the new tendencies to apply digital-free tourism and digital detox in the tourism context.

3. Digital-Free Tourism (DFT) and Tourists' Locus of Control (LOC)

To treat the dark traits associated with using digital technologies at holiday destinations (e.g., smartphone addiction and nomophobia, anxiety, and depression), tourism practitioners make practical efforts to attract tourists for digital-free holidays. Digital-free tourism (DFT) refers to holidays with a lack of electronic devices or the Internet [9]. DFT could also be defined as an intentional experience by tourists, where they switch off any digital technologies during holidays [10]. This means that tourists switch off their electronic devices and/or disconnect Internet services during vacations [19][20]. For instance, "digital downtime" by the Scottish tourism industry, and "Blackhole" resorts in the United Kingdom and North America, "digital detoxing" in the Maldives where tourists disconnect from the Internet

and are forbidden to use any digital technology during their holidays to treat the Internet addiction and manage tourist stress [11]. So, tourists are recommended to avoid any digital technologies to avoid obstacles when using digital technology in the tourism industry [3].

The reasons that lead tourists to respond to these calls for DFT and to dislike the "digital leash" are (a) social media addiction-prone applications such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, because these are barriers to enjoying the present moments during vacations; (b) social media and technologies have a harmful influence on interpersonal relations because social media platforms hinder interactions amongst travel companions on journeys; (c) the pressure provoked by forcing them to "show and live" their experiences for others by comparing themselves with others to avoid ignoring the external "ever-present expectation" in this digital era [11]. Disliking the "digital leash" encourages tourists to benefit from the privileges of digital detox during holidays, which are creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, perspective, bravery, persistence, integrity, social intelligence, forgiveness and mercy, humility/modesty, prudence, self-regulation, gratitude, and spirituality [19][20]. All these character strengths before, during, and after the journey could exist because tourists do not use any digital technology [3][4][9].

Though digital detox during holidays is important, not all tourists can withstand digital withdrawal symptoms. Some tourists cannot cut off the connection because they have particular commitments, so they cannot be unavailable, or they are afraid of getting lost [4]. For instance, tourists who cannot manage their work issues may depend on digital devices to finish work-related tasks while on holiday [10]. Moreover, suffering from withdrawal symptoms during vacations differs based on the destination types. For example, tourists may experience higher levels of anxiety and frustration in urban destinations compared to rural and natural destinations due to the need for instant information access, navigation, and word-of-mouth recommendation to feel in control of their holidays [4]. Tourists who also travel in a group or as couples are less likely to have anxiety when disconnecting than solo tourists because they feel they are in control of the trip itinerary [4].

Given that tourists' feelings of control influence them in terms of connecting with and/or disconnecting from digital technologies [10] and that there is a lack of studies that highlight feelings of control of tourists experiencing DFT holidays, the next part of this entry will shed light on tourists' locus of control as a prominent theory to understand individuals' control about surrounding events [12] to determine tourists' tendencies and abilities to engage in DFT holidays.

Locus of control refers to individuals' different characteristics in terms of the extent to which individuals ascribe their ability to achieve success (or failure) to their daily life events [12]. Individuals with internal LOC ("internals") believe that their attitude and abilities can generate desired outcomes. These "internals" have a high probability of being determined, confident, and believing that they can control their daily events and fate [25]. Moreover, they have a greater probability of considering that perceived "earned" outcomes result from their power to achieve these outcomes [26]. Conversely, individuals with external LOC ("externals") believe that causes outside themselves generate their outcomes [27]. These "externals" are more likely to assume that they are victims of external powers, environments, and circumstances they encounter [26].

Researchers in consumer psychology have clarified that LOC is one of three attribution theory dimensions—stability, controllability, and locus [28]—even though attribution theory describes how individuals explain the causes of outcomes (e.g., failures or successes) in their lives in a similar way to LOC theory [29][30]. However, attribution descriptions are usually posted temporarily and occur after a success or failure experience. By contrast, locus of control is essentially forward-looking, including insight into one's ability to control the explained outcome. Individuals may feel that their events are caused by factors beyond their control (situational attribution); yet, they believe that they can handle it (internal LOC) by taking remedies for these events [27]. Moreover, psychological studies have demonstrated that LOC is a component of self-control. This indicates that a lower level of non-cognitive abilities may intensify problems about an individual's self-control, especially externals more than internals [14].

Thus, when individuals have external LOC, they are more likely to be influenced by external causes and to be unable to control surrounding events well because they assign responsibility for the events to external causes [12]. In contrast, individuals with internal LOC are more likely to control surrounding events by assigning responsibility for the events to internal causes [15]. Internal LOC (vs. external) is more likely to be associated with better social experiences, better health, and better economic outcomes. For instance, individuals with internal (vs. external) LOC are more likely to cope with contradictory life shocks, have higher saving and satisfaction levels, adopt productivity-enhancing technologies, and seek better mental health [13]. Regarding tourist satisfaction, there is an inevitable argument that tourist satisfaction and well-being are interconnected. In a contemporary model suggested by Lin et al. [31], they found that, for the most part, tourists' indicators for their well-being are actively shaped by consistency regarding their affective satisfaction at gastronomic destinations, especially concerning high-quality services. Thus, when researchers highlighted the LOC part, tourists who feel in control of their journeys would increase their level of satisfaction [12]; therefore, they will have a high probability of well-being with an increase of control sense [31].

From the tourist gender perspective, there is a distinction in the level of LOC between males and females. For instance, females are, compared to males, usually more likely to revolve around attributing most adverse events that require efforts (e.g., DFT) to external causes with an external LOC to avoid low self-control [32] and avoid self-blame [33]. Thus, females are likely to ask more questions to get more information that may raise their confidence during the holidays [33] because females experience different levels of LOC in several situations compared to males [34]. According to Saleh [35], female tourists attempt to avoid low self-confidence during holidays by collecting more information to increase their control during tourism service encounters. Thus, while DFT holiday tourists have to avoid using the Internet, they may encounter difficulties with Internet leverage in collecting data. Consequently, researchers argue that female tourists have different perceptions of DFT holidays than males regarding their LOC.

In this vein, tourists do not take a digital-free tourism approach because of DFT advantages per se. However, the locus of control and attribution toward such an approach plays a crucial role when engaging in such holidays (**Figure 1**). Therefore, tourists with different LOC (internal vs. external) respond to digital-free tourism holidays.
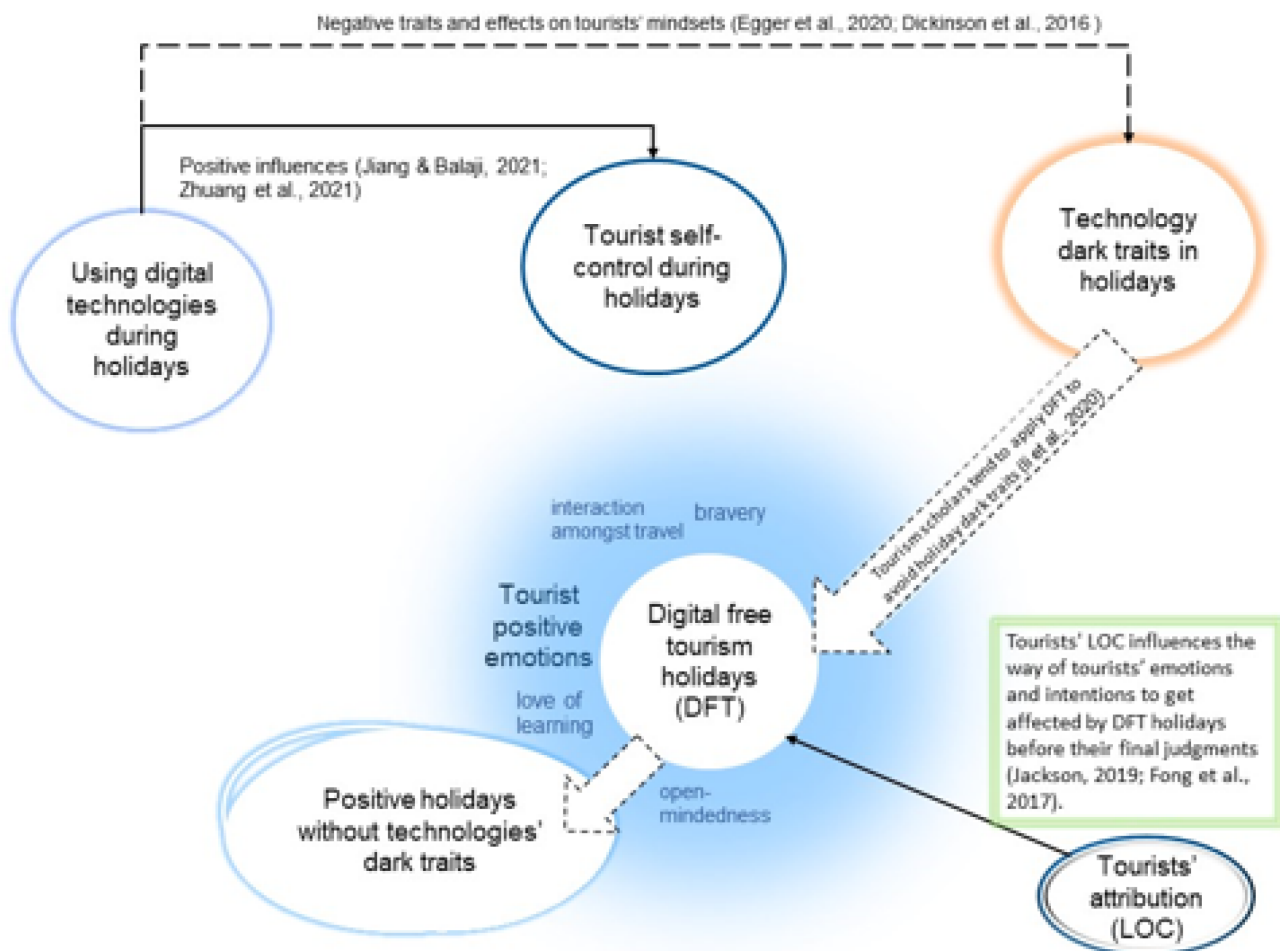
Figure 1. The interdependence between DFT, LOC, and tourists' behavioral outcomes.

Figure 1 explains that it is needless to highlight that tourist experiences and technology usage are related [36]. Tourists aim to use digital technologies during holidays to facilitate their holiday items and collect mode data, avoiding risks during holidays [37]. Tourists also use digital platforms to share their trip photos with their peers and check news updates, leading to more holiday enjoyment [9]. Notwithstanding that digital technologies during holidays have their privileges, they still have their dark traits [10][20]. For instance, they hinder interaction in travel, increase comparisons with others, and decrease open-mindedness, love of learning, perspective, and bravery. These dark traits drive destination managers to find an alternative approach to addressing these dark trait issues, introducing a digital-free tourism approach. As mentioned earlier, tourists tend to control their journey using digital technologies. The motivation for using technology reflects the fact that tourists want to have high engagement in holiday activities [10]. Tourists' motivation toward experiencing positive experiences while using technologies increases their affective engagement toward tourism event outcomes [36].

Given that affective engagement in holidays helps predict tourists' emotions [9], and given that emotions are a post hoc feeling of attributing different event outcomes to different causes [12], the "causality" concept is a stimulator in such a holiday attribution process. This means that with dark technology traits during holidays and tourists' desires to use technology to facilitate their holidays, DFT service providers/tourists will be confused in predicting such contradictory emotions and causalities concerning engagement in DFT. This is because causality results from

individuals' control over holiday events [35]. Therefore, the feelings of holiday control, desire to use technology, desire to avoid digital technology traits, and navigation of self-emotions all occur in tourists' mindsets.

DFT has advantages to increase tourists' well-being and satisfaction depending on their self-control during DFT holidays. The study proposes nuanced propositions to help destination managers to encourage tourists to engage in DFT holidays by avoiding obstacles that may cause low self-control during DFT holidays as follows:

On the one hand, to encourage tourists for digital detox during holidays, destination managers are recommended to list the benefits of digital detox by highlighting tourists' reviews about experiencing digital detox holidays on their websites. Tourism destination managers are also recommended to specialize a prominent icon on their websites and/or mobile applications during the reservation, notifying tourists about self-growth opportunities by evading digital technology use during the journey [9]. On the other hand, to avoid tourists' lower self-control as an output because of lack of information and emergencies during DFT holidays. Destination managers are recommended to distribute informative vouchers that include all information about the city tourists help centers, transportations schedules, prices; restaurant working times; pharmacies and hospitals numbers, public toilet's locations, foreign exchange centers, and police stations.

Furthermore, destination managers are recommended to ensure a prompt service encounter process, especially waiting times, to ensure that tourists participate in digital-free tourism during holidays. For example, destination managers should avoid waiting times while checking in because more waiting time increases the likelihood of an external LOC [30]. This, in turn, will motivate tourists to pick up their mobile phones and ignore the DFT challenge. Therefore, destination managers should add a new option to their website to facilitate check-in procedures for tourists before tourists' arrival. Additionally, there is a high positive correlation between addiction to digital devices, loneliness, and low self-control -external LOC- [38]. Therefore, destination managers should involve single-accommodate DFT tourists at destinations with entertainment activities at hotels by prioritizing them with hotel entertainment activities compared with tourists with companions.

Tourist orientation from tour operators about the new tourism trends helps cope with the lingering self-distress tourists may encounter during holidays. Travelers who engage in DFT holiday patterns are more likely to mirror low post-traumatic self-confidence of digital detox. Therefore, tour operators (e.g., individual and/or team organizers in different tourism destinations) have to create pre-FDT orientations in an easy way to avoid DFT obstacles. Tour operators are recommended to clarify and explore the predicted sudden and dramatic low self-confidence or low self-control tourists may encounter during the DFT holiday, the emergencies they may encounter, and the solution to cover these obstacles. Such a burning urge for "orientation" helps tourists enjoy their DFT holidays through pre-FDT orientation helps them help signify the barriers and avoid them to increase their sense of control and normalcy.

According to Galvin et al. [27], individuals who shift from external to primarily internal lead to positive feelings with high satisfaction and control the outcomes of their events (DFT holidays). Individuals with external LOC are less likely to control DFT holidays; thus, destination managers may propose the #Digital_Detox_Challenge hashtag with

incentives. So, if tourists join the challenge and achieve success in this challenge, destination managers could upgrade their reservations with discounts. This will raise the tourists' self-confidence, influencing individuals to have Internal LOC [12].

References

1. UNWTO. International Tourism Highlights; UNWTO: Madrid, Spain, 2019.

2. Calderwood, L.U.; Soshkin, M. The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019; World Economic Forum: Geneva, Switzerland, 2019.

3. Sharma, A.; Sharma, S.; Chaudhary, M. Are small travel agencies ready for digital marketing? Views of travel agency managers. Tour. Manag. 2020, 79, 104078.

4. Cai, W.; McKenna, B.; Waizenegger, L. Turning It Off: Emotions in Digital-Free Travel. J. Travel Res. 2020, 59, 909–927.

5. Melović, B.; Jocović, M.; Dabić, M.; Vulić, T.B.; Dudic, B. The impact of digital transformation and digital marketing on the brand promotion, positioning and electronic business in Montenegro. Technol. Soc. 2020, 63, 101425.

6. Cuomo, M.T.; Tortora, D.; Foroudi, P.; Giordano, A.; Festa, G.; Metallo, G. Digital transformation and tourist experience co-design: Big social data for planning cultural tourism. Technol. Forecast. Soc. Change 2021, 162, 120345.

7. Halbheer, D.; Stahl, F.; Koenigsberg, O.; Lehmann, D.R. Choosing a digital content strategy: How much should be free? Int. Res. J. Mark. 2014, 31, 192–206.

8. Mak, A.H.N. Online destination image: Comparing national tourism organisation's and tourists' perspectives. Tour. Manag. 2017, 60, 280–297.

9. Li, J.; Pearce, P.L.; Oktadiana, H. Can digital-free tourism build character strengths? Ann. Tour Res. 2020, 85, 103037.

10. Egger, I.; Lei, S.I.; Wassler, P. Digital free tourism—An exploratory study of tourist motivations. Tour. Manag. 2020, 79, 104098.

11. Li, J.; Pearce, P.L.; Low, D. Media representation of digital-free tourism: A critical discourse analysis. Tour. Manag. 2018, 69, 317–329.

12. Jackson, M. Utilizing attribution theory to develop new insights into tourism experiences. J. Hosp. Tour. Manag. 2019, 38, 176–183.

13. Awaworyi Churchill, S.; Munyanyi, M.E.; Prakash, K.; Smyth, R. Locus of control and the gender gap in mental health. J. Econ. Behav. Organ. 2020, 178, 740–758.

14. Abay, K.A.; Blalock, G.; Berhane, G. Locus of control and technology adoption in developing country agriculture: Evidence from Ethiopia. J. Econ. Behav. Organ. 2017, 143, 98–115.

15. Fong, L.H.N.; Lam, L.W.; Law, R. How locus of control shapes intention to reuse mobile apps for making hotel reservations: Evidence from chinese consumers. Tour. Manag. 2017, 61, 331–342.

16. Krings, W.; Palmer, R.; Inversini, A. Industrial marketing management digital media optimization for B2B marketing. Ind. Mark. Manag. 2021, 93, 174–186.

17. Kannan, P.K.; Li, H.A. Digital marketing: A framework, review and research agenda. Int. Res. J. Mark. 2017, 34, 22–45.

18. Shankar, V.; Smith, A.K.; Rangaswamy, A. Customer satisfaction and loyalty in online and offline environments. Int. Res. J. Mark. 2003, 20, 153–175.

19. Pawłowska-Legwand, A.; Matoga, Ł. Disconnect from the Digital World to Reconnect with the Real Life: An Analysis of the Potential for Development of Unplugged Tourism on the Example of Poland. Tour. Plan. Dev. 2020, 18, 649–672.

20. Dickinson, J.E.; Hibbert, J.F.; Filimonau, V. Mobile technology and the tourist experience: (Dis)connection at the campsite. Tour. Manag. 2016, 57, 193–201.

21. Floros, C.; Cai, W.; McKenna, B.; Ajeeb, D. Imagine being off-the-grid: Millennials' perceptions of digital-free travel. J. Sustain. Tour. 2021, 29, 751–766.

22. Zhuang, X.; Hou, X.; Feng, Z.; Lin, Z.; Li, J. Subjective norms, attitudes, and intentions of AR technology use in tourism experience: The moderating effect of millennials. Leis. Stud. 2021, 40, 392–406.

23. Hassan, T.H.; Salem, A.E.; Refaat, S.A. The Impact of Eatmarna Application Usability on Improving Performance Expectancy, Facilitating the Practice of Rituals and Improving Spirituality Feelings during Umrah Amid the COVID-19 Outbreak. Religions 2022, 13, 268.

24. Lee, C.; Hallak, R. Investigating the effects of offline and online social capital on tourism SME performance: A mixed-methods study of New Zealand entrepreneurs. Tour. Manag. 2020, 80, 104128.

25. Douglass, M.D.; Bain, S.A.; Cooke, D.J.; McCarthy, P. The role of self-esteem and locus-of-control in determining confession outcomes. Pers. Individ. Differ. 2019, 147, 292–296.

26. Toti, J.-F.; Diallo, M.F.; Huaman-Ramirez, R. Ethical sensitivity in consumers' decision-making: The mediating and moderating role of internal locus of control. J. Bus. Res. 2021, 131, 168–182.

27. Galvin, B.M.; Randel, A.E.; Collins, B.J.; Johnson, R.E. Changing the focus of locus (of control): A targeted review of the locus of control literature and agenda for future research. J. Organ. Behav. 2018, 39, 820–833.

28. Eslami, H.; Kacker, M.; Hibbard, J.D. Antecedents of locus of causality attributions for destructive acts in distribution channels. J. Bus. Res. 2020, 107, 302–314.

29. Weiner, B. Attributional Thoughts about Consumer Behavior. J. Consum. Res. 2000, 27, 382–387.

30. Folkes, V.S.; Koletsky, S.; Graham, J.L. A Field Study of Causal Inferences and Consumer Reaction: The View from the Airport. J. Consum. Res. 1987, 13, 534.

31. Lin, M.P.; Marine-Roig, E.; Llonch-Molina, N. Gastronomy Tourism and Well-Being: Evidence from Taiwan and Catalonia Michelin-Starred Restaurants. Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health 2022, 19, 2778.

32. Meyers-Levy, J.; Sternthal, B. Gender differences in the use of message cues and judgments. J. Mark. Res. 1991, 28, 84–96.

33. Saleh, M.I. The effects of tourist's fading memories on tourism destination brands' attachment: Locus of control theory application. Curr. Issues Tour. 2021, 25, 1198–1202.

34. Karkoulian, S.; Srour, J.; Sinan, T. A gender perspective on work-life balance, perceived stress, and locus of control. J. Bus. Res. 2016, 69, 4918–4923.

35. Saleh, M.I. Tourists' interpretations toward tourism destinations: Viewpoint to apply locus of control theory. Tour. Critiq. 2021, 2, 222–234.

36. Fan, X.; Jiang, X.; Deng, N. Immersive technology: A meta-analysis of augmented/virtual reality applications and their impact on tourism experience. Tour. Manag. 2022, 91, 104534.

37. Jiang, Y.; Balaji, M.S. Getting unwired: What drives travellers to take a digital detox holiday? Tour. Recreat. Res. 2021, 1–17.

38. Karpinska-Krakowiak, M. Women are more likely to buy unknown brands than men: The effects of gender and known versus unknown brands on purchase intentions. J. Retail. Consum. Serv. 2021, 58, 102273.