

# The Impact of Digital Content Marketing on Travel Intentions to Tourist Destinations: A Proposed Model Based on Perceived Value and Loyalty

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** this study analyzes the antecedents of the intention to travel to tourist destinations using digital content marketing (DCM) based on the advertising value theory and the brand loyalty theory from an attitudinal perspective.

**Methods:** a quasi-experimental design was applied with two groups: treatment and control. The treatment group answered an initial questionnaire focused on loyalty and intention to travel, followed by exposure to a stimulus, and then a second questionnaire covering all constructs. The control group completed the same loyalty and intention constructs in both phases, without exposure to the stimulus. Data were analyzed using t-tests and structural equation modeling with SPSS and AMOS.

**Results:** the t-test confirmed that DCM positively influences perceptions of loyalty and intention to travel. Results of the structural equation modeling showed that the perceived value of DCM, measured through personalization, informativeness, entertainment, and credibility, has a significant impact on destination loyalty and the intention to travel. **Conclusions:** the study offers theoretical contributions by applying experimental research methods to tourism consumer behavior and expanding the advertising value theory to a new context. From a managerial perspective, it provides relevant insights for marketers, organizations, and tourist destinations interested in adopting DCM strategies to enhance consumer engagement and travel intentions.

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## INTRODUCTION

The advent of the internet has ushered in gradual shifts in the demographic makeup of consumer populations across various industries. This communication tool catalyzed the rise of social media, transforming users from traditional consumers into content producers. As a consequence, their constant opinions on the quality of goods and services wield significant influence over brand consumption. Schweidel et al. (2022) highlight that this digital evolution has led to the proliferation of approximately 22 million consumer-centric technological devices, a number expected to double by 2030. Users engage with companies daily through these devices, assuming the role of co-creators of value.

This paradigm shift is palpable in the tourism industry, where the task of promoting destinations and products faces continual challenges amidst industry and consumer dynamics. Within this context, digital content marketing (DCM) stands out as an innovative technique gaining increasing traction across various sectors, including tourism. Its primary characteristic lies in organically delivering pertinent and valuable information to the consumer public, aiding them in diverse areas of interest in their daily lives.

In 2018, over 70% of brands in the United States claimed to have content marketing strategies in place, with more than half of global brands anticipating an increase in their DCM budgets by 2020 (Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2020). Following the coronavirus pandemic, data show that content creation has played an increasingly important role in entrepreneurship and job creation in several countries, with an estimated value of US\$104.2 billion worldwide in 2022, and a cascading effect on revenue generated by content creators in countries such as Brazil, the USA, South Korea, and Spain (Tafesse & Dayan, 2023). In addition, consumers spend around seven hours per day interacting with content from different brands on online platforms (Blanco-Moreno et al., 2024), creating an environment conducive to the continued growth of this strategy, which constitutes a large part of users' leisure time.

Despite the surge of DCM in digital industries, academic inquiry, while continuously expressing interest in the subject since Rowley (2008), reveals research gaps, particularly concerning the application of different theories to examine the phenomenon and its impact on consumer perception. Studies on DCM have explored various contexts, such as business-to-business (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016; Wang et al., 2019; Yaghtin et al., 2020; Terho et al., 2022; Salonen et al., 2024), retail products (Bowden & Mirzaei, 2021; Lou et al., 2019; Lou & Xie, 2020), gastro-nomic tourism (Bu et al., 2021), social media influenc-

ers (Odoom, 2023), and healthy tourism (Amiri Sardari et al., 2024). However, attention to its role in promoting tourist destinations and influencing the purchasing behavior of tourists remains limited (e.g., Mathew & Soliman, 2021).

Regarding theories, despite its innovative status in the digital realm and historical roots in traditional advertising, DCM has prompted the consideration of theories from scientific fields like communication and psychology, which have constituted pertinent alternatives to explain this phenomenon and its repercussions on consumer behavior.

This paper aims to analyze the antecedents of the intention to travel to tourist destinations through DCM, drawing on the advertising value theory (Ducoffe, 1995) and the brand loyalty theory, approached from an attitudinal perspective (Chen & Gursoy, 2001). In doing so, this study contributes to the literature on destination promotion, examining a digital marketing phenomenon within this context and providing fresh validation for the advertising value and brand loyalty theories.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH MODEL

### Digital content marketing (DCM) and tourism

DCM represents a promotional strategy that has not only adapted to the contemporary era but has also attained significant prominence in the industry. While the roots of content marketing can be traced back to the early 20th century (Pulizzi, 2013), its widespread adoption occurred with the advent of the internet, resulting in substantial annual investments amounting to tens of billions of dollars (Xie & Lou, 2020). Beard et al. (2021) underscore this shift, revealing that 70% of content marketers utilize social media to disseminate content, 77% leverage website creation for brand representation, and 62% employ e-newsletters. Crucially, DCM stands out as a cost-effective strategy compared to traditional advertising media, providing companies with an organic and economical means of prospecting and retaining customers.

In conceptualizing DCM, key terms such as 'information' (Wall & Spinuzzi, 2018), 'relevance' (Holliman & Rowley, 2014), and 'value' (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016) are essential. This tool serves not only as a promotional strategy but also as a consumer support mechanism, relying on the delivery of information where relevance and value play pivotal roles in fulfilling its promotional function.

Al-Gasawneh and Al-Adamat (2020) argue that strategic content planning and the selection of appropriate channels for publication enable the targeting of

specific audience groups. Whether through segment-ed newspapers, magazines, websites, or other means, tailored content with detailed information enhances consumers' understanding of a particular product. This approach allows for the strategic planning of content tailored to the desired audience, facilitating organic engagement with users, since these individuals typically harbor specific interests and actively seek information on related topics.

Concerning tourism, [Radenković-Šošić and Perić \(2016\)](#) underscore that, by focusing on creative rather than financial aspects, DCM has emerged as an alternative to alleviate the issue of low-quality tourist destination portals. Many of these portals contain outdated information due to infrequent updates by their developers and often employ impersonal language. Consequently, travel blogs, for instance, have gained preference over such portals. Additionally, [Al-Gasawneh and Omar \(2020\)](#) note that brands often collaborate with blog editors to promote their products indirectly, creating content that appears more user-generated than direct brand promotion. Therefore, when exposed to this content, users may not immediately recognize it as a direct brand advertisement. Instead, they may perceive it as individuals similar to themselves sharing insights about the product as a form of assistance.

When planning a journey to a specific destination, prospective tourists routinely turn to the internet to glean information. This information serves to piece together their itinerary or to discover establishments aligning with their day-to-day requirements at the chosen location. Moreover, these searches often extend to more comprehensive planning, encompassing facets such as purchasing airline tickets, securing passports, and obtaining tourist visas, among others. Hence, entities like travel blogs or tourism companies can proactively disseminate such content, positioning themselves at the forefront of metric rankings in these thematic areas.

Research on the interplay between DCM and tourism remains sporadic, fostering potential research ideas to address theoretical gaps. Apart from studies rooted in user generated content (UGC) for DCM planning (e.g., [Gregoriades et al., 2021](#)), there exists research incorporating DCM into managerial recommendations ([Chen et al., 2022](#); [Maeran & Mignemi, 2021](#); [Mody et al., 2017](#)). Furthermore, studies engaging consumers and/or professionals to test and evolve theories that aid in comprehending the phenomenon are prevalent ([Bu et al., 2021](#); [Mathew & Soliman, 2021](#)).

Based on this, we can conclude that the wide range of existing and consolidated theories can assist in understanding of DCM in the field of tourism. In light of

the limited number of studies exploring DCM and tourist consumers, exploratory surveys may unveil new constructs that complement existing theories/models or offer insights into diverse consumer behaviors.

### Advertising value theory

The advertising value theory, introduced by Ducoffe in 1995, aimed to gauge consumers' satisfaction with organizational communication. While existing theories at the time focused on assessing product value, those measuring advertising effectiveness were notably inconsistent. [Ducoffe's \(1995\)](#) conception defines the value of advertising as "a subjective evaluation of the relative value or usefulness of advertising to consumers" (p. 1), and studies delving into this concept can offer valuable marketing insights for advertisers who often approach campaigns with a singular perspective. [Ducoffe's \(1995\)](#) theoretical and empirical experimental study identified informativeness, entertainment, and irritation as the constructs directly influencing the perceived value of advertising.

However, some studies omit 'irritation' as a construct in research models, as suggested by [Sun et al. \(2010\)](#). They argue that irritation reflects consumers' negative reactions to improperly distributed advertising and is unrelated to the inherent value of the advertising itself. In this context, perceived informativeness and entertainment are the aspects that truly characterize the advertising value theory, ensuring the model's parsimony ([Sun et al., 2010](#)).

In this research, we adopt [Ducoffe's \(1995\)](#) theory, incorporating the constructs 'informativeness' and 'entertainment,' along with two additional constructs representing positive advertising characteristics that have found application in subsequent studies: 'credibility' and 'personalization.'

### Informativeness

[Ducoffe \(1996\)](#) defines informativeness as the characteristic of providing information in advertisements that caters to consumer needs. It aligns with the utilitarian bias of the advertising message, measuring the perceived usefulness, accuracy, and ingenuity of information presented in advertisements ([Abbasi et al., 2021](#)).

Numerous studies have uncovered statistically significant evidence supporting informativeness as a characteristic directly impacting the perceived value of advertising across various platforms, including online advertising ([Zha et al., 2015](#)), advertising on mobile technologies ([Wu & Hsiao, 2017](#)), and social media ([Van-Tien Dao et al., 2014](#); [Murillo et al., 2016](#); [Efendioglu & Durmaz, 2022](#)), among others.

## Entertainment

In contrast to informativeness, entertainment emerges as a hedonic characteristic within the advertising message. Drawing from the uses and gratifications theory (Katz et al., 1973), its value lies in its capacity to fulfill the consumer public's needs for escapism, amusement, aesthetic pleasure, or emotional release (Ducoffe, 1995, 1996).

The proposition here is that advertising's ability to entertain enhances the overall exchange experience for consumers. As a foundational construct within the theory, studies (e.g., Abbasi et al., 2021; Efendioglu & Durmaz, 2022; Zha et al., 2015) mentioned under 'informativeness' have consistently tested the relationship between entertainment and the perceived value of advertising, consistently yielding positive results. In this context, entertainment is perceived as the 'friendliness' of the ad, and when coupled effectively with informativeness, it tends to exert an even more positive impact on the perceived value of the advertising message.

## Credibility

Credibility emerges as a novel contribution to the advertising value theory, rooted in the study by Mackenzie and Lutz (1989). The authors posit that for credibility to exist, advertisements must convey honesty and truthfulness in the information presented. Abbasi et al. (2021) note that credibility hinges not only on the content of the ad but also on the brand's image and its performance in the market.

Examples of studies affirming the positive relationship between credibility and the perceived value of advertising include Hassan et al. (2013), Van-Tien Dao et al. (2014), Martins et al. (2019), and Sari et al. (2020), among others.

## Personalization

Personalization constitutes another construct integrated into studies investigating the value of advertising. This involves tailoring advertising messages based on consumer characteristics such as demographic information, preferences, context, and content (Gaber et al., 2019). According to Yang et al. (2020), consumers increasingly desire tailored advertising messages that align with their interests. Therefore, developing personalization is one of the factors that can influence the positive impact of advertising on the target audience.

Although a complex task, advancements in internet proliferation and the expanding user base in the virtual environment have facilitated companies in acquiring detailed information about users and promoting their

products in a more targeted manner (Tran et al., 2020). The positive relationship between this construct and the perceived value of advertising is evident in studies such as Wu and Hsiao (2017), Phan et al. (2018), Gaber et al. (2019), and Abbasi et al. (2021).

## Advertising value theory and digital content marketing

As previously mentioned, recent years have witnessed the emergence of studies on digital content marketing (DCM) in the literature. Some of these investigations have drawn on existing and well-established theories in the realm of consumer behavior. For example, Müller and Christandl (2019) explored the impacts of DCM using the persuasion knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994), while Lou et al. (2019) and Xie and Lou (2020) incorporated elements from the advertising value theory to examine the effects of DCM on consumer behavior. Lou et al. (2019) focused solely on the constructs of 'informativeness' and 'entertainment,' whereas Xie and Lou (2020) introduced new constructs to explore the value of luxury content marketing on social media.

In this context, the advertising value theory has demonstrated its effectiveness in DCM research. Despite being considered an innovative promotional strategy, the roots of DCM can be traced back to traditional advertising. Consequently, the advertising value theory holds the potential to enrich our comprehension of this subject.

We propose utilizing the constructs of 'informativeness,' 'entertainment,' 'credibility,' and 'personalization' to comprehend the value of DCM in the behavior of tourism consumers. These characteristics are evident in DCM concepts (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016; Pulizzi, 2013; Salminen et al., 2019), and Repovienė and Pažėraitė (2019) underscore these elements (informativeness, entertainment, credibility, and personalization) as essential for constructing DCM content aimed at promoting tourist destinations.

Moreover, building upon Kim and Han (2014), we posit that the 'personalization' construct serves as a predictor for the 'entertainment,' 'credibility,' and 'informativeness' characteristics. This is rooted in the idea that DCM content in tourism must increasingly cater to the user's lifestyle to enhance receptivity and evoke emotions that foster alternative perceptions of value. Subsequently, the direct relationships between 'informativeness,' 'entertainment,' and 'credibility' with 'perceived value' find support in the studies cited throughout this review. Thus, we formulate the first six hypotheses:



H1: The personalization of DCM content for tourist destinations is positively associated with perceived DCM informativeness.

H2: The personalization of DCM content for tourist destinations is positively associated with perceived DCM entertainment.

H3: The personalization of DCM content for tourist destinations is positively associated with perceived DCM credibility.

H4: Informativeness positively influences the perceived value of DCM for tourist destinations.

H5: Entertainment positively influences the perceived value of DCM for tourist destinations.

H6: Credibility positively influences the perceived value of DCM for tourist destinations.

### Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty stands as a well-explored theme in the literature, with comprehensive studies and discussions guided notably by philosophy and psychology (Fournier & Yao, 1997). According to Yi and Jeon (2003), brand loyalty is delineated through the process of repeated purchases over a specific timeframe, making frequency and the likelihood of purchase integral metrics for assessing this construct.

Studies on brand loyalty span various areas, including the quality of goods and services (Alexandris et al., 2008; Al-Hawary, 2013), loyalty programs (Aluri et al., 2019; Yi & Jeon, 2003), online communities (Jang et al., 2008; Zheng et al., 2015), and luxury brands (Liu et al., 2012), among others. In the tourism sector, loyalty has been a frequent focus, evident in research on hotels (Hemsley-Brown & Alnawas, 2016; Rather & Camilleri, 2019), restaurants (Bihamta et al., 2017; Kwon et al., 2020), and tourist destinations (Bianchi & Pike, 2011; Murray & Kline, 2015; Kim et al., 2018).

In the specific context of tourism, Chen and Gursoy (2001) critique behavioral loyalty concerning travelers' purchasing behavior, emphasizing that individuals can remain loyal to a destination even without physically visiting it. Yuksel et al. (2010) highlight the impact of positive emotional and cognitive ties to a place on an individual's evaluation of a destination, influencing loyalty and transforming individuals into advocates and ambassadors for the destination's brand. Therefore, marketing activities such as digital content marketing (DCM) play a role in fostering loyalty. Studies linking loyalty and

tourist destinations have frequently sought to measure this construct based on attitudinal characteristics.

Within tourism, brand loyalty has the capacity to elevate tourists' sentiments toward places (Liu et al., 2012). Existing research demonstrates that loyalty is often influenced by place attachment (Lee et al., 2012; Prayag & Ryan, 2012). However, for tourists experiencing a destination for the first time, or those who have not visited it before, place attachment may not be an immediate reality. Kim et al. (2018) propose that loyalty to the destination, in such cases, should be cultivated based on the quality of the overall experience, commencing in the pre-trip phase with information gathering about the destination in question. Consequently, DCM can act as a catalyst for the tourist experience, especially by providing potential tourists with practices for co-creating value. This proposition is supported by Hussain et al. (2022), who found that more effective advertisements, based on attributes like informativeness, interactivity, and credibility, enhance consumers' ability to engage with companies, thereby generating brand loyalty (Lou et al., 2019).

Building upon these arguments and the advertising value theory, we posit that users, when exposed to DCM, derive value during the pre-travel period, impacting their perception and loyalty to the destination. Thus, the seventh hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H7: The perceived value of digital content marketing in tourist destinations positively influences loyalty to tourist destinations.

Additionally, the personalization construct has been a focal point in academic research as a significant precursor to loyalty. Wang and Li (2012) posit that personalized content, such as a website, can yield various benefits for consumers, fostering a stronger relationship between them and the brand. This level of personalization may prompt users to revisit the site hosting specific content, seeking more information about the respective product or service, or recalling prior information.

Considered a pivotal antecedent of loyalty in service provision (Ball et al., 2006; Coelho & Henseler, 2012), personalization can also be extended to advertising. Loyalty, in this context, transcends mere repeated product purchases; it encapsulates the positive emotions elicited by the purchase and the inclination to advocate for the brand. This principle aligns with the objectives of tourism promotion for destinations. Personalized content about a tourist destination can foster positive perceptions among potential tourists, potentially triggering attitudinal loyalty. From this perspective, we propose the eighth hypothesis:

H8: The personalization of DCM content in tourism is positively related to loyalty to tourist destinations.

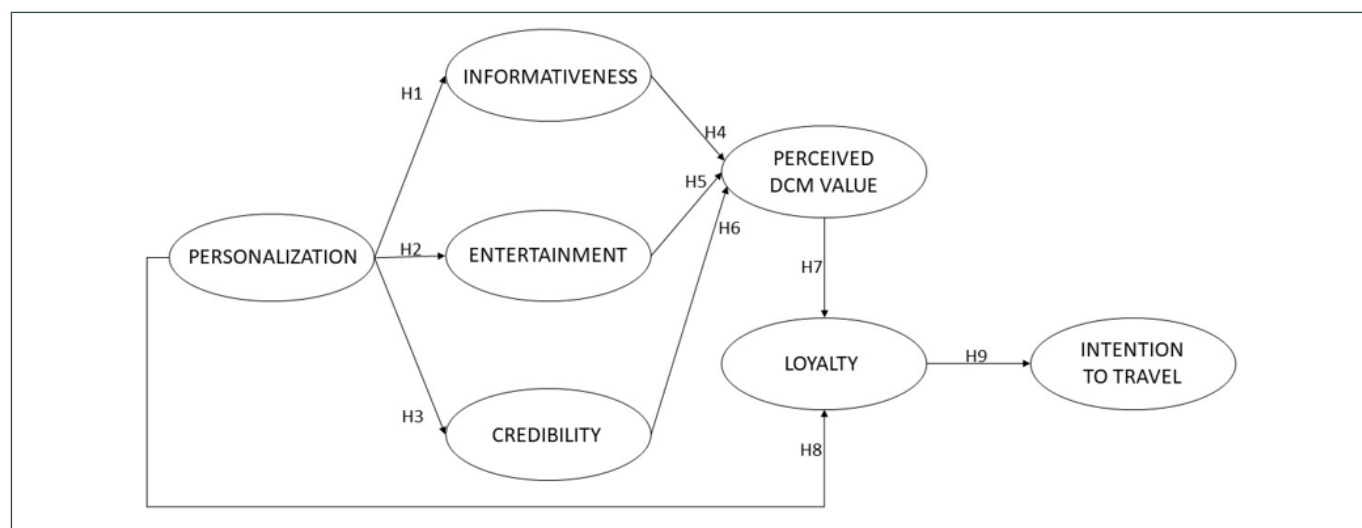
In this study, we contend that the intention to travel is kindled by loyalty to the destination, and this loyalty does not necessarily hinge on repeated visits, but instead on attitudinal loyalty entwined with emotional and affective connections.

Shin et al.'s (2022) research with Korean travelers demonstrated that the positive impact of previous international travel experiences influenced the decision to explore domestic destinations. Consequently, we posit that encounters with other trips and destinations can cultivate one's intention to travel. Furthermore, Villacé-Molinero et al. (2023) underscored the imperative to formulate strategies that cultivate sentiments toward destinations, thereby intensifying feelings of loyalty.

This sense of loyalty often correlates positively with purchase intentions, as indicated by Lou et al. (2019) in their examination of the impact of DCM on physical goods. Building on this premise, we assert that this correlation extends to tourist destinations. In other words, loyalty, triggered by attitudinal elements, is intricately connected to the intention to travel to a destination. With this perspective, the ninth hypothesis posits:

H9: Loyalty, stemming from digital content marketing of tourist destinations, positively influences the intention to travel to a destination.

The proposed model, illustrating the aforementioned hypotheses, is depicted in Figure 1.



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

**Figure 1.** The proposed model.

## METHODS

### Scale adaptation

For the empirical phase of this research, we devised a quasi-experimental protocol involving two groups of respondents: the treatment and control groups. Both groups responded to two questionnaires structured on an 11-level Likert scale, where zero denoted 'totally disagree' and ten indicated 'totally agree.' The questionnaires were administered one week apart. In the case of the treatment group, the initial questionnaire exclusively addressed agreement attribution in two constructs: loyalty and intention to travel. The second questionnaire, administered after the presentation of the stimulus, encompassed all constructs proposed in the model.

For the control group, in both the initial and subsequent phases of data collection, the questionnaire focused solely on the 'loyalty' and 'intention to travel'

constructs, as these were specifically designated for the t-tests.

In addition to the constructs related to the proposed model, the questionnaire incorporated queries concerning the sociodemographic profile of the respondents. These aimed to discern their gender, age group, and level of education. Additional questions included the respondents' preferred type of destination (e.g., beach, historical-cultural, nature, or other), their level of knowledge about the surveyed destination (ranging from 'I never heard of it' to 'I always hear about it'), and the frequency of their visits to the destination (ranging from 'never' to 'always').

Table 1 presents the seven constructs and 26 variables of the proposed model, all satisfying the 'multiple indicators' assumption (Marôco, 2014), with a minimum of three variables for each construct.

**Table 1.** Description of constructs and variables proposed in the study.

Construct	Variable identification	Variable description	Refs.
Informativeness	INF1	Timely	Ducoffe (1996)
	INF2	Good source of information	
	INF3	Up-to-date source of information	
	INF4	Complete source of information	
	INF5	Convenient source of information	
Entertainment	ENT1	Enjoyable	Ducoffe (1996)
	ENT2	Attractive	
	ENT3	Satisfying	
	ENT4	Interesting	
Credibility	CRED1	Convincing	Martins et al. (2019)
	CRED2	Trustworthy	
	CRED3	Believable/Credible	
Personalization	PER1	Fit my profile	Abbasi et al. (2021)
	PER2	Tailored for my planning	
	PER3	Personalized	
Perceived value	VAL1	Important	Ducoffe (1996)
	VAL2	Valuable	
	VAL3	Beneficial	
Loyalty	LOY1	Preferred choice	Bianchi and Pike (2011); Li et al. (2020); Wisker et al. (2020)
	LOY2	I recommend it to other people	
	LOY3	I would consider visiting it even at a high price	
	LOY4	Saying positive things to other people	
Intention to travel	INT1	I intend to visit it	Chen and Tung (2014); Molinillo et al. (2018)
	INT2	I would choose to visit it during vacations/holidays	
	INT3	I would rather visit it instead of other similar destinations	
	INT4	Effort to travel	

**Note.** Elaborated by the authors.

## Stimuli

Two types of stimuli were assigned to a nationally recognized tourist destination in Brazil: Maragogi, a coastal town in the state of Alagoas, considered one of the prominent landmarks of northeastern Brazil, often referred to as the 'Brazilian Caribbean' (Melhores Destinos, 2023).

The selection of Maragogi was driven by the necessity to opt for a destination that did not receive as much commercial exposure from national media as certain Brazilian capitals but was not entirely unfamiliar to the general public.

Since there is no information indicating that the destination officially uses the DCM technique, we selected typical DCM content already published about it on different platforms that could potentially become official for the destination. The stimuli presented comprised textual content, accompanied by images, from a national travel blog about Maragogi, and a ten-minute video hosted on YouTube containing the same information as the blog. These stimuli were exclusively presented to the treatment group at the beginning of the second phase of the research, allowing respondents to choose between reading the blog text or watching the video. We offered this option so that the content could approach the personalization characteristic, ensuring that users who preferred reading were not forced to watch the video, and vice versa.

Meanwhile, the control group answered the same questionnaire in both phases of data collection. Basic information about the destination was disclosed during the second phase without additional intervention through images, videos, or similar means.

## Pre-test and focus group

Before the final data collection, a pre-test was conducted using stimuli from another Brazilian tourist destination to assess the proposed instrument. The pre-test involved a small sample of respondents, none of whom participated in the official survey. During the pre-test, inconsistencies were noted, such as the application of a single textual stimulus and a lack of clear understanding of certain variables by respondents.

In this pre-test phase, part of the treatment group comprised tourism researchers who agreed to participate in a focus group meeting (Morgan, 1993) with the research creators. This aimed to identify and address the main inconsistencies, preventing their recurrence in the official data collection. The focus group occurred after the pre-test data had been collected and analyzed, involving seven participants in a single session, in accordance with Morgan's (1993) recommendations.

To facilitate discussion, we prepared a script of open-ended questions, allowing all participants to provide insights on each covered topic. The key outcomes of the meeting included: (1) the use of two types of stimuli (text and video) about the destination, rath-

er than solely text, recognizing that a substantial proportion of travelers plan their trips using videos; (2) a more strategically targeted choice of a destination with greater national visibility (in this case, Maragogi); (3) improvements in the wording of statements related to variables in the model, considering the Portuguese language, the cultural context of Brazil, and more transparent forms of presentation respondents.

### Data collection

In Phase 1, the treatment group comprised 651 respondents, and in Phase 2, this number was reduced to 361 after excluding responses deemed biased and detrimental to the sample. For the control group, 659 individuals participated in the questionnaire during Phase 1, while the count for Phase 2 was 470.

We attribute the higher return rate of the control group in Phase 2 to the simplified instrument, focusing on variables present in only two constructs. Despite the

reduction in respondents during Phase 2, we consider the obtained number to be satisfactory and reflective of the research objectives.

It is essential to highlight that participants in the survey could reside in any state in Brazil, excluding Alagoas, where the municipality of Maragogi is situated. This exclusion aimed to minimize the potential for biased responses. Additionally, respondents needed to be at least 18 years old and have some prior experience with leisure travel.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### Sample distribution

Using IBM SPSS software (version 26.0), descriptive analyses were carried out on the respondents' socio-demographic profiles, as well as their preferred type of destination, knowledge, and frequency of visits to the destination (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Respondent profile and preferences.

Treatment group		Control group	
Variable	%	Variable	%
<b>Gender</b>		<b>Gender</b>	
Female	61.5	Female	57.4
Male	36.6	Male	40.9
Non-binary	0.8	Non-binary	1.5
Didn't answer	1.1	Didn't answer	0.2
<b>Age</b>		<b>Age</b>	
18 to 24 years old	36.3	18 to 24 years old	33.2
25 to 34 years old	30.2	25 to 34 years old	35.5
35 to 44 years old	21.9	35 to 44 years old	19.6
45 to 54 years old	8	45 to 54 years old	6.2
55 to 64 years old	2.8	55 to 64 years old	4.9
65 or older	0.8	65 or older	0.6
<b>Level of education</b>		<b>Level of education</b>	
Some school	1.4	Some school	0
Elementary school	0.8	Elementary school	0
Some high school	3.6	Some high school	0.2
High school	15	High school	9.4
Some college	29.9	Some college	27.9
College degree	17.2	College degree	14.7
Incomplete graduate degree	5.5	Incomplete graduate degree	9.8
Graduate degree	26.6	Graduate degree	38.1
<b>Preferred destination type</b>		<b>Preferred destination type</b>	
Beach destination	42.4	Beach destination	33.8
Historical-cultural destination	20.5	Historical-cultural destination	34.7
Nature destination	34.1	Nature destination	27.2
Other	3	Other	4.3
<b>Knowledge about Maragogi</b>		<b>Knowledge about Maragogi</b>	
I have never heard of it	16.1	I have never heard of it	5.3
I rarely hear about it	7.5	I rarely hear about it	7.2
I sometimes hear about it	28.3	I sometimes hear about it	26.6
I often hear about it	24.7	I often hear about it	33.6
I always hear about it	23.5	I always hear about it	27.2
<b>Frequency of visiting Maragogi</b>		<b>Frequency of visiting Maragogi</b>	
Never visited	86.4	Never visited	71.9
Visited once	11.1	Visited once	22.6
Visit occasionally	1.9	Visit occasionally	4.3
Visit often	0.6	Visit often	1.1
Always visit	0	Always visit	0.2

Note. Elaborated by the authors.



We observed an occasional disparity in the preferred type of destination among respondents in the two groups. In the control group, historical-cultural destinations were notably favored, accounting for 34.7% of preferences. Since stimuli about Maragogi were exclusively presented to the treatment group, we consider this variation between the groups non-alarming. This is because the treatment group, which constitutes the primary focus of our analysis, predominantly expresses a preference for destinations akin to Maragogi.

Regarding the respondents' familiarity and visitation frequency, the results affirm the appropriateness of selecting Maragogi as the survey destination. The majority of participants exhibited some degree of awareness

about Maragogi, yet a significant portion had never visited the destination before.

### Perceived destination loyalty and intention to travel

In this phase, we employed independent and paired sample t-tests. The independent t-test was conducted to compare the perceptions of loyalty and the intention to travel to the destination between the groups in both Phase 1 and Phase 2. The paired t-test was utilized to assess the perception changes within each group before and after the stimulus application. Table 3 delineates the results of the independent t-test for Phase 1, revealing that, except for the INT4 variable, no statistically significant differences existed between the groups.

**Table 3.** Independent t-test — Phase 1.

Variable	Treatment group mean	Control group mean	Difference	t	DF	Sig.
<b>Loyalty</b>						
LOY1	4.87	4.65	0.21	0.86	729	0.38
LOY2	5.36	5.41	-0.05	-0.20	685	0.84
LOY3	5.36	5.36	0.006	0.02	782	0.97
LOY4	4.84	5.13	-0.29	-1.05	649	0.29
<b>Intention to travel</b>						
INT1	6.46	6.31	0.15	0.61	751	0.54
INT2	5.86	5.64	0.22	0.88	770	0.37
INT3	4.57	4.27	0.30	1.21	748	0.22
INT4	5.07	4.55	0.52	2.00	769	0.04

Note. Elaborated by the authors.

Table 4 displays the variance in perceptions between the two groups across both study phases, utilizing the paired t-test. The significance (sig.) values indicate that, for the treatment group, the introduced stimulus effectively heightened all dimensions of loyalty and the intention to travel to the destination. Conversely, within the

control group, with the exception of LOY2 and INT4, the means remained consistent from one phase to the next. We posit that external factors, such as the role of artificial intelligence (AI) and its algorithms, may have influenced these outcomes by potentially capturing users' browsing data and delivering targeted advertisements (Li, 2019).

**Table 4.** Paired t-test.

Variable	Treatment group					Control group					
	Mean phase 1	Mean phase 2	t	DF	Sig.	Variable	Mean phase 1	Mean phase 2	t	DF	Sig.
Loyalty						Loyalty					
LOY1	4.87	7.01	-8.43	290	< 0.0001	LOY1	4.65	4.83	-0.4	369	0.62
LOY2	5.36	7.95	-9.77	278	< 0.0001	LOY2	5.41	5.85	-2.3	322	0.02
LOY3	5.36	7.31	-8.49	320	< 0.0001	LOY3	5.36	5.46	-0.5	427	0.59
LOY4	4.84	7.92	-9.95	234	< 0.0001	LOY4	5.13	5.44	-1.1	285	0.25
Intention to travel						Intention to travel					
INT1	6.46	7.92	-5.91	310	< 0.0001	INT1	6.31	6.32	-0.1	404	0.88
INT2	5.86	7.62	-7.36	321	< 0.0001	INT2	5.64	5.62	0.01	421	0.99
INT3	4.57	7.04	-10.95	306	< 0.0001	INT3	4.27	4.62	-1.4	396	0.16
INT4	5.07	7.08	-7.99	323	< 0.0001	INT4	4.55	5.03	-2.2	423	0.02

Note. Elaborated by the authors.

Furthermore, we subjected the Phase 2 results for both groups to a subsequent independent t-test. This analysis revealed statistically significant differences in

all means, underscoring the affirmative impact of digital content marketing (DCM) in augmenting perceptions of loyalty and intention to travel.

### Structural model assessment

The structural equation modeling (SEM) approach was employed for the confirmatory factor analysis using the AMOS 26 package. Table 5 presents the variables corresponding to the constructs utilized in the research, alongside the factor loadings, results of the construct reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha), composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE).

Regarding factor loadings, [Hair et al. \(2014\)](#) recommend values above 0.7 as ideal, although values exceeding 0.5 can be considered acceptable. Specifically, in this study, the only values falling below 0.7 are found in the variables related to the 'personalization' construct. We opted to retain the three variables of this construct, deeming these values acceptable ([Chen et al., 2014](#);

[Deng et al., 2020](#)) and capable of supporting further analyses. The Cronbach's alpha for all constructs, as well as the CR, surpasses 0.7, affirming their validity ([Hair et al., 2014](#)). Regarding AVE, [Hair et al. \(2014\)](#) propose a threshold above 0.5. While noting that, except for the 'personalization' construct, all AVEs exceed 0.6, we highlight [Malhotra's \(2010\)](#) assertion that AVE is a more rigorous measure than CR. Even if AVE falls below 0.50, the researcher can still conclude that the convergent validity of the construct is adequate, as long as CR is above 0.6, and this can be seen in the studies by [Cheung and Wang \(2017\)](#) and [Oliveira et al. \(2022\)](#). Consequently, we affirm the achievement of convergent validity.

**Table 5.** Measurement model assessment.

Construct	Variable	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Informativeness	INF1	0.710	0.917	0.922	0.705
	INF2	0.891			
	INF3	0.891			
	INF4	0.818			
	INF5	0.876			
Entertainment	ENT1	0.922	0.955	0.954	0.840
	ENT2	0.930			
	ENT3	0.913			
	ENT4	0.901			
Credibility	CRED1	0.897	0.952	0.867	0.869
	CRED2	0.955			
	CRED3	0.945			
Personalization	PER1	0.677	0.860	0.689	0.428
	PER2	0.685			
	PER3	0.599			
Perceived value	VAL1	0.927	0.946	0.946	0.855
	VAL2	0.919			
	VAL3	0.929			
Loyalty	LOY1	0.817	0.926	0.864	0.617
	LOY2	0.702			
	LOY3	0.916			
	LOY4	0.687			
Intention to travel	INT1	0.937	0.881	0.951	0.829
	INT2	0.951			
	INT3	0.855			
	INT4	0.898			

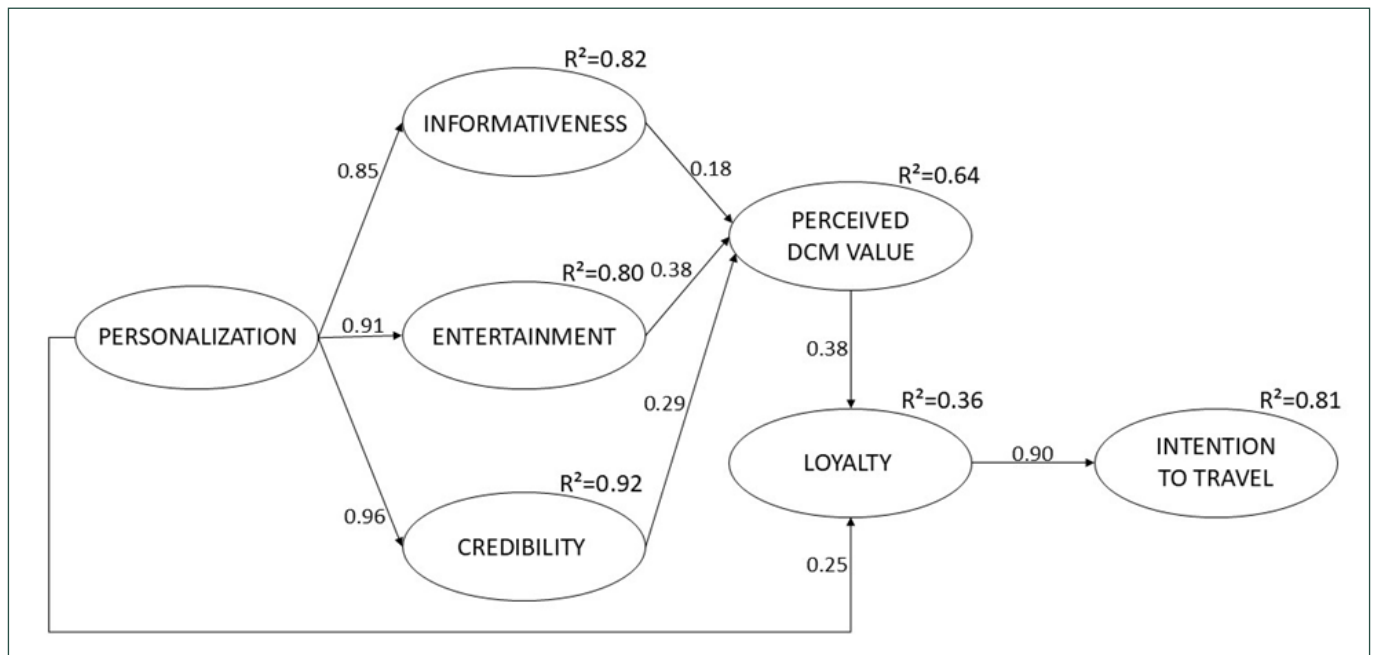
**Note.** Elaborated by the authors.

We employed several indices to evaluate the model fit:  $\chi^2/df$  (less than 5), GFI, CFI, and TLI (above 0.8), PGFI, PCFI, and PNFI (above 0.6), and RMSEA (less than 0.01) ([Maróco, 2014](#); [Hair et al., 2014](#)). The model yielded the following results:  $\chi^2/df$ : 3.303; GFI: 0.829; CFI: 0.938; TLI: 0.924; PGFI: 0.613; PCFI: 0.764; PNFI: 0.745; RMSEA: 0.053.

The structural model elucidated a significant portion of the variance in the 'intention to travel' to tourist destinations through DCM antecedents ( $R^2 = 0.81$ ). Furthermore, noteworthy are the variance values for the constructs 'informativeness,' 'entertainment,' 'cred-

ibility,' 'value,' and 'loyalty,' which stood at  $R^2 = 0.82$ ,  $R^2 = 0.80$ ,  $R^2 = 0.92$ ,  $R^2 = 0.64$ , and  $R^2 = 0.36$ , respectively. Considering that, according to [Cohen et al. \(2003\)](#), a 26% variance is already deemed high in the behavioral sciences, the presented results are deemed satisfactory, contributing significantly to understanding the perception of personalization, relevance, informativeness, entertainment, credibility, value, attitudinal loyalty, and intention to travel to tourist destinations through DCM.

It is imperative to note that the model had all its hypotheses validated (Figure 2; Table 6).



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

**Figure 2.** Study model assessment.

**Table 6.** Testing the model's hypotheses.

Hypothesis	Standardized estimate	SE	CR	p-value	Validation
H1: PER → INF	0.965	0.092	10.522	0.0001	Confirmed
H2: PER → ENT	1.095	0.089	12.370	0.0001	Confirmed
H3: PER → CRED	1.127	0.087	12.977	0.0001	Confirmed
H4: INF → VAL	0.187	0.085	2.196	0.028	Confirmed
H5: ENT → VAL	0.357	0.082	4.354	0.0001	Confirmed
H6: CRED → VAL	0.278	0.096	2.890	0.004	Confirmed
H7: PER → LOY	0.352	0.021	2.924	0.003	Confirmed
H8: VAL → LOY	0.476	0.104	4.571	0.0001	Confirmed
H9: LOY → INT	1.085	0.057	18.887	0.0001	Confirmed
INF R <sup>2</sup> : 0.82; ENT R <sup>2</sup> : 0.80; CRED R <sup>2</sup> : 0.92; VAL R <sup>2</sup> : 0.064; LOY R <sup>2</sup> : 0.36; INT R <sup>2</sup> : 0.81					

Note. Elaborated by the authors.

## DISCUSSION

The validation of hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 means that personalizing DCM content from tourist destinations establishes a positive relationship with the perceptions of informativeness, entertainment, and credibility of this content. This aligns with the findings of Kim and Han (2014) and supports the theory that closely linked characteristics increasingly manifest in the latest marketing actions, such as DCM, wherein one characteristic may impact the others.

We contend that personalization can stimulate greater user interest in reading content, consequently triggering positive feelings (such as pleasure and escapism) when learning more about a tourist destination and thus fostering trust in the conveyed message.

The confirmation of H4 implies that informativeness in DCM content in tourism can generate a perception of value. This relationship has been fundamental since the theory was first proposed by Ducoffe (1995) and has been confirmed in a wide range of studies con-

ducted since then. Logan et al. (2012) validated this hypothesis through research on advertisements displayed on television and Facebook. Over time, additional studies have been conducted to confirm the same hypothesis using advertisements and content on various social media platforms, such as Twitter (Murillo et al., 2016) and Instagram (Gaber et al., 2019; Efendioglu & Durmaz, 2022).

Additionally, the confirmation of H5 (entertainment) supports Ducoffe (1995) and numerous studies developed with these constructs, including Logan et al. (2012), Zha et al. (2015), Gaber et al. (2019), Sari et al. (2020), and Efendioglu and Durmaz (2022). We emphasize that not all DCM content is created with entertainment as a necessary characteristic. Often, users visit sites and engage with DCM content primarily to obtain information. However, entertainment, as previously discussed, represents a hedonic characteristic capable of evoking various emotions in individuals. Since tourism is an industry that seeks, among other goals, to

fulfill dreams, entertainment should serve as a foundational element in content production.

H6 predicts that the perceived credibility of DCM content about tourist destinations will generate a perception of value about them. As inferred earlier, there is a premise that DCM content should convey these characteristics and function as reliable sources of information, surpassing the traditional attributes of advertising. This hypothesis aligns with the studies by [Hassan et al. \(2013\)](#) on social media advertising, [Martins et al. \(2019\)](#) on smartphone advertising, and [Budiharja et al. \(2020\)](#) on charity ads.

The confirmation of H7 means that the personalization of DCM content can foster attitudinal loyalty to tourist destinations, encouraging future travelers to speak positively about the destination and consider it among their preferred travel choices. This positive relationship echoes the findings of [Wang and Li \(2012\)](#), focusing on the adoption of mobile services.

The outcome of H8 elucidates that the perceived value of DCM content, influenced by characteristics such as informativeness, credibility, and entertainment, is capable of instigating loyalty to the tourist destination. [Lou et al. \(2019\)](#) confirmed this proposition using DCM content from two product brands. This perception of value is triggered by feelings involving hedonic and utilitarian characteristics. In this context, [Cleff et al. \(2018\)](#) argue that the effects of these experiences generate attitudes of loyalty.

Finally, H9 was validated, asserting that loyalty indeed generates travel intention to the tourist destination. This positive relationship aligns with existing theories, such as [Lou et al. \(2019\)](#), and, when considering tourist destinations as the object, corroborates the findings of [Villacé-Molinero et al. \(2023\)](#). In this context, we posit that during the pandemic period, when thousands of travelers were unable to plan an upcoming trip, feelings of attitudinal loyalty to tourist destinations may have been significant, subsequently increasing travel intentions. Thus, in general, we can infer that the proposed model can explain the antecedent factors of the intention to travel to tourist destinations through digital content marketing.

### Theoretical implications

The first theoretical contribution of this paper refers to the extension and validation of the advertising value theory in a new subject and research object. In the initial conception of this theory, only the constructs 'informativeness' and 'entertainment' acted as positive elements in the perception of the value of advertising. Over the years, new constructs have been proposed, especially as marketing has increasingly reinvented

itself and provided promotional techniques with new characteristics.

Thus, the constructs 'credibility' and 'personalization' proved to be important in contributing to the initial theory, since these characteristics are present in the theoretical contributions involving DCM. We also highlight that, as mentioned by [Ye et al. \(2024\)](#), the antecedents of the perception of advertising value are not independent — that is, each of the characteristics mentioned tends to influence the others, and the combination of them is what makes the advertisement more informative, entertaining, and credible.

As a second contribution, we infer that the adoption of the theme in question, together with the object 'tourist destination,' will provide, in addition to the validation of the proposed theories, the growth of studies on DCM and its relationship with tourist consumer behavior.

The third theoretical contribution concerns the use of experimental research methodology in studies on tourist consumer behavior, considering the limited number of studies of this nature in the area ([Viglia & Dolnicar, 2020](#)). In addition, we provide a scenario that presents a cross-section of the Brazilian context — a country that has advanced in scientific studies on tourism — contributing to broadening discussions involving different countries in the literature.

Finally, based on the results of the analysis carried out, we propose, as a theoretical contribution, the conception of a new concept of DCM and its applicability in tourism, which we describe below:

Digital Content Marketing (DCM) is a traditional marketing strategy reinvented through the internet to provide informative, entertaining, credible, and personalized content for consumers. In tourism, DCM is a very popular technique because travelers need to seek up-to-date and credible sources to build an itinerary or even to conceive of a dream trip, which may come true in the short, medium, or long term. Furthermore, the content conveyed can lead to a feeling of loyalty and instigate other people to travel, even before the person who was initially impacted by the content does.

### Managerial implications

This research yields valuable insights for marketing professionals, organizations (tourism-related or otherwise), and destinations aiming to implement the DCM strategy to engage with the increasingly diverse profile of today's potential travelers.

Primarily, we advocate for the creation of DCM content through active exploration to discern the genuine needs of the consumer public. In tourism, virtual communities and forums, prevalent across various social media platforms or the organizations' dedicated platforms, serve as pivotal sources for discerning content requirements. By initiating monitoring practices, professionals can pinpoint prevalent topics among travelers, facilitating the organic dissemination of impactful content within the virtual sphere.

A crucial aspect is the utilization of multiple channels for content dissemination. The prevalence of institutional websites for tourist destinations has diminished over the past decade, giving way to travel blogs that have expanded their reach to social media platforms to capture a broader audience.

DCM, with its potential to offer informative, enjoyable, credible, and personalized content, has the capacity to rejuvenate official destination websites. However, it is imperative to acknowledge the emergence of new consumer generations with distinct characteristics and to devise a plan that incorporates diverse channels. For instance, textual content on websites and blogs caters to readers, while YouTube videos or platforms like Instagram and TikTok are preferred by those inclined toward visual content. Auditory content, in the form of podcasts on streaming platforms, serves individuals who prefer listening. In essence, DCM advocates content diversification rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

### Limitations and future research avenues

The primary limitation lies in the online quasi-experimental nature of this study. In applied social sciences, experimental research is generally not conducted in dedicated laboratories, contrasting with practices in the natural sciences. This aspect possesses both merits and calls for caution. Presenting stimuli for respondents to engage with in their own environments enhances the study's ecological validity. However, it also diminishes the researcher's control over the experiment's application.

Additionally, the sample size constraints prevented a more extensive survey that could analyze perceptions over various time frames. Consider, for instance, the potential insights into the loyalty and travel intentions of the treatment group one month post-stimulus. During this period, could external variables have influenced the treatment group's information-seeking behavior about the destination? These questions remain pertinent and merit exploration in future research endeavors. Conducting studies in controlled laboratory settings involving students or external participants

offers promising avenues for experimental research in this domain. The researcher has a multitude of possibilities for refining experimental methodologies, and further exploration is essential.

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