

DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND THE TOURIST DECISION-MAKING PROCESS: A STUDY ON THE “ROTA DAS ÁGUAS” IN PORTO VELHO, RONDÔNIA, BRAZIL

PLATAFORMAS DIGITAIS E O PROCESSO DE TOMADA DE DECISÃO DOS TURISTAS: UM ESTUDO SOBRE A ROTA DAS ÁGUAS EM PORTO VELHO, RONDÔNIA, BRASIL

PLATAFORMAS DIGITALES Y EL PROCESO DE TOMA DE DECISIONES DE LOS TURISTAS: UN ESTUDIO SOBRE LA “ROTA DAS ÁGUAS” EN PORTO VELHO, RONDÔNIA, BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT:

Purpose – To understand how digital platforms influence the decision-making process of tourists when choosing the Rota das Águas, in Porto Velho, Rondônia, Brazil, as a tourist destination.

Design/methodology/approach – A quantitative, descriptive study was conducted using a structured questionnaire based on the Integrative Model of Tourist Information Search Behavior, applied to 143 participants through non-probabilistic convenience sampling.

Findings – Digital platforms play a central role in the discovery, evaluation and choice of the destination, mainly through audiovisual content and other users’ reviews; however, gaps were identified in the clarity, depth and quality of online information, which limit the full use of the region’s tourism potential.

Practical implications – The findings support destination managers and policymakers in designing evidence-based digital marketing strategies, including personalized content and engagement of local influencers.

Originality/value – By empirically testing the Integrative Model in an underexplored Amazon context, the study offers original evidence on how audiovisual content and reviews shape destination choice, contributing to the literature on digital tourism.

Research limitations – Because of the non-probabilistic convenience sampling, the findings cannot be statistically generalized and should be interpreted as exploratory and representative of the studied sample.

Keywords: Digital tourism; Consumer behavior; Decision-making; Digital marketing; Rota das Águas.

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The research data can be requested from the authors.

RESUMO:

Objetivo – Compreender como as plataformas digitais influenciam o processo de tomada de decisão de turistas ao escolherem a Rota das Águas, em Porto Velho, Rondônia, Brasil, como destino turístico.

Desenho/metodologia/abordagem – Pesquisa de abordagem quantitativa e natureza descritiva, com questionário estruturado baseado no Modelo Integrativo do Comportamento de Busca de Informação do Turista, aplicado a 143 participantes por amostragem não probabilística por conveniência.

Resultados – As plataformas digitais exercem papel central na descoberta, avaliação e escolha do destino, sobretudo por meio de conteúdos audiovisuais e avaliações de outros usuários; contudo, foram identificadas lacunas na clareza, profundidade e qualidade das informações online, que limitam o pleno aproveitamento do potencial turístico da região.

Implicações práticas – Os resultados apoiam gestores de destinos e formuladores de políticas no desenho de estratégias de marketing digital baseadas em evidências, incluindo conteúdos personalizados e engajamento de influenciadores locais.

Originalidade/valor – Ao testar empiricamente o Modelo Integrativo em um contexto amazônico pouco explorado, o estudo oferece evidências originais sobre como conteúdos audiovisuais e avaliações moldam a escolha do destino, contribuindo para a literatura sobre turismo digital.

Limitações da pesquisa – Por se tratar de amostragem não probabilística por conveniência, os resultados não podem ser generalizados estatisticamente, devendo ser interpretados como exploratórios e representativos da amostra estudada.

Palavras-chave: Turismo digital; Comportamento do consumidor; Tomada de decisão; Marketing digital; Rota das Águas.

RESUMEN:

Propósito – Comprender cómo las plataformas digitales influyen en la toma de decisiones de los turistas al elegir la Ruta de las Aguas, en Porto Velho, Rondônia, Brasil, como destino turístico.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque – Estudio cuantitativo y descriptivo, con cuestionario estructurado basado en el Modelo Integrativo del Comportamiento de Búsqueda de Información del Turista, aplicado a 143 participantes mediante muestreo no probabilístico por conveniencia.

Hallazgos – Las plataformas digitales ejercen un papel central en el descubrimiento, la evaluación y la elección del destino, principalmente mediante contenidos audiovisuales y valoraciones de otros usuarios; sin embargo, se identificaron brechas en la claridad y calidad de la información en línea, que limitan el aprovechamiento del potencial turístico de la región.

Implicaciones prácticas – Los resultados apoyan a gestores de destinos y formuladores de políticas en el diseño de estrategias de marketing digital basadas en evidencia, incluyendo contenidos personalizados y la participación de influencers locales.

Originalidad/valor – Al probar empíricamente el modelo en un contexto amazónico poco explorado, el estudio aporta evidencia original sobre cómo los contenidos audiovisuales moldean la elección del destino, contribuyendo a la literatura sobre turismo digital.

Limitaciones de la investigación – Debido al muestreo no probabilístico por conveniencia, los resultados no pueden generalizarse y deben interpretarse como exploratorios y representativos de la muestra estudiada.

Palabras clave: Turismo digital; Comportamiento del consumidor; Toma de decisiones; Marketing digital; Ruta de las Aguas.

INTRODUCTION

In a scenario where the world is increasingly connected, the way tourists choose their itineraries has undergone significant changes due to the intense use of social media as a key influence in shaping preferences and deciding which destinations to visit. This transformation is consistent with a broader shift in consumer behavior, in which the decision-making process, traditionally described as a sequence of need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase evaluation (Stankevich, 2017), has become increasingly mediated by digital environments.

In the tourism context, it is observed that most travelers use social networks as their main sources of inspiration and recommendations during the initial stage of travel planning, while also consulting review websites, blogs, and specialized destination pages. This behavior reflects the growing relevance of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), through which the opinions and experience shared by other travelers on digital platforms acquire credibility, trust, and a sense of proximity, exerting a strong influence on the final destination choice (Melo & Auriani, 2024).

This growing interaction on digital platforms, combined with trust in online reviews, has transformed not only the way destinations are promoted but also consumer perception and choice (Expedia Group, 2023). Recent studies reinforce that user-generated content and online reviews play a central role in shaping destination image and travel intentions, particularly in the context of smart tourism experiences (Corrêa & Gosling, 2023; Mohammed et al., 2023).

In Brazil, tourism-related platforms such as TripAdvisor, Decolar, and Localiza have shown significant growth, becoming essential tools for tourists by providing easy access to information on vacation rentals, air transport options, and other related services (Brazil's Ministry of Tourism, 2024). This reflects the evolution of consumer preferences, which increasingly seek convenience and solutions adapted to their needs. In this scenario, digital marketing emerges as a strategic tool that allows organizations to tailor communication to specific consumer profiles and build long-term relationships, positioning digital platforms not only as information channels, but as dynamic spaces for relationship building and consumer loyalty (Serra et al., 2020).

Recent data released by the Brazil's Ministry of Tourism (2025) indicate significant growth in the number of international tourists visiting the Amazon region, reflecting the growing relevance of the Amazon as a tourist destination in Brazil. This increase, which exceeds 18% compared to the previous year, highlights the potential of the Amazon biome, which accounts for 5% of the Earth's surface and has 60% of its extension located in Brazilian territory, covering more than 4 million km². Furthermore, digital platforms play a fundamental role in this scenario by facilitating access to information, reviews, and reservations, which directly influence travel decisions by offering more personalized and accessible experiences.

However, when this scenario is applied to Rondônia, specifically to the capital Porto Velho, a clear paradox can be observed between the vast water potential of the municipality and the ineffectiveness of its digital showcase. The region, whose geography is marked by the presence of the Madeira River (Santo Antônio Energia, 2022) and several bathing resorts (balneários), features the "Rota das Águas", a project developed by the City Hall of Porto Velho with the aim of promoting tourism in the region, encouraging sustainable development, generating income, and fostering environmental awareness. Created in 2017, the project consisted of nine editions, each held in a different resort, promoting cultural, musical, and sporting activities (Prefeitura de Porto Velho, 2017).

Although the project underwent an update in 2022 with the creation of an online version available on the website of the Municipal Secretariat for Social Development and Tourism (Semdestur, 2022), the digital dissemination of the Rota das Águas contrasts drastically with the natural wealth offered by the region. The current fragmented and ineffective digital showcase does not reflect the true potential of the attractions, hindering access to information and limiting the attraction of visitors and the full utilization of the route. Thus, it becomes essential to understand how marketing strategies and sustainable tourism can be applied to boost the route's development, attract visitors, and promote tourism sustainably, in addition to evaluating the impacts of municipal initiatives on the economic development of the region.

Therefore, the approach presented raises the following question: How do digital platforms influence the decision-making process when choosing the Rota das Águas as a tourist destination in Porto Velho-RO? To answer this question, the general objective of this research is to understand how digital platforms influence the decision-making process of tourists when choosing the Rota das Águas as a tourist destination in Porto Velho-RO.

Considering the social and economic aspects, promoting tourist destinations can generate employment and income, as well as foster the inclusion of small businesses. However, for this promotion to be effective, it is necessary to understand how tourists make purchasing decisions, especially in the face of growing digital influence. Therefore, this research is justified by the need to fill this knowledge gap, adapting marketing strategies to new market trends and contributing to the increase of tourism demand and to the economic and social development of Porto Velho.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Consumer Decision-Making Process in Tourism

The traditional approach to consumer purchasing behavior involves a sequence of stages that occur during the acquisition of a product or service. This process begins with the recognition of a need, followed by the search for information, the evaluation of different alternatives, the purchase itself, and finally the post-purchase evaluation of the experience (Stankevich, 2017). This process is influenced by several factors, including internal aspects such as emotions, values, and previous experiences, as well as external influences related to social, cultural, and environmental contexts (Melo & Auriani, 2024). Although this linear model remains a useful analytical starting point, it has been increasingly questioned in the tourism literature. As Stankevich (2017) himself acknowledged, consumer choices do not always follow a strictly linear sequence, since many are based on habitual or routine decision patterns. This observation is particularly relevant to tourism, where decisions are more complex and involve higher perceived risk than routine consumption.

According to Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard (1995), the decision-making process involves several possible choices, such as deciding whether to purchase a product or save money, determining the appropriate time for the purchase, selecting the desired product, choosing where to acquire it, and deciding on the payment method. In addition, the process includes decisions regarding product use and disposal, which may involve discarding, reselling, or recycling. The authors also highlight that consumer decision-making is influenced by different elements, including product value, brand reputation, country of origin, and the level of familiarity with the product. Personal characteristics such as personality traits, beliefs, lifestyle, social status, cultural background, and family context. More recent studies have expanded this perspective by emphasizing the role of emotional and psychological dimensions in tourist behavior, arguing that understanding how individuals interpret and experience reality during their travels requires going beyond purely rational models (Schuster & Dias, 2024).

At the beginning of the purchasing journey, marketing strategies can stimulate the perception of a need by creating a sense of imbalance between the consumer's current situation and a desired state. This process generates desire and encourages the consumer to seek information about alternatives capable of satisfying that need. Such information may come from personal experience or from external sources, including opinions from friends and family, websites, advertising, and other communication channels. In the next stage, consumers evaluate different alternatives according to criteria such as price, quality, and brand reputation. Once the option that best meets their needs is identified, the consumer proceeds to the purchase decision. This stage involves additional practical considerations regarding when, where, and how much to spend, taking into account aspects such as price and payment conditions (Stankevich, 2017). According to Páscoa (2020), the purchase decision occurs when the consumer directs their focus toward acquiring the selected product or service.

After the purchase, consumers evaluate whether the product or service has met or exceeded their expectations and the promises made by the brand. When the experience is positive, consumers may become so-called "brand ambassadors," spontaneously recommending the product or service to others. This occurs when the purchasing experience is sufficiently satisfactory to motivate consumers to promote the brand voluntarily, thereby strengthening the organization's reputation and market image. Nevertheless, the decision-making process does not always follow a strictly linear sequence, as many consumer choices are based on habitual or routine decision patterns (Stankevich, 2017). This post-purchase behavior is especially significant in tourism, where travelers frequently share their experiences on social media platforms, post reviews on specialized websites, and make recommendations to other travelers (Schuster & Dias, 2024).

In the tourism context, the decision-making process becomes even more complex. Unlike the acquisition of a material good, tourism offers experiences, which makes the decision more elaborate and tourists to conduct extensive research, plan financially, and organize their itineraries in advance (Melo & Auriani, 2024). This complexity is reinforced by the growing influence of online platforms throughout the entire decision journey. As Abashidze (2024) observes, international travelers actively use online channels at various stages of behaviour and decision making and the opinions of other customers disseminated through Web 2.0 platforms are regarded as more reliable than traditional marketing communications.

The internet has therefore significantly transformed consumer behavior in the tourism sector. Currently, tourists have easy access to a vast amount of information about different destinations, allowing them to conduct independent research and make decisions more autonomously. During the evaluation of alternatives, the opinions and experiences shared by other travelers exert a strong influence on the final decision. This phenomenon is amplified by social media platforms, which function as a modern form of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). Through these platforms, consumers can rely on recommendations and travel experiences shared by friends, family members, and other users as references in the decision-making process, attributing credibility, trust, and a sense of proximity to such information (Melo & Auriani, 2024).

Based on these behavioral patterns, it can be observed that tourists have gained increasing autonomy in planning their trips, frequently using information shared by other travelers on digital platforms such as websites and social networks, as well as mobile applications to access services related to food, transportation, and accommodation during their stay (Abashidze, 2024).

Digital Platforms and Tourism

The advancement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has profoundly transformed the tourism sector, promoting new consumption patterns and the development of tourism experiences mediated by digital platforms. Barbosa and Medaglia (2020) emphasize that the development of ICT has been decisive in reshaping the traditional travel market, fostering the emergence of new business models focused on offering tourism products and services through digital platforms. Furthermore, the authors highlight that the popularization of the internet, combined with innovations such as digital media, mobile devices, and geolocation technologies, has significantly contributed to changes in traveler behavior in the 21st century.

This transformation demonstrates increasing autonomy and decision-making power among consumers, who use digital platforms not only as sources of information but also as spaces for interaction and influence. Contemporary travelers are capable of planning their trips independently due to broad access to information; they are well-informed, share their experiences in real time, and exert considerable influence on other tourists (Barbosa and Medaglia, 2020). Digital tools play a fundamental role in this process by enabling greater control over travel planning, reflecting the transformation in tourist behavior as consumers increasingly assume control over their choices.

The active participation of consumers is also reflected in the concept of value co-creation, which has become central to understanding contemporary marketing dynamics in the tourism sector. The seminal contributions of Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) established that value is no longer created solely by the firm but is co-created through the interaction between companies and consumers, a perspective later consolidated by the service-dominant logic of Vargo and Lusch (2016). In tourism, this co-creation is particularly evident, as tourists actively contribute to the reviews, shared content, and online interactions. A systematic review by Ribeiro et al. (2023) confirms that value co-creation has become a central theme in tourism and hospitality research, reinforcing its relevance for understanding contemporary tourist behaviour.

Furthermore, Kotler et al. (2012) note that research across various sectors indicates that consumers tend to trust social sources, such as the opinions of friends, family members, and social media communities, more than traditional marketing communications. This new consumer profile creates both challenges and opportunities for tourism marketing, which increasingly relies on the digital environment. Because tourism is a constantly evolving activity and maintains an intrinsic relationship with ICT, the sector makes intensive use of information and data sharing, involving continuous interactions among multiple tourism stakeholders.

In this context, digital marketing emerges as an essential tool for understanding and responding to the demands of contemporary tourists. Serra et al. (2020) emphasize that the need to understand tourists' motivations, their behaviors during destination experiences, and the perceptions formed after these experiences has strengthened the role of marketing, particularly digital marketing, in supporting tourism as a global social phenomenon. The personalization of digital strategies becomes fundamental in this scenario, as it enables closer relationships with consumers and encourages loyalty. Digital marketing, therefore, functions as a strategic tool for promoting products and brands in online environments, allowing organizations to tailor communication to specific consumer profiles and build long-term relationships. As a result, traditional media have gradually lost space to the internet, consumption relationships have changed, and society now operates in what can be described as the "age of search," in which information that cannot be found online is often perceived as nonexistent.

Consequently, digital platforms are no longer limited to functioning as information or sales channels; rather, they represent dynamic spaces for relationship building and consumer loyalty. This transformation has revolutionized tourism marketing by redefining the structure of marketing strategies and the traditional Marketing Mix.

This transformation has led to the development of Digital Marketing Plans that incorporate tools such as websites, images, videos, social media platforms, email marketing, search engines such as Google, and Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Within this context, consumers themselves become strategic agents in the promotion of destinations and tourism brands. Through online reviews, shared experiences, and social media interactions, digital consumers act as co-producers and co-communicators of tourism marketing strategies (Serra et al., 2020).

Online reviews and social media engagement, commonly referred to as electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), have significantly transformed the information search process in tourism by shifting much of the influence from institutions to users themselves. This phenomenon is highlighted in studies on smart tourism experiences, which show how virtual engagement and social interactions generate emotional responses that strengthen place attachment and directly influence tourists' intention to visit destinations (Corrêa & Gosling, 2023). At the same time, the incorporation of digital influencers into tourism promotion strategies has become an important trend. These individuals act as mediators of meaning and inspiration, encouraging audiences to explore new destinations. Recent studies indicate that persuasive communication by influencers mobilizes audiences through authentic narratives that resonate with their follower communities, significantly shaping tourism perceptions and travel decisions (Rodríguez Hidalgo et al., 2024). Therefore, online tools, combined with e-WOM and the influence of content creators, play a vital role in engagement strategies and the competitive positioning of destinations within the contemporary digital tourism ecosystem.

METHODOLOGY

Characterization and Population

The present study was characterized as applied research, as it consisted of the production of knowledge focused on its practical utilization, aimed at solving concrete and specific problems. It was descriptive, as it aimed to describe the characteristics of a specific population or phenomenon, or to identify possible relationships between variables using standardized data collection techniques (Prodanov & Freitas, 2013, p. 126). Regarding the approach, a quantitative approach was adopted, which allowed identifying patterns and trends through the collection and analysis of structured data, such as the frequency with which tourists used certain digital platforms, the degree of influence perceived in different media, or the relevance of certain criteria, as noted by Siena et al. (2024, p. 53).

Quantitative research is characterized by the use of quantification both in the methods of gathering information and in its treatment using statistical techniques. The premise is that everything can be quantifiable and translated into numbers [...]. The data collection instruments most commonly used in the quantitative method are: databases (public and private), forms, closed questionnaires, among others (Siena et al., 2024, p. 53).

The target population of this research consisted of tourists and potential tourists from the region of Porto Velho, Rondônia, aged between 18 and 60 years, who were interested in the tourist destination Rota das Águas. The sample comprised 143 valid questionnaires, selected through non-probabilistic convenience sampling. It should be noted that, given the non-probabilistic nature of the sampling strategy, the findings of this study cannot be statistically generalized to the broader population. The results should therefore be interpreted as representative of the studied sample and as providing exploratory insights into the phenomenon under investigation. The diversity of the participants' profiles was nonetheless sought, considering variables such as age group, gender, travel frequency, and degree of familiarity with digital platforms.

Rota das Águas (Route of the Waters)

The Rota das Águas, located in Porto Velho, Rondônia, represents an important tourist itinerary focused on leisure, ecotourism, and the appreciation of the region's water resources. The route is mainly situated along the BR-364 Highway and the Penal Road, where several bathing resorts are concentrated in the rural area of the capital of Rondônia. These locations offer experiences integrated with nature, regional gastronomy, and leisure facilities that attract both residents and tourists (Semdestur, 2022). Most of these establishments are family-run businesses that maintain a proposal of sustainable tourism, emphasizing well-being, simplicity, and environmental appreciation. It should be noted that the characterization of this itinerary was developed based on institutional data provided by Semdestur (2022) and on an in loco survey conducted by the researchers.

Despite its natural potential, the Route of the Waters faces significant challenges in its digital promotion. Although the project underwent an update in 2022 with the creation of an online version available on the website of the Municipal Department for Social Development and Tourism (Semdestur, 2022), the digital dissemination of the route contrasts drastically with the natural wealth offered by the region. The current fragmented and ineffective digital showcase does not reflect the true potential of the attractions, hindering access to information and limiting the attraction of visitors and the full utilization of the route. This gap between the destination's natural appeal and its online presence constitutes the central problem addressed by this research.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

Regarding the data collection instrument, it was structured into two main blocks. The first block aimed to identify the tourist's profile and their level of knowledge and experience with the Rota das Águas; for this purpose, variables related to age group, gender, education, monthly family income, place of residence, previous experience with the destination, and visited locations, such as resorts, inns, and floating structures, were included.

The second block was based on the Integrative Model of Tourists' Information Search Behavior, proposed by Gursoy and McCleary (2004), composed of 13 statements organized into seven theoretical dimensions and evaluated using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," with the aim of capturing the participants' perceptions regarding the process of seeking and using digital information related to the tourist destination. The statements and their respective dimensions are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Structure of the Data Collection Instrument.

Dimension	Statements
1. Influence of Digital Platforms	1. I feel familiar with the Rota das Águas as a tourist destination. 2. I have seen content about the Rota das Águas on social networks, blogs, or videos.
2. Destination Expertise	3. I know how to evaluate the quality of the tourist destinations within the Rota das Águas. 4. I can recommend the Rota das Águas based on detailed information I have obtained.
3. Cost of External Information Search	5. It was easy to find online information about the destinations that make up the Rota das Águas 6. Digital platforms made choosing the Rota das Águas more accessible.
4. Cost of Internal Information Search	7. I preferred to seek new information about the Rota das Águas rather than rely solely on my memory.
5. External Information Search (Digital/Online)	8. I actively sought information about the Rota das Águas on websites, blogs, and social networks. 9. Videos and posts on Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, or YouTube influenced my decision to visit the Rota das Águas. 10. Reviews on digital platforms (like TripAdvisor or Instagram) influenced my choice of destination.
6. Involvement (Engagement with the Destination)	11. I was enthusiastic about the idea of visiting the Rota das Águas.
7. Destination Learning (Intentional and Incidental)	12. I read detailed information about the Rota das Águas with the objective of learning about the destination. 13. I learned about the Rota das Águas while casually watching videos or seeing posts.

Source: Elaborated by the research authors based on Gursoy and McCleary (2004)

The questionnaire was administered through the Google Forms tool, distributed in a hybrid format (online and in-person), to expand the reach and diversity of participants within the timeframe established for the research.

During the questionnaire's pilot test phase, a relevant limitation was observed: the participants' lack of knowledge about the destinations that make up the Rota das Águas. Considering that the object of this research is the influence of digital platforms on the decision-making process of tourists who consider the Rout of Waters as a destination, this finding required adjusting the sample inclusion criteria. Accordingly, only questionnaires from respondents who already considered the possibility of visiting the route, that is, those who had already seen or knew the Rout of Waters, were retained in the analysis, ensuring that the responses reflected the perceptions of the target population under investigation.

Data Collection Technique and Data Analysis

Regarding the data collection technique, the survey technique was employed, as it is a modality of social study that includes censuses and opinion polls, based on collecting information through direct questioning applied to individuals or groups, aiming to understand their behaviors and opinions, facilitating the measurement of the influence of marketing strategies and digital networks on consumer behavior.

Finally, the collected data were organized and tabulated using Microsoft Excel, and statistically analyzed using IBM SPSS 20 Statistics software, which was employed to perform descriptive statistical analyses, such as calculating means and frequencies, techniques considered appropriate for the objectives proposed in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

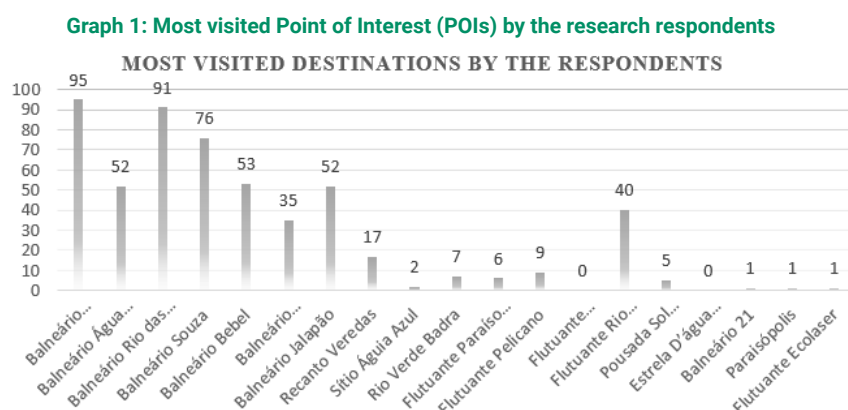
The data obtained through the field research provide a comprehensive understanding of the visitors' profile and their perceptions regarding the Rota das Águas as a tourist destination. In this section, the results are organized into three axes: characterization of the respondent audience, most visited Points of Interest (POIs), and statistical analysis of the 13 statements related to the influence of digital platforms in the decision-making process for choosing the Rota das Águas as a tourist destination in Porto Velho/RO.

The reliability analysis of the instrument revealed a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.903, indicating excellent internal consistency among the 13 evaluated items. This confirms the questionnaire's adequacy to accurately measure the respondents' perceptions regarding the variables investigated.

Regarding the respondents' profile, in general, the research sample is primarily composed of female individuals (64%), reflecting the predominance of female participation in the research. The predominant age group is between 18 and 25 years old, representing a young audience, which is relevant as it is a group highly connected to digital platforms and influenced by online marketing strategies. Most participants have completed high school. Regarding monthly family income, 46% stated they earn between two and four minimum wages, while a significant portion declared an income of up to two minimum wages, indicating a low-to-middle-income socioeconomic profile. Finally, it stands out that 95% of the respondents reside in Porto Velho, reinforcing the relevance and representativeness of the sample, considering that the object of study is inserted in the territorial context of the capital of Rondônia.

This high percentage characterizes the flow studied primarily as domestic tourism, proximity leisure, or excursionism. This is a relevant finding, as it demonstrates that digital platforms are performing the vital function of mobilizing the local community itself to discover, consume, and value the territory in which they live, generating a sustainable and circular economy for Porto Velho.

After characterizing the participants profile, the study sought to identify the main Point of Interest (POIs) visited within the Rout of Waters, as shown in Graph 1 below:



Source: Elaborated by the research authors.

It is observed that the Cachoeirinha Resort was the most frequented, with 95 indications, followed by Rio das Garças (91) and Souza (76). Other standouts included Bebel Resort (53), Água Gelada and Jalapão (both with 52), as well as Flutuante Rio Preto (40), Recanto Veredas (35), and Flutuante Pelicano (9). These numbers highlight tourists' preferences for specific points along the Rota das Águas. In contrast, some locations recorded low or no visitation, which may reflect either lower visibility in digital searches or a lack of awareness by the target audience, rather than necessarily indicating lower intrinsic attractiveness of these destinations.

As for the statements, a detailed analysis follows, based on the percentage and statistical results (Table 2):

Table 2. Statistical analysis of the respondents' perceptions about the Rota das Águas

Question	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation	Variance	Agreement (%)
Familiarization with the Rota das Águas	4.18	4	5	1.03	1.05	80%
Contact with digital content	3.71	4	5	1.43	2.05	66%
Evaluation capacity	3.67	4	5	1.3	1.7	64%
Recommendation based on data	3.96	4	5	1.28	1.63	73%
Ease of finding information	3.75	4	5	1.25	1.56	65%
Platforms make the choice more accessible	4.23	5	5	1.03	1.05	78%
Active search for information (memory vs. research)	4.17	5	5	1.14	1.3	72%
Active search on websites/social networks	3.71	4	5	1.38	1.9	61%
Influence of videos/posts	3.99	5	5	1.35	1.82	73%
Reviews on platforms influence choice	3.81	4	5	1.41	1.99	67%
Enthusiasm to visit the Rota das Águas	4.38	5	5	0.97	0.94	83%
Reading detailed information	3.77	4	5	1.34	1.78	65%
Casual learning (casual videos/posts)	3.76	4	5	1.28	1.65	65%

Source: Elaborated by the research authors.

The assertion regarding familiarization with the Rout of Waters obtained a high mean ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.03$) and an agreement level of 80%, indicating that respondents show a high level of familiarity with the destinations of the route, reinforced by the mode (5), which demonstrates the consistency of the responses and suggests consolidated prior knowledge among participants.

Contact with digital content related to the route showed a moderate mean ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.43$) and an agreement level of 66%. The high standard deviation indicates that, while some participants report intense exposure, others present little or no contact, reflecting distinct consumption profiles. The evaluation capacity of tourism options presented a mean close to 4 ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.30$, 64% agreement), suggesting that some participants feel relatively confident to evaluate tourism options, although the variation in responses reveals some divergence in perception.

Recommendation based on data and third-party experiences obtained a mean of 3.96 ($SD = 1.28$, 73% agreement), indicating significant value placed on recommendations based on data and third-party experiences. The dispersion in the responses may reflect different levels of trust in the usefulness or credibility of the information used for this purpose, although the questionnaire did not directly measure this dimension. Ease of finding information presented a mean of 3.75 ($SD = 1.25$, 65% agreement), suggesting reasonable ease in accessing information about the destination, although this ease is not perceived homogeneously.

The assertion that platforms make the choice more accessible obtained the highest agreement among the search-related items ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.03$, 78% agreement), with low variability, demonstrating consensus among participants regarding the effectiveness of these tools in democratizing tourism information. The active search for information presented a mean of 4.17 ($SD = 1.14$, 72% agreement), showing a good level of engagement in knowledge building prior to decision-making. Active search on websites and social networks showed a mean of 3.71 ($SD = 1.38$, 61% agreement), indicating that social media play a relevant role, although this practice is not homogeneous among respondents.

The influence of videos and posts obtained a mean of 3.99 ($SD = 1.35$, 73% agreement), attesting to the relevance of audiovisual content in the decision process. This finding aligns with recent international evidence showing that user-generated travel short videos significantly increase tourists' familiarity with and behavioral involvement in a destination, both of which in turn strengthen their intention to visit (Bai et al., 2023). The high agreement on the influence of audiovisual content in the present study thus corroborates the growing relevance of short-form video platforms in the contemporary decision-making process. Reviews on platforms influencing choice presented a mean of 3.81 ($SD = 1.41$, 67% agreement), indicating that reviews made by other users exert relevant influence on the choice of the tourist destination, although the high variability reflects some divergence, possibly associated with different levels of trust in these sources. This pattern is consistent with the broader literature on e-tourism, which indicates that the credibility of online travel reviews depends on factors such as source reliability, content quality, and perceived usefulness, and that trust in user-generated content is a key antecedent of its influence on travel decisions (Guzzo, Ferri, & Grifoni, 2022). The variability observed in the present sample may therefore reflect differences in how respondents evaluate the credibility of the reviews they encounter, rather than a uniform response to online content.

Enthusiasm to visit the Rota das Águas obtained the highest mean and lowest dispersion ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.97$, 83% agreement), demonstrating homogeneity in responses and suggesting that the strategies adopted so far have sparked real interest. Reading detailed information presented a mean of 3.77 ($SD = 1.34$, 65% agreement), showing that many participants have a habit of seeking detailed information before deciding on a destination. Casual learning through videos and posts obtained a mean of 3.76 ($SD = 1.28$, 65% agreement), indicating that content consumed casually also contributes to forming the decision.

The results obtained in this research highlight the leading role of digital platforms in the decision-making process of tourists considering the Rota das Águas as a tourist destination in Porto Velho. Contemporary tourist behavior is deeply rooted in the active search for information in digital environments, which is a key point in how tourists organize and experience their trips. The analysis of the statements indicates that most respondents show familiarity with the destination and reveal a notable level of enthusiasm when planning a visit, indicating that, partially, the adopted strategies have been effective, especially regarding the destination's presence on social networks and other digital media.

However, even in this scenario of relative engagement, the data also point out critical weaknesses. The information currently available about the attractions of the Rota das Águas may not be perceived as sufficient in quality, depth and consistency, as suggested by the high variability of responses in statement related to search ease and the detailing of online content (e.g., ease of finding information, $SD = 1.25$; reading detailed information, $SD = 1.34$). Although 78% of participants state that digital platforms make choosing the destination more accessible, responses show some divergence regarding the clarity and reliability of this information. This points to a potential gap between finding the content and actually understanding what the destination has to offer.

This perception points to a central challenge for tourism marketing: ensuring that digital presence is accompanied by truly qualified content. As Serra, Morais, and Cunha (2020) emphasize, we are in the "age of search," where a lack of relevant information, attractive images, and interactive resources can cause a destination to go unnoticed by the connected tourist. In this sense, although the data show that videos, posts, and digital reviews strongly influence user decisions, as evidenced by the high averages in corresponding statements, current content still does not seem to efficiently reach all audiences. This finding is consistent with previous studies that highlight the central role of user-generated content and is shaping destination image and travel intentions (Corrêa & Gosling, 2023; Mohammed et al., 2023).

The responses show a certain diversity of perceptions, given that while some tourists demonstrate a high level of connection and engagement with digital media, others still feel their needs are not fully met by current strategies. This highlights that tourism marketing must consider the different profiles of visitors, including those who need more complete information or visual resources to make their decisions. Because of this, contents that, beyond the image, manage to transmit the cultural, symbolic, and emotional value of the destination stand out.

Furthermore, according to the data, the influence of social networks and user-generated content acts decisively in the tourist's persuasion process, reinforcing the logic of value co-creation and trust in peers as suggested by Kotler et al. (2017) elements that replace traditional forms of advertising persuasion. Thus, the digital presence of the Rota das Águas must go beyond simple institutional dissemination; it is important to incorporate influencer marketing practices, engaging stories, and active participation from online communities, which may include partnerships with local influencers, interactive campaigns, and the valorization of spontaneous content produced by visitors themselves.

Another relevant aspect is the strength of emotional engagement evidenced in the assertion about tourists' enthusiasm for the Rota das Águas, which obtained the highest levels of agreement and lowest dispersion ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.97$). This demonstrates the affective and symbolic potential of the destination, serving as a significant competitive advantage in a market full of options. However, for this enthusiasm to effectively convert into visits and loyalty, expectations created on social networks must be matched by a clear, informative digital experience that facilitates decision-making, since, as highlighted by Stankevich (2017), choices in tourism are not solely rational, but strongly tied to emotions, symbols, and stories.

The low visibility of some tourist spots on the Rota das Águas, evidenced in the graph of the most visited destinations, demonstrates a weakness in the destination's promotion strategy. Some resorts are barely mentioned, indicating they are not yet well-integrated into online searches and shares, which could be caused by low activity on social networks or even a lack of incentives for visitors themselves to create and share content about their experiences. Therefore, investing in actions such as search engine optimization, developing institutional videos, and using digital games and dynamics to engage the public can help increase visibility and attract more people to these lesser-known places.

In summary, the results show that, although digital platforms already play an important role in tourists' relationships with the Rota das Águas, their impact could be even greater if more effective online promotion and engagement strategies were adopted. The online presence of the destination still lacks more comprehensive information, higher interaction, and targeting that better serves different types of audiences, highlighting important challenges in how the destination is being perceived and explored online, indicating there are still gaps to be filled so that digital influence can consolidate itself in a more effective and comprehensive way.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand how digital platforms impact consumer behavior in the decision-making process when choosing the Rota das Águas as a tourist destination in Porto Velho/RO. Through data collection and analysis, it was possible not only to achieve the proposed objectives but also to highlight central elements of this influence.

The results indicate that behavioral and psychological factors, such as personal motivations, perceptions, and third-party recommendations, carry significant weight in consumers' destination choices. Furthermore, the data demonstrate that although the Rota das Águas is still largely unexplored by mass tourism, there is a receptive audience, especially among the young and digitally connected, which can be reached through strategic campaigns on social networks. In this scenario, the power of digital platforms is evident not only for attracting external visitors but primarily for fostering proximity tourism and local leisure, engaging the Porto Velho community itself to consume and value their territory.

These findings advance the literature on digital tourism and tourists' decision-making processes by providing original empirical evidence on how audiovisual content and online reviews shape destination choice in an under-researched context, namely an emerging tourist route in the Brazilian Amazon. By empirically testing the Integrative Model of Tourists' Informa-

tion Search Behavior in this setting, the study extends the application of this theoretical framework beyond the contexts in which it has been predominantly examined.

Based on the analysis of the data, some suggestions can be offered to strengthen the digital promotion of the destination itself, the Rota das Águas. Although no specific item of the questionnaire directly assessed influencer marketing, the high influence attributed by respondents to audiovisual content and online reviews suggests that strategies combining visual and emotional aspects of the tourism experience, including partnerships with local content creators, could reinforce the destination's visibility. Similarly, the findings point to the relevance of segmented, experience-oriented communication adapted to different traveler profiles. These suggestions, however, should be understood as practical implications derived from the analysis rather than as findings directly measured by the research instrument.

In light of these findings, it is suggested that the public sector, in coordination with private enterprise, strengthen the promotion of the destination itself on digital media, through campaigns and attractive audiovisual materials. It should be noted that the public sector is responsible for promoting the destination as a whole, whereas the promotion of individual accommodations and establishments falls primarily to the private sector. In this regard, public actions aimed at reducing the tax burden on the accommodation sector could favor improvements in these establishments, including their digital marketing communication.

It is important to acknowledge the methodological limitations of this study. Given the non-probabilistic convenience sampling strategy, the findings cannot be statistically generalized to the broader population and should be interpreted as representative of the studied sample, providing exploratory insights into the phenomenon under investigation. For future research, it is suggested to investigate the direct impact of campaigns involving local influencers and the perception of tourists who have already visited the Route, so that it is possible to evaluate the degree of satisfaction and the factors that most impacted their experience, aiming to expand knowledge on local tourism and provide practical insights for public and private managers to strengthen marketing and management strategies for the destinations comprising the Rota das Águas.

It is concluded, therefore, that a well-structured digital presence is a key factor for strengthening sustainable tourism in the region. The study contributes to the field of Administration by highlighting the importance of strategic marketing in the promotion of emerging tourist destinations and reinforces the need for clear, segmented, and experience-oriented communication for sustainable regional development. It is hoped that the reflections presented here serve as a basis for new actions to foster regional tourism and for the sustainable development of the sector in the capital of Rondônia.

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