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WOM antecedents of city residents:
differences between men and women

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Abstract

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism has reduced the flow of visitors to cities, paralyzing what was a growing sector in recent years. Currently, cities urgently need to attract tourists to their territories. In this dissemination of cities, the role of citizens residing in cities cannot be neglected since, through their word of mouth (WOM), they promote their cities' experiences, infrastructure, and atmosphere. However, the WOM of cities differs between men and women.

In this context, our study aimed to explore the factors that influence WOM by men and women residing in cities, identifying that infrastructure, atmosphere, and perceived psychological well-being play an essential role in this influence.

Thus, this cross-sectional study obtained data through a questionnaire that resulted in a sample consisting of 428 individuals. The hypothesis test was carried out using SMART PLS software and identified that infrastructure, atmosphere, and perceived psychological well-being positively influence citizens' WOM. In this context, our research contributes to those responsible for cities to develop actions, with their citizens, with the aim of disseminating their heritage and encouraging tourists to visit the territories through them.

Keywords: Infrastructures, Wellness, Word of Mouth, Residents, Tourism

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1. Introduction

The theme of quality of life has aroused a growing interest in the academy; several studies have been developed either on the subject of public management, in terms of being social, lacking further development (Cuadrado-Ballesteros, Mordán, & García-Sánchez, 2014). "Municipalities have a growing role in sustainable development and promoting citizens' quality of life (Burrett, 2009, p.155). Mohseni (2020) works on charitable smart cities, where cities benefit from various facilities and opportunities. This way, when residents feel satisfied with the city's facilities and opportunities, they will have a positive attitude towards tourism. Through WOM, residents help promote (e.g., Ribeiro, Oom do Valle, & Silva, 2013) and create the destination image (Bornhorst, Ritchie, & Sheehan, 2009). This study aims to understand the factors (infrastructure, atmosphere, and perceived psychological well-being) that influence WOM in men and women residing in cities.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Quality of life for residents

The concept of quality of life is complex and involves several subjective and objective indicators (Sirgy, 2001). The quality of the built social infrastructure influences the quality of life, being able to meet the needs of residents, and affect social well-being (Vaznoniene, 2015) in the built environment, being strongly connected with social sustainability (Grum & Grum, 2020).). In addition to built infrastructure, social infrastructure also includes public services such as education, health, maintenance, postal services, firefighting services, and other public services (Atkociuniene, Vaznoniene & Pakeltiene, 2015).

González, Carcaba, Ventura, and Garcia (2011) analyzed the quality of life of the most prominent Spanish municipalities, concluding that the factors that condition a better quality of life are related to living conditions, namely education, health facilities and culture, pollution and crime, but also population density, growth and aging.

Węziak-Białowolska (2016) analyzed aspects of the quality of urban life in European cities, realizing that satisfaction or dissatisfaction with life in a city depends on public transport, cultural facilities, availability of points of sale, green spaces, air quality, people's reliability, public administration, and administrative efficiency, being these factors motivating some dissatisfaction. On the other hand, the factors most linked to satisfaction with life in the city are safety and place of residence.

Giannico, Spano, Elia, D'Este, Sanesi, and Lafortezza (2021) analyzed the relationship between green spaces in cities and the quality of life perceived by citizens, environment, social inclusion, and urban management in European cities, considering that there are benefits and an influence of these green spaces on the health and well-being of citizens, improving their quality of life. Farrokhian, and Mayedzadeh, (2020) also point out that the increase and improvement of green spaces in the city bring significant improvements to overall higher quality of life for residents. Another important factor concerns the perception of the celebratory atmosphere in the city that increases the subjective well-being of the residents of the host city. Stefansdottir (2018) adds that the atmospheric characteristics of different locations influence residents' perception of quality of life.

In addition to the city's infrastructure and atmosphere, Burret (2009) adds that municipalities need better means to plan, manage and involve the community, demonstrating transparency and responsibility towards citizens. In this way, the city's communication also affects the residents' quality of life. "The growing demand for transparency has recently fostered greater openness within public administrations. Considered an essential tool of good management, transparency helps to reinforce the authorities' perception of legitimacy" (Keuffer & Mabillard, 2020, p. 782). For Keuffer and Mabillard (2020), municipalities are more open, transparent, and closer to the population, with more proactive dissemination of information, reducing information asymmetry and conditioning the quality of interactions between the various actors and the quality of life of those involved residents. The study by Jurowski and Brown (2001) points out that the involvement of residents with the city leads to a more favorable assessment of the quality of life. In this sense, cities and those responsible for their management have a crucial responsibility in how residents look at, live, and experience the city. Residents' quality of life and how they promote the city.

In this sense, our study proposes the following research hypotheses:

H1: City communication influences the psychological well-being of residents;
H2: The atmosphere of the city influences the psychological well-being of the residents;
H3: City infrastructures influence the psychological well-being of residents.

2.2. Word of Mouth (WOM)

WOM has been studied since the 1960s in marketing (Arndt, 1967) and is defined in various ways. Litvin et al. (2008, p. 459) described WOM as "communication between consumers about a product, service or company whose sources are independent of commercial influence." With the advancement of the internet, personal interactions also began to be reflected online, giving rise to eWOM (“word of mouth" or "word of mouse"). In a highly competitive industry such as tourism, using WOM has brought critical competitive advantages to destination brands (Litvin et al., 2008). According to Baloglu and McCleary (1999), WOM to friends or colleagues is the essential source for creating tourist images of destinations. However, residents also play a leading

role in this process. Their attitudes towards tourism help in the promotion (e.g., Ribeiro, Oom do Valle, & Silva, 2013) and creation of the destination image (Bornhorst, Ritchie, & Sheehan, 2009), influencing the visitors' experience (Gursoy et al. 2009; Wang & Xu 2015). Residents can also be tourists (Franklin & Crang, 2001), as they visit places and vacation in the regions close to where they live (Singh & Krakover, 2015).

Residents' support for tourism generates even more tourism (López et al., 2018). The communication carried out by cities has an increasingly decisive role in influencing tourist behavior. In this context, our study proposes the following research hypothesis:

H4: City communication influences word of mouth performed by residents.

Residents' support for tourism often results from the perception of socio-economic and environmental benefits resulting from tourism that affect their lives and attitudes (Jaafar et al., 2015). On the one hand, if the effects are positive, this will influence the positive WOM of residents (Lopez et al., 2018). Thus, it is important to involve residents in planning tourism practices that affect their quality of life (Malek & Costa, 2014) for the successful development of the destination brand (Eshuis, Klijn, & Braun, 2014). On the other hand, WOM is also influenced by the destination image (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011) and by the attachment to the place (place attachment) that affects the behavior of residents (Chen & Dwyer, 2018). Residents' perception of the place is a credible form of information that helps to reduce the risk of purchasing the service and increases the notoriety of the place (Confente 2015), which makes WOM an increasingly influential factor in choosing the destination (Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

In this way, destinations should seek to develop marketing strategies that enhance positive WOM through residents and improve their quality of life, namely in the psychological dimension. In this sense, we propose to study the following research hypothesis: H5: Psychological well-being influences residents' word of mouth.

Thus, through the deduction of hypotheses, we propose to study the following conceptual model (figure 1):

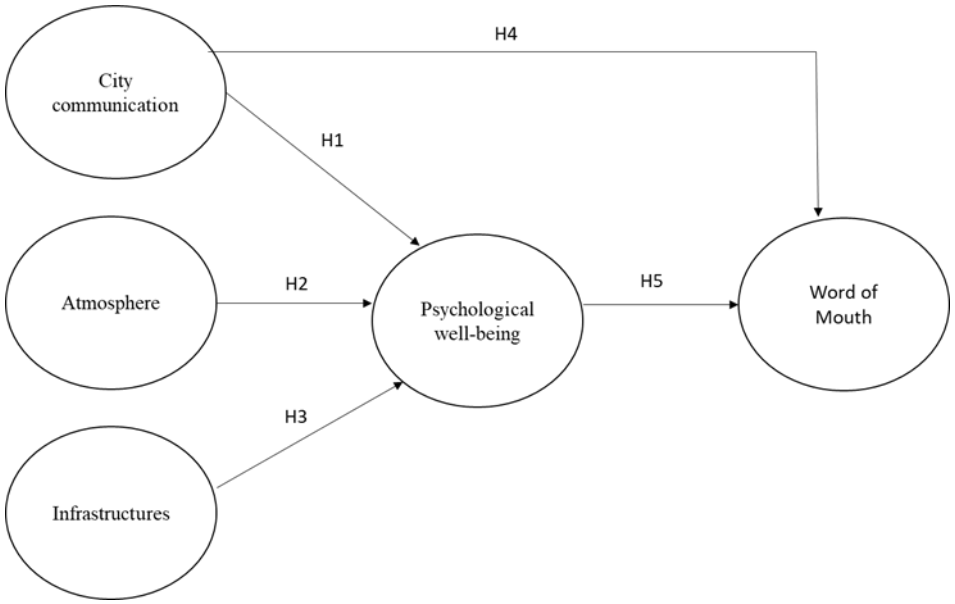

Figure 1 - Conceptual Model

3. Methodology

In order to validate the proposed conceptual model, we chose residents in Portugal as the population. Sampling was non-probabilistic for convenience, and data collection was conducted online between March and June 2020. The cross-sectional study presented here had as its unit of analysis a sample of 428 individuals whose characterization is shown in table 1.

Table 1 - Sample characterization

Variable	Category	N	%
Gender	Female	266	62,1
	Male	162	37,9
Age	< 20 years	57	13,3
	20 to 29 years	186	43,5
	30 to 39 years	44	10,3
	40 to 49 years	71	16,6
	50 to 59 years	36	8,4
	60 to 69 years	22	5,1
	> 70 years	12	2,8
Academic qualifications	Basic education	56	13,1
	High school	163	38,1
	Higher education	209	48,8

The research was carried out through a self-administered questionnaire by the participants. To measure the constructs, we adapted scales used by other authors. Thus, we adapted the scales by Gómez et al. (2015) for the infrastructure and the atmosphere construct. The items referring to the city's marketing communication construct were adopted from Węziak-Białowolska (2016), and for the psychological well-being construct, we used the scale presented by Macke et al. (2018). The items adopted for word of mouth were adapted from Ruiz-Mafe et al. (2018). In order to standardize the measurement scales, the investigation used 7-point Likert scales, ranging from (1) totally disagree to (7) totally agree.

4. Results

The results of this study were estimated through partial least squares estimation (PLS-SEM - Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modeling). This estimation method is suitable for exploratory research and does not require data normality to be observed (Hair et al., 2016). Data analysis via PLS-SEM is performed in two steps. First, we analyzed the reliability and validity of the measurement model, and second, we analyzed the relationships between the constructs as Hair et al. (2016) suggested. The PLS-SEM algorithm was run on SMART PLS v3.3.2 software (Ringle et al., 2015).

4.1. Common Method Bias

Due to the nature of the answers obtained and given that they could present some bias by the common method (Common Method Bias), we performed previous analyzes as recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003). Thus, we performed Harman's single factor test, where the first factor represented 38.76% of the total variance. This value is below the threshold value of 50%, according to Podsakoff et al. (2003) recommend. Furthermore, we carried out successive analyzes of the possible existence of multicollinearity through the analysis of the VIF indicator (Variance Inflator Factor). In this analysis, we obtained VIF values (Table 2) between 1.404 and 2.854. These values are below the threshold value (VIF<5). In this context, bias by the common method does not appear to be a problem.

4.2 Measurement Model: Validity and Reliability

For the analysis of the validity and reliability of the measurement model, the research obtained the values indicated in table 3, which show that the average variance extracted (VEM) (with values in the range between 0.547 and 0.811) and the composite reliability (F.C.) (with values in the range between 0.877 and 0.928) is above the limit values (VEM>0.5; C.R.>0.7) (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Additionally, we found that Cronbach's α values (with values in the range between 0.834 and 0.886) and rho_A values (with values in the range between 0.854 and 0.935) are also above the minimum limits suggested by the literature (α >0.7; Rho_A > 0.7) (Hair et al., 2016).

Our study found that the standardized factor loadings are above the threshold value (λ >0.7) as recommended by Chin (1998).

Table 2 – VIF Coefficients, Means, and Standard Deviations of Items

Items	VIF	Mean (Male)	Standard deviation (Male)	Mean (Female)	Standard deviation (Female)
ATM1	2,434	4,74	1,326	4,92	1,325
ATM2	2,854	4,43	1,409	4,63	1,360
ATM3	2,439	4,60	1,353	4,68	1,397
BP1	1,986	5,22	1,211	5,32	1,334
BP2	2,404	5,33	1,323	5,66	1,294
BP3	2,374	4,96	1,584	5,12	1,629
COM1	2,325	5,13	1,343	5,33	1,316
COM2	2,453	4,86	1,482	5,05	1,399
COM3	2,201	5,61	1,296	5,52	1,425
I1	1,404	5,18	1,304	5,30	1,351
I2	1,552	5,40	1,288	5,61	1,193
I3	1,638	5,03	1,429	5,12	1,359
I4	2,184	4,70	1,462	4,85	1,323
I5	1,905	4,83	1,306	5,05	1,256
I6	1,760	5,14	1,328	5,21	1,316
WOM1	2,129	4,81	1,399	4,98	1,379
WOM2	2,489	4,90	1,336	5,00	1,318
WOM3	1,889	4,74	1,326	4,92	1,325

Notes: VIF=Variance Inflactor Factor; ATM=Atmosphere; BP=Psychological Well Being; COM=Communication; INFRA=Infraestructure; WOM = Word of Mouth

Table 3 – Reliability and Validity of Constructs

	Cronbach α	rho_A	CR	AVE
ATM	0,886	0,935	0,928	0,811
BP	0,863	0,865	0,916	0,785
COM	0,871	0,874	0,921	0,795
INFRA	0,834	0,866	0,877	0,547
WOM	0,851	0,854	0,910	0,771

Note: CR= Composite Reliability; AVE= Average Extracted Variance; ATM= Atmosphere; BP= Psychological well being; COM=Communication; INFRA=Infraestructure; WOM = Word of Mouth

In the expectation of verifying the validity of the measurement model, we analyzed the discriminant validity through the three methods provided by the SMART PLS software: Fornell and Larcker criterion (1981), cross-load analysis, and analysis of the Heterotrait-Monotrait correlation ratio (Henseler et al., 2015).

Thus, our analysis started by verifying the criterion of Fornell and Larcker (1981) and, through the results obtained (table 4), we confirmed that the interconstruction correlations are lower than the values of the square root of the extracted mean-variance.

Second, we observed discriminant validity using the cross-loading criterion (Henseler et al., 2015). Table 5 shows that the comparison of the values of standardized factor loadings (marked in bold) of each indicator is, in all cases, superior to the crossed loads concerning the remaining constructs.

In the third discriminant analysis, we analyzed the Heterotrait-Monotrait Correlation Ratio (Henseler et al., 2015). The values obtained (Table 6) confirm that the interconstruct Heterotrait-Monotrait correlations are below the maximum value suggested by the literature (HTMT<0.9) (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 4 – Discriminant Validity: Fornell and Larcker Criteria

	ATM	BP	COM	INFRA
ATM	0,901			
BP	0,456	0,886		
COM	0,163	0,441	0,892	
INFRA	0,174	0,473	0,588	0,739
WOM	0,295	0,531	0,515	0,538

Notes: ATM= Atmosphere; BP= Psychological well-being; COM=Communication; INFRA= Infrastructure; WOM = Word of Mouth; all correlations are significant (p<0.01); on the diagonal are presented the square roots of the average variances extracted from the constructs.

Table 5 –Discriminating Validity: Cross Loadings

	ATM	BP	COM	INFRA	WOM
ATM1	**0,868**	0,311	0,077	0,089	0,215
ATM2	**0,910**	0,383	0,073	0,091	0,192
ATM3	**0,923**	0,498	0,247	0,252	0,356
BP1	0,426	**0,863**	0,368	0,379	0,439
BP2	0,429	**0,897**	0,383	0,421	0,455
BP3	0,360	**0,898**	0,421	0,453	0,515
COM1	0,137	0,383	**0,891**	0,533	0,469
COM2	0,091	0,371	**0,893**	0,501	0,429
COM3	0,201	0,423	**0,891**	0,538	0,477
I1	-0,080	0,194	0,331	**0,602**	0,331
I2	0,027	0,299	0,351	**0,668**	0,351
I3	0,155	0,318	0,439	**0,735**	0,436
I4	0,129	0,388	0,548	**0,840**	0,472
I5	0,192	0,476	0,501	**0,806**	0,387
I6	0,244	0,329	0,388	**0,759**	0,415
WOM1	0,228	0,482	0,424	0,414	**0,874**
WOM2	0,256	0,476	0,493	0,490	**0,908**
WOM3	0,294	0,440	0,438	0,512	**0,851**

Notes: ATM= Atmosphere; BP= Psychological well being; COM= Communication; INFRA= Infraestructure; WOM = Word of Mouth

Table 6 – Discriminant Validity: Ratio of Heterotrait-Monotrait Correlations

	ATM	BP	COM	INFRA	WOM
ATM					
BP	0,505				
COM	0,164	0,507			
INFRA	0,205	0,531	0,675		
WOM	0,295	0,531	0,515	0,538	

Notes: ATM= Atmosphere; BP= Psychological well being; COM= Communication; INFRA= Infraestructure; WOM = Word of Mouth

4.3 Results of the Structural Model: Hypothesis Test

Hoping to explore significant differences existing in the conceptual model between male and female individuals, we chose to create two distinct groups: Male Gender (N=162) and Female Gender (N=266).

In order to analyze the structural model globally, we observed the R2 values of the endogenous variables present in our conceptual model. Thus, the values in table 7 demonstrate that, although the explanation of the variable psychological well-being is higher in female individuals, the description of the word-of-mouth variable by the other variables in the model is higher in the group made up of individuals from the male gender.

Table 7 – Regression Coefficient

construct	R^2 (Male)	R^2 (Female)
BP	0,345	0,433
WOM	0,434	0,343

Notas: BP= Psychological well-being; WOM = Word of Mouth

Then, we evaluated the hypothesis test results by considering the coefficients of each trajectory present in the model, applying the bootstrapping procedure with 5000 subsamples. The results obtained for the group consisting of male individuals are presented in table 8, and the results obtained for the group consisting of female individuals are shown in table 9.

Indirect Effects

In addition to the research hypotheses studied, we found indirect effects between the constructs during the study since the PLS-SEM estimation allows us to evaluate the indirect effects present in the model. Thus, we present the indirect effects in the model for the group of male individuals (table 10) and the group of female individuals (table 11).

Table 8 – Structural Model (Male N=162)

Hypothesis	Path	β	t values	p values	Confidence Interval (95%) Inferior	superior	f^2
H1	COM → BP	0,088	0,921	0,357	-0,100	0,274	0,007
H2	ATM → BP	0,340	5,294	0,000	0,204	0,454	0,162
H3	INFRA → BP	0,334	4,302	0,000	0,160	0,467	0,098
H4	COM → WOM	0,445	5,987	0,000	0,282	0,578	0,303
H5	BP → WOM	0,351	5,187	0,000	0,216	0,481	0,188

Notas: β= Standardized trajectory coefficients; ATM= Atmosphere; BP= Psychological well being; COM= Communication; INFRA= Infraestructure; WOM = Word of Mouth; f^2 = effect size

Table 9 – Structural Model (Female N=266)

Hypothesis	Path	β	*t* values	*p* values	Confidence Interval (95%) Inferior	superior	f^2
H1	COM → BP	0,281	5,021	0,000	0,173	0,391	0,096
H2	ATM → BP	0,394	7,035	0,000	0,280	0,498	0,273
H3	INFRA → BP	0,270	4,607	0,000	0,145	0,377	0,089
H4	COM → WOM	0,282	4,616	0,000	0,162	0,400	0,094
H5	BP → WOM	0,401	6,149	0,000	0,260	0,518	0,190

Notas: β= Standardized trajectory coefficients; ATM= Atmosphere; BP= Psychological well being; COM= Communication; INFRA= Infraestructure; WOM = Word of Mouth; f^2 = effect size

Table 10 – Indirect effects (Male N=162)

Path	β	*t* values	*p* values	Confidence Interval (95%) Inferior	superior
COM → WOM	0,031	0,850	0,396	-0,029	0,115
ATM → WOM	0,119	3,620	0,000	0,062	0,189
INFRA → WOM	0,117	3,278	0,001	0,056	0,192

Notas: β= Standardized trajectory coefficients; ATM=Atmosphere; BP= Psychological well being; COM= Communication; INFRA= Infraestructure; WOM = Word of Mouth

Table 11 – Indirect effects (Female N=266)

Path	β	*t* values	*p* values	Confidence Interval (95%) Inferior	superior
COM → WOM	0,113	4,192	0,000	0,066	0,173
ATM → WOM	0,158	4,583	0,000	0,097	0,231
INFRA → WOM	0,108	3,297	0,001	0,050	0,176

Notas: β= Standardized trajectory coefficients; ATM= Atmosphere; BP= Psychological well being; COM=Communication; INFRA=Infraestructure; WOM = Word of Mouth;

5. Discussion and conclusions

To study the factors influencing word of mouth by the residents of the cities, we identified that the marketing communication of the city, the atmosphere of the territory, and its infrastructures influence the well-being of the residents and, consequently, the word of mouth of the residents.

To test the research hypotheses, we evaluated the structural coefficients (β) and the significance of each relationship using the Student's t-value and p-value. Furthermore, in each relationship found, we calculated the effect size value (f 2). According to Hair et al. (2016) the f 2 values represent, depending on the value presented, weak effects between the independent variables (f 2 ≤ 0.15), average effects (0.15 < f 2 < 0.35) or substantial effects (f 2 ≥ 0 .35).

In the analysis of hypothesis H1, the role of city marketing communication in explaining the psychological dimension of subjective well-being is not clear. If, on the one hand, we found that, in male individuals, the effects are non-existent, on the other hand, in the group made up of female individuals, the effects exist; they are significant although they are considered weak. Although the H1 hypothesis is not supported for the male subjects, it was statistically significant for the female group.

In the hypothesis test carried out on the relationship between the atmosphere of the territory and the psychological well-being of individuals, our study found that the effects in both groups (male and female) are similar. In this sense, we conclude that the atmosphere of the place decisively influences the psychological well-being of the groups of individuals analyzed. However, the effects appear to be stronger in the female group. Thus, we consider that hypothesis H2 was supported by our study in both groups of individuals.

Hypothesis H3 is supported by our study, although the existing effects are considered weak in both groups. Since the infrastructure construct is reflected in leisure activities, we consider that these results are due to items that reflect the concept of Gómez, Lopez, and Molina (2015). Individuals residing in cities may not use these infrastructures, which leads to the local infrastructures being of little significance in the psychological well-being of individuals. Another explanation we found for the weak effects of infrastructure on the psychological well-being of individuals is related to the fact that the minimum infrastructure a city should have, so the lack of such infrastructure in cities can reduce the well-being of individuals. Still, its existence does not necessarily imply greater well-being, namely at the psychological level.

Hypothesis H4 shows differences in analysis in comparing the two groups analyzed. In the study of male individuals, we found that the city's marketing communication significantly influences word of mouth made by individuals. However, in females, the significant effects are considered weak. Despite this, we assume that the study supports hypothesis H4. In testing hypothesis H5, we considered that the results in both groups are similar. Based on the results, we consider that the well-being of individuals living in cities influences their word of mouth. In this context, hypothesis H5 is supported in both groups.

6. Theoretical and Practical Contributions

Thus, in our study, we realized that the atmosphere and infrastructure of cities have relevant effects on the psychological well-being of individuals. Consequently, through indirect effects, our study also concludes that the atmosphere and infrastructure of cities influence word of mouth in both male and female individuals. This study also reveals that marketing communication by cities affects word of mouth differently. On the one hand, in males, the effects of communication in cities only directly influence word of mouth, with no indirect effects through psychological well-being. In the female group, word of mouth is directly affected by the communication of cities and indirectly through individuals' well-being.

Thus, we consider that there are practical contributions that emerge from the realization of this study. In this way, we believe that cities should have infrastructures that promote the well-being of the resident population through the existence of places where opportunities arise for individuals to spend their free time. In addition, we also consider that the managers of these cities should consider the atmosphere of cities. Thus, creating a calm and relaxing city provides greater well-being and, consequently, word of mouth dissemination of the city. Although the communication of cities has had different conclusions for the groups studied in this investigation, we consider that communication directly or indirectly influences word of mouth. Thus, we suggest that cities promote their best to their residents, making the necessary publicity, for example, for existing events.

7. Limitations and Future Suggestions

During this study, we found some limitations that may have contributed to the results presented. In this sense, we consider that the sample is mainly made up of individuals under 30 years of age may have been a limitation. Thus, we suggest that other samples be investigated. Our study only considered the psychological dimension of well-being. We believe investigating a conceptual model that includes physical well-being will have exciting results in this sense.

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