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Meaningful travel in the age of #MeTourism: A study of digital self-representation

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to explore the role of selfie-taking behavior and mobile technologies in shaping meaningful travel experiences. It investigates how tourists' attitudes toward selfies relate to their satisfaction with travel experiences and their perceived travel happiness, particularly within the context of #MeTourism and digital self-representation. **Methodology** – A theoretical model was developed and tested using a quantitative research approach. Survey data were collected from a sample of active travelers who engage in social media sharing during trips. Statistical analysis was used to examine the relationships between attitudes toward selfies, mobile technology use, travel experience satisfaction, and travel happiness. **Findings** – The results indicate that positive attitudes toward selfies and active use of mobile technologies significantly influence tourists' perception and satisfaction with the destination experience. However, while these factors shape how travelers experience and interpret their journeys, they do not have a direct or significant impact on overall travel happiness. **Implications** – These findings provide useful insights for tourism marketers and destination managers. By understanding the aesthetic and emotional dimensions of digital self-representation, stakeholders can design strategies to enhance tourists' engagement with destinations and encourage the sharing of favorable imagery on social media. Ultimately, this can contribute to a more personalized and satisfying travel experience, though not necessarily a deeper sense of travel-related happiness.

Keywords: #MeTourism, selfies, tourism experience, destination experience, travel satisfaction, travel happiness, mobile technologies

#MeTourism i smisao putovanja: Uloga digitalnog predstavljanja sebe

Sažetak

Svrha – Ova studija ima za cilj da istraži ulogu ponašanja u vezi sa pravljenjem selfija i upotrebom mobilnih tehnologija u oblikovanju smislenih putničkih iskustava. Istražuje se kako stavovi turista prema selfijima utiču na njihovo zadovoljstvo putovanjem i doživljenu sreću tokom putovanja, posebno u kontekstu #MeTourism koncepta i digitalnog samopredstavljanja. **Metodologija** – Razvijen je i testiran teorijski model korišćenjem

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kvantitativnog istraživačkog pristupa. Podaci su prikupljeni putem ankete od uzorka aktivnih putnika koji dele sadržaj na društvenim mrežama tokom putovanja. Statističkom analizom ispitani su odnosi između stavova prema selfijima, korišćenja mobilnih tehnologija, zadovoljstva putničkim iskustvom i osećaja sreće tokom putovanja. **Rezultati** – Rezultati pokazuju da pozitivni stavovi prema selfijima i aktivna upotreba mobilnih tehnologija značajno utiču na percepciju i zadovoljstvo turista doživljajem destinacije. Međutim, iako ovi faktori oblikuju način na koji putnici doživljavaju i tumače svoja putovanja, oni nemaju direktan ili značajan uticaj na ukupnu sreću tokom putovanja. **Implikacije** – Ovi nalazi pružaju korisne uvide za marketinške stručnjake u turizmu i menadžere destinacija. Razumevanjem estetskih i emocionalnih dimenzija digitalnog samopredstavljanja, zainteresovane strane mogu osmisliti strategije koje podstiču angažovanje turista na destinacijama i deljenje pozitivnih vizuelnih utisaka na društvenim mrežama. Na taj način može se doprineti personalizovanijem i zadovoljavajućem putničkom iskustvu, iako to ne mora nužno dovesti do dubljeg osećaja sreće povezanog sa putovanjem.

Ključne reči: #MeTourism, selfiji, turističko iskustvo, iskustvo destinacije, zadovoljstvo putovanjem, sreća tokom putovanja, mobilne tehnologije

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1. Introduction

Online communication largely focuses on sharing visual content (photos, videos) with the aim of sharing experiences. In line with the broader shift toward the experience economy, tourism has increasingly evolved from the consumption of services to the co-creation of personalized and memorable experiences. In the context of the rapid digital transformation of tourism, visual communication has become a central mechanism through which travel experiences are constructed, communicated, and evaluated. Information and communication technologies have significantly reshaped the creation and delivery of tourism experiences (Sustacha et al., 2023). The advent of smartphones and the development of social media have caused high information mobility and created a new level of intelligence in providing tourism services. Mobile technology has become the primary tool through which tourism experiences are created, shared, and interpreted (Cimbaljević et al., 2025; Prebensen et al., 2013). It also supports tourists in numerous activities during their stay in the destination, such as searching for information and navigating within the destination.

Social networks have become an essential element in the management and marketing of tourism products and services. In fact, the combination of visual content and modern communication approaches (Kalinić & Lesjak, 2019) has become a dominant pattern in contemporary destination marketing. Photos shared by people on social media can promote destinations that are not featured in traditional media, thus giving credibility to the information being transmitted (Liberato et al., 2018). Further, this information can be shared at any time by any user, thus improving the perceived image of the tourist destination. Taking photos while traveling has shifted from documenting experiences to becoming a form of social interaction. Among various forms of visual content shared online, selfies represent a particularly powerful medium of digital self-representation. Unlike traditional photography, selfies do not merely document the destination but actively position the tourist within the experience, contributing to the co-creation of meaning and the construction of personal identity (Siegel et al., 2023). In this sense, selfies can be seen as a bridge between the individual and the destination, where personal identity and place meaning are simultaneously constructed. Therefore, understanding selfie-taking behavior is essential for explaining how contemporary tourists construct, interpret, and evaluate their travel experiences in the era of mobile technologies.

Despite growing body of research on selfies and social media use, prior studies have predominantly focused on psychological traits, motives for self-presentation, or marketing implications, while these factors have often been examined in isolation. There is a lack of integrative approaches that simultaneously consider tourists' attitudes toward selfies and mobile technologies, as well as their combined influence on destination experience and its outcomes. Moreover, limited attention has been given to how these factors jointly shape both evaluative and emotional dimensions of tourism experiences within a single analytical framework. In particular, the relationship between selfie-related attitudes, mobile technology engagement, travel experience satisfaction, and travel happiness remains underexplored within a unified structural framework. This gap is especially evident in digitally mediated tourism contexts, where self-representation and technology use jointly shape how travel is perceived and evaluated. This study aims to examine the extent to which tourists' attitudes toward selfies and mobile technology use influence destination experience and, subsequently, travel experience satisfaction and travel happiness. Drawing on theories of self-presentation, co-creation of experience, and technology-mediated tourism, the study proposes and tests a structural model that integrates these constructs within a single analytical framework. This study makes several contributions to the existing literature. First, it integrates attitudes toward selfies and mobile technologies into a unified framework of destination experience. Second, it extends prior research by linking these constructs to both evaluative (travel satisfaction) and emotional (travel happiness) outcomes. Third, it provides practical implications for tourism practitioners by highlighting the importance of digitally mediated self-representation in shaping tourists' experiences. Specifically, the research addresses the following hypotheses: (1) Tourists' attitudes toward selfies influence destination experience; (2) Tourists' attitudes toward mobile technologies influence destination experience; (3) Destination experience influences travel experience satisfaction; and (4) Destination experience influences travel happiness. By empirically testing these relationships, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how digitally mediated self-representation shapes the evaluative and emotional dimensions of contemporary tourism experiences.

2. Literature review

Although prior research has extensively examined selfies, mobile technologies, and tourism experiences, these streams of literature have largely evolved in parallel rather than in an integrated manner. Existing studies tend to focus on psychological motivations for selfie-taking, patterns of technology use, or experiential outcomes in isolation, offering limited insight into how these elements jointly shape tourists' perceptions and evaluations of their travel experiences. Moreover, empirical findings remain inconclusive, with some studies emphasizing the positive role of digital practices in enhancing engagement and social value, while others highlight potential drawbacks such as distraction, superficiality, or reduced authenticity. Against this backdrop, a more synthesized and critical examination of the literature is needed to clarify these relationships and identify existing gaps. Accordingly, this section reviews prior research on (1) tourists' attitudes toward selfies, (2) attitudes toward mobile technology use, and (3) the role of destination experience in shaping satisfaction and travel happiness, with the aim of developing a coherent theoretical foundation for the proposed hypotheses (Figure 1).

2.1. Tourists' attitudes toward selfies and destination experiences

The use of smartphones and social media platforms has transformed photography from a private memory-making practice into a public act of digital self-representation. Unlike traditional travel photography that puts landscapes or attractions in the center, selfies position

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the tourist as the main point of the image, merging the destination with personal identity construction (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016; Siegel et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2017). In this sense, selfie-taking is not merely a recording activity but a performative practice through which tourists interpret and communicate their experiences. Prior research has predominantly examined selfies through the lenses of self-presentation, impression management, and social validation. Studies suggest that individuals use selfies to construct desirable identities, reinforce social belonging, and obtain feedback from online audiences (Krämer et al., 2017; Li et al., 2023; Lyu, 2016; Sorour & Hammad, 2026). Within tourism contexts, these practices enable travelers to selectively frame their experiences, emphasizing aesthetically appealing or socially meaningful elements of destinations. In this sense, selfies function as mediating tools that shape how experiences are constructed, remembered, and shared.

However, the experiential implications of selfie-taking remain contested. On one hand, selfies may enhance engagement by encouraging tourists to interact more actively with their surroundings, co-create meaning, and derive social value through sharing and feedback. On the other hand, a growing body of research highlights potential downsides, suggesting that an excessive focus on capturing and curating images may divert attention from direct immersion in the destination, leading to more superficial or fragmented experiences. Furthermore, concerns related to privacy, social pressure, and performative self-presentation may reduce perceived authenticity and introduce cognitive or emotional strain (Christou et al., 2025; Wang & Guo, 2024). These contrasting perspectives indicate that selfies are not inherently beneficial or detrimental; rather, their influence depends on how individuals perceive and engage with them. In this regard, tourists' attitudes toward selfies represent a critical yet underexplored factor. While some individuals perceive selfies as enjoyable, meaningful, and socially enriching, others associate them with vanity, intrusion, or loss of authenticity (Blanco-Moreno et al., 2024; Trinanda et al., 2022). These attitudes are likely to shape the extent to which selfie practices are integrated into the travel experience and how they influence cognitive and affective evaluations of the destination. Despite this, prior studies have largely focused on behavioral frequency or personality traits, with limited attention to attitudinal dimensions as drivers of experiential outcomes (Höpken et al., 2026; Lyu, 2016; Siegel et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2021).

Taken together, existing research suggests that selfies can play an active role in the co-creation of tourism experiences, influencing attention, interpretation, and social interaction (Prebensen et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the direction and strength of this influence remain theoretically ambiguous due to the coexistence of positive and negative effects. Addressing this gap, the present study conceptualizes attitudes toward selfies as a key determinant of destination experience. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_1: Tourists' attitudes toward selfies positively influence their perceived destination experience.

2.2. Attitudes towards mobile technology use and destination experience

Smartphones and mobile applications has reshaped how tourists access information, interact with destinations, and construct travel experiences. Mobile technologies are not just tools for navigation or booking, they have become embedded in tourism experience. Through real-time connectivity, social media access, and digital content creation, tourists continuously mediate their experiences via technology (Chen et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2024). As a result, the travel experience is increasingly co-created through technology-enabled practices that influence perception, interpretation, and emotional engagement. Mobile technology use during travel affects how tourists attend to their surroundings and how they interpret

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destination attributes. Access to digital information can enhance understanding of cultural and natural attractions, reduce uncertainty, and facilitate social interaction (Dias & Afonso, 2021; Yoo et al., 2015). Simultaneously, social media platforms allow tourists to share moments instantly, receive feedback, and remain socially connected while traveling (Huang et al., 2024). These practices contribute to perceived social value by strengthening interaction with travel companions and online audiences, and they may enhance well-being through feelings of connectedness and engagement.

Existing research highlights several mechanisms through which mobile technology use may enhance destination experience. Access to real-time information can reduce uncertainty, facilitate decision-making, and deepen understanding of cultural and natural attractions (Dias & Afonso, 2021; Yoo et al., 2015). At the same time, social media connectivity enables tourists to share experiences instantly, maintain social ties, and receive feedback from online audiences, thereby reinforcing perceived social value and engagement (Huang et al., 2024). From this perspective, mobile technologies can enrich both cognitive and affective dimensions of the travel experience by supporting interaction, personalization, and co-creation (Uslu & Tosun, 2024). However, the literature also points to important tensions regarding the role of mobile technologies in tourism. While digital connectivity may enhance engagement, excessive or compulsive use can reduce attentional focus on the physical environment and disrupt direct interaction with the destination. Studies have suggested that constant connectivity may lead to distraction, fragmented experiences, or a diminished sense of presence, raising concerns about the authenticity of technology-mediated travel (Roberts & David, 2020). This duality has led to a growing recognition that the impact of mobile technology is not uniformly positive, but depends on how it is used and perceived by tourists. To address this complexity, prior research distinguishes between different forms of technology engagement, particularly harmonious and obsessive usage (Lalicic & Weismayer, 2018; Weismayer et al., 2021). Harmonious engagement reflects a balanced and voluntary use of mobile technologies that complements the travel experience, allowing tourists to benefit from digital support without losing immersion. This type of engagement has been associated with positive emotions and greater experiential integration. In contrast, obsessive engagement reflects a more compulsive reliance on mobile devices, which may generate tension, dependency, or reduced control over the experience (Roberts & David, 2020). While such usage may still enhance social connectivity and digital interaction, it may simultaneously undermine experiential depth.

Despite these insights, prior studies have largely focused on behavioral patterns or usage intensity, with limited attention to tourists' attitudes toward mobile technology as a determinant of experiential outcomes. Attitudes toward technology, whether it is perceived as supportive, intrusive, or indispensable, are likely to shape how tourists integrate mobile devices into their travel and, consequently, how they evaluate their destination experience. Given that destination experience encompasses both social value and well-being dimensions (Prebensen et al., 2013), these attitudinal differences are particularly relevant for understanding variation in experiential perception. Taken together, the literature suggests that mobile technologies play a central yet ambivalent role in shaping tourism experiences. While they offer opportunities for enhanced engagement, information access, and social interaction, they may also introduce distraction and reduce experiential authenticity. Addressing this gap, the present study conceptualizes attitudes toward mobile technology use as a key factor influencing destination experience. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_2: Tourists' attitudes toward mobile technology use positively influence their perceived destination experience.

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2.3. Destination experience and travel experience satisfaction

Destination experience represents a multidimensional construct that includes tourists' cognitive, emotional, and social responses to the visited environment. It reflects how tourists interpret, evaluate, and emotionally engage with destination attributes during their stay (Li et al., 2025). Prior research conceptualizes destination experience as including affective responses, perceived social value, and well-being dimensions that emerge from interactions with the physical setting, local culture, and social context (Io, 2017). Travel experience satisfaction, in contrast, refers to the evaluative judgment tourists form regarding the extent to which their expectations have been met or exceeded. Rooted in expectation–disconfirmation theory satisfaction represents a post-consumption assessment of overall travel performance relative to prior expectations. In tourism research, satisfaction is typically treated as a cognitive appraisal outcome that reflects tourists' evaluation of the quality, value, and meaningfulness of their experience (Nguyen et al., 2026; Weng et al., 2023).

Existing tourism research suggests that richer and more engaging destination experiences are associated with higher levels of satisfaction. Experiences characterized by emotional involvement, social connection, and perceived well-being provide the foundation for favorable cognitive evaluations (Brochado et al., 2022; Prebensen et al., 2013). Within the experience economy framework, value is not derived solely from the delivery of services but from the meanings co-created through participation and interaction (Vaz Serra et al., 2024). Consequently, destination experience is often positioned as a primary antecedent of satisfaction, as tourists evaluate their trips based on the extent to which experiences are perceived as meaningful, enjoyable, and socially enriching. However, the relationship between experience and satisfaction is not entirely straightforward. Some studies suggest that satisfaction may also be influenced by external factors such as service quality, price-value perceptions, or situational conditions, which are not always fully captured by experiential constructs. Moreover, highly stimulating or novel experiences may not always translate into higher satisfaction if they generate discomfort, uncertainty, or unmet expectations. These nuances indicate that while destination experience is a key driver of satisfaction, its effects may vary depending on how experiences are interpreted and evaluated by tourists. Despite these complexities, some evidence supports a positive relationship between experiential quality and satisfaction outcomes. Given that destination experience in this study captures both social value and well-being dimensions, it is expected that more positively perceived experiences will lead to more favorable evaluations of travel. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_3: Tourists' perceived destination experience positively influences their travel experience satisfaction.

2.4. Destination experience and travel happiness

While travel experience satisfaction reflects a cognitive evaluation of overall performance relative to expectations, travel happiness represents a broader affective state encompassing feelings of joy, fulfillment, and psychological well-being derived from the travel experience (Chen et al., 2019; Jung et al., 2025). Happiness in tourism research is often conceptualized as a subjective well-being outcome, capturing the extent to which travel generates positive emotions and enhances overall life satisfaction (Nawijn, 2011). Unlike satisfaction, which is primarily evaluative, happiness reflects a more enduring affective condition shaped by emotional and experiential engagement. Destination experience plays a critical role in generating travel-related happiness. Experiences characterized by enjoyment, immersion, social connection, novelty, and perceived meaning can trigger positive emotions that

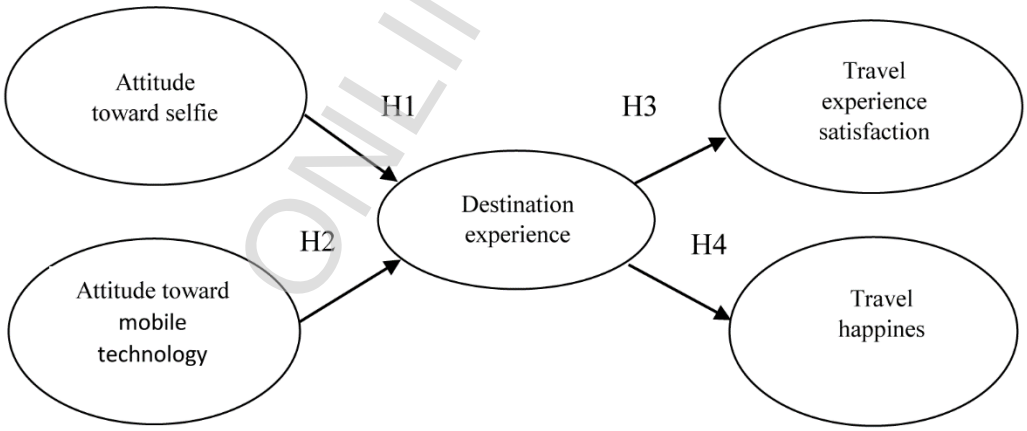
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contribute to subjective well-being (Li et al., 2025). Research on memorable tourism experiences demonstrates that emotionally rich and socially engaging experiences enhance positive affect and contribute to tourists' happiness during and after travel (Hosany et al., 2022). Similarly, studies on tourism and well-being highlight that interaction with the physical environment, cultural context, and social surroundings fosters psychological restoration and positive emotional states (Nawijn & Filep, 2016). From this perspective, destinations contribute to well-being not only through the provision of services but through the creation of experiences that resonate on an emotional and existential level.

Nevertheless, the relationship between destination experience and happiness is more complex than often assumed. Emerging research suggests that not all positive experiences translate directly into increased happiness, as affective outcomes may depend on individual expectations, personal values, and the broader context of the travel experience (Kwon & Lee, 2020; Shin et al., 2024). For instance, a trip may be evaluated as satisfactory in terms of quality and performance, yet fail to generate deeper feelings of joy or fulfillment. Conversely, emotionally intense or meaningful experiences may contribute to happiness even when certain aspects of the trip are perceived as imperfect. These findings indicate that happiness is not merely an extension of satisfaction but a distinct outcome shaped by the emotional depth and personal significance of experiences. Despite these nuances, the literature generally supports the view that destination experience plays a critical role in fostering travel happiness, particularly when experiences involve affective engagement, social interaction, and perceived meaning. Given that the present study conceptualizes destination experience through well-being and social value dimensions, it is reasonable to expect that more positively perceived experiences will enhance tourists' travel happiness. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_4: Tourists' perceived destination experience positively influences their travel happiness.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



Source: Authors' research

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3. Methodology

3.1. Research instruments

The survey consisted of 3 main parts. The first part included 5 scales measuring: Attitudes towards selfies (7-factor scale developed by Paris & Pietschnig, 2015), Travel experience satisfaction (scale developed by Neal et al., 1999; Neal et al., 2007), Travel happiness (scale developed by Neal et al., 1999; Su et al., 2015; Su et al., 2016), Attitudes towards mobile usage (2- factor scale developed by Lalicic & Weismayer, 2018; Tussyadiah, 2013), and Destination experience (2-factor scale developed by Prebensen et al., 2013). All the answers were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 - I totally disagree, 5 - I totally agree). Second part included sociodemographic characteristics of respondents (gender, age, education). Third part of the survey referred to respondents' behavior towards social media usage during travel (social media privacy, type of selfies they share while travelling, time of sharing, frequency of sharing selfies on social networks, usage of tag and filter while sharing selfies on social networks).

3.2. Data procedure

The data collection took place between mid-January and May 2023. An online questionnaire was created and distributed using Survey123 software to reach participants online. The survey link was disseminated via Facebook, Viber, and email, relying on a convenience sampling approach, while respondents were also encouraged to forward it to other accounting professionals, applying a snowball sampling method. Participants were clearly informed about the aim of the study, as well as the voluntary and anonymous nature of their involvement.

3.3. Data analysis

To examine the proposed hypotheses, structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed using AMOS. Model fit was assessed through several commonly used fit indices, including the chi-square statistic (χ^2), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Values of CFI, TLI, and GFI above 0.90 are generally considered indicative of an adequate model fit, while RMSEA values below 0.08 suggest an acceptable level of fit (Kline, 2015). Additionally, a non-significant chi-square value is typically interpreted as evidence of good model fit.

4. Results

4.1. Respondent's profile

The study sample consists of 401 participants from Serbia. There is a higher number of female (75.6%) than male respondents (24.4%). The average age of the sample is 25.13 years (ranging from 18 to 67). Majority of respondents have finished high school (62.8%), while there is 36.6% of respondents who have a bachelor's degree or higher. The manner tourists use social media is presented in the Table 1. Most participants maintain partially public or private profiles, tend to share selfies with attractions or other people rather than alone, post mostly during the trip or the same day, and use photo filters with varying frequency, reflecting a balance between social engagement and personal privacy in their digital self-representation.

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Table 1: Respondents' behavior towards social media usage during travel (%)

My profile on social networks (Facebook, Instagram) is:		**How often do you share selfies on social media while traveling? (this includes sending selfies on Viber and WhatsApp)**	
completely public	11.5	several times a day	12.5
partially public	29.9	once a day	20.2
private	53.1	once in 2-3 days	31.2
I don't have a profile	5.5	extremely rarely or never	36.2
While I'm traveling, I mostly share on social media:		How often do you tag people when you share a photo on social media (Facebook, Instagram)?	
		I don't have a profile	5.2
		never	10.5
selfies I am alone	9	rarely	12.2
selfies with attractions	37.7	sometimes	26.9
selfies with other people	53.4	often	20.9
		always	24.2
The period you most often share / send selfies from your trip is:		How often do you use a photo processing filter before sharing a photo?	
at the moment I make it	10.5	never	18.2
later in the day	52.1	rarely	26.7
the next day	7.5	sometimes	32.2
after a couple of days	8.2	often	15.5
when I return from a trip	21.7	always	7.4

Source: Authors' research

4.2. Descriptive statistics and measurement model validity

Descriptive statistics for all study variables are reported in Table 2. The results indicate that Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each variable/dimension exceed the recommended threshold of 0.6, suggesting that the measurement instruments demonstrate adequate reliability and a high level of internal consistency, in line with Taber (2018). Prior to testing the structural (path) model, convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs were assessed to ensure the validity of the measurement model.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and measurement model validity

Dimension	**Mean**	**Std.**	**α**	**AVE**	**CR**
Attitudes towards selfies					
Negative opinion (13 items)	2.48	.547	.734	0.40	0.86
In-group behavior (9 items)	3.85	.533	.744	0.42	0.86
Pastime (7 items)	3.19	.616	.678	0.43	0.84
Travel factor (6 items)	3.81	.630	.698	0.41	0.80
Status symbol (6 items)	3.22	.576	.726	0.42	0.81
Privacy concerns (5 items)	3.47	.618	.701	0.45	0.80
Impression management (3 items)	3.91	.697	.632	0.49	0.74
Attitudes towards mobile technologies					
Social factor (3 items)	3.18	1.07	.826	0.66	0.85
Harmonious behavior (4 items)	2.34	.999	.838	0.56	0.83
Obsessive behavior (6 items)	1.57	.738	.861	0.53	0.86

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Destination experience					
Social value (4 items)	1.90	.934	.880	0.54	0.82
Well-being (14 items)	1.92	.724	.904	0.51	0.93
Travel happiness (4 items)	4.04	.687	.716	.075	.092
Travel experience satisfaction (4 items)	1.87	.922	.889	0.54	0.82

Source: Authors' research

Convergent validity for each construct was assessed by computing the average variance extracted (AVE) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Adequate convergent validity is indicated when factor loadings are statistically significant and AVE values exceed 0.50 for each construct; however, AVE values above 0.40 may still be considered acceptable when composite reliability (CR) is greater than 0.60 (Huang et al., 2013). The findings revealed that all constructs achieved AVE values above 0.40 and CR values above 0.60 (Table 2), supporting satisfactory convergent validity. Discriminant validity was subsequently evaluated by comparing the AVE of each latent construct with the corresponding squared inter-construct correlations (Table 3). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), discriminant validity is established when the AVE for each construct exceeds its squared correlations with other constructs.

Table 3: Squared correlation estimates and average variances extracted

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**
Negative opinion	*.40*													
Ingroup behavior	0.292	*.42*												
Pastime	0.094	0.223	*.43*											
Travel factor	0.009	0.002	0.169	*.41*										
Status Symbol	0.027	0.039	0.188	0.204	*.42*									
Privacy concerns	0.064	0.085	0.015	0.000	0.002	*.45*								
Impression management	0.003	0.058	0.085	0.077	0.096	0.021	*.49*							
Social factor	0.001	0.002	0.027	0.112	0.093	0.001	0.038	*.66*						
Harmonious behavior	0.007	0.005	0.051	0.166	0.122	0.001	0.017	0.410	*.56*					
Obsessive behavior	0.010	0.010	0.036	0.064	0.080	0.008	0.004	0.150	0.3329	*.53*				
Travel happiness	0.001	0.005	0.011	0.065	0.053	0.004	0.059	0.023	0.0424	0.002	.54			
Travel satisfaction	0.006	0.003	0.044	0.084	0.092	0.006	0.006	0.191	0.4543	0.490	0.014	*.51*		
Social value	0.001	0.000	0.025	0.069	0.100	0.019	0.009	0.130	0.3226	0.360	0.007	0.549	*.75*	
Wellbeing	0.019	0.011	0.036	0.138	0.113	0.023	0.004	0.176	0.4225	0.475	0.010	0.608	0.560	*.54*

Note: Italics indicate average variances extracted (AVEs)
Source: Authors' research

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The squared correlations derived from the total scores range between 0.00 and 0.549, remaining below the corresponding AVE values. This indicates that all constructs demonstrate adequate discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker, 1981; Zaiţ & Bertea, 2011).

4.3. Results of the path model

A path analysis was performed to examine the proposed research hypotheses. However, the initial model did not demonstrate an adequate level of fit, firstly suggesting eliminating the effects of Ingroup behavior, pastime, travel factor, status symbol and impression management (Tourists' attitudes towards selfies) as well as the Social factor (Tourists' attitudes towards mobile technologies) on **Social value** as well as the effects of Ingroup behavior, pastime, status symbol and impression management on **Well-being.** The analysis showed that Social value and Well-being (Destination experience) do not affect Travel experience satisfaction. The modification indexes also suggested that there are direct effects of Travel factor, Status Symbol and Impression management (Tourists' attitudes towards selfies) and Harmonious and Obsessive behavior (Tourists' attitudes towards mobile technologies) on Travel happiness and Travel satisfaction. Following the re-estimation of the model, the structural analysis produced satisfactory fit indices. Specifically, GFI (.983), RMR (.023), NFI (.979), RFI (.955), TLI (.992), CFI (.997), and RMSEA (.022) all indicated an acceptable model fit in relation to the hypothesized relationships among the latent constructs. Furthermore, the chi-square statistic was not statistically significant (χ^2=59.137, df=42, p=.182), providing additional support for a well-fitting model.

The results of the path model indicate that Tourists' **attitudes towards selfies** showed to partly influence Tourists' **destination experience (H1)**. Specifically, Negative opinion showed to positively influence Social value factor (β=.144, t = 4.451) while Privacy concerns showed negative effects on Social value factor (β=-.128, t =-.3.415) and Well-being (β=-.099, t =-3.082). Well-being is also positively affected by Travel factor (β=.100, t =3.340). Tourists' **attitudes towards mobile technologies** also showed influences on Tourists' **Destination experience (H2).** Specifically, Harmonious behavior positively affects both Social value (β=.340, t = 7.580) and Well-being (β=.346, t = 8.453). Obsessive behavior also showed positive effects on Social value (β=.403, t = 8.993) and Well-being (β=.462, t = 11.693). When it comes to Tourists' **Destination experience**, the analysis showed that both factors, Social value (β=.280, t = 6.859) and Well-being (β=.291, t = 6.251) positively affect Tourists' **travel experience satisfaction (H3),** while effects on Tourists' **travel happiness** were not confirmed **(H4)**.

The model also revealed certain direct effects between variables that were not hypothesized by the study (Table 4). Certain factors of Tourists' attitudes towards selfies showed direct positive effects on Travel happiness: Travel factor (β=.126, t =2.294), Impression management (β=.163, t =3.227) and Status symbol (β=.098, t =1.791). Moreover, factors of Tourists' attitudes towards mobile technologies showed effects on Travel happiness and Travel experience satisfaction: Harmonious behavior positively affects both Travel happiness (β=.168, t =2.737) and Travel experience satisfaction (β=.202, t =5.598). Obsessive behavior negatively affects Travel happiness (β=-.119, t =-2.042) but positively affects Travel experience satisfaction (β=.215, t =5.704).

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Table 4: The results of model

Hypothesis		β	S.E.	t-value	p-value	Supported
H1	Negative opinion→ Social value	.144	.055	4.451	.000	Yes
	Privacy concerns→ Social value	-.128	.057	-.3.415	.000	NO (different sign)
	Travel factor → Well-being	.100	.034	3.340	.000	Yes
	Privacy concerns→Well-being	-.099	.037	-3.082	.002	NO (different sign)
H2	Harmonious behavior→ Well-being	.346	.029	8.453	.000	Yes
	Obsessive behavior→ Well-being	.462	.038	11.693	.000	Yes
	Harmonious behavior → Social value	.340	.042	7.580	.000	Yes
	Obsessive behavior → Social value	.403	.057	8.993	.000	Yes
H3	Social value→ Travel experience satisfaction	.280	.040	6.859	.000	Yes
	Well-being→ Travel experience satisfaction	.291	.060	6.251	.000	Yes
	Direct effects suggested by the model	**B**	**S.E.**	**t-value**	**p-value**	**Result**
	Travel factor→ Travel happiness	.126	.060	2.294	.022	Confirmed direct effects
	Impression management→ Travel happiness	.163	.049	3.227	.001	Confirmed direct effects
	Status symbol→ Travel happiness	.098	.066	1.791	.043	Confirmed direct effects
	Harmonious behavior→ Travel happiness	.168	.042	2.737	.006	Confirmed direct effects
	Harmonious behavior→Travel experience satisfaction	.202	.033	5.598	.000	Confirmed direct effects
	Obsessive behavior→ Travel happiness	-.119	.054	-2.042	.041	Confirmed direct effects
	Obsessive behavior →Travel experience satisfaction	.215	.047	5.704	.000	Confirmed direct effects

Note: β = standardized regression coefficient
Source: Authors' research

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5. Discussion and concluding remarks

Few studies have examined selfie images as experiential determinants influencing destination experience and travel outcomes. According to the results of the path model, three out of four hypotheses received empirical support. Specifically, H1 predicted that tourists' attitudes toward selfies would positively influence their perceived destination experience, which was partially supported in our findings. This partial support suggests that the effects of attitudes toward selfies and mobile technologies are not uniform but vary depending on specific dimensions of the destination experience and underlying psychological mechanisms.

Attitudes toward selfies influenced destination experience dimensions. Negative opinions enhanced social value, while privacy concerns had a negative impact on both social value and well-being. One possible explanation is that even negative or critical attitudes toward selfies may stimulate social comparison and interaction, thereby strengthening perceived social value. Selfie-taking actively mediates tourists' attention, interpretation, and social interaction, explaining why certain negative attitudes can still produce social value. This finding reflects the dual nature of self-presentation processes highlighted in prior studies (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016; Lyu, 2016; Siegel et al., 2023). Positive attitudes toward selfies may enhance social value and well-being, while privacy concerns limit engagement and reduce emotional benefits.

Attitudes toward mobile technologies also affected destination experience, with both harmonious and obsessive usage positively shaping social value and well-being. The positive influence of both forms of usage suggests that the intensity of engagement with mobile technologies enhances tourists' involvement with the destination, regardless of whether the usage is harmonious or obsessive. In line with passion theory (Lalicic & Weismayer, 2018), even obsessive engagement may increase immersion in the experience, although it may carry potential negative implications in the long term. This finding corresponds to H2, which proposed that tourists' attitudes toward mobile technology use would positively influence their perceived destination experience.

H3 was supported, confirming that social value and well-being are important determinants of travel experience satisfaction. In contrast, H4 was not supported, since destination experience did not show a significant effect on travel happiness. This unexpected result may suggest that travel happiness represents a broader and more stable construct not solely determined by situational experiences at the destination. From a co-creation perspective, this deviation may be expected, as not all emotional dimensions of travel are directly determined by evaluative experiences; rather, they emerge from interactions with personal predispositions, social context, and prior emotional states. Travel happiness may be influenced by individual predispositions or overall life satisfaction, consistent with distinctions in the literature between short-term satisfaction and long-term well-being (Kwon & Lee, 2020; Nawijn, 2011; Shin et al., 2024). This divergence highlights that while experiential engagement drives cognitive satisfaction, affective well-being may require additional mediators, such as novelty seeking, personality traits, or prior emotional baseline (Prebensen et al., 2013; Uslu & Tosun, 2024).

These findings highlight the complex role of selfie-related attitudes and mobile technology engagement in shaping specific aspects of tourists' experiences and satisfaction. Previous studies have highlighted the role of selfies in shaping tourist experiences, particularly through self-presentation and social interaction motives. The present findings extend this perspective by demonstrating that selfie-related attitudes not only reflect self-presentation motives but also actively shape experiential outcomes. In this sense, selfies function as mechanisms through which tourists construct meaning, interpret destination attributes, and enhance engagement, aligning with co-creation and experiential mediation frameworks. Mobile technologies play an increasingly important role in shaping tourist experiences, particularly through harmonious and obsessive passion frameworks. Harmonious passion leads to positive emotions, while obsessive passion may generate negative outcomes. However, the findings suggest that even obsessive engagement can enhance experiential involvement, indicating that high levels of technology use intensify the experience despite potential psychological trade-offs. Tourists may worry about losing control of their experiences and becoming too dependent on mobile technology. These results partially align with previous research emphasizing the role of digital technologies in shaping tourist experiences (e.g., Dias & Afonso, 2021). Unlike earlier research focusing mainly on

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psychological motivations or marketing outcomes, the present findings demonstrate that selfie-related attitudes also function as experiential determinants, influencing social, cognitive, and affective dimensions of destination experience. Moreover, the significant influence of destination experience on satisfaction supports established theoretical assumptions that experiential evaluation precedes cognitive satisfaction judgments. However, the absence of a significant relationship with travel happiness suggests that the link between experience and broader well-being outcomes may be more complex than previously assumed, underscoring the importance of distinguishing short-term cognitive satisfaction from long-term affective happiness.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that tourism professionals can enhance travel experience satisfaction by designing environments and services that facilitate selfie-taking and digital sharing. This knowledge can help tourism service companies better tailor their offerings to the needs of modern travelers. In addition, this study contributes to contemporary tourism research by empirically demonstrating that digitally mediated self-representation functions as a structural component of destination experience formation, not merely as a communication practice. By integrating attitudes toward selfies and mobile technologies into a unified model linking experience, satisfaction, and happiness, the findings provide theoretical insight into how technology-driven behaviors amplify and shape both cognitive and affective dimensions of tourist experiences. In light of the growing importance of selfie practices, destination marketers should develop strategies that enable tourists to effectively create and share desirable impressions, thereby enhancing both their experience and satisfaction, while also considering the psychological implications of technology use on well-being. Integrating these findings with existing theory demonstrates that selfie and mobile technology attitudes are core components of modern digitally mediated tourism experiences.

Overall, this study demonstrates that digital self-representation and mobile technology engagement are central to shaping both cognitive and affective dimensions of tourists' experiences, highlighting the importance of integrating technology into experiential design. These findings underscore that selfies and mobile devices are not merely communication tools, but fundamental elements influencing satisfaction, well-being, and co-created travel experiences.

6. Limitation and further research

The study's limitation is the sparse references to the relationship between attitude toward selfies, mobile technology, travel happiness, and experience satisfaction since this is among the first studies to analyze the relationship between these factors. Further, because of the homogeneous study sample, the conclusions of the study could be biased. Expanding the research would be important to gain more understanding of how people change their attitudes because the sample was only taken in fewer locations. This study did not include moderating influences that could have improved the explanation of travel experience satisfaction and travel happiness. Since travel satisfaction had a strong mediating effect on the model of tourist happiness (Chen & Li, 2018), travel satisfaction could be investigated as a potential mediator of happiness. Because this research used a scale that reflects attitudes toward selfies, future research could apply the selfie behavior scale as a moderator. Hence, the research could include social media addiction scale with the aim of examining the extent to which tourists use social media, how important they are to them or whether they use it more intensively than they admit. This could enrich knowledge on the usage of social media and posting selfie photos in terms of frequency and explain whether it really brings happiness to tourists and their travel experience satisfaction. Also, it is critical to address some issues in

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future studies, such as what happens when tourists share photos as a part of their negative experiences. What impact will this behavior have on the destination experience and travel happiness?

CRediT author statement

Marija Bojić: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization, Supervision. **Sanja Kovačić:** Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis. **Dunja Demirović Bajrami**: Writing – original draft, Visualization, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Đurđa Miljković**: Writing – original draft, Validation, Investigation.

Declaration of generative AI in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the authors did not use generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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