

An Optimization Exploration of the Usage of Pinterest, to Increase Switzerland's Awareness as a Destination, Before and During a Self-Managed Trip.



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Source picture on title page : person using a laptop in Hotel Nomad, Basel, Internal picture in the database of Switzerland Tourism : <https://st.mypublish.ch/index.php?page=.myAssets3:cat-264>

Abstract

Visual content communities such as Pinterest (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 63) perform well for destination marketing (Maurer & Hinterdorfer, 2013, p. 213), especially as users are reached along the entire customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p. 69). This study investigates Pinterest's optimization possibilities in raising awareness of the destination Switzerland before and during a self-managed leisure trip.

A mixed methodology was used to gather data by hosting an online focus group talk and observations, with nine participants. In the observations, the participants interacted with Pinterest to plan a fictional trip in Switzerland. Their behavior was observed, and questions helped understand their preferences. The data were analyzed using the classical content comparison and constant comparison methods.

The results showed that lower interactivity is favored before and during the trip. Moreover, the popularity of topics presented on pins differs depending on the stage of the trip. One significant finding was that generic content about Switzerland is viral before the trip, and during the trip, generic findings of more limited areas were popular. Other findings were presented about the optimal number of pictures in a visual, the importance of keywords and the most popular visuals elements.

To conclude, lower interactivity in the pin's caption and one picture in the pin's visual before and during a trip is recommended. Further, to respond to the audience's needs generic content and the topics presented should be included as content. Finally, the keywords should be optimized mainly focusing on the destination's name in different languages.

Keywords: Pinterest, Customer journey, Switzerland, Social media, Leisure tourism.

Foreword and Acknowledgments

This study is conducted as part of the bachelor's degree in Tourism Management at the HES-SO Valais Wallis in Sierre, Switzerland. Simultaneously completing a traineeship at Switzerland Tourism in Amsterdam, I was inspired to write my Bachelor Thesis for the company. In the course of my activity in administrating the Dutch-speaking social media accounts, I became aware of the need of further research in social media marketing. This is why I contacted Dominic Stöcklin, head of social media at Switzerland Tourism in Zurich, to discuss potential study subjects. He suggested doing some research on Pinterest. Being a Pinterest user myself and seeing further potential, this topic of research immediately seized my interest. This paper aims to give Switzerland Tourism recommendations on Pinterest's optimization possibilities, focusing on the stages before and during a self-managed trip. Those recommendations are based on the literature review, social media strategy at Switzerland Tourism, the insights of the focus group talk and individual observations. One of the first significant challenges was the lack of data provided openly by Pinterest. The platform hides the number of views of each content, making it impossible to gather data directly on the platform. This led to the decision to conduct a focus group and individual observations instead of analyzing the competitors to gather customer behavior data. A second significant challenge was learning to moderate an online focus group and observations to gather relevant data.

This study could not have been conducted without the help of professionals in social media and tourism management. Therefore, I would like to thank the following people for their precious help: Kate Varini, thesis supervisor, for the support, thoughtful inputs and time devoted along the whole process. Dominic Stöcklin, head of social media at Switzerland Tourism and mandator of this project, for the information provided and the valuable inputs given along the realization of this project. I would also like to thank the nine final-year students of the HES-SO Valais Wallis. They participated in the focus group and individual observations. Their help was crucial in gaining insight into customer behavior. As the project was conducted simultaneously alongside the traineeship, family and friends' support was vital along with the whole project. I would like to thank all of them, especially those proofreading this project: Nadja Osterwalder, Melissa Auderset and Thomas Moonen.

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List of Abbreviations

UGC	User generated content
CTA	Call-to-action

Introduction

Social media is essential for potential guests to acquire information on tourism offers (Amaro, Duarte & Henriques, 2016, p. 11–12) because tourism products cannot be tested before purchasing (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008, p. 100). It has been proven that tourism products' risk can be reduced with social media (Leung, Schuskert & Yeung, 2013, p. 195–196). Moreover, social media became an omnipresent part of consumers' lives. Therefore, one medium can reach consumers along the whole customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p. 69). Visual content communities such as Pinterest (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 63) would, therefore, work well for destinations marketing (Maurer & Hinterdorfer, 2013, p. 213).

The potential of Pinterest is high primarily due to the longevity of pins. According to Lynch & Horton (2016), Twitter and Facebook posts have a relatively short lifespan, from a few minutes to a few hours. Pinterest, on the other hand, has a lifespan of approximately 105 days (Pinterest, 2019). Moreover, the content community has more than 335 million monthly active pinners worldwide (Pinterest, 2020), comparable to Twitter, with 330 million users (Twitter, 2019). It also needs to be noted that the platform is still growing in users. There was a growth of 70 million monthly active users in 2019, representing a growth of 26%. The platform has been prevalent in the US at its beginnings. Today, it is an international platform which is likely to become even more popular outside of the US in the next years. A growth of 8% was noted in the year 2019 in the US and 35% outside the US (Pinterest, 2020). Furthermore, 72% of all Pinterest users are female (Statistica, 2020a). This is interesting because women in relationships are more likely to collect information regarding the possibilities of a holiday destination, according to Mottiar & Quinn (2004).

The focus lies on the use of Pinterest in two stages of the customer journey: before and during a self-managed trip. In this study, a self-managed trip is defined as a trip booked by a person without an external company's help. The "before the trip" stage lasts until the guest sets foot on the first on-site location and includes the following stages: need for recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives. When the guest arrives at the first on-site location, the "during the trip" stage begins which lasts until the guest leaves the last on-site location.

These research results can be valuable for Switzerland Tourism, Switzerland's national tourism organization, and the mandator of this research. The recommendations presented in this paper can increase the public's perception of Switzerland as a tourist destination through Pinterest, which could increase key performance indicators and overnight stays. Nonetheless, the results can also be used by other organizations in tourism. Partially, the findings could also be extended to other content communities. Moreover, it contributes to recent literature on Pinterest from an academic perspective, which should be tested in further research to see if the awareness of a destination increased after implementing the recommendations.

This project's first step consisted of literature research on effective social media brand posts aiming to raise awareness before and during a self-managed trip. These findings served as a basis for this research project's objectives, which are defined as follows: to find the optimal degree of interactivity. Interactivity is defined by the researcher as the level of possible interaction with the customer. Three levels were defined as low, medium, and high. Further, this project also examined the type of information that is sought before and during a self-managed trip. Besides, new factors were also being researched.

The mixed-methods methodology was used to answer the research question and the objectives, resulting in a framework. Therefore, qualitative and quantitative data collection was conducted. In a first step, an online focus group was conducted to collect primary qualitative data to get a deeper insight into the optimal degree of pins' interactivity before and during a trip and the type of content searched for before and during a self-managed trip. Further individual observations were conducted to compare the self-reported data from the focus group with the observations and discover new potential factors.

The study's context is presented in chapter 1; this is an essential step in creating recommendations by considering the prerequisites. Chapter 2 presents a literature review aiming to answer the following question: What are the characteristics of effective social media brand posts before and during a trip to drive brand awareness? The literature review findings informed the objectives of this study are presented in chapter 3, along with the research question. The methodology to answer the research question by creating a

framework is explained in chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents the focus group results, followed by chapter 6, presenting the observations' findings. The results are explained in chapter 7 and additionally summarized in a framework. Chapter 8 introduces recommendations based on the previous summary of the results. The study's limitations and further perspectives are formulated in chapter 9 to enable the reader to get an accurate picture of the study and its further outlook.

1. Context

This section will outline the background of this study. The mandator is introduced together with the department for which this research paper is written. The state of the art of social media strategy is reviewed, with a particular emphasis on Pinterest as used by the client, i.e., Switzerland Tourism.

1.1. Switzerland Tourism

Switzerland Tourism provides the mandate for the research. Switzerland Tourism is the national marketing organization promoting the demand for Switzerland as a holiday, travel and MICE destination domestically and internationally (Switzerland Tourism, 2019a). The organization is mandated by the Swiss Confederation, who contributes 56% of its budget. The tourism industry, as a key partner, contributes the other 44% of funding. Switzerland Tourism has 240 employees, including 24 trainees working at the Zürich headquarters and 22 offices abroad (Switzerland Tourism, 2019a).

1.2. Social Media at Switzerland Tourism

Four employees and one trainee work in the social media department in the Zurich head office. In most of Switzerland Tourism's offices abroad, an employee is also responsible for social media activities focusing on the office's specific market. This research focuses on the social media strategies utilized to attract leisure tourists; therefore, elements related to meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (business travel) are excluded from the study. The social media strategy is consistent with Switzerland Tourism's global strategy, i.e., "positioning Switzerland as the best destination in the Alpine Region and generate sustainable demand for leisure travel" (Switzerland Tourism, 2019b, p. 13).

1.3. Social Media Strategy at Switzerland Tourism

This section will define the scope of potential recommendations. This ensures that the recommendation will respect the global social media strategy of Switzerland Tourism.

The social media strategy and the content produced are based on the values defined in the marketing nucleus. It can be consulted in the appendix as it is confidential (see appendix I). This ensures that all marketing activities are in line with the global mission.

Switzerland Tourism uses a customer journey as the foundation for their social media strategy. In the awareness stage of the journey, target customers are made aware of Switzerland as a travel destination. The attraction stage is accomplished when target customers like Switzerland's tourist offers. The confidence stage of the journey is reached when target customers consider booking a tourist offer, followed by the commitment stage when users engage with content on the website. The last stage refers to advocacy and is accomplished when tourists promote Switzerland as a destination (Switzerland Tourism, 2019b, p. 26).

Each stage of the journey has a specific goal. First, the goal of inspiration uses innovative storytelling focusing on the users. Engagement is the goal of getting many users to engage with content. A traffic goal is defined as the increase of quality traffic on myswitzerland.com. The strategic goal "Actions" aims to increase actions on myswitzerland.com through relevancy and call-to-actions (CTAs). The last strategic goal is called "Advocacy" and is defined as building a strong community promoting Switzerland as a destination (Switzerland Tourism, 2019b, p. 27). Table 1 summarizes the journey stages, the strategic goals and the key performance indicators.

Table 1 Social Media Strategy at Switzerland Tourism

	Awareness	Attraction	Confidence	Commitment	Advocacy
Strategic goal	Inspiration	Engagement	Traffic	Actions	Advocacy
Main Key Performance Indicator	Paid and organic impressions	ER defined by Switzerland Tourism *	Paid and organic traffic	Paid and organic micro conversions	Traffic from user-shared links
Secondary Key Performance Indicator	Followers	Video views			Hashtag mentions by users

* "Engagement / Impressions x 100; Engagement defined as likes + comments + shares for organic posts and likes + comments + shares + other actions for paid posts" (Switzerland Tourism, 2019b, p 27-28).

Source: Switzerland Tourism, 2019b, p. 27

The leading platforms used by Switzerland Tourism are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter. The secondary platforms are YouTube, TripAdvisor, Pinterest and LinkedIn. For the Asian markets, other platforms are also used (Switzerland Tourism, 2019b, p. 20-22). Each platform corresponds to one or several strategic goals.

Switzerland Tourism uses a cluster approach to respond to specific markets' needs in its content creation and distribution. The markets are grouped based on price sensitivity, user segments, shared attributes, and needs as shown in figure 1 (Switzerland Tourism, 2019b, p. 18). A new market cluster is tested since August 2020. However, it is not yet definitely confirmed (D. Wahlen, trainee social media, personal communication, 19 August 2020).

Figure 1 Market Clusters for content creation and distribution



Source: Switzerland Tourism, 2019b, p. 18

1.4. State of Pinterest at Switzerland Tourism

Pinterest's evolution at Switzerland Tourism is analyzed to explain the research question's relevancy and give recommendations. The findings are summarized in the following paragraphs.

The Pinterest account was launched in 2016. The account was not used to its fullest potential as human resources were lacking at Switzerland Tourism in Zurich, even though Switzerland Tourism saw potential in this social media platform (D. Stöcklin, Head of Social Media at Switzerland Tourism, personal communication, 7 September 2020). Until 2019, Pinterest was not part of the social media strategy. It was added in July 2020, as the platform became more interesting for Switzerland Tourism. Switzerland Tourism also regards Pinterest as an interesting platform for the social media marketing mix. It is a unique search platform that is primarily known for inspiring users. Thanks to the increased efficiency in managing other social media platforms, more human resources were attributed to Pinterest. This is the

reason why Switzerland's Pinterest account grew in activity in the past year. The role of Pinterest within the customer journey is important for Switzerland Tourism, especially because Pinterest is a place dedicated to finding inspiration and conducting research before making a travel decision. Pinterest's main strategic goal, shown in table 1, is inspiration, which does not exclude having goals related to confidence (D. Stöcklin, PC, 7 September 2020). The Pinterest account operates in English as there is only one account managed by Switzerland Tourism. The exceptions are a German board for partners who want to target German-speaking markets (Switzerland Tourism, 2020c) and Korean boards for the Korean market (Switzerland Tourism, n.d.-a).

In winter 2019/2020, the first paid Pinterest campaign focusing on Switzerland as a wedding destination was launched by Switzerland Tourism (Switzerland Tourism, 2019c). The second paid campaign on Pinterest followed in July 2020 in the following markets: Switzerland, Germany, Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom. The campaign was part of the Corona crisis recovery campaign "I need Switzerland". The campaigns are summarized in table 2.

Table 2 Overview Paid Pinterest Campaign at Switzerland Tourism

	Wedding Campaign 2019/2020	I need Switzerland 2020 Campaign
Strategic goal	Inspiration	Inspiration
Paid Impressions	1.78 million	46 million
Paid Clicks	8,835	2,918
Traffic on website	658	No information available

Sources: Switzerland Tourism, 2020a, p. 3; Switzerland Tourism, 2020b, p. 12.

On 3 November 2020, Switzerland Tourism's Pinterest account had 26,000 followers and 373,000 monthly viewers (Switzerland Tourism, n.d.-a). Moreover, there are 712 pins and 88 group boards (Socialbakers, n.d.). An overview of the follower growth, pins created and interactions of the first three quarters of 2020 is shown in table 3.

Table 3 Results Pinterest at Switzerland Tourism

	01.01.20 – 31-03.20	01.04.20 – 30.06.20	01.07.20 – 30.09.20
Interactions	87	4,200	293
Pins created	51	187	222
Followers growth	1,361	2,372	1,956

Source: Socialbakers (n.d.)

Most pins on Switzerland Tourism’s Pinterest account are standard static pins. Only a few pins are standard video pins and they are linked to a paid campaign. Also, some carousel pins are showcased. The pins are created on the platform canva.com (Switzerland Tourism, 2020c, p. 49). Switzerland Tourism follows the creative best practices shared by Pinterest. The best practices include picking a captivating visual, making it brand-centric, giving relevant context, including the logo, and including text overlay on the visual (Switzerland Tourism, 2019c, p. 18).

2. Literature Review

In the following subchapters, social media is defined, and classification is presented. Social media's importance for the tourism industry is examined, and social media's role in the customer journey is outlined. Finally, the key characteristics driving awareness via the presentation of visual brand content online are identified.

2.1. Social Media

This section defines and categorizes social media, with a particular focus on Pinterest. Moreover, user-generated content and its relevance for Pinterest is evaluated.

Social media can be defined as:

“a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61).

Web 2.0 technology allows the two-way exchange of information. It provides the possibility for users to create and share their content. Further, there are two unique traits presented by Lange-Faria & Elliot (2012, p. 195), which help define social media. The first characteristic is the interactive nature of social media platforms, such as liking and commenting posts or sending direct messages. The second is the ability to share photos and videos, which can be selected by friends. These two characteristics enabled those platforms to grow their user base around the world.

According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010, p. 62), social media can be classified based on the four theories, which are an integral part of social media: The social presence theory, the media richness theory, the self-presentation theory, and the self-disclosure theory.

The social presence theory (Short, Williams & Christie, 1976) indicates the level of two-way contact that can be reached acoustically, visually, and physically. Therefore, it is assumed that dissimilar media differ in their social presence. For example, face-to-face discussions have a higher social presence than email communication (cited in Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Another example is that video conferencing has a higher social presence than text messages.

According to Daft & Lengel (1986), media richness theory is founded on the hypothesis that every conversation aims to solve uncertainty or ambiguity. Therefore, media do not have the same degree of success in resolving unclarities by looking at the amount of information transferred in a specific period (cited in Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). As an example, a phone call has a higher media richness than a text message as more information can be shared in less time.

The self-presentation theory assumes that individuals want to control the impressions other people have of them, as Goffman reported (cited in Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61-62). For example, a traveler wants to express his personality and, as a result, shares pictures of his recent trip with his friends.

Self-disclosure is the sharing of personal information done consciously and as well as unconsciously (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 62). For example, Facebook has a higher self-disclosure than YouTube. On Facebook, personal information is the foundation of the platform. There is a small amount of personal information shared on YouTube as the platform is based on content.

Those theories make sure that the classification keeps its relevance as well for future social media platforms. The following classification of social media in table 4 is adapted in regard to the travel industry from Kaplan & Haenlein's framework:

Table 4 Classification of social media

		Degree of Social presence and media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Degree of self-presentation and disclosure	High	Travel Blogs (e.g., Nomadicmatt.com)	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., online guided tours such as Nintendo 3DS Guide in the Louvre)
	Low	Collaborative Projects (e.g., likealocalguide.com)	Content Communities (e.g., Pinterest)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood game generating tourism in Rome)

Source: Adapted from Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 62

Thus, Pinterest is a content community platform and, as such, is mainly characterized by the small amount of personal information shared on a user's profile (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 63). Such platforms focus on user-generated content (UGC) rather than personal information. UGC is content created by users instead of professionals and is shared online (Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008, p. 16). According to Colicev, Kumar & O'Connor (2019, p. 113-114), UGC has a more significant impact on brand awareness than brand-generated content. This provides an idea of UGC's importance, especially in creating awareness for a product or service.

2.2. Pinterest

In this section, Pinterest's potential is examined, followed by demographic information on users. Finally, the relevance of a visual platform for the tourism industry is evaluated.

Pinterest is an image bookmarking tool and a visual search tool created in 2010 (Cario, 2012, p. 5). The platform has more than 335 million monthly active users worldwide (Pinterest, 2020). According to Statistica (2020b), there are even 416 million active users in the second quarter of 2020. Therefore, the size is comparable to Twitter, with 330 million users (Twitter, 2019). In the year 2019, there was a growth of 70 million monthly active users, representing a growth of 26%. Users in the US drove initial popularity. Today, Pinterest is an international platform: A growth of 8% was noted in 2019 in the US, and 35% outside the US (Pinterest, 2020).

72% of all Pinterest users were female as of July 2020 (Statistica, 2020a). Females in relationships are more likely to collect information regarding holiday destinations, according to Mottiar & Quinn (2004, p. 158). Nevertheless, this provides little insight into how to optimize the usage of Pinterest in tourism, as gender is not a significant factor in destination activity choice, according to Frew & Shaw (1999, p. 200).

Pinterest is a platform based on images and this is an excellent opportunity as "sight is our most powerful sense" according to Rosen (2005, p. 28). This is even more true for tourism products, which are high-risk products: The platform would, therefore, work well for

destination marketing (Maurer & Hinterdorfer, 2013, p. 213). In the following chapter, the importance and usage of social media in the tourism industry are explored.

2.3. Social Media in Tourism

This section will outline elements that indicate the importance of social media in the sales of products and experiences in the travel industry.

The studies of Amaro, Duarte & Henriques (2016, p. 11-12); Hudson & Thal (2013, p. 157-158); Zeng & Gerritsen (2014, p. 29-30) show that social media have become an essential media where consumers acquire information that might inform a tourism experience. More information gathered from other like-minded individuals having already completed their tourism information (e.g., customer reviews, photos) lowers the risk of purchase of an experience quality beneath expectations (Kim, Qu, & Kim, 2009, p. 219-220) because experiences cannot be tested before purchase (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008, p. 100). A study by Leung, Schuskert & Yeung (2013, p. 195-196) suggests that social media can minimize the risk of being dissatisfied with the purchased experience or product. Therefore, an ever-increasing percentage of consumers review user-generated content before visiting a tourism destination for the first time (Amaro, Duarte & Henriques, 2016, p. 3).

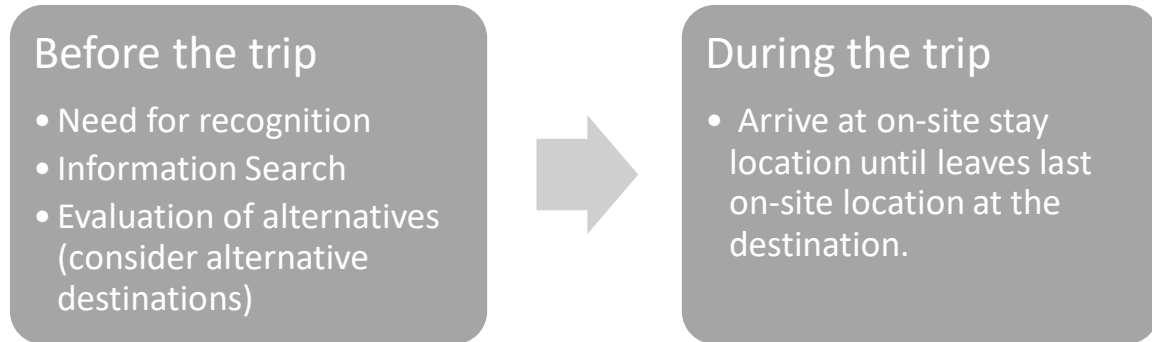
According to Di Pietro & Di Virgilio (2012), a significant number of consumers are using social media extensively before deciding on holiday accommodation (cited in Matikiti, Mpinganjira, & Roberts-Lombard, 2017, p. 3). Moreover, another study made by Gretzel & Yoo (2008, p. 40-41) indicates that this type of information plays a critical role in the planning stage of a trip.

2.4. The Customer Journey

According to Lemon & Verhoef (2016, p. 74-76), the customer journey is defined as the steps the customer takes on the purchase cycle, including the touchpoints, and can be broken into different stages over a specific period of time. During this journey, the customer has contact with the company several times. Those contacts are called touchpoints. The research

will focus on before and during a self-managed leisure trip as the stages of the customer journey as shown in figure 2 by Cox et al. (2009, p. 745).

Figure 2 Customer Journey



Source: Adapted from Cox et al. (2009, p. 745) and Choi, Lehto, Morrison & Jang (2012, p. 32-33)

The stages are defined as follows:

The “before the trip” stage includes brand-owned touchpoints defined by Lemon & Verhoef (2016, p. 76-77) as all interactions with a consumer created and controlled by a company. It includes all brand-owned media such as social media accounts, websites, advertisements. The “before the trip” stage lasts until the customer sets foot on the first on-site stay location and includes the following phases: need for recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives. In other literature, such as in Lemon & Verhoef (2016, p. 76), the first stage includes all interactions until the purchase. This cannot be used for the customer journey in travel as purchasing a trip can happen months before the actual traveling takes place. The time between the purchase and the actual traveling would otherwise be neglected. For example, a customer books a holiday to Switzerland in March, but the trip starts in July. The time between March and July is still considered before the trip.

The “during the trip” stage starts when the customer arrives at the first on-site stay destination as the information searches decline after purchase until spontaneous information search starts on the location. For example, to find an activity to do on the first location of the trip or where to drink a coffee in the proximity of the on-site stay location (Choi, Lehto, Morrison & Jang, 2012, p. 32-33). This stage lasts until the customer leaves the last on-site stay destination.

In the following section, the different characteristics of what might be deemed successful content are proposed during the two stages of the customer journey. These can be used in the next stages of the research.

2.5. Social Media and the Customer Journey

Social media has become a vital touchpoint in companies' customer journey (Demmers, Weltevreden & van Dolen, 2020, p. 53). Touchpoints frequently have the aim to respond to one specific consumer need. Hence numerous media are used to fulfill the different needs of consumers along the customer journey (Baxendale, Macdonald & Wilson, 2015, p. 236; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p. 69). In contrast, social media platforms are an omnipresent part of consumers' lives. This makes it possible to respond to the customer via several touchpoints along the journey on one platform (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p. 69).

Before the trip, consumers seeking tourism experiences use social media platforms to discover tourist destinations, different means of transport, hotels and activities of the chosen destination (Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, & Buultjens, 2009, p. 753). Moreover, social media platforms are used mostly during the pre-trip stage as reported (Cox et al., 2009, p. 754). In addition, social media usage during the trip is less significant than before the trip. Content generated by users increases during the travel time in the form of videos or photos from their trip, as reported by Munar & Jacobsen (2014, p. 52).

During the two main stages of the customer journey, social media functions as a widely diffused word-of-mouth information platform which can positively or negatively influence the travel decisions of others (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008, p. 461; Hudson, Roth, Madden & Hudson, 2015, p. 74; Luo & Zhong, 2015, p. 275).

2.6. Effective Social Media Brand Posts Before and During a Trip to Drive Brand Awareness

The understanding of brand posts in this study is based on Tafesse's and Wien's definition (2017, p. 1) as short and frequent updates by brands shared with their followers on social media platforms. Brand awareness is defined by Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair & Okumus (2015, p. 601) as decision makers' ability to recall a brand and differentiate between various brands.

Brand awareness is crucial to communicate with potential customers. In the tourism industry, destinations must increase their brand awareness. Otherwise, tourists will not recall a destination in their consideration set when deciding on the next holiday destinations (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair & Okumus, 2015, p. 601).

Virtual interactivity on Social Media is linked to increased brand awareness. Virtual interactivity on social media is defined as users and companies having direct two-way communication, not including time or distance as a factor. This means that when users interact with a brand or with other users, the brand's awareness increases (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair & Okumus, 2015, p. 602).

This study focuses on how the usage of Pinterest can increase brand awareness by increasing virtual interactivity, known as customer engagement, during all three customer journey stages.

The findings of a prior study (De Vries, Gensler & Leeflang, 2012, p. 84) provide some insight into the important characteristics of popular social media posts in terms of the number of likes and comments. These identified characteristics are the following: vividness, interactivity, informative or entertaining brand post.

"Vividness" was defined by Steuer (1992) as:

"the representational richness of a mediated environment as defined by its formal features, that is, the way in which an environment presents information to the senses" (p. 81).

"Interactivity" can be defined as the level at which a brand post enhances the possibility of a conversation between the brand and the user (Fiore, Jin & Kim, 2005, p. 672; Coyle & Thorson, 2001, p. 67).

The level of vividness and interactivity is defined in table 5 which is adapted from de Vries et al. (2012, p. 86) to Pinterest.

Table 5 Classification of Vividness and Interactivity

Level	Vividness (type of pin)	Interactivity (text on pins)
Low	Photo or Image (Standard Static Pins)	Text without CTA/Question
Medium	Not defined	CTA (the fans are urged to do something)
High	Video (Standard Video Pins)	Question

Source : Adapted from de Vries et al. (2012, p. 86)

A recent study by Demmers, Weltevreden & van Dolen (2020, p. 53-77) evaluates the preferred use of those characteristics previously defined by De Vries, Gensler & Leeflang (2012, p. 84) in all three stages of the customer journey to reach higher engagement.

In the past, a higher level of vividness was linked to a higher level of engagement, as suggested by de Vries, Gensler & Leeflang (2012, p. 88). More recent studies show that a photo generates more engagement than a video (Demmers, Weltevreden, & van Dolen, 2020, p. 68; Luarn, Lin & Chiu, 2015, p. 9-10).

In the before stage, interactive elements are linked to increased user engagement (Demmers, Weltevreden, & van Dolen, 2020, p. 68).

Before the trip, posts sharing useful information rather than entertaining posts reach a higher engagement rate. In contrast, entertaining posts achieve better results than informative posts during the consumption stage (Demmers, Weltevreden, & van Dolen, 2020, p. 67-68).

Another study by Huertas & Marine-Roig (2018, p. 196) analyzed the type of information searched by users before the trip and during a trip. Before the trip, the following types of information are more frequently searched than during the trip: main attractions, day trips & accommodation. The following types were searched more frequently during the trip than before the trip: weather, most visited places, restaurants, culture, leisure & shopping, and transportation.

2.7. Summary of Findings

The literature review's goal was to determine the specific characteristics of branded social media posts that drive brand awareness before traveling and during the stay of a self-managed trip. The findings are summarized in the framework in table 6.

Table 6 Findings Literature Review

	Optimal degree of vividness	Optimal degree of interactivity	Optimal content type (Informative vs. Entertaining)	Types of information searched
Before the trip	Medium	High	Informative	Main attractions Day trips Accommodation
During the trip (on-site)	Medium	Low	Entertaining	Weather Most visited places Restaurants Culture Leisure & Shopping Transportation

Source: Author's data

The framework shown in table 6 informs the methodology in several ways. The optimal degree of interactivity and types of information searched are used as factors in the online focus group and observations.

3. Research Question and Objectives

In this chapter, the research question is explained, and the objectives which guide the methodology are defined.

As mentioned in the literature review, social media became an essential touchpoint in the customer journey. Pinterest exists already since 2012. Today the platform is still growing internationally and has more monthly active users than Twitter. Switzerland tourism owns a Pinterest account since 2016 but did not use the full potential in recent years. Switzerland Tourism sees the potential to improve their Pinterest account and is specifically interested in improving content before and during the trip (D. Stöcklin, PC, 2 September 2020). This leads to the following research question: How to optimize the usage of Pinterest to increase the awareness of Switzerland as a destination before and during a self-managed trip? The following objectives are based on the findings of the literature review.

- To evaluate the optimal degree of interactivity of pins before and during a trip.
- To evaluate the types of information searched by users before and during a trip from previous literature and identify new factors.

4. Methodology

This chapter outlines the process of data collection and analysis of this research paper. The data collected and analyzed will give deeper insights to answer the research question and the objectives.

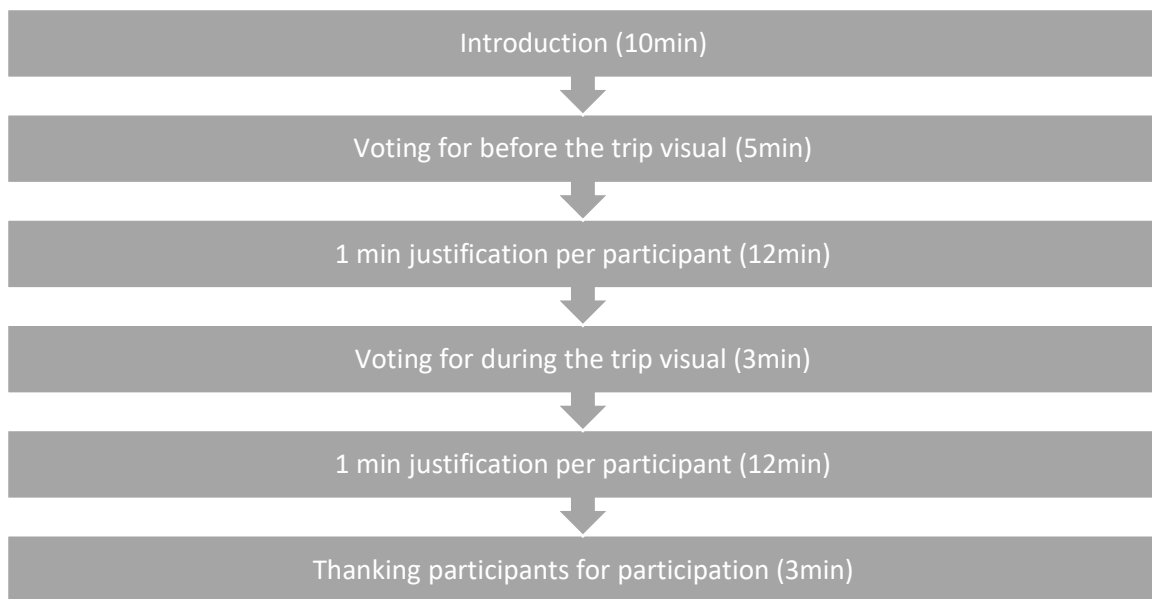
The methodology used in this paper is called mixed-methods. This means that an qualitative and quantitative approach is being used. This method has shown to be effective in giving in-depth insights, which would not be possible to achieve with a single method (Venkatesh, Brown & Bala, 2013, p. 1). The secondary data collected to inform the methodology used external desk research, which identified best practice usage of visual social media content (to drive brand awareness before and during a self-managed trip). Further, an online focus group research was conducted to collect primary qualitative data to get a more in-depth insight into the optimal degree of pins' interactivity before and during a trip, and the type of content searched for before and during a self-managed trip. This was followed by individual observations to compare the self-reported data with the observations and discover new potential factors.

4.1. Online Focus Group

A focus group assessed the optimal degree of interactivity and the types of information searched of pins before and during a trip to Switzerland. The focus group method is one of the most commonly used in qualitative marketing and advertising research. Marketing organizations use this type of research approach to identify insights into the motivation of users of products or services (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017, p. 48). In this research, the focus group was conducted online as traveling to Switzerland from the Netherlands was not recommended, in September, during the Covid-19 outbreak. Online focus groups are not new as phone focus groups already have been used previously (Koskan et al., 2014, p. 1), nevertheless the advance in technology has made online focus groups more versatile and useful (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017, p. 51). The online focus group was held on the 29th of September 2020 in Sierre at the HES-SO Valais Wallis, Switzerland, where nine final year students were present in a classroom and the researcher hosted virtually. These participants were completing a bachelor's degree in tourism, and all resided in Switzerland. The proposed group size was optimal as a focus group should have a minimum of 6 participants and a

maximum of 12 (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech & Zoran, 2009, p. 3). Also, the domestic market was the biggest market of Switzerland Tourism in terms of overnights with 45.3% in 2019 (Switzerland Tourism, 2020d), which was the primary key performance indicator of Switzerland Tourism. Moreover, the participants were all females, which corresponded to the gender of 72% of Pinterest users in July 2019, as mentioned previously in the literature review. The process of the focus group is summarized in figure 3.

Figure 3 Process focus group



Source: Author's data

The researcher moderated the 45-minute focus group via a video conferencing platform. The session was recorded for data analysis. Participants have signed an agreement, and the researcher ensured that the data collected was stored safely and not shared. In table 7, the focus group's process is explained in detail and the justifications of the researcher's decision.

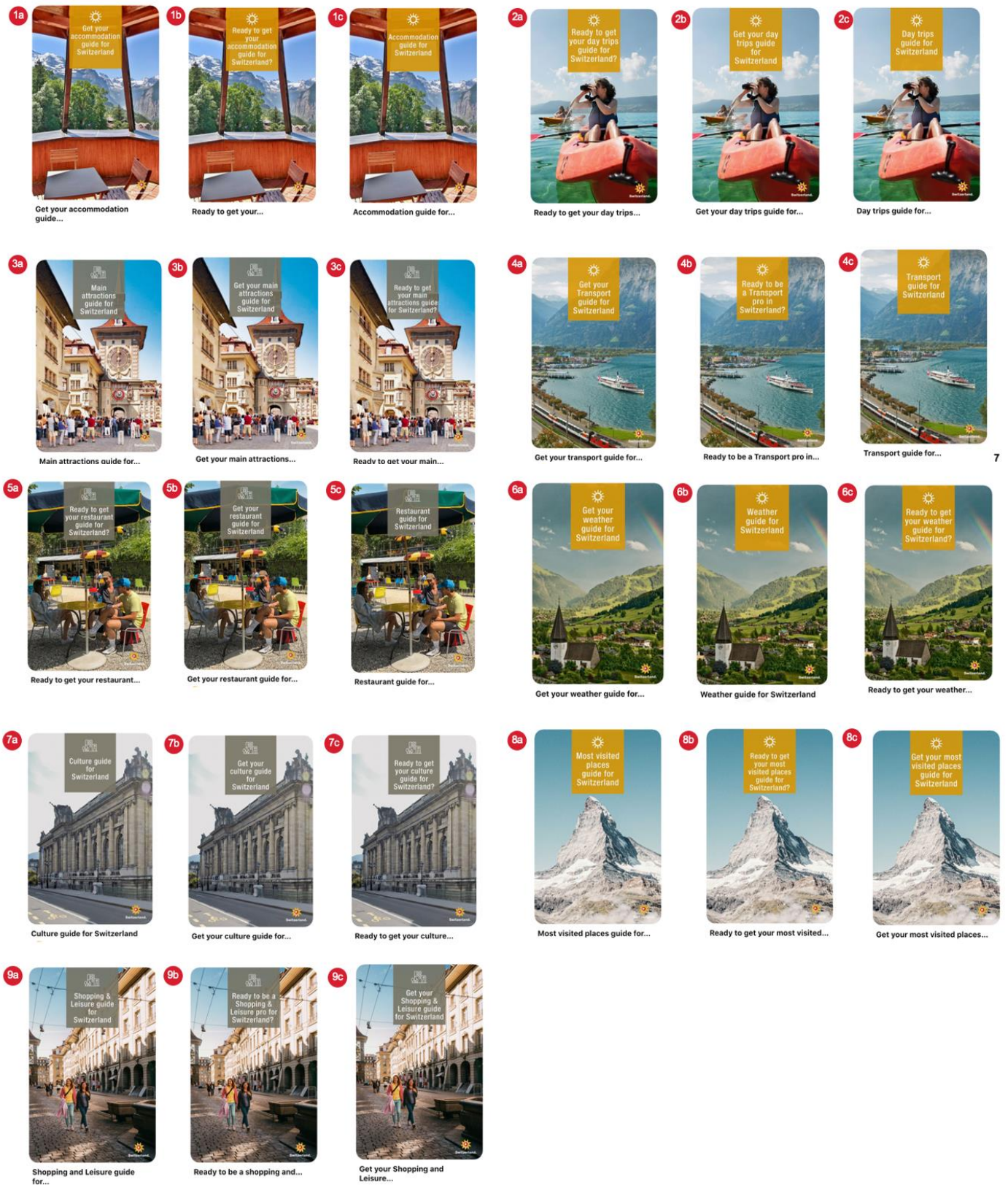
Table 7 Action and justifications of the focus group

STEP	ACTION	PROCESS / JUSTIFICATION
1	The participants report which pin is most appealing to them out of 27 pins (figure 4). This is done in both stages of the customer journey (via the chat option).	This small activity-oriented question is beneficial for participants who need more time to reflect on the question and get the group's attention to the core question of this study. Another advantage is that participants get engaged by asking them to do something (Colucci, 2007, p. 1422). The method of choosing between alternatives is popular in focus group research, according to Krueger (1998), especially in visual displays and advertising layout (Krueger & Casey, 2000) (cited in Colucci, 2007, p. 1425). The author created Pinterest pins with differences in interactivity and topics based on the literature review findings.
2	Each participant is asked to justify their choice.	This helps to evaluate the findings of the literature review but also to identify possible new factors by collecting qualitative data. The process of the focus groups is outlined in figure 3.

Source: Author's data

Figure 4 presents the pins created by the researcher focusing on two factors: the optimal level of interactivity and the types of information searched before and during a self-managed trip.

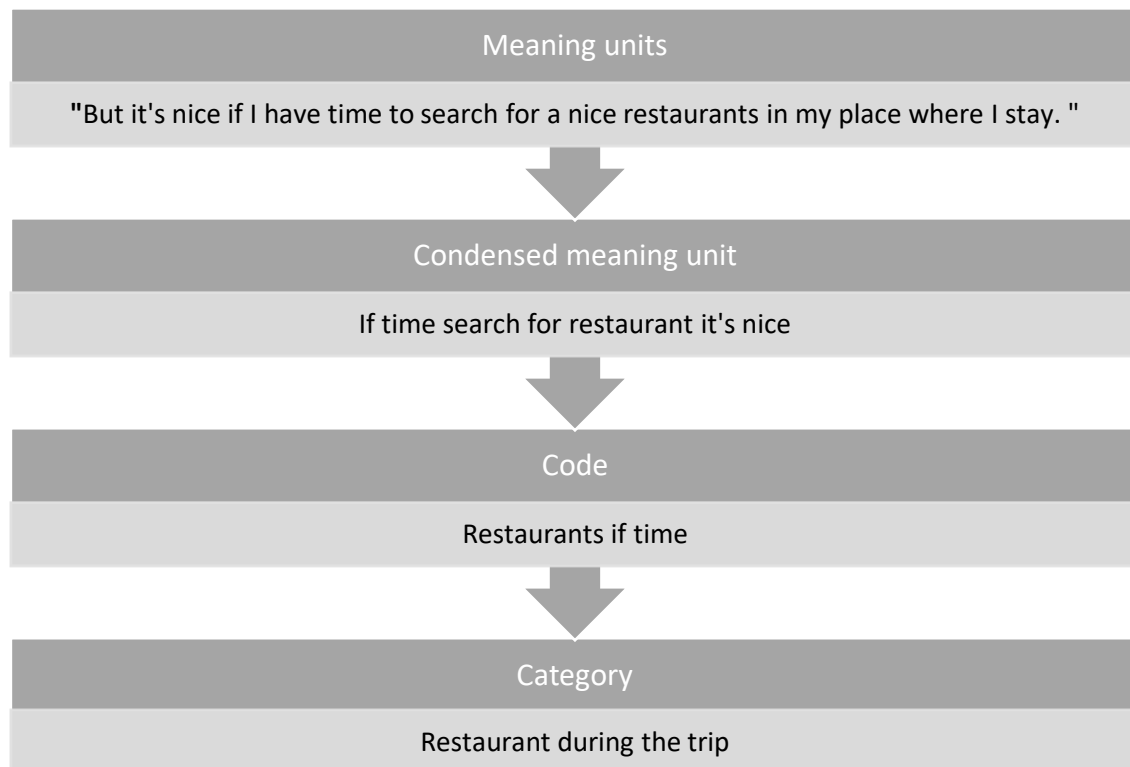
Figure 4 Pins created by the researcher for the focus group



Source: Author's data created on canva.com

As there is not a specific preferred method for analyzing focus group methods (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech & Zoran, 2009, p. 1), the method chosen was based on the approach proposed in the study *A Qualitative Framework for Collecting and Analyzing Data in Focus Group Research* by Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech & Zoran (2009, p. 5-7). Therefore, the classical content comparison analysis was chosen to study the recording of the focus group. First, the word-for-word transcript (see appendix II) was created. Secondly, the researcher got very familiarized with the transcript by reading it multiple times (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017, p. 94). Additionally, three stages were part of this method. First, the data was separated into smaller pieces, also called meaning units. Each piece got a code that represented the content. In stage two, these codes got put into similar groups. The third step was counting all similar groupings and identifying all instances of a given code (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech & Zoran, 2009, p. 5-7; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017, p. 94). In this study, the categories were mostly based on the research objective except for new factors. Figure 5 shows an actual example of the process conducted from the meaning units to the categories in this study.

Figure 5 Process content analysis focus group with example



Source: Author's data

4.2. Observations

Following the focus group, observations were conducted to identify new factors and evaluate the focus group's findings using the proposed scenarios. This method was chosen to enable the researcher to observe the participant in a natural environment, making the data collected more reliable than reported data. The data collection method helped discover new knowledge (Queirós, Faria, & Almeida, 2017, p. 376). The nine participants of the observations were the same as in the focus group.

The observations occurred individually via a video conferencing tool, which was recorded for data analysis. The participants were asked to type keywords on Pinterest. The researcher gave the participants remote control so that they could access Pinterest without creating an account. The researcher assigned two tasks to the participants. The participant is asked to think out loud to increase the amount of data collected and help the researcher better understand the process. The maximum session duration was of 15 minutes, including explanations. The two tasks are the following ones:

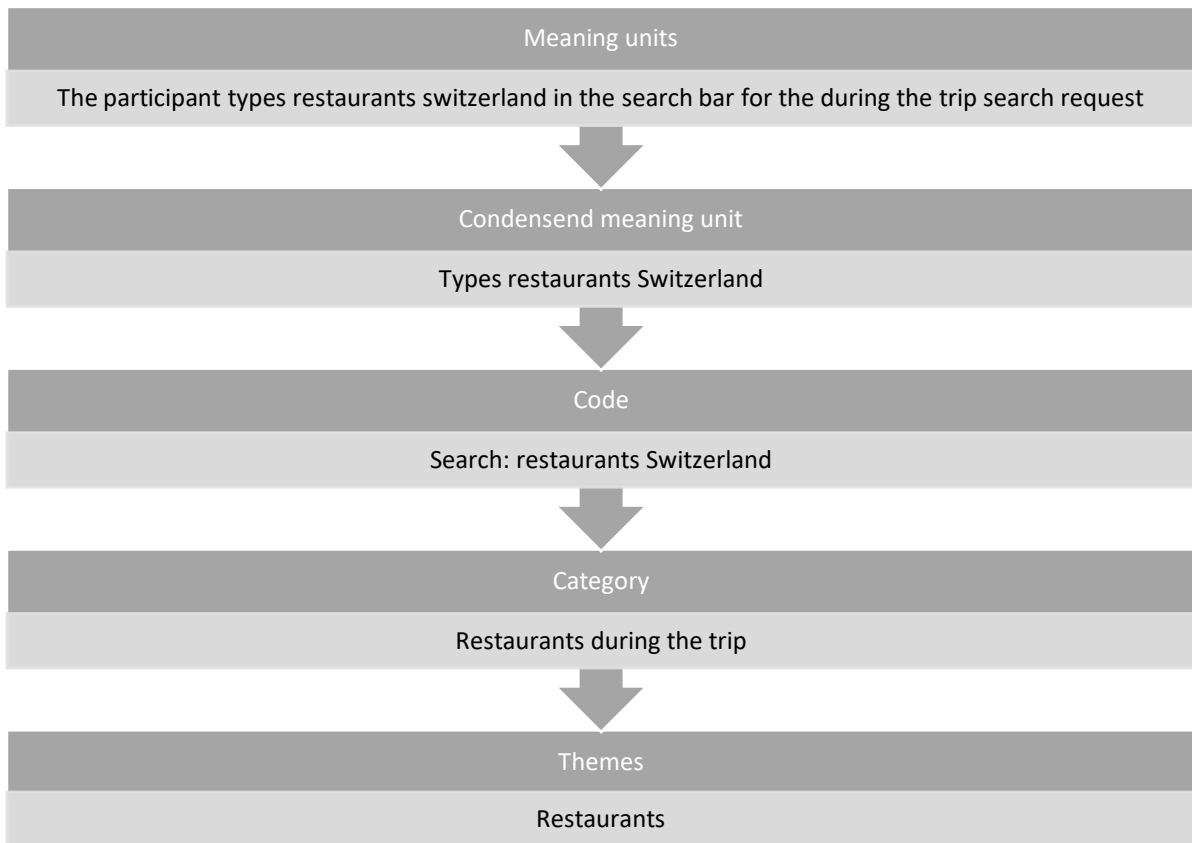
1. Assume you want to get inspired and find ideas for your next holiday in Switzerland. Please make two search requests, and in each one of them, select the most appealing pin to you.
2. Assume you are currently in Switzerland in your first on-site location of your holidays. You want to find inspiration for the current trip. Please make two search requests, and in each one of them, select the most appealing pin to you.

After collecting all the data, a transcript of each observation was created. Additionally, all recordings were watched, and observations were added to the transcripts, which were not stated by the participant. This is the data which were used for the analysis. The constant comparison method was used to analyze the observational data collected (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech & Zoran, 2009, p.6). This method was similar to the classical content analysis. The difference was that themes organized the result. This also helped to identify findings of the literature review in the results and discover new categories of search terms. This method consisted of three steps. In the first step, the data was condensed to small pieces, each getting

a code (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech & Zoran, 2009, p. 6). In this step, it was crucial to retain the data's core meaning (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017, p. 94).

In a second step, the codes, usually one or two words long (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017, p. 94), were placed into categories. The final stage consisted of creating themes based on the factors researched, representing the categories of the groups previously found (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech & Zoran, 2009, p. 6). Figure 6 shows an actual example of this study:

Figure 6 process analysis observations



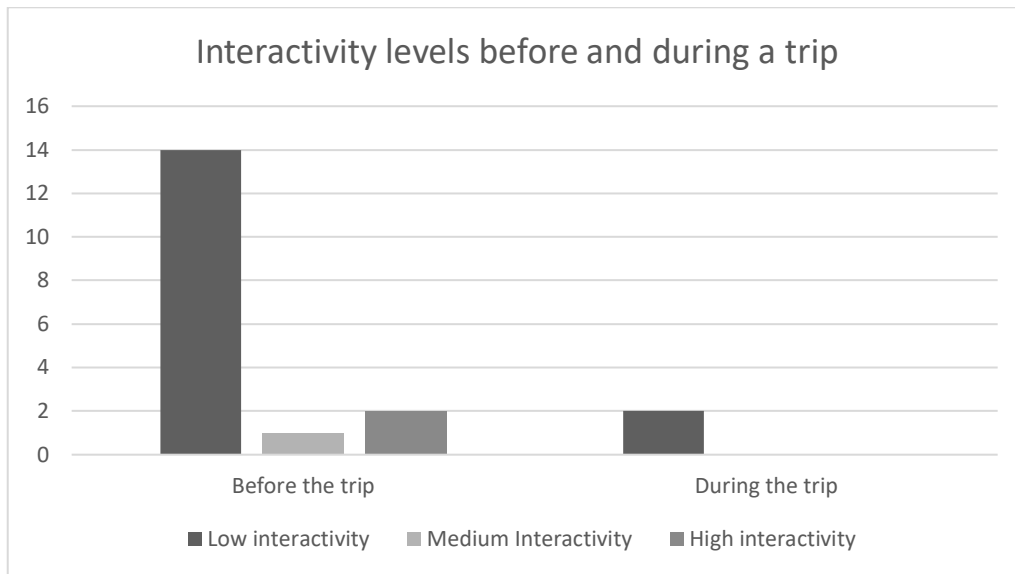
Source: Authors data

5. Results Focus Group

In this section, the findings of the focus group are discussed per objective. The results of the observations follow this. All participants were assigned numbers to protect their privacy, as they all had similar demographics, it did not affect the results. Moreover, the participants' quotes are not word-for-word but are shortened while keeping the same meaning to improve readability.

5.1. Optimal Level of Interactivity Before and During the Trip

The first factor discussed is the optimal level of interactivity before and during a trip, as previously defined in the literature review. Regarding the “before the trip” stage, it was mentioned 14 times by the participants that a short description without any CTA or question was most appealing. An explanation for choosing the description with the lowest level of interactivity was shared by participant nine: “Yeah, I don’t need a question. I need the answer. So, I want to be fast and clear.” In two instances, the high interactivity description was perceived as the most appealing. Participant five shared her reasoning for choosing the description with the highest level of interactivity: “Yeah, somehow it fitted the best in the picture for me. It looked most appealing to me. I don’t really know why.” In one instance, the CTA in the description was seen as the most appealing. The participant shared no explanation for this choice. In the “during the trip” stage, only two instances mentioned the interactivity level as a factor for their choice. Both cases favored the low level of interactivity. As participant three stated: “because of the titles it was quite short and attracted me the most”. As a result, the lowest interactivity level was perceived as most appealing in both stages of the customer journey defined previously.

Figure 7 Optimal level of interactivity of pins before and during the trip

Source: Author's data

5.2. Topics Searched on Pinterest Before and During the Trip

The topics researched were identified in the literature review. Each topic was either classified as before or during the trip. Therefore, the instances of a code were counted, and the topic was assigned to the stage of the trip with the most cases of a code, comparing both stages of the trip.

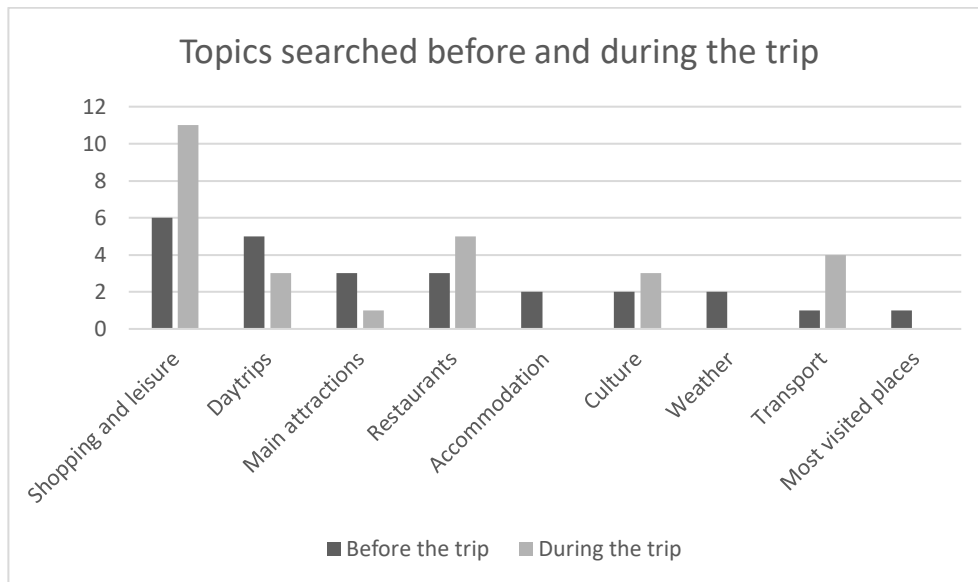
In the “before the trip” stage of the customer journey, day trips, main attractions, accommodation, weather, and most visited places were classified as topics that are searched the most by the participants of the focus group compared to during the trip. In five against three instances, day trips were regarded as a topic searched mostly before the trip. Participant two explained her choice as follows: “Um, because I think we have a lot of options for day trips. Especially this summer, it is more popular. It would be nice to have this.” Another reason was shared by participant eight: “Because I like the idea that for day trips, and maybe sometimes if you want to do a short excursion on the weekend, only for one day, I think it’s really practical to have like a guide for inspiration, where to go.” Main attractions were also most popular before the trip with four against one instance. Main attractions were one participant’s reason to travel as explained by participant four: “Well it was about the main attraction, which is what I like to visit when I’m traveling.” Accommodation was only mentioned in two instances before the trip but zero times during the trip. The interest for this

topic was limited, but it was part of the “before the trip” stage as outlined by participant one: “accommodation is something that I’m personally ... looking before the trip.” This opinion was also shared by participant nine: “Accommodation, you need to have this before.” Another topic searched mostly before the trip is the weather. However, it was only mentioned twice, which shows an equally low interest in this topic as the accommodation topic. Weather was perceived as an exciting and usual topic by participant one: “It is also interesting to know about the weather beforehand. So maybe you know what clothes you have to pack and bring. And it’s maybe a topic that you usually don’t have in a guide, so it’s something different.” On the other hand, participant six also explained that weather is not a topic she would search for on Pinterest: “For the weather, I don’t think that I need a leaflet. I just google it.” The last topic searched was most visited places. It was only mentioned once in the focus group in the “before the trip” stage. Participant five explained this choice: “Just because this is also something which you need to see when you’re in Switzerland, everybody knows it.”

The following topics were searched mostly during the trip: shopping and leisure, restaurants, culture, and transport. The topic of shopping and leisure was the most appealing topic “during the trip” stage. It was mentioned eleven times during the trip against six times before the trip. It was a popular topic for different reasons. Participant nine mentioned that shopping and leisure activities could be booked spontaneously and therefore during the trip: “So, this is the thing that you can choose day after days. And you don’t need a special plan to choose.” Participant five also highlighted that those activities would be considered if there is time left on the trip: “The leisure and the shopping opportunities. They’re also like if I have too much time, I could still go to a shopping mall or do something else which is in this leisure topic, but just have the time left. So that’s why I would look at it during my stay.” Another participant made a similar statement: “The leisure activities are also something you can easily do if you have some free time.” Restaurants were also a topic classified as searched mostly during the trip. It was mentioned seven times during the trip and only three times before the trip. One participant searched for restaurant options during the trip to find good restaurants that are not as popular: “Also because maybe you can find more different restaurants or restaurants that aren’t so popular on the internet. If you want to try something new, I think it might be very useful.” One participant also mentioned that restaurants are unnecessary for trip planning, but it is nice to have it if time allows it. She explained this as follows: “Also,

because it's not something, I think it's really important and something I really have to do. But it's nice if I have time to search for a nice restaurants in my place where I stay." Culture was also a topic that was mostly searched during the trip. However, the difference is small: it was searched three times during the trip versus twice before the trip. One reason for choosing to search for cultural offers was stated by participant one: "same that maybe if I look some of the things before but like mainly for museums or culture um activities, I look them up during my trip." Another reason for this choice was shared by participant eight, who stated that this was not a priority but an option if there is time left on the trip: "maybe I can find some more nice museums or something to visit if I have enough time". The fourth topic searched mostly during the trip was transport with four instances against one before the trip. Participant two shared the need to search for transport to get to the main attractions: "the main attractions are always important if you do a trip, then transport as well. If you plan something you may need to take the trains or something." The following reasoning was shared by participant six: "Transport because I usually search for activities before the trip and then during the trip, I will search how to get to these activities", as well as by another participant: "When I'm on site, I will look how to get there, what I can do, where I can eat."

Figure 8 Topics searched before and during a trip



Source: Author's data

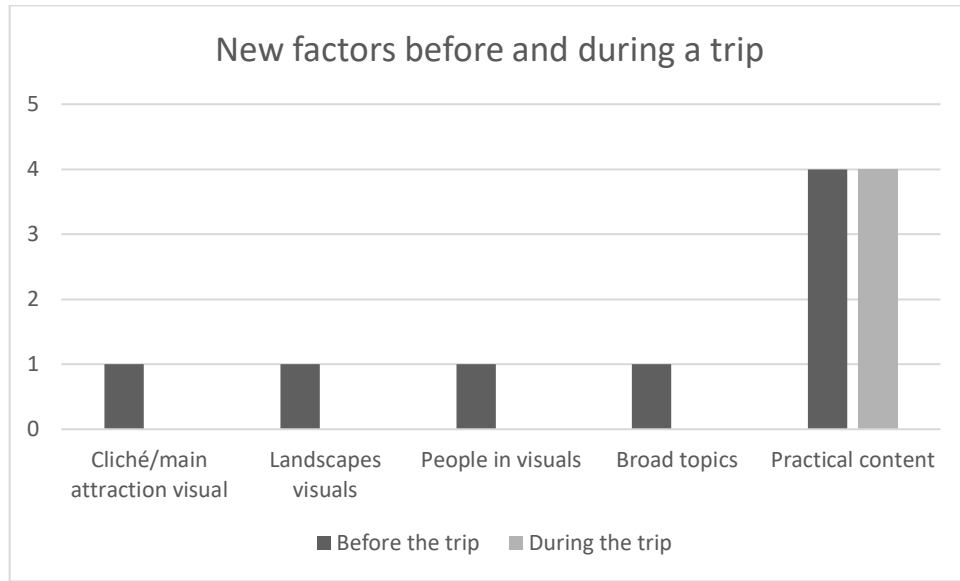
5.3. New Factors Before and During the Trip

Besides the level of interactivity and the topics, other factors were also mentioned during the focus group. The following factors were only named in the “before the trip” stage. Firstly, about the pins’ visual, a participant mentioned that the orange background of the pin’s text was very appealing. The pins showcasing landscapes were trendy as it was a significant reason to visit Switzerland as participant nine said: “They have great landscape and I think that is why you want to visit Switzerland.” Participant five also mentioned that it was appealing to see a pin with a person present in the picture as it made her want to be in the picture too: “because of the woman with her yellow shirt, it looks like you immediately look at her and want to be in that picture as well.” Secondly, another factor which was mentioned twice, is that it was appealing to two participants that the pin showed a popular destination/cliché in Switzerland. Participant one stated the following: “I think the picture is really nice. And it’s something it’s like a bit of cliché for Switzerland.” A similar opinion was shared by participant five: “because of the clock tower. It’s something which is like, a big attraction in Switzerland. So, I guess everybody wants to visit it.”

New factors related to pin’s topics before the trip were also voiced. One participant explained that broad topics were appealing to her: “Because it’s so vast, actually. So, it’s a big topic.” One factor which was mentioned twice is that practical information was appealing on Pinterest, especially lists. As participant eight shared: “I think it’s really practical to have like a guide for inspiration, where to go.” Moreover, participant nine said: “I’m looking for a guide so like, you knew that these are the best solutions, I don’t know.”

Practicality was also shared twice as an essential factor in the “during the trip” stage. As participant four shared: “More because it’s practical information you can have on site, actually, like I look before for activities.” Participant nine also shared an interest in guides/practical information during the trip: “So same as before I chose the guide.”

In summary, the following new factors were found in the focus group.

Figure 9 New factors focus group before and during the trip

Source: Author's data

5.4. Summary of the Findings Focus Group

The focus group results are summarized in table 8 by the two stages of the trip, optimal interactivity level during both stages, topics search mostly during both stages of a trip, and new factors found during both stages. Subsequently, these results are compared to the literature review findings to see the differences and similarities.

Table 8 Summary findings focus group

	Optimal level of interactivity	Topics searched mostly in a stage of the trip	New factors
Before the trip	low	Day trips Main attractions Accommodation Weather Most visited places	Cliché/main attraction Landscape visuals People in visual Broad topics Practical content
During the trip (on-site)	low	Shopping and leisure Restaurants Culture Transport	Practical content

Source: Author's data

Regarding the interactivity level, both stages of the trip showed that the lowest interactivity level was favored, which means that no CTA or question is present in the description. Those findings differed from the findings of the literature. Namely, in the “before the trip” stage, it was assumed based on scientific literature that higher interactivity was favored in social media content. The focus group’s data showed that this was not the case, as the lowest interactivity level was most appealing. The same difference applied to the “during the trip” stage. In the “during the trip” stage, the lowest level of interactivity was also the most appealing, which is in line with previous literature.

The next factor discussed is the topics searched mostly during the two stages of the trip. In the literature review, the following topics were favored before the trip: main attractions, day trips, accommodation, and most visited places. The focus group’s findings were similar except for two topics: weather and most visited places were considered topics searched mostly on Pinterest before the trip. However, existing literature suggested that these are more relevant in the “during the trip” stage. One explanation for weather being a before the trip topic is that one would not look for the weather on Pinterest but search online for the most updated information as participant six stated: “I mean, for the weather, I don’t think that I need a leaflet. I just google it.” One explanation of why there was a slight interest before the trip was that it could be interesting to know about the climate to know what to bring. It is not such a mainstream topic, as participant one said: “But it is also interesting to know about the weather beforehand. So maybe you know what clothes you have to pack and bring. And it’s maybe a topic that you usually don’t have in a guide, so it’s something different.” Regarding the most visited places: this topic was only mentioned once in the whole focus group. The reasoning behind that choice was that participant five did not want to miss out on the famous places. As she shared: “Just because this is also something which you need to see when you’re in Switzerland, everybody knows it.”

As a result of the literature review, the following topics were searched most during the trip: weather, most visited places, restaurants, culture, leisure & shopping, and transport. The findings of the focus group showed two differences compared to the findings of the literature review. The topics weather and most visited places were mostly searched before the trip and not during the trip on Pinterest. As explained in the last paragraph, the weather was

mentioned twice in the “before the trip” stage. One explanation was shared by participant one, who thought that the weather was not a mainstream topic and could help choose what to pack on a trip. Most visited places were mentioned once in the focus group. The topic was regarded as a before the trip topic as they were regarded as an essential topic by participant five.

6. Results Observations

This section includes the results of the individual observations divided per objective. The results are compared to the findings of the literature review and the focus group. All participants were assigned numbers to protect their privacy, as they all had similar demographics, it did not affect the results. Moreover, the participants' quotes are not word-for-word but are shortened while keeping the same meaning to improve readability.

6.1. Optimal Level of Interactivity Before and During the Trip

During the observations, the interactivity of the chosen pins was evaluated and divided into four categories. In the literature review, three categories were distinguished: low interactivity, medium interactivity, and high interactivity. One category was added since the literature review as the participants also chose pins showing no level of interactivity and, therefore, no description on the pin's visual.

Before the trip, the participants' most chosen interactivity level was the "no interactivity" level. This was the case in eight of the 18 search requests in the "before the trip" stage. The second most popular was the low interactivity level (seven instances). Also, three pins were chosen with a medium level of interactivity. The participants chose no pin with a high level of interactivity.

One reason for choosing the pins with no interactivity, was that it seemed more trustworthy, as participant three explained: "Then I would rather go on pictures than classic guides, because... In my opinion not like a marketing or advertisement that they're looking for, like, the 10 most beautiful places in Switzerland or how to spend one week because I'm not really into that kind of marketing. So rather, I would choose this picture." Participant five also explained that she would first look for a beautiful picture and then click on it to see its location. Therefore, the description of the visual was not essential: "I would choose that one, because it's the most beautiful one. And it's with a lake, and I like lakes or rivers or whatever it is. So, I would choose that one." This opinion was also shared by participant two: "So I like it because there are mountains and, actually... actually hiking." Participant seven also looked specifically for the pictures and her interest and not at the description on the picture "the

others were all mountains and I want to go in the lake. And I think the, the photo was beautiful. And the colors are attracting me.” and “I choose this because I like dessert. I think this photo, um, but I want to eat that.” Participant eight also specifically searched for a pin with little text. She scrolled for 40 seconds as she could not find any pin which appealed to her ultimately, as she shared: “a picture where there isn’t so much text on it.” Participant eight also stated that she chose a pin because it looked different from the other results, and the visual was mysterious and beautiful at the same time: “Okay, yeah. It looks very different than the others. More mysterious, but beautiful with the houses and, and the background mountains.” The pins next to the one selected were mostly horizontal, without text overlay and showcased bright colors.

The low level of interactivity was also chosen because it looked professional according to participant one, and the picture was also appealing: “I’m gonna choose this because it looks ... like kind of professional, with the title. And I like the picture.” Participant two explained that the title made her curious about the options on the website, and she liked the picture: “here now it’s the pin here with the cow, that attracts me the most in the first picture, because I like the way the title is placed. And, I compared it with the one below it. And I prefer like the title unique places to stay. I’m already thinking about: Oh, what could it be? That’s a nice thing. I would click on that.” Participant six looked explicitly for a pin with a description showcasing several options, such as a list of tips or activities to undertake: “I like the picture with things to do in Montreux and Vevey. Because, yeah, I am normally looking for tips and not only one tip, so then I will go on this post and then also, go on the internet site. To see all these things.” In the second search of the same participant, the same behavior was observed: “it’s not an accommodation, but I like this Epic Travel Guide. So, then I will go on the internet web page, to see what it is written in this Travel Guide.” Participant nine liked a clear and short description as she explained: “Also I like when the title is clear. For example, two weeks in Switzerland complete itinerary. I don’t really like it because there’s too much information.” So, participant nine specifically argued against high levels of interactivity. This opinion was shared with participant four, who also liked short title on the visual and a longer title when clicked on it “And then the title is great, because it’s written and where to stay. So, it’s more than just ten most beautiful places.”

Three pins had a medium level of interactivity, which means a CTA was included in the description. Participant one liked the idea of having a bucket list with things that need to be done on a trip: “Maybe, the thing with the bucket list on the right side. I would choose this because of the title, because I think the thing with the bucket list is very attractive to click on it and to know what special things there is in Lucerne to do.” Participant nine experienced the same attractiveness of the CTA: “It is like you have to, and so I don’t want to miss my trip.” Participant three was not attracted by the CTA but by the topic of the pin, which was of immense interest to her: “It’s like a bit more extraordinary, like the style of the guide and then you have also the night and camping and I’m really into camping and traveling with my tent. So, this would appeal to me.”

During the trip, the low level of interactivity was most popular. In ten out of 18 search requests, the chosen pin was of low interactivity. The no interactivity level with seven chosen pins came in second place. Only one pin was of medium interactivity, and the participants chose no pin with a high level of interactivity.

The participants chose pins with a low level of interactivity for different reasons. Participant one explained that a short description is more important than the picture to know what the pin is about: “Because if I’m looking for activities, it’s less interesting about the pictures, but like something written on it, so I know about what it is.” Participant four also liked a description, to know what the pin was about: “I guess it’s the only one which appeals to me and which shows what we can do. Otherwise it was only pictures.”

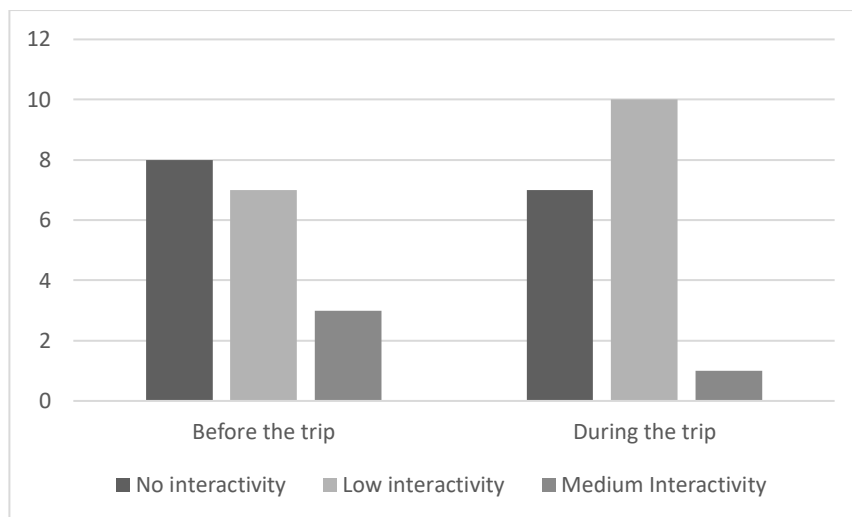
Participant three chose a pin without interactivity as she was just looking for a beautiful picture with a combination of mountains and lakes, and the text did not have significant importance: “Maybe also this one. The combination of water and mountain, not specially with the text, doesn’t need to...” Participant five could not find pictures that she liked, mainly because there were no pins with text. She could not find what she was looking for, which means that this could have influenced the result as there were almost no pins with text: “Not really nice pictures to be honest. Um. That one doesn’t look that bad. So, I would like to go there then.” Participant eight explained that she was curious where the pin was taken, so she chose a pin to know the location: “So, I will click on this picture to see, to read more about it,

to see where it is.” Participant four also chose a pin without interactivity as there were almost no pins with text showing a picture of food when searching for restaurants. After being asked, she explained that she usually would always look for a picture with text, but the search results were not optimal for her. This could have influenced her choice as not all factors were present in the results of her search request: “Yeah, I like to actually take the picture with the fondue. Maybe it’s a good restaurant where there are typical Swiss dishes. I don’t know.”

The medium interactivity level has been chosen once for the following reason: Participant five also wanted to try the food as the title suggested (22 Amazing Swiss Foods you need to try): “that one looks really nice. And then I would like to try that as well.”

As summarized in figure 10, in both stages, low and no interactivity levels were found in the vast majority of the search requests. Medium levels of interactivity were only found a few times, and high interactivity levels were simply not found.

Figure 10 Optimal level of interactivity before and during a self-managed trip



Source: Author's data

6.2. Topics Searched on Pinterest Before and During the Trip

In the “before the trip” stage, the most popular search requests (eight out of 18 searches) were generic, such as “Switzerland travel” or “traveling in Switzerland”. All those search requests were categorized as generic as the participants searched no specific topic. Although generic searches were most popular before the trip, also five out of 18 searches were generic during the trip. Participant one explained that she was looking for ideas on things to do and to visit in the “before the trip” stage: “I think it’s a nice picture... that when I click on the link, it gives me more places like this to like do activities and to visit.” In the “during the trip” stage, a similar explanation was given by participant eight who was looking for inspiration: “it looks really amazing with the background of the mountains and that you have the possibility that you can hike there is, looks great. Also, with the person in it. I want to go there too.” This could mean that people also searched for activity ideas during the trip so that the same pins could be searched as before the trip.

One difference was that during the trip, the content searched for was not about Switzerland as a country, but mostly about the region, in which the participants assumed to stay. As participant one stated: “I think I would search for the city where I’m staying. Or I know tomorrow I’m going to another destination, I would like search there.” Participant three also mentioned that she would look for a specific destination during the trip: “I would search for Lake Lucerne. If I if I knew it already, I think.” Participant four confirmed this: “I would put Bern as well as I’m there.” Participant nine expressed the same thoughts and corresponding behavior: “So I will write the city in which one I am.” Participant eight stated that it depends on the length of the trip and the budget: “well, maybe it depends on the time I have. If I have only like, a day or half a day, I would search definitely something in and around Bern. But if I have more time and money, I would look for some other places not in Bern.”

Day trips were the most popular topic searched, excluding the generic searches. It was searched equally often before the trip and during the trip: four times in both stages. Participant five explained that she looks for ideas for day trips: “I think I would, google or search first of all mountains, because Switzerland is full of mountains, or I would say maybe mountain Switzerland. And then I think, I would choose that one, because it’s the most

beautiful one.” It is plausible that day trips were searched evenly before and during the trip because many day trips in Switzerland can just as good be planned before a trip as during a trip.

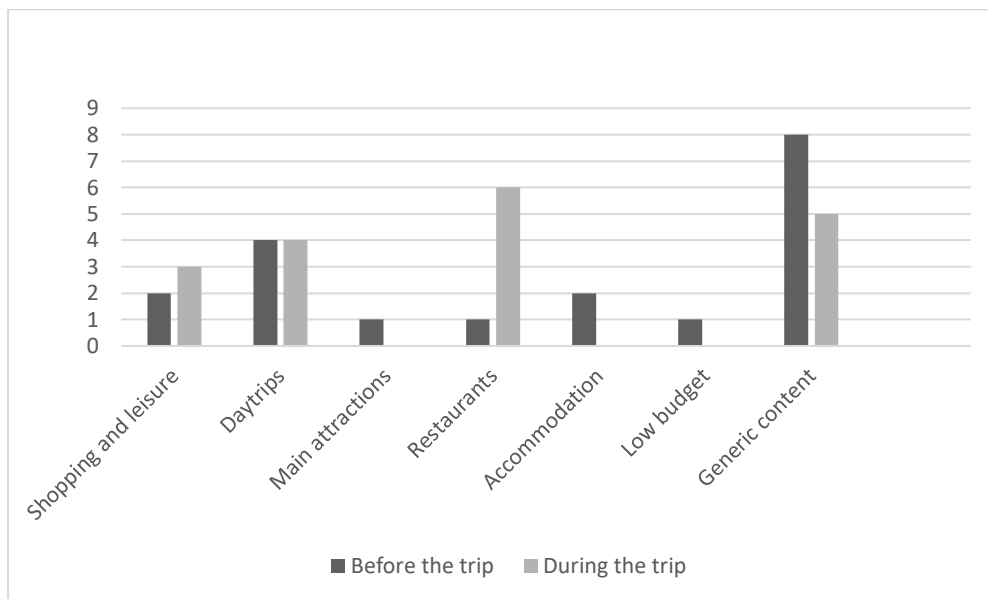
Another topic which was searched mostly in the before the stage was accommodation, which was searched twice. Two other topics were searched once each. Participant three searched low budget options because she wanted to see Switzerland on a low budget: “I would rather look for cheap places, or to travel on the cheap low budget.” Participant six also searched for main attractions as she liked to get a list with propositions, as she explained as follows: “I am normally looking for tips and not only one tip, so then I will go on this post and then also go on the internet site, to see all these things.”

During the trip, the most searched topic was restaurants, which included searches for food options. It was searched six times out of 18 searches. Participant one explained that it is a topic which she would search during the trip, as her trip would not be planned around restaurants, but it is a nice to have: “I would not plan my trip based on the restaurants that I want to go.” Participant five searched for food options to become inspired and try new things as she explained: “I’m kind of looking up the food. The traditional and everything so maybe I would do a search for traditional Swiss food. And maybe that one looks really nice. And then I would like to try that as well.” In general, the participants agreed that they would like to try Swiss specialties. Participant two also explicitly looked for food options in Bern and liked the traditional food better than, for example, the vegan options: “I would put Bern as I’m there. And as more specific topic. I don’t know, if I’m looking for restaurants, so I will put restaurants. Yeah, I like to actually take the picture with the fondue. Maybe it’s a good restaurant where there are typical Swiss dishes.” Another participant, participant six, was also looked for food options in Bern but could not find any pin which she liked, so she chose a travel guide for Bern, hoping that there were food options in the guide: “I usually want to know where I can go eating. I really like this one, the ultimate Bern city guide. It’s not only about eating, but there are probably also some restaurants.” As mentioned, day trips were equally popular before and during the trip, although the topic was not searched in the same context. Participant five highlighted that choosing the destination for the day trip depended on the location of the stay such as city or the countryside. Also, a day trip would only be considered

after the place of stay was explored fully. For example: “it depends when, where I have been on my first location. So when I was, for example, in Zurich, and I liked it a lot, but I would like to see a bit of nature as well from Switzerland, then I would like to go somewhere, where the nice mountains are and nice lakes. But if I would be first in a natural place, then I would maybe want to find some nice city.” Shopping and leisure were also more popular during the trip than before the trip. It was searched three times. Participant six explained that she does visit popular spots but also likes to get some local tips: “I usually don’t visit the famous sightseeing spots. Or I do but I also like some, to visit some hidden places and also getting contact with locals. So maybe this gives me some tips.”

In figure 11, the different topics that the participants searched for are summarized. These results are compared to the literature review and the focus group results at the bottom of this section.

Figure 11 Topics searched before and during a self-managed trip - observations



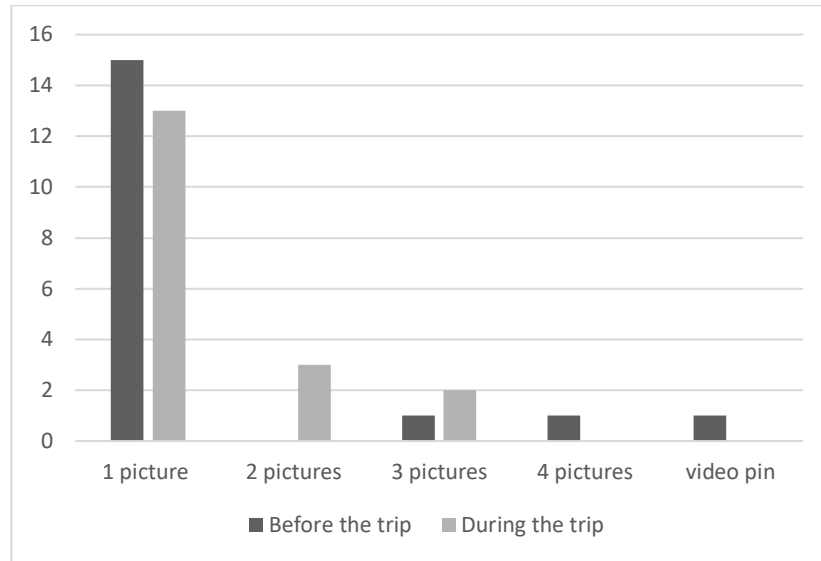
Source: Author's data

6.3. New Factors Before and During the Trip

A new factor that was observed was the most popular type of pin chosen by the participants, i.e., whether the pin consisted of a single image, multiple images, or a video. In both stages of the customer journey, the participants preferred the pin showcasing a single image instead of numerous images or videos. In the “before the trip” stage, participant eight explained that less is more: “a picture where there isn’t so much text on it. And... not like this one with four pictures. I wanted one big picture instead of four smaller ones.” The following types have been chosen once each in the “before the trip” stage. Participant four once chose a pin with three pictures and once a pin with four pictures because she liked to see the possibilities: “Because it is a bit of an overview of what Switzerland can bring you.” Participant two liked the video pin because the video showed someone hiking: “So I like it because there are mountains and, actually... actually hiking.” In the “during the trip” stage, participant six also explained that she consciously likes a single picture and text: “I think I like it more when it’s just one picture and text.” No explanation was given during the trip on the three pins chosen with two pictures, but two out of the three pins were about the restaurant and food topic. This could indicate that the type of pin’s preference was related to the topic, but this cannot be confirmed based on this research. Also, no thoughts were shared about the reasoning behind choosing twice a pin with three pictures in it.

However, as summarized in figure 12, the research clearly indicates that the participants had a shared preference for pins with solely one picture in it. In both stages of the customer journey, this type was chosen more often than all other types combined.

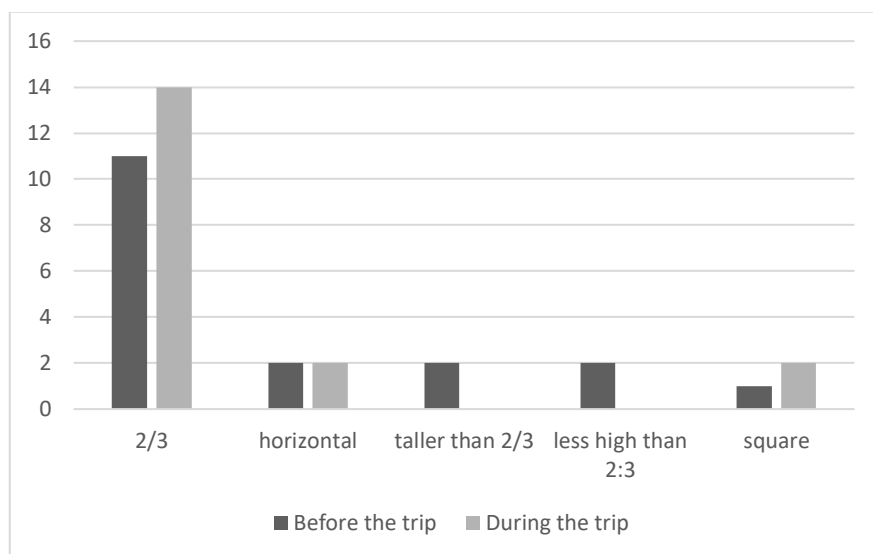
Figure 12 Optimal type of pin before and during a trip



Source: Author's data

Another factor that was observed was the most popular format of pins before and during the trip. In both stages, the most popular format was 2:3. In the “before the trip” stage, 11 out of the 18 pins chosen were of 2:3 format. In contrast in the during the trip, it was chosen 14 out of 18 instances. This format is also recommended by Pinterest and is already used by Switzerland Tourism. No thoughts were shared by the participants on why they chose which format. So, these findings visualized in figure 13 are solely based on observation.

Figure 13 Optimal Format before and during a trip - observations

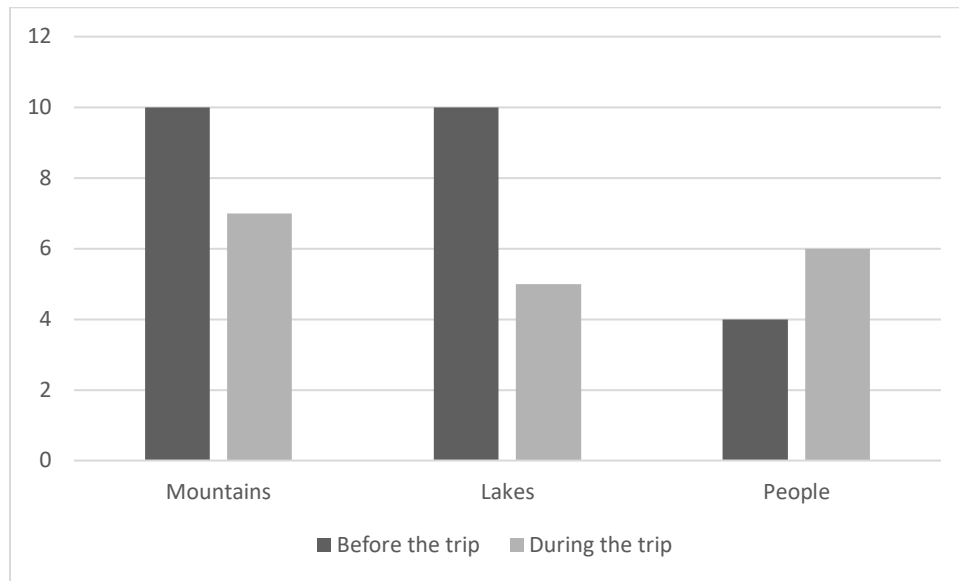


Source: Author's data

Another factor analyzed was the top three elements present in the pin's visual chosen before and during a trip. This factor might overlap with the topics, but the researcher argues that this is relevant, especially for the visual of generic content. The top three elements were the same in both stages of the trip but not in the same order. Before the trip, mountains and lakes were both present ten times each in the 18 pins selected. The third most popular element was people. This element was present in four pins. Participant five expressed that she looked for mountains as Switzerland has many mountains. However, she also likes lakes, so she chose the combination of the two: "I would google or search first of all mountains, because Switzerland is full of mountains, or I would say maybe mountain Switzerland. And then I think, um then I think I would choose that one, because it's the most beautiful one. And it's with a lake, and I like lakes or rivers or whatever it is. So, I would choose that one." Another opinion was shared by participant seven, who was explicitly looking for lakes and not mountains: "The others were all mountains and I want to go in the lake." An opinion was shared by participant three that she appreciated if there are not many people on pictures and chose a pin with one person on it: "Oh, I think this one is pretty nice. And I like it when there are not so many people on the picture." Participant two also chose a pin showing only a single person. They liked that the activity proposed is seen: "I like it because there are mountains and, actually... actually hiking."

During the trip, mountains were also the most present element, with seven instances in a total of 18 selected pins. Mountains were followed by people, which were present six times, followed by lakes five times. Participant three liked the combination of mountains and lakes: "I really like to go into the mountains where there's a lake or some water beside. So, I rather search for places where I can combine these two." Participant eight liked people in pictures because it made her want to be there too: "It looks really amazing with the background of the mountains and that you have the possibility that you can hike there is, looks great." The findings are summarized in figure 14.

Figure 14 Top 3 elements present in the selected pins before and during the trip



Source: Authors' data

Another factor that was evaluated is the description of the pins which were selected by the participants. In the “before the trip” stage, all descriptions presented listicles or travel guides with a selection of activities, places, or tips. Six out of ten descriptions that had overlay text also specified the number of the selected elements, such as “12 Fairytale towns in Switzerland”. Participant one explained that listicles were attractive to her: “The bucket list on the right side. I would choose this because of the title, because the thing with the bucket list is very attractive to click on it and to know what special things there is in Lucerne to do.” Participant four also stated that she likes to get a selection of the offers: “Because it is a bit of an overview of what Switzerland can bring you.” Participant six also agreed with the two statements previously mentioned: “I like the picture with things to do in Montreux and Vevey. Because I am normally looking for tips and not only one tip, so then I will go on this post and then also go on the internet site, to see all these things.”

In the “during the trip” stage, the descriptions presented not only listicles or a selection of activities but also a story. Similar to the “before the trip” stage, participant four valued to know precisely the content of the website: “I guess it’s the only one which appeals to me and which shows what we can do. Otherwise it was I guess, only pictures.” Two out of the eleven titles during the trip mentioned a local perspective. Participant one found the story appealing as she thinks it is UGC “maybe because it’s a story, it’s information from firsthand.” Participant

nine also liked the authenticity of a local perspective “For the local part, because I think, local know better what’s great or not and it’s make it more authentic.” Participant six wanted to find places which are less known and therefore liked information from locals: “I usually don’t visit the famous sightseeing spots. Or I do but I also like to visit some hidden places and also getting contact with locals. So maybe this gives me some tips.” The titles of the selected pins of the participants are summarized in table 9.

Table 9 Titles of selected pins by participants of observations

Before the trip	During the trip
12 Fairytale towns in Switzerland	Three mornings in Switzerland – A Swiss hiking story
5 bucket list activities you must try in Lucerne	Where to eat in... Zürich!
Visit Switzerland – Budget travel tips	22 Amazing Swiss Foods you must try.
Unique places to stay in Switzerland	The best traditional dishes in Switzerland
10 most beautiful places to visit in Switzerland	8 Swiss train journeys for your bucket list
8 experiences you can only have in Switzerland	Things to do in Bern, Switzerland
7 places you have to visit in Switzerland	Where to eat in... Zürich!
30 most beautiful places Switzerland	The best itinerary for Zurich according to a local.
Things to do in Montreux & Vevey Switzerland.	How to experience Bern like a local.
Switzerland An Epic Travel Guide.	The ultimate Bern city guide.
	Lake Lucerne Roadtrip

Source: Author’s data

At the beginning of the individual observation, participant six asked in which language the searches needed to be made. She mentioned that she would typically choose German, but as the study and the Pinterest account are in English, the search was done in English. Another participant, participant seven, did not mention anything about the language. However, while searching, the French name of a Swiss destination and not the English version got used, giving zero results on the destination. So, taking into account different languages is another important factor. When overlooked, it can negatively impact the results.

Furthermore, the selected pins' descriptions had one factor in common, which was observed 12 times in total out of 21 selected pins with a description. In those cases, the destination's name was more visible through another font, the font size, or the bold function. There were six titles of selected pins in both stages of the trip, with the destination being the most prominent part of the description. As this finding is based solely on observations, it is difficult to confirm but could be an indication worth pursuing.

6.4. Summary of the Findings of the Observations

The results of the observations are summarized in table 10 and classified in the two stages of the trip, and the factors: optimal level of interactivity, topics search mostly during one stage of a trip, and new factors found. Subsequently, these results are compared to the literature review findings to see the differences and similarities.

Table 10 Summary observations findings

	Optimal level of interactivity	Topics searched mostly in a stage of the trip	Diverse factors	Top 3 Elements in selected pins in order of frequency
Before the trip	No interactivity	Generic content (Switzerland) Day trips Accommodation Low Budget Main attractions	One picture pin Format 2:3 Destination most prominent in description	Mountains Lakes People
During the trip (on-site)	Low interactivity	Generic content (regional destination) Shopping & Leisure Restaurants Day trips	One picture pin Format 2:3 Destination most prominent in the title	People Mountains Lakes

Source: Author's data

In terms of interactivity level, in the “before the trip” stage, no interactivity was favored. During the trip, low interactivity was most popular. The results of the before the stage were significantly different from the literature review results, which favored high interactivity. On the other hand, the findings in the “during the trip” stage were the same as in the literature review, where a lower level was favored.

The topics searched mostly during both stages were different as no topics were given to discover what the participants would be interested in in the real situation and not only when reported. Some topics found in the literature review were not searched by the participants, such as most visited places, weather, culture, and transportation. The discovery of another type of content was observed. In the “before the trip” stage, participants looked for very generic content about Switzerland, and during the stage of the trip, also generic content was searched but mostly focused on a regional destination. Also, low budget travel tips were another new topic, which might be related that the participants were young students. Lastly, day trips were mostly searched during the “before the trip” stage in the literature review, but in the researcher’s result, it was a topic searched equally in both stages of the trip.

Some new factors were discovered. Both before and during the trip, the following factors were characteristic of the popular pins during the study: Visual with one single image, visual showing mountains, lakes, and people, format 2:3, and making the destination the most prominent part of the description.

7. Summary Results

This section presents the findings extracted from observations and the focus group. Those findings are then compared with the literature review and the research question.

In the focus group, low interactivity was favored in both stages of the customer journey. During the observations, no interactivity was favored in the “before the trip” stage, and low interactivity was favored “during the trip” stage. Those findings confirmed elements from the literature review regarding the interactivity level of pins. In the “Before the trip” stage, low interactivity was favored. However, in the “during the trip” stage, high interactivity was reported by the literature as most popular, but the research showed that no interactivity was favored.

During the focus group talk, the following topics were favored before the trip: day trips, main attractions, accommodation, weather & most visited places. In the observations, the following topics were most popular: generic content of Switzerland, day trips, accommodation, low budget, and main attractions. This confirmed findings from the literature. Nonetheless, new popular topics were identified in the “before the trip” stage, i.e., generic content of Switzerland, low budget, most visited places, and weather.

In the “during the trip” stage, the following topics were popular during the focus group: shopping and leisure, restaurants, culture, and transport. In the observations, the following topics were most popular during the trip: generic content of regional destinations, shopping & leisure, restaurants, and day trips. These findings are consistent with the literature review findings on the following topics: restaurants and leisure & shopping. The following topics of previous literature were not popular on Pinterest during the study: culture, weather, most visited places, and transport. One important new topic identified is the generic content of regional destinations, which was also identified as a new finding during the focus group and proven during the observations.

In the focus group, landscapes, people, and main attractions in pictures were identified as popular elements in pins before the trip. The participants shared no information about the most popular elements in the “during the trip” stage. The observations showed that mountains, lakes, and people were the three most frequent elements in the participants’ selected pins before and during the trip. Only main attractions were not popular during the observations. This is a new factor not presented in previous literature.

Furthermore, the most popular format of the pins searched in this research was 2:3. This applies to both stages of the customer journey. This format was previously recommended by Pinterest and is currently used by Switzerland Tourism.

The observations showed that a pin showing only one picture instead of multiple pictures or a video was the most popular in both stages of the customer journey. Those findings were not previously identified in the literature.

During both stages of the trip, practical content was identified as a popular topic in the focus group. In the observations, practical guides or listicles with a selection of recommendations were the most famous content types before and during the trip. This new finding was not previously mentioned in the literature.

Another observation made during the observation is that the most popular pins before and during a trip had one characteristic in common: the destination was the most prominent part of the title. This was not discussed in the literature.

In the during stage of the trip, the researcher observed that one participant would have naturally searched in her mother tongue (German instead of English). Moreover, another participant used the destination’s French name, which gave zero results as it was not similar to the destination’s English name.

Table 11 summarizes the results of the study on the optimal interactivity level, topics searched, and popular new factors during both stages of the trip.

Table 11 Summary results study

	Optimal interactivity level	Topics searched mostly in a trip stage	New popular factors
Before the trip	no interactivity low interactivity	main attractions accommodation most visited places generic content (Switzerland) low budget weather	<u>visual elements</u> landscapes people main attractions mountains lakes
During the trip (on-site)	low interactivity	shopping and leisure restaurants culture transport generic content (regional destination)	<u>visual elements</u> mountains lakes people
			<u>destination name</u> multiple languages
Both Stages of the trip	-	day trips	format 2:3 Pins one picture Pin practical content listicles prominent destination name

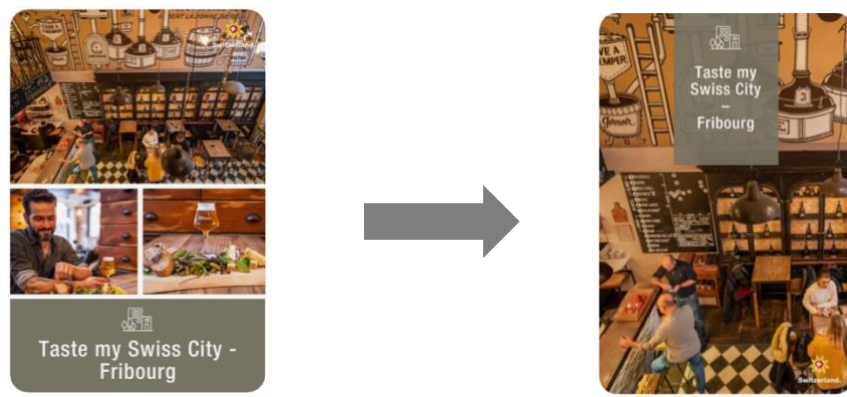
Source: Author's data

8. Recommendations

The recommendations are listed from quick to time-intensive to implement.

The results showed that pins showing one picture instead of multiple pictures were most popular among the observations in both stages of the customer journey. As Switzerland Tourism already uses a template which includes a pin with only one picture, this can be implemented directly and with no extra effort from the social media team. Figure 15 shows an example of an adaptation of a pin created by Switzerland Tourism.

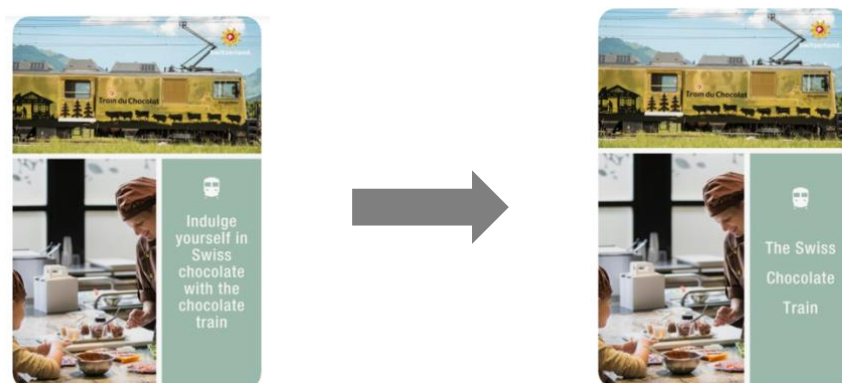
Figure 15 Adaptation of a pin with multiple pictures to one picture



Source: Retrieved October 30, 2020, from www.pinterest.com.au/pin/87820261473799567/

Regarding the pin's level of interactivity, there were slightly different but mostly similar results between both stages of the customer journey. Nevertheless, the recommended interactivity for both stages of the customer journey is low if the best practice example that recommends text overlay is followed. This was defined previously as text without a CTA or Question. Figure 16 shows an adaptation of a pin published by Switzerland Tourism with the recommended change.

Figure 16 Adaptation from a medium interactivity pin to low interactivity pin



Source: Retrieved October 30, 2020, from www.pinterest.com.au/pin/109282728447581427/

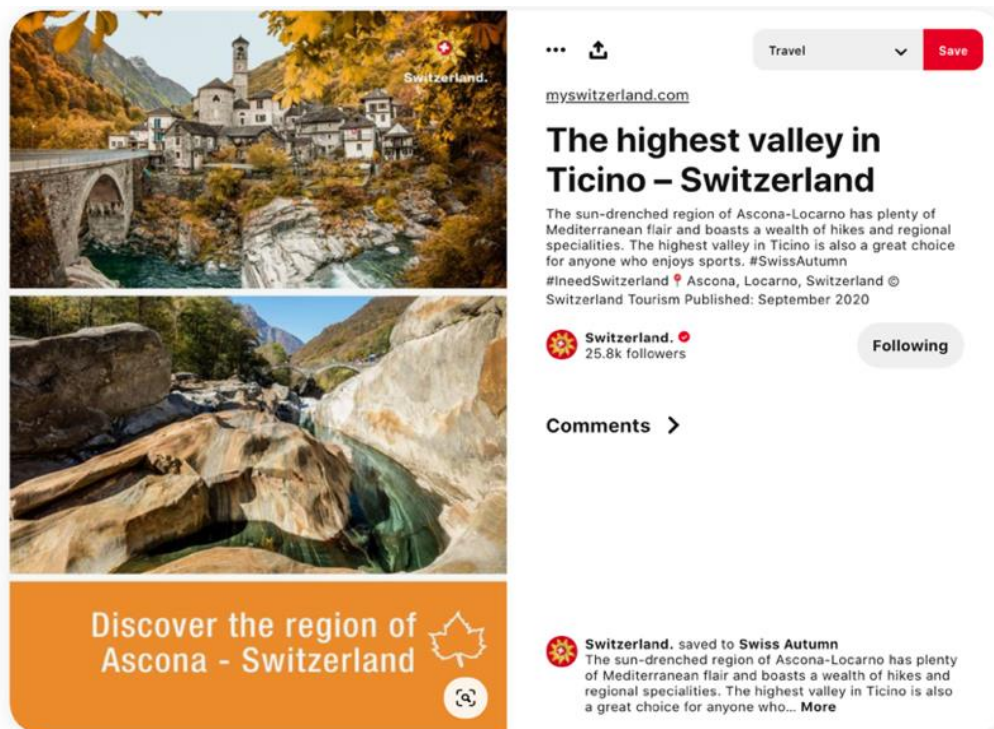
Other recommendations consist of optimizing the use of keywords in the descriptions of the pins. During the observations, only one pin from Switzerland Tourism was noticed by the participants in the 36 searches. The recommendations take into account that Switzerland Tourism's Pinterest account will stay in English, mainly because it would exceed Switzerland Tourism's possible workload to make it in all languages of their current markets (D. Stöcklin, PC, 8 September 2020). The first suggestion is to include all language versions of a destination in German, French, Italian, and English in the description of a pin as a hashtag. For example, the French version of Ticino is Tessin, and therefore #tessin is added in figure 18. This is to respond to the need of Swiss people and neighboring countries who use either the Italian, German or French versions of a destination. This will help the searcher find the pins, and as English is widely spoken, the searcher can get the information needed. The second suggestion is to make the description search engine friendly and include what potential guests would search. The researcher searched associated words in the Pinterest search bar and included some of the words in the pin description shown in figure 17. An example that implements both suggestions is shown in figure 18.

Figure 17 Associated keywords of Ascona in Pinterest

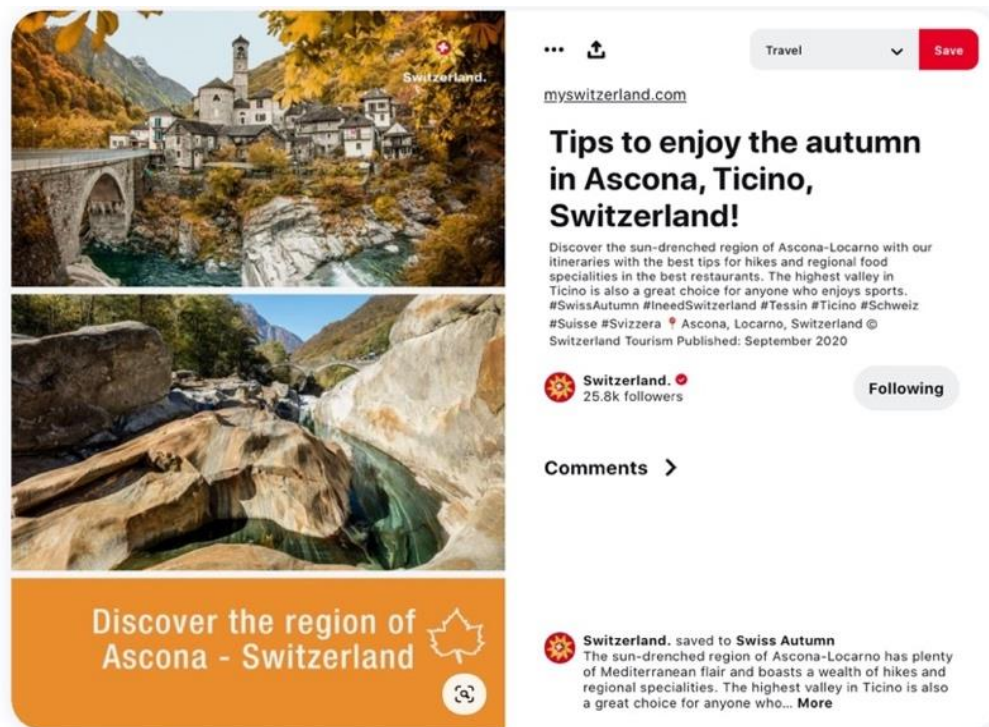


Source: www.pinterest.com

Figure 18 Adaptation keywords in pin description



Source: Retrieved October 30, 2020, from www.pinterest.com.au/pin/87820261473707646/



Source: Adapted from <https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/87820261473707646/>

The next recommendation is to include more practical generic content topics showcasing multiple tips, experiences, activities, and attractions in both trip stages. An example of a pin linking to the following page: www.myswitzerland.com/en/destinations/attractions/top-attractions is shown in figure 19.

Figure 19 Example top attractions in Switzerland pin.



Source: Author's data created on canva.com

In the “before the trip” stage, it is recommended to include generic content about Switzerland in general and during the trip of a more limited area such as a city or a region. When including a destination, the destination’s name should be given a prominent part of the text on the pin.

Further, specific topics are searched the most during either before or during the trip. Those findings were reported during the focus group and confirmed during the observations to be relevant. Before the trip, the following topics were popular: day trips, accommodations, and main attractions. During the trip, restaurants and leisure and shopping were popular. Therefore, it is suggested to create pins on the topics mentioned above and adapt them to their trip stage. Hence topics in the “before the trip” stage should focus on Switzerland and the ones during the trip more on specific regions.

Finally, the selected pins’ most popular elements of the observations were mountains, lakes, and people, before and during the trip stage. Especially the combination of lakes and mountains were prevalent. It is therefore suggested to as often as possible, while staying relevant, include those three elements.

9. Limitations of the Study and Perspectives for Further Study

This study's primary limitation was the time available to write and complete the research and data protection laws to collect customer behavior data without influencing their behavior. It would have been very beneficial to host an experiment that gathered data from actual Swiss tourists. As every customer journey is unique and the setting employed was hypothetical. The study participants had to assume that they were in the before or during the trip stage. This is, of course, not optimal. It would be highly beneficial to track participants' usage of Pinterest when going on a real trip. Additionally, this would also help define a customer journey based on the participants and not only on literature. Therefore, it would be beneficial to create a pilot for further studies and measure real data from the participants traveling within or to Switzerland, including the post-trip stage during a whole year. Another input for further study would be to analyze the most searched keywords related to Switzerland and recommend content that responds to the tourists' searches.

The demographic of the study participants was not entirely representative of the actual tourists in Switzerland using Pinterest. It would be beneficial to have a greater range of ages, countries of residence, and gender. The participants were all students and creating a focus group with different age groups could be interesting to compare. Moreover, all participants are future tourism professionals, which might have slightly influenced the results. The customer journey is also very different, depending on the country of residence. Also, the participants were all female, which is the biggest group of Pinterest users, but it would be interesting to evaluate possible differences between gender.

Furthermore, no experts (including Pinterest itself) were available to the researcher. Some of the insights could undoubtedly be of great value for this research. For example, if data could have been provided about popular keywords associated with Switzerland.

External factors such as the time of the year and the outbreak of Covid-19 could have influenced participants' data and interest during data collection. For example, during summer, lakes might be a more popular search term than in winter months. Additionally, the

current Covid-19 pandemic might have influenced the data collected as cities might be less popular than remote destinations.

The lack of recent literature about Pinterest, especially on the customer journey, was also a slight barrier: Pinterest's literature is not very recent as the platform was created in 2011. Only minimal research on Pinterest has been done in the last five years. Therefore, also, more generic literature about social media was used. As Pinterest evolves quickly, this research contributes to a small number of recent studies about Pinterest.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate Pinterest's optimization possibilities before and during a self-managed leisure trip to raise Switzerland's awareness as a destination. Based on the literature review, pins' interactivity level, the topics sought, and new factors were researched. Interactivity level was defined based on the text overlay on pins. No interactivity is when no text overlay was present. Low interactivity is when a text overlay was present. Medium, when a CTA was used and high when a question was stated. The findings corresponded with the literature in certain aspects and at the same time disconfirmed certain previous findings. In addition, new findings are presented, which led to the framework presented in table 11.

This study's primary limitation is the near impossibility to realize this study in a natural environment due to data protection laws and time available. It would have been ideal to track participants during a more extended period without them being aware.

This study contributes to recent studies on optimization possibilities of content communities in the customer journey from an academic perspective. Further studies could investigate the implementation of those factors to analyze if Pinterest's key performance indicators improved and investigate if the findings are valuable for other social media platforms.

From a managerial perspective, Pinterest is a social media platform mostly used by females. As a result, it can reach a new target audience, which is often responsible for coming up with holiday destination proposals, as stated in the literature review, and could increase overnights. This platform also differentiates itself by being a search engine that can target users actively searching for ideas. Therefore, it is even more essential to respond to potential customers' needs to raise their destination awareness. Further, the trends and interest searched by Pinterest users can be an indication of future trends. Therefore, researching the search term on these platforms can be of great value for future marketing strategies. Lastly, improved key performance indicators of Pinterest could also increase web visits, which is an essential key performance indicator for the digital marketing department.

From a broader perspective, those findings can also be interesting for other tourism organizations. Moreover, other social media platforms could also be interested in the findings to improve their awareness.

Concluding, the two most important recommendations for further research are:

- Creating a pilot study in a natural environment over a longer period and assess all stages of the customer journey including the after the trip stage.
- Implementing the findings to measure their success based on key performance indicators.

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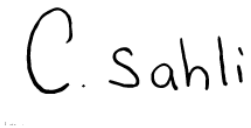
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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I have carried out this final research project on my own without any help other than the references listed in the list of references and that I have only used the sources mentioned. I will not provide a copy of this paper to a third party without the permission of the department head and of my advisor, including the partner company with which I collaborated on this project, with the exception of those who provided me with information needed to write this paper and whose names follow : Dominic Stöcklin and André Hefti.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C. Sahli". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

Carole Sahli