

Exploring critical aspects of the contemporary family tourism experience: A qualitative approach from the LGBTQ+ influencers' perspective

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Objectives | The role of social media and influencers is becoming a significant research focus for tourism and hospitality academics (Femenia-Serra, Gretzel & Alzua-Sorzabal, 2022; Pop, Săplăcan, Dabija, & Alt, 2022; Xie et al., 2023). At the same time, family travel retains an important market share in the travel industry but surprisingly the relative literature is not as extensive as one would expect. Gursoy (1999) extended the lens of tourism applications of the family life-cycle concept to include non-traditional families (e.g., cohabiting couples, never married individuals with children, widows) and his findings have been corroborated by ensuing studies (Hong et al., 2005; Lin & Lehto, 2006). Moreover, Nanda, Hu & Bai (2007) introduced the 'type of family' as an important determinant of family decision-making of vacation purchases. In that vein, Lucena, Jarvis & Weeden (2018) are among the few scholars who attempted to illuminate holiday motivations and destination choices of same-sex parented families.

Within this context, it would be purposeful to gain a deeper understanding of LGBTQ+ families' influences in their decision-making regarding family travel and critical aspects/challenges of the LGBTQ+ family tourist experience by focusing on relevant influencers' content. This exploratory study aims to illuminate the modern family tourism experience from a social media perspective and through a less-explored lens – that of LGBTQ+ families – by shedding light on the following research questions:

- How can special needs of LGBTQ+ family travellers be identified through social media content?
- How is the family travel experience structured through the lens of LGBTQ+ family travellers?
- Which are the elements of the tourism experience and aspects of destinations that are considered important for the LGBTQ+ family traveller?

Methodology | Qualitative methods and more precisely content analysis were used for this exploratory study. The content of a UK LGBTQ+ family travel blog with more than 2 million annual

readers served as the basis for this investigation. Apart from their blog named "Inside Our Suitcase", the same-sex family is popular in Facebook & Instagram and YouTube with thousands of followers and members. Content analysis, based on 21 publicly accessed posts (total of published posts focusing on experiencing out-of-home destinations) and 30,000 words describing LGBTQ+ family experiences, and Leximancer software were used to provide insights and answers to the research questions.

Main Results and Contributions | Content analysis showed that the main pillar-concept of the content was the LGBTQ+ identity and its relevance to each aspect of the tourism experience. Moreover, spatial aspects of the experience, such as details about the hotel, the island, the views, etc., were included while practical aspects of the tourism experience were also described, including cost details and detailed explanations-meanings of the descriptions provided. The elements of safety, popularity of choices, LGBTQ+ friendliness and acceptance were deemed important. Dedicated events and venues also acted as significant attractions for these travellers. The tourism experience evolved mainly around the following pillars:

- Social aspects: gay, community, people, couple, discrimination, tourist, history
- Spatial aspects and destination attractions: city, hotel, place, bars, island, event, accommodation, country, centre, beaches, views, bar, 5-star
- Marketing elements for an enriched experience: options, range, spa, luxury, exploration, privacy.

This study contributes to the existing body of tourism behaviour literature by using social media content to gain insights into the way tourist needs and wants diversify in the context of contemporary family forms, such as LGBTQ+ families. These insights are also of practical importance to destination managers, as they suggest areas of intervention at the destination level to become more attractive to this segment.

Limitations | This is an exploratory study aiming to shed light on the tourism behaviour of the LGBTQ+ family traveller based on a relatively limited and multi-sourced social media content. The results are therefore producing preliminary insights and cannot be generalized; more, in-depth research would be valuable for the identification of contemporary trends in family travel behaviour.

Conclusions | LGBTQ+ travellers form a significant prosperous segment that requires proper targeting and marketing strategies on behalf of DMOs and tourism businesses. At the same time, the literature about family travel is relatively scarce while the contemporary LGBTQ+ family travel behavior seems to be a relatively unexplored research area. As the academia and the industry are both focusing on embracing diversity, inclusivity and equity, more studies and insights are

necessary to acquire better knowledge in these fields. The present study underscores the importance of several important factors of the LGBTQ+ family travellers' experience: safety and acceptance, LGBTQ+-friendly environments, privacy, personalized attention, positive attitudes, variety of choices, exploration opportunities, emotional expression, connection to the natural environment and premium offerings. Building on a theoretical basis, the family travel experience through the lens of LGBTQ+ family travellers can be structured on social, spatial and marketing aspects. More research is required to explore in depth the LGBTQ+ family travel behaviour.

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