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You Want to go where? Shifts in social media behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 restrictions have transformed acceptable sociability, shifting behaviours toward technology-facilitated interactions as a substitute for face-to-face connectivity. Virtual communities are increasingly important forums to share leisure travel experiences while travel itself remains severely disrupted. Pre-pandemic posting about travel built social capital, reflecting values that were generally pro-tourism. However, instances of “shaming” those continuing to travel during COVID-19 have devalued tourism’s social currency. To understand the impact of COVID-19 on travel-related self-disclosure patterns, the study analysed data from Canada’s destination marketing organization’s Instagram page over two peaks and one valley of the pandemic, uncovering several behaviours, including expressions of sentiment, popular for their simplicity and minimal risk, and affective advocacy, a riskier other-focused behaviour. From first peak to second, the use of self-focused behaviours went up, whereas the use of other-focused behaviours went down. The findings show how social calculus impacts patterns of self-disclosure, reshaping digital interactions associated with leisure.

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Introduction

Social media and online travel communities have become increasingly important forums for individuals to discuss and share leisure travel experiences and desires (Lamont and Ross 2020). Online self-disclosures reflect tourism social values and travel norms that have been traditionally favourable (Perez-Vega et al. 2018). Posting travel experiences typically builds social capital. However, a major upheaval in people’s lives, such as a pandemic, is likely to affect determinants of social behaviour (Elchereth and Drury 2020), including online self-disclosure. In 2020, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic struck and spread globally, causing an estimated 116 million illnesses and over 3 million deaths worldwide at the time of writing (World Health Organization 2021). The severity of the impact on the tourism industry was unprecedented (World Travel & Tourism Council 2021), as countries imposed tight travel restrictions to mitigate transmission. While statistics have tracked the economic decline in tourist volume and expenditures, less is known about the impact of the pandemic on travel’s social value as expressed online. Media have reported several instances of travel shaming, a behaviour

in which people criticize others for continuing to travel or post vacation images (Hendrickson 2021; Ward 2020), devaluing travel's social currency (Compton 2020). For many, the fear of being publicly shamed was a stronger motivator for engaging in protective behaviours than was the concern for their own well-being (Kim 2020). Yet the influence of COVID-19 on leisure travel-posting behaviour remains unclear.

What is known is that the use of social media significantly increased in 2020 as people turned to technology-facilitated connections as a substitute for face-to-face connections. Nability-Grover, Cheung, and Thatcher (2020) consider the impact of risk associated with online self-disclosure, and how COVID-19 may influence not just what, but how people disclose. The authors present self-disclosure from two perspectives: a self-focus perspective whereby users calculate personal benefits and risks associated with self-disclosure; and an other-focus perspective whereby users consider others' reactions in evaluating the benefits and risks of disclosure. They believe that a pandemic places greater weight on the other-focus perspective, adding more social than private calculus to the self-disclosure decision. While the authors do not test their theory, they identify socially responsible and appropriate disclosures as one of five directions for research. The purpose of this study is to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on leisure travel-related social media behaviour, and how social concerns might influence self-disclosure patterns. The following questions guide the research:

- (1) has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted leisure travel-related social media behaviour?
- (2) how has online self-disclosure in travel communities changed during COVID-19?
- (3) how might changes in online behaviour impact tourism Destination Marketing organizations (DMOs) in the future?

The COVID-19 pandemic provides a unique opportunity to observe social media behaviour through a time of active online engagement and heightened risk perceptions. The study draws on social exchange theory that posits that relationships are based on subjective evaluations of benefits and costs to manage social capital (Adongo, Kim, and Elliot 2019). As individuals reach out online to combat physical isolation (benefit), with the phenomenon of travel shaming invoking their social responsibility (cost), the pattern of self-disclosure is no doubt shifting to reflect emergent social values. Analysing the real-time discourse of an online travel community through the peaks and valley of the pandemic reveals shifts in behaviour that provide insight into tourism's 'new normal'. Understanding these shifts informs social exchange theory's application to a travel community context, as well as tourism practitioners' messaging appropriateness during high-risk periods.

Literature review

Social capital and self-disclosure

Introduced in the 1980s to describe social obligations and expectations (Coleman 1988), social capital captures "values derived from resources embedded in social ties with others which characterize the structure of opportunity and action in communities' (de Zúñiga, Barnidge, and Scherman 2017, 44), thus shaping interpersonal relationships. Social

media allows users to build broader social supports, enhancing online and offline social capital (de Zúñiga, Barnidge, and Scherman 2017), revealing the power of social media-based social capital to foster community relationships.

In a tourism context, the power of social media can strengthen the relationship between social identification, when an individual identifies as an in-group member of a society (Rather, Najar, and Jaziri 2020), and social commerce, a synthesis of e-commerce and social media (Liang and Turban 2011). Huang, Chen, and Wong (2020) found that hotel guests who identified as in-group members of an online community were more likely to engage in social commerce, with acts of sharing, liking, and commenting dictating online self-discourse. By participating in and identifying with an online community, social media users selectively self-present to build social capital through their self-disclosure – the communication of personal information to others online (Nabity-Grover, Cheung, and Thatcher 2020). Self-disclosure builds from social exchange theory to explain why users disclose personal information to an online audience, weighing perceived costs and benefits (Cheung, Lee, and Chan 2015). In the context of social media, self-disclosure takes many forms, from posting personal information, photos and updates, to revealing preferences by liking posts and tagging others to build and maintain relations. In this media-facilitated social exchange, Huang, Chen, and Wong (2020) focused on two types of user supports: informational and emotional. Informational support aligns with cognitive conceptualisations, where users exchange information-based suggestions and guidance; while emotional support aligns with affective conceptualisations, where users share understanding and intimacy.

Positive reinforcement of an individual's social capital can come from increased online engagement (e.g. more likes, more positive responses, etc.), even before a vacation takes place (Cortés 2017). While much research has focused on the positive aspects of travel-related social media, less is known about the management of one's social capital during times of social upheavals, such as Covid-19. The emergent research suggests that the pandemic may change not only tourism but the tourist psyche in the long run (Kock et al. 2020).

Pandemics, risk, and travel shame

From natural disasters to health pandemics, tourism's vulnerability to crises has evoked considerable research on impacts, changes in perceptions, management, and recovery (Reddy, Boyd, and Nica 2020). Predictably exacerbated by human mobility, past outbreaks have affected shifts in leisure travel behaviour and related perceptions of risk. Now, ubiquitous technology facilitates the spread of crisis-related information and misinformation. Mizrachi and Fuchs (2016) examined social media behaviours during the Ebola outbreak and their negative impact on travel bookings across Africa, most notably by individuals sensitive to potential risks associated with travel. As globalization and climate change increase the threat and severity of pandemics, there will be a parallel increase in perceptions of travel risk.

Early studies of Covid-19 suggest a number of shifts in travel behaviour, with greater emphasis on local destinations, visiting friends and family, outdoor parks and nature tourism where physical distancing is possible, at least initially (Hall et al. 2020). Li et al. (2020) compared individuals' psychological distance during Covid-19, identifying 'open-

hearted' and 'closed' attitudes, with greater risk and travel aversion perceptions among 'closed' individuals. Research has considered structural changes and the negative impacts of Covid-19 on airlines, hotels, cruise lines and even rental cars (Sharma and Nicolau 2020), and importantly, on tourists. Bae and Chang (2021) found that social pressure in the form of public shaming during Covid-19 had a larger impact on preventative behaviours (e.g. mask-wearing, hand-washing, etc.) than did the perceived risk of contracting the virus. Additionally, Cato et al. (2020) examined the impact of public shaming during Covid-19 and found that a fear of being publicly shamed strengthened one's resolve to engage in pro-social behaviours. Kock et al. (2020) posit that some tourists' psyches will settle on a new equilibrium, pushed by the pandemic's unsheathing of deep-rooted human anxieties. The authors employ the lens of evolutionary psychology to explain how adaptive behaviour will override socially constructed paradigms. They distinguish between proximate motives, like observable shifts in online self-disclosure, and ultimate motives, those not observable but reflective of evolutionary drives.

Pandemics change the risk calculus associated with travel, and subsequently, the underlying mechanisms that drive online self-disclosure (Nabity-Grover, Cheung, and Thatcher 2020). Kuo et al. (2021) study social capital and the effect of social norms and networks on place identity. Social influences or expectations of others in one's network to conform can dictate accepted community behaviour and encourage conformity. Past research of self-disclosure in the context of social networking sites suggests that social influence (a benefit), rather than privacy concerns (a cost), has the strongest effect on self-disclosure (Cheung, Lee, and Chan 2015). Nabity-Grover, Cheung, and Thatcher (2020) posit that the pandemic has made users more aggressively self-monitor what they disclose online due to the increased salience of other-focus influences – "content perceived as disobeying public health guidance (... going out ... gatherings ... spring break photos ...) have become taboo and are increasingly the target of vitriol" (3). The authors explain this behaviour as an other-focus perspective or social calculus, whereby users avoid topics that were once acceptable, such as leisure travel, to preserve their social capital through the pandemic. While research has studied social capital-based social media in a tourism context (de Zúñiga, Barnidge, and Scherman 2017) and the impacts of Covid-19 risk on tourist behaviour (Bae and Chang 2021), the intersection of considering self-disclosure patterns online during a high-risk pandemic has only been suggested (Nabity-Grover, Cheung, and Thatcher 2020).

Research methodology

To uncover shifts in social behaviours during the Covid-19 pandemic, Canada was selected as this study's research setting. Leisure-based travel to Canada was severely impacted by Covid-19, with an estimated 95% decrease in international visitation in 2020 (Destination Canada 2021). Canadians also travelled less due to closed borders and uncertainty surrounding health and safety precautions taken by foreign destinations, along with strict quarantine rules imposed upon their return. While travel was reduced, social media usage strengthened, with 32.2 million active social media users in Canada, an increase of 8% between January 2020 and January 2021 (DataReportal 2021). Instagram is one of Canada's most popular social media platforms, with 54.4% of social media users actively using the platform (DataReportal 2021). Of Destination Canada's (DC) various social

media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, their Instagram page maintained the most active group membership, drawn to near-daily posts, most with tens of thousands of likes and hundreds of comments on each. With a group membership of 1.7 million followers comprised of both residents of Canada and potential visitors, DC's Instagram page was therefore selected as the data collection platform for this study. As Canada's official destination management organization, DC's posts depict a variety of natural, historical, and popular landscapes and landmarks across the country.

Sequential exploratory strategy

The use of content analysis methods in tourism research has increased exponentially since the 2000s (Camprubí and Coromina 2016). Additionally, exploratory studies in social science have grown in popularity, particularly effective at addressing emergent issues (Mason, Augustyn, and Seakhwa-King 2010). Therefore, this study employs a sequential exploratory strategy of quantitative analysis, followed by qualitative interpretation. First, user-generated content posted during a specific time period was captured. Given the growing influence of social media on visitors' decision making (Zhang and Cole 2016), the selected content was in the form of user-generated comments posted to DC's Instagram page. After this content was counted and collated, a qualitative content analysis was performed to identify social behavioural themes. A method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative data, a qualitative content analysis focuses on observing manifest behaviours and determining their latent meaning (Schreier 2012, 170). Schreier (2012) outlines three characterizing features of qualitative content analysis used to frame this portion of the analysis: (1) it reduces data from larger amounts of concrete information to fewer abstracted ones, (2) it systematically combs through all material relevant to the research question through a clearly defined process, and (3) it is flexible in its inclusion of both concept- and data-driven categories. Finally, an ANOVA post hoc test was performed to measure significant differences among the identified behaviours in relation to distinct Covid-19 phases.

To assess members' behaviours on DC's Instagram page during Covid-19, the phases of the pandemic were charted based on the number of daily Covid-19 cases (Government of Canada, 2021). Figure 1 reveals three broad 'phases' of the pandemic, starting with an initial spike in cases during a first peak lasting from March 12th until June 5th (Phase 1), a subsequent levelling of cases between June 6th and September 5th (Phase 2), and a return to a second major, and much larger, peak captured from September 6th to January 8th (Phase 3).

The pattern of the pandemic is divided by these three distinct periods of time: a peak, a valley, and a second peak. The following analysis considers the social media discourse during each distinct phase.

Quantitative content analysis

Data were collected by selecting every 6th post to DC's Instagram page from March 12, 2020, to January 8, 2021, and transferring them to Microsoft Excel to manually code. If the 6th post was a feature of a specific individual versus a Canadian destination, then the subsequent post was selected. This resulted in four posts during phase 1, eight posts

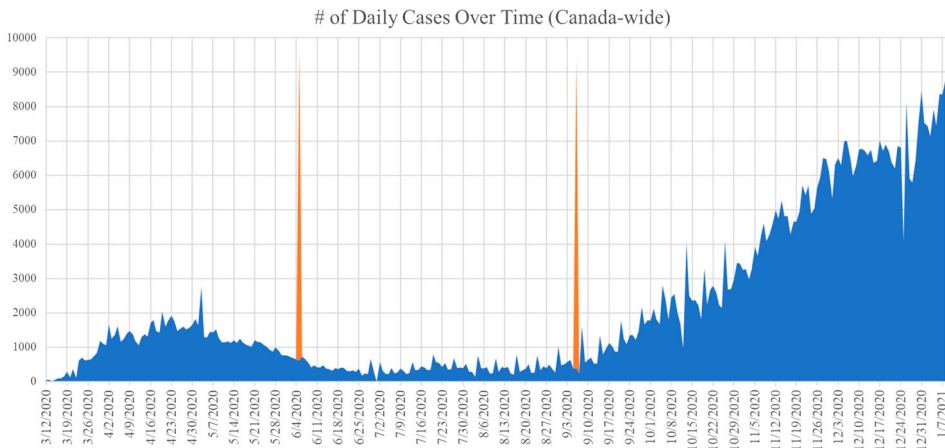


Figure 1. Number of Daily Covid-19 Cases (as reported by Canada.ca).

during phase 2, and fifteen posts during phase 3, for a total of 27 posts throughout the data collection process. The data collection finished when the data findings plateaued. The final sample totalled 4,818 comments made in response to the 27 posts, an average of 178 comments per post. When this volume is compared to similar posts from the pre-pandemic year prior, the number of comments was higher during Covid by 278 (4,818 vs 4,539), supporting the general trend of heightened online activity during Covid-19. After cleaning the data (e.g. removing duplicates, non-English responses, etc.), 3,360 comments remained for coding (69.7% of total). Each post is summarized in [Table 1](#). Following Instagram procedures, emojis and tagging are included in the number of comments given that these actions all require the user to type an expression of some form, whereas by contrast, 'likes' only require a user to click the associated thumbs up icon. While both comments and likes are useful to determine the level of engagement, 'likes' are identified separately in [Table 1](#) and not included in the coded data.

The 27 posts selected for this analysis reveal considerable variability. First, there is a range of visual elements, including natural landscapes (e.g. mountains, northern lights, national parks, etc.), major landmarks (e.g. CN Tower, historic buildings, Remai Modern Museum, etc.), and people in different settings (e.g. a girl sitting on a cliff edge, a person walking along a beach, etc.). Second, there is a wide geographic representation, with destinations depicted from all Canadian regions (West, North, Central, and East), as well as unnamed destinations meant to depict the country's general landscapes, such as vivid autumn displays or untamed wildlife. Finally, the posts demonstrate varying degrees of user engagement, with the numbers of likes ranging from a comparatively modest 5,807 to a high of 29,134 and a range of 42–422 comments. As variability in engagement, image and location are reflective of DCs posts; the selection is considered representative of the posts to DC's Instagram page.

Qualitative content analysis

Data analysis began in January of 2021 to determine whether Covid-19 had impacted changes in self-disclosure behaviours. A coding frame was built and segmentation

Table 1. Summary of DC Instagram Posts from Data Collection.

Phase	Date (2020)	Brief Description	Location depicted	# of Likes	# of Comments (# Coded)
Peak 1	03-12	Northern lights landscape	Churchill, Manitoba	22899	231 (194)
Peak 1	03-19	Flowers and cherry blossoms	Montreal, Quebec	18987	128 (96)
Peak 1	04-23	Miscellaneous city architecture	Montreal, Quebec	22302	343 (202)
Peak 1	05-20	Gros Morne National Park	Newfoundland	28446	396 (321)
Valley	06-12	Parliament Hill and surrounding area	Ottawa, Ontario	29134	422 (292)
Valley	07-03	CN Tower Centre Island view	Toronto, Ontario	29103	338 (224)
Valley	07-21	Lone person walking along beach	Canada	14093	82 (37)
Valley	07-30	Lighthouse on sandy beach	Canada	12533	114 (50)
Valley	08-07	Various sights of mountain area	Whistler, B.C.	18774	255 (178)
Valley	08-17	Remai Modern Museum	Saskatoon, Sask.	5807	42 (17)
Valley	08-25	Video paddling on Sudbury Basin	Sudbury, Ontario	8086	120 (51)
Valley	09-02	Various trendy locations	Montreal, Quebec	8422	105 (55)
Peak 2	09-10	Cape Breton Highlands	Nova Scotia	21492	185 (151)
Peak 2	09-16	Lake Louise and Canadian Rockies	Banff, Alberta	23747	205 (171)
Peak 2	09-24	Bike rider with colourful houses	Canada	10735	73 (45)
Peak 2	10-02	Autumn views	Canada	16225	133 (85)
Peak 2	10-12	Marble Mountain Resort	Newfoundland	23384	142 (101)
Peak 2	10-20	Girl, cliff with farm fields in distance	New Brunswick	15582	82 (64)
Peak 2	10-30	Buildings with 'spooky' histories	Canada	16414	93 (63)
Peak 2	11-06	Traveling various locations by foot	Canada	16433	107 (85)
Peak 2	11-16	Aerial view of South Nahanni River	Nahann Park, NWT	20028	126 (106)
Peak 2	11-24	Black bear cub sitting in the grass	Gaspésie, Quebec	20172	147 (122)
Peak 2	12-03	Snowy landscape with mountains	Yukon	15338	92 (60)
Peak 2	12-15	Canadian delicacies	Canada	10544	223 (179)
Peak 2	12-22	Various perspectives of the falls	Niagara Falls, Ontario	14730	159 (93)
Peak 2	12-30	Polar bear lying on the snow	Churchill, Manitoba	17677	138 (99)
Peak 2	01-08 (2021)	Northern lights in the night sky	Canada	27637	337 (219)

procedures were identified. Segmentation of the thematic codes was conducted based on the process outlined by Schreier (2012, 178). The codes were then modified based on the social media advocacy behaviours identified by Lever (2020). Code numbers were employed to ensure consistency and reliability among raters. Manifest behaviours were observed (e.g. expressing sentiment, sharing an emoji, tagging a friend, etc.) and then coded for latent meanings (e.g. Positive Affect Expression, Affective Advocacy, etc.) within those behaviours. Codes were compared between authors and showed close agreement, indicating inter-rater reliability (Armstrong et al. 1997). For those that differed, discussions took place and codes were modified until mutually agreeable. The analysis presented in Table 2 reveals a total of 3,360 manifest behaviours coded as 12 latent behaviours.

Findings

Focusing on those behaviours with at least 100 traces across all analysed posts, four behaviours stand out: Positive Affect Expression (1,646), Affective Advocacy (869), Bucket Listing (188), and Cooperative Advocacy (158). Other behaviours with just below 100 traces include missed opportunity lamenting, as well as the other notable behaviours (responses to DMOs/private tourism operators, and photo/equipment quality related comments). The remaining coded behaviours were evident but much less frequent: cognitive advocacy, clarification-seeking, tension creating, and alternate

Table 2. Coding Frame and Behavioural Themes.

Behavioural Theme	Code	Latent Meaning	Manifest Behaviour	# of Traces by Code	Average # of Traces by Phase		
					Peak 1	Valley	Peak 2
Sentiment Expressions	1	Positive Affect Expression	Sharing positive sentiment (e.g., 'Beautiful!'), appreciation of area featured, confirming appeal of destination	1,646	88	57	56
Advocate-perspective	2	Affective Advocacy	Tagging, encouraging visitation to destination, recalling past social gatherings	869	60	29	27
	3	Cognitive Advocacy	Providing more information or itinerary, noting change since last visit, adding specific recommendation, linking to other travel sites	46	2	1	2
	4	Cooperative Advocacy	Members poking fun at each other, informal planning for visits, agreeing to trip on short notice	158	15	5	4
Visitor-Perspective	5	Bucket Listing	Expressing interest in visiting, creating 'bucket list' plans, excitement to go someday, early 'dream' phase	188	13	6	6
	6	Clarification-seeking	Seeking clarification, looking for things to do, confirming location details, seeking guidance for trips	23	1	1	1
	7	Missed Opportunity Lamenting	Disappointment for missing the destination, expressing frustration with distance to destination, financial inability to travel	80	5	3	2
Other Notable Behaviours	8	Tension Creating	General member tensions, sarcasm, negative expression of tourist impact	26	2	1	1
	9	Alternate Context Associations	Connecting to their job or other aspect of their life, linking to other products	14	2	0	0
	10	Responses to DMOs/ Operators	Responding to question from DMO/ private operator	97	4	3	4
	11	Photo/ equipment quality	Commenting on the quality of a photo rather than the content, asking for more details on the camera used	83	7	3	2
	12	Other/ Miscellaneous	Self-promotion, promoting another Instagram page, travel-related content but unclassifiable	130	5	6	5

context associations. Finally, there were a number of traces coded as miscellaneous (130) to capture self-promotional comments and unclassifiable content. The average number of traces by phase indicates that social media engagement was relatively high in peak 1, then dropped during the valley, and levelled off in peak 2. This suggests that over the course of the pandemic, online self-disclosure changed, likely influenced by a social calculus that now factored in costs as well as benefits to the sharing of travel-related content.

To further explore shifts of the four dominant behaviours, their percentage of all comments across each of the three pandemic phases (peak 1, valley, peak 2) was calculated. These frequencies are presented in [Table 3](#).

Table 3. Frequency of Most Significant Behaviours.

Latent Behaviour	Peak 1	Valley	Peak 2
Positive Affect Expression	43.3%	50.7%	50.9%
Affective Advocacy	29.4%	25.4%	24.3%
Bucket Listing	6.5%	5.1%	5.4%
Cooperative Advocacy	7.4%	4.3%	3.6%

This reveals that, as a percentage, Positive Affect Expression was the dominant latent behaviour as well as the only theme to increase its share of comments across the phases. These behaviours were likely influenced by the simplicity of this form of engagement: expressing in a word the sentiment evoked by the depicted destination or posting an emoji. This allowed the user some form of meaningful engagement in a relatively simple way. Affective advocacy was the next most frequently occurring behaviour, with instances of Affective Advocacy declining from the first to second peak as users tagged others less frequently and were less likely to encourage others to travel to the destination or recall past social gatherings over time. Similarly, Cooperative Advocacy behaviours, in which users focused on informal planning and agreeing to short-notice trips, also declined from peak 1, to valley to peak 2, likely for similar reasons. Finally, Bucket Listing, named after the 2007 film 'The Bucket List' in which two seniors create a list of things they dream of doing before they 'kick the bucket', or die, was frequently demonstrated on DC's Instagram page. This theme focused on expressions of interest in visiting the destination, an excitement to visit someday, and an indication of a 'dream' to eventually travel to the place depicted in the post. In terms of frequency, Bucket Listing was higher during the peaks and lower in the valley. That is, when Covid-19 cases peaked, users frequently shared their dream or excitement of putting a place on their bucket list. Logically, when cases increase, travel restrictions tighten, and an individual's dreams of visiting once restrictions lift appear higher than when travel restrictions are low.

To measure the statistical significance of the changes by phase, a one-way ANOVA test was performed. Results are presented in Table 4.

A Tukey post hoc test indicated that the differences in means from peak 1 to peak 2 were significantly different for all four latent behaviours: Positive Affect Expression ($p = .085$), Affective Advocacy ($p = .049$), Bucket Listing ($p = .005$), and Cooperative Advocacy ($p = .064$). The change from peak 1 to the valley was significantly different for Bucket

Table 4. One-Way ANOVA Test to Compare Means of Three Phases (Significant Relationships Bolded).

Latent Behaviour	Phase (A)	Phase (B)	Mean Difference (A-B)	Std. Error	Sig.
Positive Affect Expression	Peak 1	Valley	30.75	19.575	0.129
	Peak 1	Peak 2	32.27**	17.988	0.085
	Valley	Peak 2	1.52	13.994	0.915
Affective Advocacy	Peak 1	Valley	31.00	19.213	0.125
	Peak 1	Peak 2	33.08*	15.933	0.049
	Valley	Peak 2	2.08	12.396	0.868
Bucket Listing	Peak 1	Valley	10.13*	3.929	0.017
	Peak 1	Peak 2	11.07*	3.610	0.005
	Valley	Peak 2	0.94	2.809	0.740
Cooperative Advocacy	Peak 1	Valley	7.50**	4.106	0.080
	Peak 1	Peak 2	7.32**	3.773	0.064
	Valley	Peak 2	1.75	3.489	0.622

*Significant at 5% confidence interval, **Significant at 10% confidence interval

Listing ($p = .017$) and Cooperative Advocacy ($p = .064$). There were no significant differences between valley and peak 2 among the latent behaviours.

Discussion

Through a sequential exploratory mixed-method strategy, this study identified 12 latent behaviours within DC's Instagram page, four of which were dominant: Positive Affect Expression, Affective Advocacy, Bucket Listing, and Cooperative Advocacy. While the average number of comments for all themes dropped over time from peak 1 to peak 2, it is noteworthy that the share of Positive Affect Expression actually rose compared to the other themes. By sharing a smiley-face emoji, or expressing one's appreciation of a destination, users are able to maintain their engagement with the content as a benefit to their desire to share with others, while simultaneously minimizing the risk of criticism for planning an actual trip or asking for more information about a destination, which hints at an intention to travel and in turn leads to potential travel shaming by others. The other three common behaviours of Affective Advocacy, Cooperative Advocacy and Bucket Listing decreased over time, reflecting a shift away from these other-focused behaviours. This supports Nabity-Grover, Cheung, and Thatcher (2020) in that the pandemic social calculus influenced individuals to be more cognizant of others' perspectives when weighing the benefits and costs associated with communicating within their digital social networks.

Interestingly, while Covid-19 cases changed significantly between peaks and the valley, most of the observed behaviours did not. Only two behaviours decreased significantly from peak 1 to valley: Cooperative Advocacy and Bucket Listing, both of which are other-focused behaviours. This suggests that the shift away from other-focused behaviours happened early in the pandemic, as did instances of travel shaming and the consequences of risk-taking. Such a continuous focus on the pandemic by the media is likely to have influenced this early shift in behaviour. Both Cooperative Advocacy and Bucket Listing involve expressions of future travel desires and plans, neither aligning with the mood of the time. Behaviours changed over the course of the pandemic, rather than in sync with Covid-19 case waves. For instance, Affective Advocacy continually decreased relative to other behaviours from peak 1 to valley to peak 2. A behaviour largely focused on tagging and inviting others to visit the destination, this reduction reflects a social calculus away from other-focused behaviour as the pandemic continued. From the first peak of the pandemic to the second, the rate of use of self-focused behaviours (i.e. Positive Affect Expression) went up, whereas the rate of other-focused behaviours (i.e. Advocacy, Bucket Listing) went down. Other-focused tagging behaviours have the potential to inflate the associated social risks associated, in that tagging a friend or family member and encouraging them to travel during the pandemic can result in social costs. Nabity-Grover, Cheung, and Thatcher (2020) propose that the other-focus perspective becomes more salient when one's actions have the potential to be negatively viewed by one's peers.

By identifying the significant changes in self-disclosure on DC's social network, this study's findings corroborate the shift from other-focused to self-focused behaviour, reflecting a reshaping of digital interactions and values associated with leisure travel. While these results were revealed during the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism's ever-present vulnerability to natural and man-made crises combined with the continual proliferation of technology-enabled social time, suggest some permanency to the changes.

For example, in public online travel communities, average users may observe more and share less, and save highly personal posts for member-based online communities.

Implications

Theoretical implications

This research responds to the call to explore socially influenced disclosures online during a unique timeframe of active social media engagement and heightened risk perceptions precipitated by the 2020/21 Covid-19 pandemic (Nabity-Grover, Cheung, and Thatcher 2020). Social exchange theory posits that relationships are based on subjective evaluations of costs and benefits to manage social capital (Adongo, Kim, and Elliot 2019), demonstrated online as users selectively self-present based on a cost–benefit weighting (Cheung, Lee, and Chan 2015). The pandemic forced social media users to weigh the benefit of online engagement to combat physical and emotional isolation with the cost associated with the spectacle of travel shaming. Prior studies have examined social media-based social capital's potential to foster community relationships (de Zúñiga, Barnidge, and Scherman 2017). The current study contributes to the literature by exploring the intersection of a growing phenomenon at a time of crisis: online self-disclosure during the Covid-19 pandemic.

By tracking and coding thousands of manifest behaviours over the peaks and valley of a pandemic, this study provides evidence of a social calculus that places greater weight on an other-focused perspective when self-disclosing online. From the first peak of the pandemic to the second, the rate of use of self-focused behaviours (i.e. Positive Affect Expression) went up, whereas the rate of other-focused behaviours (i.e. Advocacy, Bucket Listing) went down. The shift away from other-focused behaviours happened early in the pandemic, indicating an awareness of and a desire to avoid potentially negative reactions. This supports Cato et al. (2020), who found that a fear of being publicly shamed strengthened one's resolve to engage in pro-social behaviours.

The Huang, Chen, and Wong (2020) study of an online community identified two types of user supports: informational, where users exchange information-based suggestions; and emotional, where users share understanding and intimacy. The current study's finding that the share of Positive Affect Expression rose in comparison to the more cognitive-type themes suggests that emotional supports were favoured over informational supports during Covid-19. This result sheds light on a gap in the research in terms of social media behaviour during a time of social upheaval. As proposed but not tested by Nabity-Grover, Cheung, and Thatcher (2020), the data support that a pandemic makes users more aggressively self-monitor what they disclose online due to the increased salience of other-focused influences. Posting a self-focused emoji versus a more outward tagging allows users to maintain engagement while preserving social capital. By empirically investigating online discourse through Covid-19 and considering social exchange, social capital and past research, the current study advances our understanding of digital interactions in response to shifting travel values.

Managerial implications

As travel restarts and marketers look forward, DMOs must be mindful of the change in travellers' social calculus, and the shifts in social media discourse from other-focused to

self-focused behaviours. Li, Teng, and Chen's (2020) study of engagement in tourism social media identifies the importance of customer trust. To rebuild trust in travel, DMOs should begin by featuring places that are safest to welcome visitors back, ensuring that users' perceptions of risk, both physical and social, are minimized. For instance, knowing that users are tagging others less frequently and making fewer informal plans with other members, DMOs may choose to share posts that depict small family groups or solo travellers where risk is minimized, as well as feature places that are safest to welcome visitors back. Indeed, posts depicting various Canadian mountain ranges with lone travellers in the foreground, a wide-angle shot of a distant evening Toronto skyline, a single outstretched arm holding a Beavertail pastry, and a solitary view of Lake Louise's blue water and mountain range in the background all received high levels of engagement during Covid-19, signalling the appeal of the destination versus groups of people, at least until the traveller psyche heals.

The study findings also signal the importance of social networks through times of crisis. DMOs have an opportunity to create meaningful social media spaces that encourage self-discourse and engagement. Increased interactions between DMOs and users, in the form of questions posed by the DMO to their audience, along with encouraging users to write comments and to share experiences, build a virtual community primed for the return of travel.

Conclusions

This study addressed three research questions: whether Covid-19 impacted travel-related social media behaviour; how online self-disclosure in travel communities changed during Covid-19; and how changes in online behaviour might impact DMOs in future.

Pre-pandemic, social media posting was often associated with envy toward others, influenced by intentions to maintain one's social capital, akin to 'keeping up with the Joneses' (Siegel and Wang 2019). However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the social capital of posting travel-related content to social media shifted, reflecting new feelings of travel-related shame rather than envy. Since shame can result in the psychological response of burnout (Lim and Yang 2015), these findings appear to challenge the view that the social benefits of posting to social media outweigh the risks to one's privacy (Cheung, Lee, and Chan 2015) when those self-disclosure decisions are made during a global pandemic.

To understand how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted leisure travel-related social media behaviour self-disclosure patterns, thousands of Instagram comments were captured and coded. As a result of the sequential exploratory analysis, it was observed that behaviours related to Positive Sentiment Expression, Cooperative and Affective Advocacy, and Bucket Listing stood out among the other latent behaviours identified, and that instances of self-focused behaviour (i.e. Positive Sentiment Expression) increased relative to other-focused behaviour (i.e. Affective/Cooperative Advocacy and Bucket Listing) across pandemic phases. Examples from this study to support this shift include the relatively increased rate of posting self-focused positive sentiment such as smiley-faces, heart emojis, or referring to the destination's beauty, while those behaviours that affect one's social calculus (i.e. advocacy and bucket listing) declined, a response to maintain users' needs for privacy in this context.

These significant changes in online behaviour should encourage DMOs to accept the extended leisure time spent in the social world (Lamont and Ross 2020) in anticipation of travel, no longer solely a function of trip planning but a place for travel-related discourse to construct one's social identity. In future, DMOs should consider hosting member-based social media sites as unique spaces to create social worlds for extended leisure experiences to unfold.

Given the exploratory nature of the study and the focus on observational data, there may be unexpected confounding variables beyond the themes identified, limiting the study's generalizability. Future research is needed to empirically test these latent behaviours within a travel-based social media context to determine the influence of identification on users' actions, such as their destination selection and visit intention resulting from their sense of group belonging. Additionally, the use of social media listening applications would facilitate the analysis of a larger sample of posts. As the Covid-19 pandemic stretches into another year, understanding leisure time spent in virtual communities continues to be relevant, informing shifts in sociability and connectivity and signalling new norms of leisure behaviour.

Disclosure statement

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