




## THE TRAVELER'S EXTENDED SELF ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE DEMATERIALIZATION OF TOURISM CONSUMPTION REPRESENTATIONS

O EU ESTENDIDO DO VIAJANTE NAS MÍDIAS SOCIAIS E A DESMATERIALIZAÇÃO DAS REPRESENTAÇÕES DO CONSUMO TURÍSTICO

EL YO EXTENDIDO DEL VIAJERO EN LAS REDES SOCIALES Y LA DESMATERIALIZACIÓN DE LAS REPRESENTACIONES DEL CONSUMO TURÍSTICO

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### ABSTRACT:

**Purpose** – This study seeks to understand how the constitution of the traveler's extended Self on social media has been shaped by the dematerialization of representations of tourism consumption.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A qualitative exploratory approach was adopted. Data were collected through a focus group and analyzed using content analysis techniques.

**Findings** – The results indicate that the traveler's extended Self has adapted to behavioral changes mediated by social media. Moreover, the dematerialization of tourism consumption representations has significantly influenced how memories of travel experience are created, stored, and preserved.

**Practical implications** – The findings suggest that tourism destinations and companies in the sector should encourage the recording of authentic travel experiences, avoiding the production of content aimed solely at display on social media. In other words, they should foster the creation of genuine narratives and meaningful memories, while digital platforms can contribute by offering resources that ensure the long-term preservation of these memories.

**Originality/value** – This article contributes to consumer behavior studies in tourism by presenting a distinct perspective on the constitution of the traveler's extended Self on social media, focusing on the current dematerialization of tourism consumption representations.

**Research limitations** – The exploratory nature of this study limits the generalization of the findings to the specific participants investigated. However, it serves as a starting point for future research seeking to broaden the understanding of the phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Digital extended self; Social media; Tourism consumption representations; Dematerialization.

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## RESUMO:

**Objetivo** – Este estudo buscou compreender como o processo de constituição do “Eu Estendido do viajante” nas mídias sociais tem se configurado diante da desmaterialização das representações do consumo turístico.

**Desenho/metodologia/abordagem** – Foi utilizada uma abordagem qualitativa de caráter exploratório. Os dados foram coletados por meio de um grupo focal e o processo analítico se deu a partir da técnica de análise de conteúdo.

**Resultados** – Os resultados apontaram que o “Eu Estendido do viajante” tem se adaptado às mudanças de comportamento mediadas pelas mídias sociais. Além disso, evidenciou-se o impacto da desmaterialização das representações do consumo turístico na forma como as memórias das experiências de viagem são criadas, armazenadas e preservadas.

**Implicações práticas** – Os achados indicam que destinos turísticos e empresas do setor devem estimular o registro de experiências autênticas de viagens, evitando a produção de conteúdos voltados à simples exibição nas redes sociais. Ou seja, precisam favorecer a construção de narrativas genuínas de memórias significativas, enquanto as plataformas digitais podem contribuir ao oferecer recursos que assegurem a preservação duradoura dessas lembranças.

**Originalidade/valor** – Este artigo contribui para os estudos sobre o comportamento do consumidor no turismo, apresentando uma perspectiva distinta acerca da constituição do “Eu Estendido do viajante” nas mídias sociais, com foco na atual desmaterialização das representações do consumo turístico.

**Limitações da pesquisa** – O caráter exploratório deste estudo restringe o escopo da compreensão dos resultados aos sujeitos investigados. Entretanto, serve como ponto de partida para pesquisas correlatas que visem a ampliar o entendimento do fenômeno abordado.

**Palavras-chave:** Eu Estendido Digital; Mídias sociais; Representações do consumo turístico; Desmaterialização.

## RESUMEN:

**Propósito:** Este estudio buscó comprender cómo el proceso de constitución del Yo extendido del viajero en las redes sociales se ha configurado frente a la desmaterialización de las representaciones del consumo turístico.

**Diseño/metodología/enfoque** – Se utilizó un enfoque cualitativo de carácter exploratorio, cuyos datos fueron recolectados mediante grupo focal y analizados a partir de la técnica de análisis de contenido.

**Hallazgos:** Los resultados señalaron que el Yo extendido del viajero se ha adaptado a los cambios de comportamiento mediados por las redes sociales. Además, se evidenció el impacto de la desmaterialización de las representaciones del consumo turístico en la forma en que se crean, almacenan y preservan las memorias de las experiencias de viaje.

**Implicaciones prácticas:** Los hallazgos indican que los destinos turísticos y las empresas del sector deben estimular el registro de experiencias auténticas de viaje, evitando la producción de contenidos orientados únicamente a la exhibición en redes sociales. Es decir, deben favorecer la construcción de narrativas genuinas y memorias significativas, mientras que las plataformas digitales pueden contribuir ofreciendo recursos que aseguren la preservación duradera de estos recuerdos.

**Originalidad/valor:** Este artículo contribuye a los estudios sobre el comportamiento del consumidor en turismo, presentando una perspectiva distinta sobre la constitución del Yo extendido del viajero en redes sociales, con énfasis en la actual desmaterialización de las representaciones del consumo turístico.

**Limitaciones de la investigación:** El carácter exploratorio de este estudio restringe el alcance de la comprensión de los resultados a los sujetos investigados. Sin embargo, sirve como punto de partida para investigaciones relacionadas que busquen ampliar la comprensión del fenómeno abordado.

**Palabras clave:** Yo extendido digital; Redes sociales; Representaciones del consumo turístico; Desmaterialización.

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism activity is grounded in the provision of a diverse set of services whose nature is intrinsically linked to the realm of experiences. Unlike other economic sectors, tourism consumption involves more than a simple commercial exchange in which a good is acquired and incorporated into an individual's possessions. It is a dynamic that transcends materiality, encompassing subjective dimensions that shape the traveler's perception and memory. Aroeira, Dantas, and Gosling (2016) argue that tourist experience is constructed through the individual's interaction with the place visited, involving the assimilation of cultural, social, and symbolic elements. Thus, it is a relationship that extends beyond mere physical contact with a geographic space. The value attributed to the trip, therefore, lies in the destination's capacity to provide meaningful and potentially transformative experiences for the visitor.

Despite the immaterial nature of tourism consumption, it is characteristic of traveler behavior to seek ways to materialize the moments experienced during a trip. According to Wilkins (2011), this materialization typically occurs through the acquisition of symbolic objects associated with a place and through photographic records, both of which serve as supports for the later retrieval of memories. Although Souza, Barbosa, and Costa (2022) highlight the importance of souvenirs in gift-giving after a trip, it is equally relevant to also consider how frequently such objects are purchased for personal benefit. These items are often incorporated into an individual's experiential repertoire and are displayed in domestic and/or professional environments (Masset & Decrop, 2021). According to Lee et al. (2023), these representations of tourism-related consumption reveal the traveler's desire not only to prolong the emotional bond established with a destination, but also to maintain a connection with the experiences they had there.

Within this context, the meanings attributed to representations of tourism consumption can be understood in light of Belk's (1988) concept of the extended self. This concept suggests that individuals – consciously or unconsciously – tend to perceive consumption objects as part of themselves, that is, as components of the identity they construct and seek to express socially. In the tourism field, Ganglmair-Wooliscroft and Wooliscroft (2014) argue that travelers may regard tourist attractions – and by extension, the destinations themselves – as extensions of their Self through a process of symbolic appropriation. Lo and McKercher (2015) interpret this experiential apprehension (or materialization) of the 'I went there' as the foundation of what they call the 'Traveling Self'.

However, with the increasing digitalization of social practices, the ways in which the traveler's extended Self is expressed have also begun to manifest – more intensely and more frequently – within virtual environments. According to Souza, Barbosa, and Guimarães (2025), it is impossible to conceive the contemporary world without digital social platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok) as spaces for sharing travel experiences, constructing narratives, and reinforcing symbolic meanings. Du et al. (2022) state that the daily use of TikTok has expanded decisively into the tourism context, demonstrating its strong impact on traveler consumption behavior. This shift has occurred alongside the dematerialization process highlighted by Belk (2013), in which physical objects are increasingly replaced by digitalized versions. Lee et al. (2023) and Mateus et al. (2020) emphasize that, within tourism, this transformation has further reduced the already limited possibilities for material representation of consumption.

Given this scenario, this study set out to investigate how the process of constituting the traveler's extended self on social media has been shaped by the dematerialization of representations of tourism consumption. Previous research has examined how dematerialization can influence behavioral parameters in different consumption contexts (Herrmann, 2012; de Sousa et al., 2014; Pena & Brito, 2021). However, the phenomenon remains insufficiently explored within tourism studies. It is important to note that Belk's (1988) conceptualization of the extended Self has been revisited to incorporate reflections on the current digital context (Belk, 2013; Schultz, 2014; Belk, 2016), bringing aspects such as dematerialization to the forefront of the debate. Accordingly, it is important to investigate how this phenomenon has manifested in contemporary tourism consumption, particularly in the context of travel and with emphasis on social media.

## REVISÃO TEÓRICA

### ***Traveling Self, Digital Extended Self, and the Dematerialization of Tourism Consumption Representations in the Virtual Environment***

Contemporary social structures have become increasingly oriented toward a consumption-centered dynamic (Bauman, 2008). Within this context, it is unsurprising that the field of consumer behavior has consolidated around efforts to understand the meanings that products and brands assume in people's everyday lives (Solomon, 2016). In tourism, Câmara et al. (2023) argue that consumption extends beyond merely promoting well-being; it also functions as a means of identity formation, integrating itself into the development of the Self. For James (1890) and Perlman (2016), this Self corresponds to self-awareness, formed through socialization in different environments throughout one's life. Tourism consumption, therefore, can influence how individuals construct and reaffirm their identities by associating destinations and/or experiences as extensions of themselves.

The notion that individuals consider people, places, objects (and experiences) as extensions of themselves originates from Belk's (1988) Extended Self proposition. This concept emphasizes that individuals – consciously or unconsciously – tend to regard what they possess as an integral part of who they are, and thus, as an extension of their own Self.

Such 'possessions' are not limited to products acquired through monetary transactions. They may also include places, experiences, people, animals. This occurs because the relationship individuals develop with these 'objects' – understood here as anything with which a person can establish a sense of possession – leads them to incorporate these elements into the domain of the 'Mine' (Ye & Gawronski, 2016). According to Belk (1988), self-awareness is fragile and requires elements that support the construction of identity. These elements offer a degree of stability to the Self, even though their loss may trigger emotional reactions comparable to grief, due to the sense of identity deprivation that often emerges (Belk, 2013, 2016).

In the tourism context, objects associated with places visited often form part of what Lo and McKercher (2015) call the Traveling Self, that is, the traveler's extended Self. In line with the Extended Self concept, the Traveling Self is composed of memories, experiences, and evidences that reinforce the idea of 'I have already been there'. Erfani (2022) notes that records of visited places – whether photographs, videos, or other objects that evoke the destination – function as forms of self-expression that materialize what the traveler has experienced. Thus, representations of tourism consumption also operate as pillars for strengthening self-awareness, as they allow individuals to attach personal meaning to their travel experiences (Breathnach, 2006; Masset & Decrop, 2021; Swanson & Timothy, 2012).

However, the representation of travelers' experiences has become increasingly digitalized. There is a clear trend toward the dematerialization of the few physical evidences of a trip. Photographs, for instance – once printed and kept in albums – are now stored in virtual galleries or, as noted by Souza, Barbosa, and Guimarães (2025), commonly shared on social media platforms. According to Belk (2013), this process still constitutes an extension of the Self, but in a digital form. For Silva et al. (2020), if virtual environments enable experiences of belonging, construction, affirmation, or identity transformation, then they may be understood as symbolic territories just as relevant as the physical spaces that once fulfilled this role.

There is no doubt that social media has assumed a central role in shaping and sharing tourism experiences. Within these platforms, media such as photographs and videos function as more than aesthetic-experiential representations of the individual; directly or indirectly, they also contribute to the promotion of destinations. However, Kossoy (2021) emphasizes that, at their core, these elements primarily act as guardians of individual and collective memories. This perspective goes beyond the logic of visibility and performativity, since sharing travel experiences is no longer merely an act of aesthetic display. Consequently, the construction of a traveler's extended Self – through photographs and videos shared on social media – tends to reaffirm who the individual is, both for themselves and for the other members of their virtual social networks (Belk, 2016).

## METHODOLOGY

The exploratory nature of this study supports the use of a qualitative approach to understand the phenomenon under investigation. Malhotra (2019) explains that such research, because it involves less structural rigidity, offers greater flexibility for generating insights into the topic of interest. It is particularly useful when the subject is still little known, complex, or insufficiently explored in the existing literature (Cooper & Schindler, 2016). In this study, primary data were collected through a focus group, a technique that captured the participants' perceptions, meanings, and experiences, allowing for a deeper understanding of the nuances of the phenomenon, consistent with the exploratory nature of the investigation (Trad, 2009).

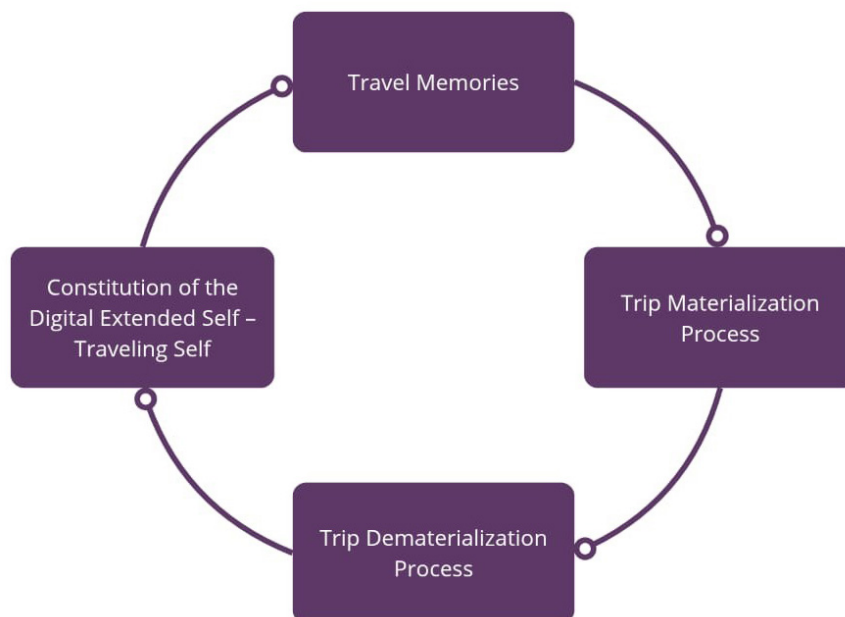
Data collection took place in July 2024, at the Department of Hospitality and Tourism (DHT) of the Federal University of Pernambuco. Kind (2004) suggests that at least two groups should be organized, although this is not mandatory. Souza (2020) notes that, as in other qualitative data collection techniques, the saturation criterion is also commonly adopted to determine the necessary number of focus groups required. According to Gatti (2005), greater diversity in participant profiles tends to broaden the range of perspectives, facilitating the attainment of saturation. Accordingly, participant selection for this study followed the principle of heterogeneity (e.g., age, sex, etc.). Additional criteria were applied: (a) having taken at least a single tourism trip; (b) being an active social media user (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube etc.); and (c) being 18 years of age or older.

There is no consensus in the literature regarding the ideal number of participants in a focus group session. Flick (2009) suggests between five and nine participants, while Gil (2007) recommends a minimum of six and a maximum of ten. In this study, the focus group included ten participants – six men and four women. All were university students, but from different programs (Computer Engineering, Tourism, Computer Science, Hospitality, History, Philosophy, and Design) and at different stages of their academic studies. Their ages ranged from 19 to 61. The heterogeneous composition generated a wide range of opinions, reflecting the participants' sociocultural differences, lived experiences, and personal backgrounds.

The session lasted approximately sixty-six minutes and was divided into four blocks, as illustrated in Figure 1. Cooper and Schindler (2016) note that such group interviews typically last around two hours, although the duration may vary depending on the number of topics to be addressed and the moderator's experience in conducting this type of session. In this study, the four central blocks were subdivided into eighteen discussion topics. The first block, 'Travel Memories', explored: (a) what traveling represents for the participants, (b) their earliest travel memory, (c) their most memorable trip, and (d) their recollections of their most recent trip. The second block, 'Trip Materialization Process', addressed: (a) how participants materialize their trips, (b) the role of physical photographs (albums), and (c) the subjective value associated with these objects.

The third block, 'Trip Dematerialization Process', focused on: (a) the dematerialization of objects that represent trips (photos, videos, souvenirs, postcards, etc.); (b) whether and how the participants themselves dematerialize these objects; and (c) the impacts of losing the physical nature of these travel-related evidences. The final block examined: (a) what travel photos and videos say about people; (b) what the participants (and others) typically post on social media about their trips and why; (c) the relationship between what is posted on social media about trips and the poster's Self; (d) the sharing of non-physical travel-related data; (e) the subjective value of travel posts; (f) the relevance of such posts on social media for building or maintaining a virtual social network; and (g) the effect of not posting about a trip on the participants' digital extended Self (impact on the Traveling Self).

Figure 1: Focus Group Session Blocks



Source: Adapted from Arcuri (2016).

The focus group was conducted by one researcher, who acted as the session moderator. A second researcher supported the process as an observer. According to Oliveira et al. (2022), the moderator is responsible for facilitating group interaction and ensuring that the discussion remains aligned with the proposed topic. The observer, in turn, contributes by taking complementary notes regarding participants' behaviors, gestures, and facial/body expressions during the session. To guide the discussion, a script containing a set of thematic prompts was used, developed based on the four key themes previously outlined. Before the session began, rapport was established (Cooper & Schindler, 2016): participants were informed about the purpose of the research and were asked for permission to record audio, with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity.

The analytical process followed the content analysis technique (Bardin, 2016). The data were first transcribed and then grouped according to the theme to which they referred. Cooper and Schindler (2016) explain that thematic units of analysis represent higher-level abstractions inferred from a text – such as a transcription – and from its context. In other words, from the participants' statements, understandings were extracted that could be classified under one of the four themes (Travel Memories, Trip Materialization Process, Trip Dematerialization Process, and Digital Extended Self – Traveling Self). It is important to note that the analysis process considered not only manifest content but also the latent content (Fearing, 1954). Thus, the researchers were also responsible for identifying implicit meanings embedded in the participants' accounts of their experiences (Kleinheksel et al., 2020).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Initially, the participants were asked about the meaning of traveling, more specifically, what travel represents to them. Unanimously, they agreed that traveling is a leisure activity, a way to escape the hectic and turbulent routine of life in metropolitan areas. Jelinčić and Matečić (2021) highlight that, in general, tourism is associated with relaxation and the maintenance of emotional well-being. Câmara et al. (2023) argue that travel generates benefits such as hedonic satisfaction, attitudinal loyalty to the destination, happiness, well-being, and even physical conditioning, etc. In essence, a trip can momentarily divert individuals from everyday concerns, allowing them to recharge and return to their routines with renewed energy.

This understanding was evident in the participants' statements: "Even though I don't stop (to rest) during trips, I associate travel with rest." (PARTICIPANT 8). "For me, traveling is escaping from everything that is happening in my life and where I live. Being able to go somewhere else and forget." (PARTICIPANT 6). "For me, adding to what he (another participant) said, it is the opportunity to live a completely different routine." (PARTICIPANT 2). "On a trip, you kind of live a life that isn't yours. You are living a different life for a week or two, and then you go back to your normal life and think: 'Wow, I want to travel again!'" (PARTICIPANT 1). "I find it a very enriching experience. When I travel, something in me changes. I invent something new." (PARTICIPANT 2).

The 'different life' described by the participants is closely tied to escapism and the search for novelty – core characteristics of tourism. Otto and Ritchie (1996) argue that any action that enables consumers (tourists) to escape routine, especially through new experiences at a destination, tends to be highly attractive. Hosseini et al. (2023) add that people often seek travel experiences that awaken their senses, enrich their personalities, touch their emotions, and stimulate their minds. Therefore, the participants' comments highlight a key specificity of consumer behavior in the tourism: the tendency to value what is new, exceptional, and capable of freeing them from everyday responsibilities (Souza, 2015).

When asked about their earliest travel memory, the participants frequently associated these recollections with the presence of close family members, such as parents, uncles, and others. This underscores the role of tourism in strengthening family bonds and creating affective memories. According to Hosseini et al. (2023), such "travel markers" – mentioning the people who went with them on the trip – serve as fundamental pillars of a memorable tourist experience. Interpersonal relationships formed during family trips often persist in individuals' memories, giving rise to nostalgic feelings years later.

At the same time, the participant's accounts revealed that these early memories also often involved settings or contexts outside the usual routines. "As a child, playing soccer with my mother in the parking lot of a house we had in Itamaracá." (PARTICIPANT 1). "My mother and I got on a bus with strangers to take a trip to the beach. It's my most 'vivid' memory." (PARTICIPANT 8). "My first travel memory is leaving a small town in Pernambuco to come to Recife. Me, my mother, my father, and my grandfather in a car that broke down in the middle of the highway." (PARTICIPANT 7). As Jelinčić and Matečić (2021) point out, displacement is key element contributing to the mnemonic retention of remarkable tourism experiences.

One particularly striking aspect was the emphasis the participants placed on the airplane as a defining element of their trip. Silva et al. (2020) argue that beyond enabling access to destinations, the means of transportation itself can also provide experiences that fall outside the ordinary. It is therefore unsurprising that the participants highlighted their first airplane trip meant as deeply meaningful, and not merely a means of travel to the destination: "Rio de Janeiro, 2009. I was very little. I went with my family, it was the first trip I ever took by plane. This really stayed with me because, for me, it was truly a trip [...] I only consider it a trip if it's to a farther place." (PARTICIPANT 9). It is striking that, even today, air travel continues to carry a symbolic significance that transcends its functional purpose.

Regarding recollections of more recent trips, the participants again referred to aspects of displacement (e.g., duration, distance). However, unlike early memories centered on family, recent memories emphasized 'new affective bonds'. Câmara et al. (2023) argue that socialization is a fundamental aspect of tourism activity, often facilitating interaction with others during trips. Jelinčić and Matečić (2021) note that adults more commonly travel alone or with fewer companions, which may explain this shift in emphasis

When asked about how they materialize their trips, that is, how they seek to give tangible form to their travel experiences, the participants indicated two main strategies: (1) taking photographs and videos and (2) buying souvenirs associated with the destination. This is shown in the statement of Participant 1: "videos, photos, and small souvenirs are the main ones." Participant 4 added: "besides videos and photos, I also bring magnets from every place I go to." These responses show that traditional forms of representing tourism consumption remain common, despite widespread digitalization. According to Souza, Barbosa, and Costa (2022), material elements of a trip, such as souvenirs, maintain an intrinsic relationship with emotions, reflecting affective aspects of tourism consumption.

Physical photographs and, consequently, photo albums, both serve to portray and preserve genuine moments – trip experiences considered meaningful. According to the participants, these materials allow memories to be evoked without relying on electronic devices, electricity, or internet access. In their view, this ensures a safer and more reliable retrieval of memories. Masset and Decrop (2021) argue that individuals often establish a strong sense of ownership over such objects, as their material nature symbolizes the protection of something considered to hold high subjective value.

The participants emphasized that selecting meaningful moments and experiences from a trip to assemble a photo album is a gratifying activity. Choosing which representations of tourism consumption will be materialized reveals extensions of the Self, in line with Belk's (2014) perspective. It is evident, however, that constructing the 'Traveling Self' involves intentionality, since it is shaped by parameters that guide these choices. As one participant explained: "The most spontaneous memory, the most spontaneous photo you printed out, where everyone is doing something different or is distracted. To me, that's the one that is worth the most, because it is a real moment." (PARTICIPANT 6). Usually, the presence of other people in the photographs is decisive, as shared experiences during a trip become links to what was experienced at the destination (Conti et al., 2020).

Regarding the dematerialization of objects that represent travel experiences, the participants' responses showed little convergence. Participant 5 was the only one who felt completely comfortable and satisfied with the absence of physical evidence. For him, "this is evolution. In the past, we carried lots of equipment and batteries, and now we have a device with the same function [referring to the cellphone], with much more practicality and without the limit of 36 photos [...]. I think it's extraordinary." Other participants, however, argued that this dematerialization process may have occurred too quickly, sparking a new interest in rescuing (and perhaps preserving) the physical nature of some of these objects. As participant 4 stated: "We evolve so much that at some point people just want to go back."

The 'impact of losing the physical character of souvenir objects' was one of the topics that generated the most conflicting perceptions and opinions during the session, largely due to the heterogeneous profiles of the participants. For some, instead of authentic and genuine photographs with sentimental value, what remains are short-lived images that transport physical realities into virtual narratives. Participant 9 noted that if the owner of a social media account passes away, the content they generated – including their representations of tourism consumption – may be removed by the platforms. The ease with which these materials are replaced by the lightness of encrypted information is therefore a source of concern. According to Han (2022), the world is becoming increasingly "phantasmagoric", intangible, and incomprehensible – a place where existence gives way to the ephemerality of digital performance.

On the other hand, the participants highlighted accessibility, greater storage capacity, and longevity as favorable attributes of the dematerialization of tourism consumption. This reinforces Conti et al.'s (2020) argument that the loss of physical character does not discourage posting on social media as a way of illustrating pre, in-situ, and post-travel experiences. In this sense, photos – even digital ones – continue to express values, past memories, future plans, personal development and professional projects. Depending on the platform used, there are even possibilities for transforming a user's profile into a type of memorial, with the purpose of eternalizing tourism experiences.

Regarding the sharing of tourism experiences on social media, the participants stated that the composition of objects and destination settings influences their decision to post. For them, places that feature characteristic landmarks of a region – the so-called 'instagrammable' settings – are ideal for posts on platforms such as Instagram. As Participant 5 explained: "I care a lot about the backgrounds. If I'm in Rio, the Redeemer has to appear. If I'm in São Paulo, Paulista Avenue has to

appear. We need to spot it and recognize where it was. Many times we end up only taking pictures with our drinking fellows, and later on we ask: 'Where was this?'" (PARTICIPANT 5). Silva et al. (2020) emphasize that this visual experience is capable of narrating itineraries and illustrating the traveler's experiences for their audience on digital platforms (e.g. friends, family, followers).

Overall, the participants presented similar ideas regarding the role of social media as intermediary between the photographs shared and the audiences who consume them. Described by Participant 1 as a human 'showcase', major social media platforms function as spaces where the users present themselves to the audience, through the content displayed on their digital profiles. Belk (2014) argues that the motivation behind the sharing of images is linked to status enhancement, identity expression, and the pursuit of increased attractiveness and/or acceptance within a social group. This argument aligns with the participants' perspectives, as they emphasized that digital platforms are intentionally designed to facilitate social aspects such as belongingness and identity expression.

When asked again about the process of selecting what to post on social media, Participant 3 emphasized that when it comes to travel, it is common to share content that expresses not only who people are, but also who they aspire to be. Other interviewees agreed that negative content generates negative impressions, and therefore there is little incentive to publish it. "If the place is not very beautiful, I don't post it. There has to be some visual appeal for me to post." (PARTICIPANT 9). According to Silva et al. (2020), one of the objectives of such posts is to promote and disseminate local tourism attractions. When aesthetically pleasing, they spark curiosity and desire in others.

The participants demonstrated a consistent understanding of the subjective value associated with posting travel experiences on social media. They reported selecting moments that express how positive their travel experiences were; these are the ones chosen to be preserved in a dematerialized form. Heersmink (2020) notes that the act of storing or sharing memories, whether through physical or digital media, reflects a desire to build a legacy of travel experiences. The shared content not only records moments but also contributes to an individual's life narrative, reinforcing the importance of a virtual autobiography in shaping an authentic identity.

The relevance of the posted content to one's virtual social network was also a widely discussed. The participants reported experiences of exchange and mediated interactions through their travel posts. As Participant 8 explained: "Creating a supportive network, when I intend to visit somewhere that I know someone has already visited, I get in touch with them. I know about it because I had seen on Instagram. The person may not be very close to me, but I ask about their impressions, recommendations, etc. Or, when I see that someone has been to a place I've visited myself, I leave a comment as well." Hernández (2021) confirms that such interactions reinforce the role of social media as practical tools capable of integrating different phases of the tourism consumption cycle.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study investigated how the dematerialization of tourism consumption representations, mediated by social media, has influenced the constitution of the traveler's extended Self in the digital age. To achieve this, aspects related to travel memories, the materialization and dematerialization of tourism consumption, and the new configuration of the extended Self – the Traveling Self – in a digital era, were examined. The interpretation of the evidence, supported by the theoretical framework, indicates that the traveler's extended Self has adapted to recent changes in consumption behavior, especially those occurring on social media.

The results corroborate Belk's (2013) notion of the Digital Extended Self, revealing a significant transformation in how travel memories are created, stored, and preserved by social media users. The shift from materialization to dematerialization has, to some extent, diminished the relevance of certain representations of tourism consumption. In the past, when tied to feelings of attachment and uniqueness, materialized representations more clearly expressed authenticity, identity, and memory, perhaps due to the costs and care required for their maintenance. Today, however, certain records serve the immediacy and exhibitionism characteristic of social media.

With the advances in digital technologies, practicality has become a determining factor in individuals' relationships with dematerialized keepsakes. Virtually unlimited and low-cost storage capacity encourages the production of ephemeral materials oriented toward online narratives. Moreover, the pursuit of attractiveness and engagement on digital platforms contributes to a certain loss of authenticity, as the selection of what is considered relevant for sharing often overshadows spontaneity. In this context, some travelers have begun to prioritize destinations that offer 'Instagrammable' settings, replacing more genuine travel motivations.

In summary, this study deepens the understanding of how dematerialization influences the constitution of the traveler's extended Self in the digital era, and the behavioral trends that emerge from the growing integration of social media into travel routines. Elements such as visual appeal, superficial connections, and the pursuit of the 'ideal' photograph have diluted the enriching elements of travel memories, transforming digital records into resources aimed primarily at visibility and engagement. Recovering these values requires a shift in users' perceptions of social media, encouraging more genuine expressions of travel memories. The practicality and durability of the digital world can be harnessed beyond exhibitionism, becoming tools for sharing memories, inspiring trips, and strengthening cultural and emotional bonds.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY

Research data can be requested from the authors.

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## CONTRIBUIÇÃO DOS AUTORES

Gabriel Jard Recoaro Silva: Research; Data curation; Data analysis; Data presentation design; Writing the original draft.

Anderson Gomes de Souza: Conceptualization; Funding acquisition; Methodology; Project administration; Supervision; Data and experiment validation; Writing – review and editing.

Débora Maria Soares Silva: Supervision; Data presentation design; Writing original draft; Writing – review and editing.