Photographs in Tourism Destination Management Research in the Post-COVID-19 Era

Argyri Moustaka and Mary Constantoglou

Abstract Main purpose of this paper is to explore how tourist photography in the post-COVID-19 era can contribute by creating experience value in coastal tourism and in destination management. An important reference is made on how the tourist photography contributes to the upgrading of the tourist product of the area and more precisely on a mass tourism destination in Greece, Halkidiki. Further, the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic is studied together with the consequences it generates in the destinations. More specifically, the study undertaken had to answer the following questions: What is the photographic image that tourists form in their minds when visiting Halkidiki? How does a photographic image contribute to a sustainable tourist development? Is there an increase in the display of photos from tourist destinations, in the COVID-19 and in the post-COVID-19 era, due to the greater use of the internet? How influential are photographs for traveling in the post-COVID-19 era? The study took place from March to May 2021 and was undertaken with the use of quantitative methodology. The results of the conducted research show that the creation of photographic images is related to clean and sandy beaches along with natural beauty. In addition, the photographic images can consolidate the tourism of the destination to a satisfactory level. This happens especially nowadays when virtual travel, through images, is boosted due to the pandemic COVID-19. As a general conclusion, photographic images influence the decision for a trip in the post-COVID-19 era.

Keywords Branding · Destination management · Photography · COVID-19 · Decision-making

JEL Classification L83 · Z31 · Z30 · Z32 · Z33 · Z38

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1 Introduction

An important aspect that contributes to tourism is the visual component. Tourists collecting pictures and photography is the mean that leads them to recognize touristic places of interest. Photographing the unusual or unexpected in tourism has been used as a setting to show the conventional character of daily life. Lately, the attention has moved from attempting to capture the unexpected in order to create social bonds between guests and hosts, to travelers at the destination and between travelers and those who haven't visited the destination. An influential factor is social media which link travelers and those who have not traveled and thus the model of networked travel has created (Dinholp & Gretzel, 2016).

The image is separated in cognitive and affective. Personal opinions and perceptions regarding a destination such as landscape, weather, residents, diet, and infrastructure create cognitive images. The feelings of a traveler apropos the advantages and disadvantages of a destination indicate the affective image (Deng & Li, 2018). Emotions like sympathy or antipathy can be generated by photographs (Balomenou & Garrod, 2019). Moreover, photography can be used as a mean to convey ideas and methods which would not have been normally expressed in an oral interview (Balomenou & Garrod, 2016). Taking pictures or observing them can produce feelings of delight, allure or sadness (Deng & Li, 2018).

What is observed is that in developing countries, social and financial prejudices have broken out due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Jamal & Higham, 2021). The COVID-19 virus is extremely contagious and has created chaos on the global economy including the sectors of travel and tourism which have been tremendously damaged. As COVID-19 has influenced the economy and tourism of the world it is mandatory for officials to keep track on recovery among several destinations (Yang et al., accepted).

Along with the arrival of the pandemic COVID-19 feelings such distress and concern are common among tourists but also in the hotel sector. Tourists feel worry and fright regarding the risks on health as a consequence of COVID-19, while the hotel sector experiences the same feelings about the unpredictability the future brings. The fact that both tourists and the tourist sector share the same feelings throughout this existing pandemic is extremely significant as these feelings can create emotional connection between them. As a result, this is vital for the recovery of tourism as this emotional connection can lead tourists to travel when the breakout is over (Hang et al., 2020).

The role of photographs is vital in the link between image destinations (Deng & Li, 2018) and is similarly the mean of changing the unique features of a place to reformations having as target to support a travel destination (Hunter, 2008).

1.1   The Importance of Photography for Tourist Destinations

The significant role of photography as a communicational tool is characterized by its aptitude to impact without seeming to do so. Photographs that seem to shape not only the information but also the vision are travel photographs that are created in an excessive volume. What is understandable is that these photographs regardless their ability to framing and establishing what and how the tourists see, they also shape the tourists' understanding and knowledge of what they say. Common sayings like "the camera does not lie" or "pretty as a postcard" indicate the significance of photography as a norm of worth and judgment in optical attentiveness (Albers & James, 1988).

Photographing is a necessary touristic habit and an exceptional contemporary medium by which individuals create life stories and long-term remembrances. Notably photographs, as a method of graphic descriptions, recommend that people link messages with these objects in connection to their memories through traveling (FeifanXie & Garner, 2009).

The reason why photos are appreciated is that a huge volume of facts is depicted in a picture. Diverse brain procedures are stimulated while using pictures compared to the use only of oral communication. Therefore, it produces diverse types of knowledge that offer contact to contributors' information about common events. Similarly, photographs can help participants to explain their experiences and feelings differently, and offer the potential to overcome the limitations of research methods that rely on oral or written data (Winter & Adu-Ampong, 2021). Consequently, photo-elicitation is regularly accepted as a technique that delivers bigger accuracy and authenticity (Glaw et al., 2017).

Taking a photo of an item that characterizes a specific part of life, contributors pay attention on that part attributing mental and sentimental tones in that procedure (Hatten et al., 2013). As a result, it would be wise to reflect on photograph as an outcome of a naturally personal procedure, expressing the contributor's own perception of truth of the world (Winter & Adu-Ampong, 2021). The experience is defined as fun and engaging by members of photo-elicitation studies (Glaw et al., 2017; Meo, 2010). Diverse explanations can be transferred by a photographic demonstration (Hodgetts et al., 2007a, 2007b). The meaning is produced in a dialectical relationship between the photo and the photographer, and between the photographer and the viewer (Hodgetts et al., 2007a, 2007b).

During the process of photo-making the contributors are urged to think of matters, arguing on "what could not be photographed is as important as what is photographed." This part is important for developing a full perception of an individual's social world (Winter & Adu-Ampong, 2021).

Some places are "made" through photography and act inspirational to the tourists' curiosity. Secondly, taking photos is an indispensable part of the traveler's experience and performance to capture the image of what is worthwhile seeing and to bring the image home as memory trace and evidence (Scarles, 2010; Schänzel & Smith, 2011). Destination Management/Marketing Organizations need to focus on the experiences

gathered and the competitive dimension analysis to achieve the fulfillment of visitors' needs and gain a high level of satisfaction (Constantoglou, 2020). Specifically, DMOs must know travelers' opinions to build their strategy based on actual tourists' recommendations and views (Molinillo et al., 2018) rather than relying on assumed responses.

Therefore, photography has affected the form of the field of tourism which remains an ongoing process mostly in this digital time. Tourism research has narrowed the use of photographs although the relation between photography and tourism is tight (Balomenou & Garrod, 2019).

Park and Kim (2018) detected two main study framings in which tourism photography is frequently used:

Visual demonstration in the creation of destination pictures.

The importance of tourist photography as an amount of the touristic experience.

What is reminded is that besides these two frameworks there is space for further advanced approaches in the usage of photographs in tourism. Furthermore, Balomenou and Garrod (2019) based on these two main frameworks outline three sub-categories related to the active approaches:

(1) Researcher-based content analysis of researcher-found photographs, (2) photo-elicitation based on researcher-found photographs, and (3) photo-elicitation based on participant-generated photographs. Whereas sub-categories (1) and (2) cover researcher-found photographs, e.g., from websites, flyers to travel either a destination image or tourist experiences, the second sub-category uses these already found pictures to draw perceptions from contributors (e.g., tourists, tourism investors).

Nowadays, online pictures are significant players. Online platforms like Flickr, Tumblr, etc., are able to rapidly copy lens and post-processing results to raise a feeling of melancholy, realism (Chopra-Gant, 2016), competence (Prideaux et al., 2018) or self-based ideal and imaginary methods of "being there" (Conti & Heldt Cassel, 2019; Fast et al., 2019), thus performing as a vehicle of utopianism (Maclaran & Brown, 2005).

Likewise, the pictures can contain hashtags, descriptions, and geographical location in order to narrate settings, feelings, and views that may not be obvious from a first look (Abbott et al., 2013) and to relate the pictures to categorized group of posts (Cuomo et al., 2016).

Existing apps focused on photography facilitate the tourist in terms of interpreting, capturing, and articulating relevant details while being in a specific location (Conti & Heldt Cassel, 2019; Lo & McKercher, 2015).

Moreover, the behaviors tourists take and share pictures create a unique, individual way of place making, place estimation, and identity building (Conti & Lexhagen, 2020).

Buhalis (2000), as it refers to Souiden et al. (2017), supports that the image a tourist has of a particular destination before visiting is a determinant factor in his decision-making process. Confirming this view, states that the establishment of a positive destination image determines a place's ability to attract and retain tourists. Thus, the previously held image influences the choice of tourism destinations and

destinations with stronger positive images have a higher likelihood of being selected and revisited (Souiden et al., 2017).

Tourism destination image (TDI), or the overall impression of one place, is one of the most studied areas in tourism literature. To date, empirical examination of TDI has generally employed either structured or unstructured approaches. When analyzing and reporting results of TDI measurements, researchers generally focus on image items with the highest ratings in structured approaches, or the most frequently used words in unstructured approaches, as these represent the widespread and salient image held by tourists. Nevertheless, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) often find such image results merely common sense (Pan & Li, 2011).

Summing-up, it can be said that photographs have been extensively distributed in the tourism economy firstly by the tourists but also as a way to support vacation industry destinations. As Urry recommends, tourism industry would not be in the same shape as it is today without the involvement of photography: both parts are inextricably linked (Balomenou & Garrod, 2019). Consequently, photographs are seen as stimuli to the outcomes of tourism regarding the promotion. The word promotion is explained as convincing customers to buy by triggering their interest while the features of goods are extensively explained (Moustaka & Constantoglou, 2021).

1.2 Creating Emotions by Capturing or Seeing Travel and Tourist Photos

An important distinction of the images refers to cognitive and affective images. Cognitive images are indicated as personal beliefs and awareness about the characteristics of a destination like its scenery, climate, locals, nutrition, transport, buildings, etc. Contrastingly, affective image discusses the person's emotional estimations about the assets and weaknesses of a place and the way it makes them feel (e.g., pleased, fascinated, unhappy, etc.) (Deng & Li, 2018).

Photographs by conveying complex notions and picturing opinions can attain a multi appealing outcome; as a result tourists are photograph consumers not only in an active but also passive way. Photographs and tourists are reciprocally formed by each other. Photography in tourism industry can be categorized into travel and tourist photography. Tourist photography regularly portrays the lifeless characteristics of an image, is introduced in an uninteresting way, the imagination is kept flat and serves in presenting a location. Nonetheless, travel photography is highly interesting. Travel photography illustrates the doubt, the subtle impression, the excellence description, and the delicate uncertainty of a sole instant of a location. The tourist generates an apparent picture of the destination from the photographs taken throughout the expedition and conveys them. Thus, the observation and communication cycle, also known as the interpretive reproduction cycle, is formed (Moustaka & Constantoglou, 2021).

The power of photographs is undeniable. Through the photographs the viewer loses track of thinking: this procedure lasts an instant, the viewer can freeze blurred by the emotional burden of the photograph. The power of some photographs is that they cannot be forgotten: as, for instance, the winner of Pulitzer prize photojournalist Kevin Carter's "Vulture and the Little Girl," taken in 1993 in South Sudan, became symbolic of the fight against hunger and malnourishment, whereas a photograph of a child, drowned during the effort to leave Syria to Greece, lying dead on a Turkish beach in 2015, attained Turkish photographer Nilufer Demir's intention to "express the scream of his silent body" and turned out to be one of the most essential pictures of the existing refugee crisis (Balomenou & Garrod, 2019).

Balomenou and Garrod (2019) specify that Ferdous (2014) claims that problems describing human faces give the impression of nonconcrete and distant as photographs cast an inflexible light on them: they can awaken sentiments that are difficult to overlook. People are responsible of themselves and their actions—or regularly of their ability to ignore—which could have effect on lives around in the world. Photographs are a mean to provoke feelings such as compassion or hostility (Balomenou & Garrod, 2019).

Photographs' function is to capture unique instants (Rakić & Chambers, 2012), interfering in the structure of three-dimensional acts**,** stopping time, and ensuing in stable images. Balomenou and Garrod (2019) refer to Goldstein claiming that these abnormal incentives have the influence to contact and provoke profound emotional responses. Furthermore, the photography permits contributors to express notions and approaches that would not typically be likely using oral interview practices (Balomenou & Garrod, 2016).

Nowadays, the receivers of photographs experience emotions by the usage of online photography. Online photography apps can rapidly imitate lens and post-processing results to adopt a sense of nostalgia, authenticity (Conti & Lexhagen, 2020), competence (Prideaux et al., 2018), or self-based flawless and imaginary techniques of "being there" (Conti & Heldt Cassel, 2019), thus performing as a mean of fantasy. Therefore, tourists are facilitated by the use of online photography apps in interpreting, apprehending, and communicating something rather significant while being present in a particular location compared to themselves and the world in which they exist in by sharing it digitally (Conti & Lexhagen, 2020).

1.3 Appearance of COVID-19. Consequences for Tourist Destinations—Change of Emotions

It is noticed that in developing countries the COVID-19 pandemic has created social and economic discriminations (Jamal & Higham, 2021). Millions of employees in tourism, hospitality, and live shows have been unable to work due to the lockdown and have to endure financial deprivation and debit obligations. Especially tourism workers in countries where the effects of the pandemic have been harsh are the most

exposed. Tourism and its associated industries are key players in the economies of many developing countries. This fact is the main reason to which these industries have been on the center of attention throughout the crisis and moreover these communities that tourism determines them "have now become communities in crisis" (Nepal, 2020). The social well-being and the financial stability of the tourism workers are currently unstable.

As well, the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted different sectors of tourism (Gossling et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2020), ultimately causing the industry to shut down for months. Despite the fact that various efforts have been made since June 2020 to reopen the industry, most sectors continue to struggle and the UNWTO (2020) as indicated in Collins-Kreiner and Ram (2020), has acknowledged tourism as one of the hardest hit industries (Dolnicar & Zare, 2020; Gossling et al., 2020). Crises are regular occurrences in tourism (Dolnicar & Zare, 2020; Gossling et al., 2020). Many destinations are affected by natural and human-made crises and, over the years, have developed tactics and strategies of resilience and mitigation (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). The crisis stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, however, has been different and unique in many ways. Firstly, the decline in travel, hospitality, and tourism has been worldwide (Collins- Kreiner & Ram, 2020). Secondly, the economic collapse has been more dramatic. Thirdly, the ongoing crisis has the potential to cause fundamental modifications in many tourism segments (Dolnicar & Zare, 2020).

The model's application to COVID-19 reflects a decline in tourism demand in response to rising health risk. People who feel more threatened by the coronavirus are more likely to avoid or postpone traveling (Karl et al., 2021).

Moreover, Chien et al. (2017), as referred in Hang et al. (2020), make evident that tourist's feelings such as concern, distress, and nervousness can affect their insights of threats as well. Specifically, is being considered whether and how affective forecasting can lower tourists' perceived travel coronavirus infection risk and influence future travel decision-making. Individuals feeling more exposed to the coronavirus are more probable to delay or stay away from traveling. According to this fact, tendencies associated to COVID-19 have a significant influence on tourist's reactions related to their behavior (Hang et al., 2020).

1.4 Expectations of Tourist Destinations Through the Promotion of Photos After the Pandemic COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic can deeply affect the tourist's emotions and thoughts as well as altering the traveling mode. These intuitions are helpful to comprehend how the tourist's action is formed due to coronavirus. First of all, a study demonstrates that individuals tend to develop a more collective approach rather than individual when they have to face a dangerous virus. Following, a study proved that pathogen menaces lead individuals to avoid gatherings and crowded spaces. Also, a threatening disease stimulates people to reject unfamiliar situations (Zenker & Kock, 2020). Therefore,

individuals might be discouraged to travel throughout a pandemic, so as to achieve a decrease on the risk of contracting the virus or forced to look for technologically non-dangerous alternatives (Zenker et al., 2021).

What is known so far is that the COVID-19 pandemic offered to potential tourists the chance to follow virtual tours and to observe various pictures of travel places (as it is unfeasible for tourists to travel and as a consequence to visit museums or any other places) (Nanni & Ulqinaku, 2020). Virtual reality tools turn out to be a vital platform for tourism companies to sustain their incomes. For instance, several attractions as The Louvre, Guggenheim Museum, Vatican City, Yosemite National Park, and several others give the opportunity to be visited virtually to locked-down worldwide viewers (Itani & Hollebeek, 2021).

The role of photographs was supreme as tourism is considered as an outstandingly optical experience and because photographs narrate anticipated stories regarding a place (Sheungting Lo et al., 2011). Photographs are as well the procedure of collecting, giving form and shaping features of the physical components to reproduce the photographer's personal spiritual images (Pan et al., 2014). Consequently, photography is the proof of showing that a tourist visited a place. Tourists create their travel remembrances and tell their stories by travel photographs (Nikjoo & Bahkshi, 2019).

Photographs are key players in the communication of image destination (Deng & Li, 2018) and are likewise the means of altering the original features of a destination to recreations having as a goal the promotion of a travel destination. They present the natural and cultural assets of a place in the finest light and even recommend the most suitable interactions between tourists and hosts via their representations (Hunter, 2008).

The different ways that tourists taking photos and adding their personal touch and viewpoint is one of the most promising sides of photography. For example, solo travelers take fewer photos compared to people who travel with company or backpackers who gaze upon conservative and shallow comportments of others as for instance older tourists. A propos nationality, Asian travelers together with tourists coming from South and North America have the tendency to take more photos contrary to European citizens (Nikjoo & Bakhshi, 2019).

Despite the fact that travel activities are severely decreased during the pandemic, an increase in visiting selected destinations was noticed when travel limitations were alleviated. Some characteristic travel forms have occurred throughout the pandemic. Destinations centered on the nature, drive-to and local trips are favored by travelers. Moreover, it has been noticed that individuals prefer less trips that include many stops and choose to travel around a single area and discover the surroundings based on this area. This traveling mode is mentioned by Buckley and Westaway (2020), as specified in Miao et al. (2021), whose research designates that open-air regional tourism product is an ongoing process in the post-COVID time (Miao et al., 2021).

As a final point, it is significant to highlight the permanent existence of photos, not only in local travels but also in drive-to places and in nature-focused destinations (Miao et al., 2021). Written texts lose the ability of capturing a landscape, the process of feeling it through smell and hearing; nevertheless, photographs have the ability of

expressing simultaneously multidimensional messages. Through photographs individuals can communicate things effortlessly, bearing in mind that many people lack the ability of expressing themselves orally (Balomenou & Garrod, 2019).

2 Case Study Area

Halkidiki is situated in the Northern part of Greece and has a total population of 110,593 inhabitants according to the National Census data of 2019.

Halkidiki is one of the oldest tourist destinations of the country. The area of Halkidiki offers a variety of images to the visitors. The peninsula is famous for its long and sandy beaches, but also its mountain, the Holomondos. The green forests in combination with the blue sea, lead to a color combination that the visitor hardly forgets.

Source Google Earth (2021)

The table below shows the capacity of hotels in the area for the year 2020. As shown, most hotels have **1***, while the number of hotels decreases as the star rating increases. The opposite happens with the case of hotel rooms. The larger the hotel is, the more rooms it has. Thus, hotels **5*** have the most rooms and those with **1***, the fewest. The same goes for hotel beds. Hotels with **5*** have the most beds. The number of beds in hotels is decreasing, descending star category.

Hotel capacity 2020						
	5*	4*	3*	2*	1*	Total
Hotels	38	62	98	147	168	513
Rooms	6734	6349	4229	3694	3634	24,640
Beds	14,552	12,881	8515	7229	7011	50,188

Source Hellenic Champer of Hotels (2021)

In terms of international arrivals, one observes a gradual increase between the years 2014 and 2019. The largest increase in visitors is observed between the years 2014 and 2015, as well as the years 2017 and 2018. Regarding national arrivals, there is clearly an increase between the years 2014 and 2016, followed by a decline in the period 2016 and 2017. After the decline, there is a large increase in the period 2017–2018 and finally a smaller decrease in the years 2018–2019.

Finally, with the international overnight stays, there is a decrease in the periods 2014–2015 and 2015–2016. This is followed by an increase in overnight stays in the periods 2016–2017 and 2017–2018. In the last period 2018–2019, there is a slight decrease in overnight stays. The largest increase is noted in the years 2016–2017 and the smallest decrease in the period 2018–2019.

In the national overnight stays, there is an increase in the periods 2014–2015 and 2015–2016. This is followed by a decrease in overnight stays in the periods 2016–2017. In the period 2017–2018, there is a large increase in overnight stays and in the period 2018–2019 a small decrease in overnight stays.

Arrivals and overnight stays in hotels 2014–2019								
		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Change (%)
Arrivals	International	566.869	622.691	623.731	675.648	893.327	897.195	58
	National	113.433	127.670	130.846	125.645	185.771	180.519	59
Overnight stays	International	3.952966	3.920566	3.838574	4.247573	5.052166	5.048484	28
	National	431.312	473.306	486.052	464.301	609.149	598.522	39

Source Hellenic Statistical Authority (2021)

2.1 Research Methodology

The central purpose of a research study is to assemble and evaluate data having as a view the examination of a specific issue (Mills et al., 2017). Therefore, the main aim of this paper is to examine whether tourists have a photographic image while visiting Halkidiki after the pandemic COVID-19 and what they think this image is. More specifically the study undertaken had to answer the following questions:

What is the photographic image that tourists form in their minds when visiting Halkidiki?

How does a photographic image contribute to a sustainable tourist development?

Is there an increase in the display of photos from tourist destinations, in the COVID-19 and in the post COVID-19 era, due to the greater use of the internet?

How influential are photographs for traveling in the post-COVID-19 era?

In order to achieve information on the above research questions, a quantitative survey was undertaken with the use of questionnaires to the visitors. The questionnaire was precisely planned, semi-organized, and opened to confirm its efficiency and to guarantee that the participants are able to express their point of view. The quantitative research contained 30 questions. The data collected were statistically examined with the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0. During designing the questionnaire, the concerns of the local society, those of the authorities and the stakeholders along with similar other studies published in journals were taken into account. The socioeconomic status, travel information, photographic image management, analysis of the crisis that emerged from pandemic COVID-19, and the effectiveness of photographic image in the post COVID-19 era were covered in the questionnaire.

The survey was conducted online between February and March 2021.118 questionnaires were collected of the total of 560. The sample could have been admittedly larger, but many people refused to participate in the (rather lengthy) survey due to lack of time. Despite the random selection of participants, the sample includes representatives from a wide range of socio-demographic groups thus, selection bias has been avoided.

The central object of the present research is concentrated on visitors' attitudes, behaviors, and impressions of Halkidiki's photographic image. The quantitative research is characterized as primary, since these were the first data which were collected. It is also characterized as descriptive and cross-cutting as it aims to describe the perceptions of visitors according to the photographic image of Halkidiki.

2.2 Results

Findings of the quantitative research.

A main finding from the questionnaire was that most of the people visiting Halkidiki are aged between 36 and 55 compared to younger people who visit Halkidiki less. More specifically, 48% were aged between 36 and 45, while the age group 46–55 corresponds to 26% of the total visitors.

Moreover, Halkidiki is a family and recurring destination since a significant percentage of respondents (78%) had visited Halkidiki more than three times and 77% had visited Halkidiki mainly for entertainment after the encouragement from friends at a rate of 82%.

In addition, 96% of the visitors believe that the contributing factor for choosing Halkidiki is the sun and the sea and 78% the natural environment. However, 61% of the visitors have been affected while choosing a destination by the pictures of the sightseeing.

What is important to mention is that 74% of the respondents consider that Halkidiki has clear touristic photography, whereas 56% identify Halkidiki by standard touristic photographs rather than artistic traveling ones.

Thirty-one percent of the respondents are satisfied by Halkidiki's pictures, 15% highly satisfied, and 35% are moderately satisfied. Twenty-five percent of the travelers believe that there is a plethora of online photographic pictures of Halkidiki and 35% consider that there are many photographic pictures featuring Halkidiki. Still, 28% of the visitors replicate moderately these pictures online and 27% do not replicate any pictures.

An aspect which should be underlined is that travelers' percentages are shared in relation to the response of the real picture compared to the one having in mind before visiting Halkidiki. In particular, 28% of the travelers believe that photographic pictures correspond in a great extent to reality, while 29% reflect that they correspond in a big extent and 29% believe that they correspond to a moderate extent.

An interesting factor that travelers consider regarding the photographic image of Halkidiki is the clean and sandy beaches (61%), the mountain and sea combination (48%), and the natural beauty (56%). Traditional villages are considered enough interesting about the creation of a photographic image for 35% of the travelers as well gastronomy and cultural and archeological sites accordingly in 32 and 26%.

Finally, the dominating elements in the photographic image of Halkidiki are the sea as it was chosen by 93% of the travelers and natural environment in 53%.

Twenty-six percent of the travelers have been mentally and financially affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and 35% of the travelers have been moderately affected which led them to stop traveling in 65%. A quite big percentage of 39% feels impatient observing pictures of a destination after the COVID-19 pandemic and 36% feels concerned. Seven percent of the travelers who did not stop traveling choose destinations close to nature (62%) which offer beautiful photographic images and lack of overcrowding. Following the end of the pandemic, 82% of the respondents desire to return to the destination mainly accompanied by family (64%) and friends (39%) and stop traveling virtually.

The photographic image in the post-COVID-19 era affects 39% of the respondents on the decision-making on traveling and 51% are thinking that they might be affected.

Below there is a depiction of the mean prices and the standard deviation of the travelers' opinion regarding the photographic image of Halkidiki (Table 1).

According to Table 2 and Chart 1, mean price 2,63 and standard deviation 1,05 is apparent that Halkidiki's travelers are moderately and highly satisfied by the projection of photographic picture of the area. In other words, tourists claim that they are moderately and highly satisfied with the promotion of Halkidiki, through the photographic images on the internet.

Moreover, according to the mean and the standard deviation of Table 3 and Chart 2 is highlighted by the visitors that there is an abundance of online pictures of Halkidiki. There are many photographic images of Halkidiki on the internet, through which travelers can observe the beauty of the place.

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Table 1 Respondents' Profile—socio-demographic information

Demographics		Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	47
	Female	53
Age	18–25	3
	26–30	3
	31–35	9
	36–45	48
	46–55	26
	56–65	6
	>65	5
Country of Residence	Greece	91
	Europe	7
	Outside Europe	2
Education	Primary–Junior high School	2
	Senior High school	12
	College University	40
	Postgraduate studies MSc	42
	Ph.D. Doctorate degree	4
Total income	Up to 20.000€	48
	20.001–30.000€	25
	30.001–40.000€	13
	More than 40.001€	14
Employment status	Unemployed	8
	Employed	79
	Retired	8
	University Student	5

Source Survey data

Table 2 Mean and standard deviation on the traveler's satisfaction from the projection of the photographic image

	How satisfied are you with the projection of photographic images of Halkidiki?
Mean	2,63
Standard deviation	1,05

Source Survey data

Chart 1 Mean and standard deviation on the traveler's satisfaction from the projection of the photographic image. *Source* Survey data
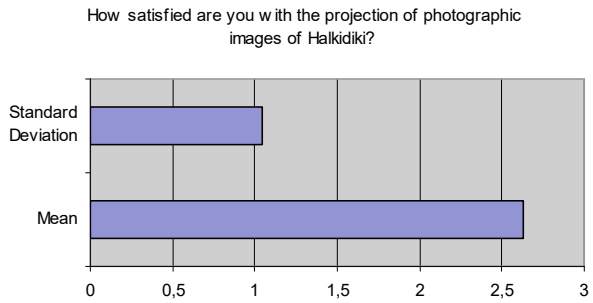
How satisfied are you with the projection of photographic images of Halkidiki?

Table 3 Mean and standard deviation regarding the plethora of online photographic images about the destination of Halkidiki

	Is there a plethora of photographic images on the internet about the destination of Halkidiki?
Mean	2,31
Standard deviation	1,06

Source Survey data

Is there a plethora of photographic images on the internet about the destination of Halkidiki?
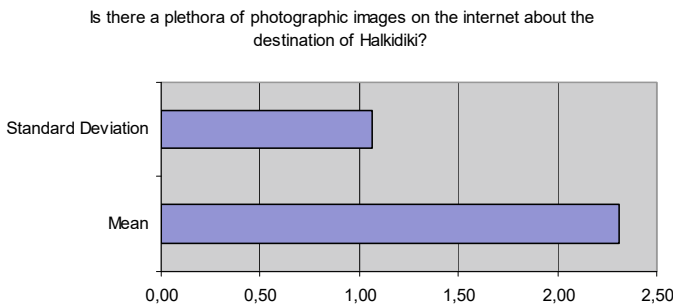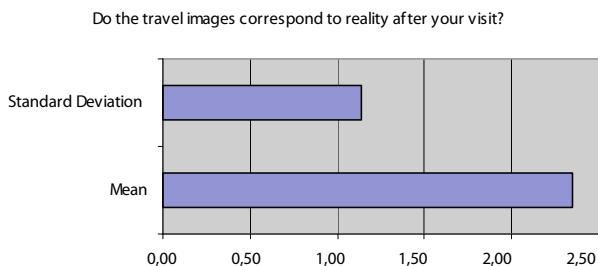

Chart 2 Mean and standard deviation concerning the plethora of photographic images on the internet about the destination of Halkidiki. *Source* Survey data

Simultaneously, existing pictures about the destination of Halkidiki correspond highly to reality compared to the pictures visitors were imagining before traveling to Halkidiki. That is, the photos of Halkidiki as presented on the internet are related to reality. This is ascertained by the tourists after their visit to the place. This is depicted in Table 4 and Chart 3 according to the mean and the standard deviation.

A propos the pictures' reproduction on social media the visitors tend to reproduce them from «enough» to «not at all». It is fact that there is not much interest from visitors to reproduce the photos they take on social media. I think this is related to the character of each person and not to the area one visits. This is shown in Table 5 and Chart 4 according to the mean and the standard deviation.

Table 4 Mean and standard deviation concerning the travel images correspond to reality after the visit

	Do the travel images correspond to reality after your visit?
Mean	2,35
Standard deviation	1,14

Source Survey data

Do the travel images correspond to reality after your visit?

Chart 3 Mean and standard deviation concerning the travel images correspond to reality after the visit. *Source* Survey data

Table 5 Mean and standard deviation for the reproducing of photos on social media

	Are you reproducing the photos you have collected on social media?
Mean	3,25
Standard deviation	1,37

Source Survey data

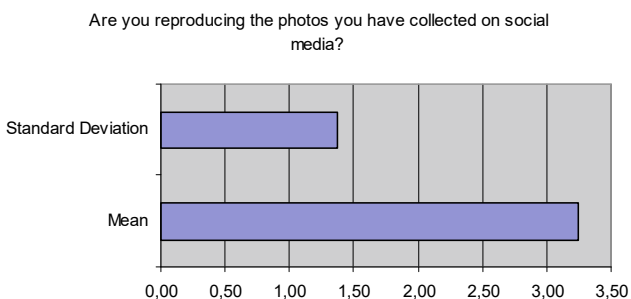Are you reproducing the photos you have collected on social media?

Chart 4 Mean and standard deviation for reproducing photos on social media. *Source* Survey data

Continuing, as regards the evaluation of the factors about the creation of the photographic picture of Halkidiki the information are listed on Tables 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 and in Charts 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 and concern the mean and standard deviation of the factors.

Table 6 Mean and standard deviation for the creation of photographic image by clean and sandy beaches

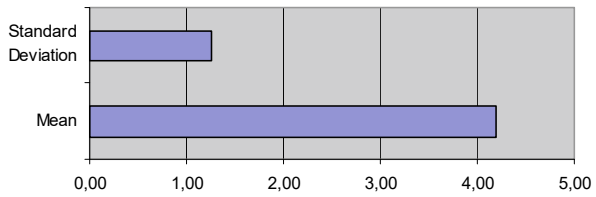|	Rate the following sights that create the photographic image of Halkidiki on a scale of 1 (indifferent)–5 (very interesting). [Clean and sandy beaches]
Mean	4,19
Standard deviation	1,26

Source Survey data

Table 7 Mean and standard deviation for the creation of photographic image by the traditional villages

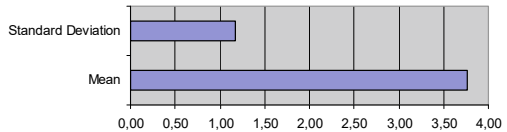|	Rate the following sights that create the photographic image of Halkidiki on a scale of 1 (indifferent)–5 (very interesting). [The traditional villages]
Mean	3,77
Standard deviation	1,17

Source Survey data

Table 8 Mean and standard deviation for the creation of photographic image by the combination of mountain and sea

	Rate the following sights that create the photographic image of Halkidiki on a scale of 1 (indifferent)–5 (very interesting). [The combination of mountain and sea]
Mean	3,93
Standard deviation	1,30

Source Survey data

Table 9 Mean and standard deviation for the creation of photographic image by the natural beauty

	Rate the following sights that create the photographic image of Halkidiki on a scale of 1 (indifferent)–5 (very interesting). [Natural beauty]
Mean	4,19
Standard deviation	1,16

Source Survey data

Table 10 Mean and standard deviation for the creation of photographic image by cultural and archeological attractions

	Rate the following sights that create the photographic image of Halkidiki on a scale of 1 (indifferent)–5 (very interesting). [Cultural and archeological attractions]
Mean	3,53
Standard deviation	1,22

Source Survey data

Table 11 Mean and standard deviation for the creation of photographic image by gastronomy

	Rate the following sights that create the photographic image of Halkidiki on a scale of 1 (indifferent)–5 (very interesting). [Gastronomy]
Mean	3,58
Standard deviation	1,29

Source Survey data

Chart 5 Mean and standard deviation for the creation of photographic image by clean and sandy beaches. *Source* Survey data

Rate the following sights that create the photographic image of Halkidiki on a scale of 1 (indifferent) to 5 (very interesting). [Clean and sandy beaches]

Chart 6 Mean and standard deviation for the creation of photographic image by the traditional villages. *Source* Survey data

Rate the following sights that create the photographic image of Halkidiki on a scale of 1 (indifferent) to 5 (very interesting). [The traditional villages]

Chart 7 Mean and standard deviation for the creation of photographic image by the combination of mountain and sea. *Source* Survey data

Rate the following sights that create the photographic image of Halkidiki on a scale of 1 (indifferent) to 5 (very interesting). [The combination of mountain and sea]
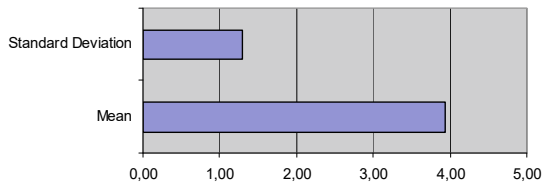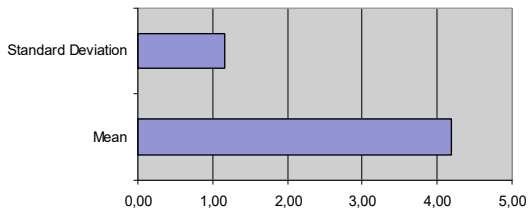
Chart 8 Mean and standard deviation for the creation of photographic image by the natural beauty. *Source* Survey data

Rate the following sights that create the photographic image of Halkidiki on a scale of 1 (indifferent) to 5 (very interesting). [Natural beauty]
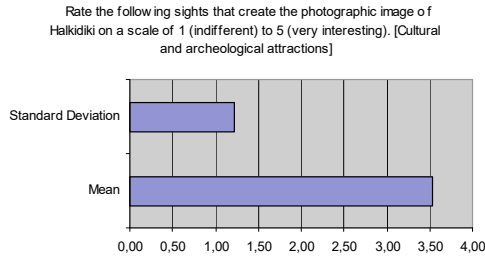
Rate the following sights that create the photographic image of
Halkidiki on a scale of 1 (indifferent) to 5 (very interesting). [Cultural
and archeological attractions]

Chart 9 Mean and standard deviation for the creation of photographic image by cultural and archeological attractions. *Source* Survey data

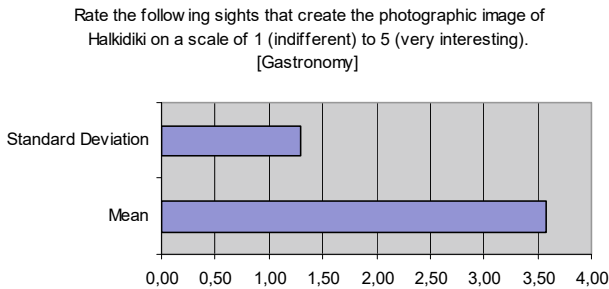Rate the following sights that create the photographic image of
Halkidiki on a scale of 1 (indifferent) to 5 (very interesting).
[Gastronomy]

Chart 10 Mean and standard deviation for the creation of photographic image by gastronomy. *Source* Survey data

More specifically, travelers believe that the photographic image of Halkidiki is very much related to clean and sandy beaches. In other words, there is a great interest from tourists to photograph the beaches of the area, as it seems in Table 6 and Chart 5

Moreover, the traditional villages have also rated quite highly in the list. This means that the traditional villages of the Halkidiki Peninsula, create a high degree of images in the minds of tourists, according to Table 7 and Chart 6.

This combination of mountain and sea is of a moderate interest to visitors for the creation of photographic image. This can be deduced from the results in Table 8 and Chart 7.

An important photographic image for tourists is created by the natural environment, which follows the clean and sandy beaches. Therefore, the natural environment is high in the preferences of the visitors for the capture of the photographic images, as it seems in Table 9 and in Chart 8

According to Table 10 and Chart 9, the cultural and archeological sights are rated moderate in the list. There is a normal interest of visitors to get to know the history and culture of the place and to capture them in photographic images, as memories.

Latest element that inspire travelers to portray photographically is the gastronomy. There are several traditional foods of the area which can inspire visitors to photograph

them against the backdrop of the sea or the mountain. This is shown in Table 10 and Chart 9 according to the mean and the standard deviation.

On the tables and charts above it is clearly depicted that travelers consider the sea and the natural beauty of a place as very interesting elements to the creation of a photographic image.

Continuing below, it is clear that visitors have been greatly affected financially and psychologically by the pandemic COVID-19 according to Table 12 and Chart 11. Humanity has been experiencing this difficult situation for a long time and this affects people in various fields.

One area affected by the pandemic COVID-19 is travel. Many travelers stopped traveling largely due to the prevalence of the pandemic COVID-19 and this can be deduced from the results in Table 13 and Chart 12.

Table 12 Mean and standard deviation showing the financial and psychological impacts of COVID-19 to visitors

	I have been significantly affected, financially and psychologically, by the COVID-19 pandemic
Mean	2,64
Standard deviation	1,17

Source Survey data

Chart 11 Mean and standard deviation showing the financial and psychological impacts of COVID-19 to visitors. *Source* Survey data

I have been significantly affected, financially and psychologically, by the COVID-19 pandemic
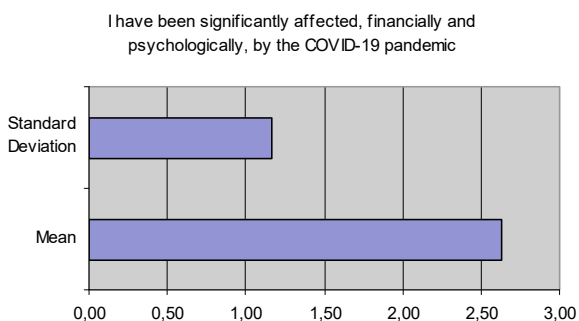
Table 13 Mean and standard deviation regarding the avoidance of travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic

	I stopped traveling because of the pandemic COVID-19
Mean	1,69
Standard deviation	1,16

Source Survey data

Chart 12 Mean and standard deviation regarding the avoidance of travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Source* Survey data

I stopped traveling because of the pandemic COVID-19
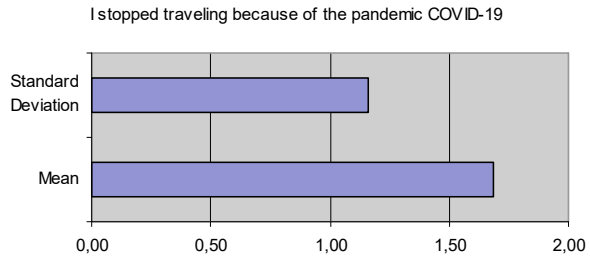
2.3 Discussion

In this research, it is significant to mention that tourists visiting Halkidiki belong to the age group 36–45 coming from Greece. At the rate of 42% are MSc postgraduates. Their total income varies up to 20.000€ as all of them are employed. These demographics highlight the need of finding ways and methods to serve young and educated tourists who are having holidays on a budget.

In this research, tourists claim that there is a clear photographic image of Halkidiki which is based not only on clean and sandy beaches but also on the natural beauty.

Consequently, the photographic images tourists consider when visiting Halkidiki are related to natural beauty (56%) and clean and sandy beaches.

Moreover, photographic images can contribute to a destination's sustainable touristic development as long as they adopt a holistic approach. Also, tourists have the tendency to revisit destinations which have offered them sightseeing satisfaction as well as sufficient services. Specifically, the characteristics mentioned above are the ones that are mainly promoted on social media but also generally as online images. Thus, all the involved parties in the marketing industry of a destination should have the ability to provide photographic images that reinforce a person's wish to visit this destination and as a result to produce a holistic encouraging photographic image of it. Also, an agency for the Management of Tourist Destinations, which will be exclusively responsible for finding new ways and methods to promote the photographic image of a city, should be immediately established. Above all, destinations should aim to the formation of positive images which in turn influence tourists through the features they describe. To achieve a unique destination photographic image that occupies tourists' mind and influences their decision to visit, destination managers need to communicate and cooperate with each other.

A way to achieve larger projection would be a greater existence of online pictures not only on internet but also on social media as just 36% of the visitors believe that there are just many of them.

The projection of photographic pictures should be emphasized in order to the destination of Halkidiki to attract more visitors as most of them are affected by the photographic image regarding traveling in the post-COVID-19 era. Thirty-nine percent of the participants claim that they are affected, while 51% argue that they might be affected.

There are several ways to improve the image of Halkidiki in order to maintain and expand the market as the stable and reliable cooperation of all the members of the local community—which is a great priority in response to the existing problems—and the awareness among the locals and the visitors through internet and photographs. Moreover, what is taken as a necessity is a clear definition that separates the area from other existing competitive touristic regions as to achieve an increase on the tourists and simultaneously to be seen as an alluring destination. As a result, the region will expect a financial enhancement and growth.

In conclusion, tourists:

Form photographic images related to the natural beauty and clean and sandy beaches.

Believe that there is a clear photographic image and this image reflects a touristic city.

Consider that the projection of Halkidiki through Internet and through photographs contribute and affect their decision to visit the place.

Were significantly affected financially and psychologically by the pandemic COVID-19 and stopped traveling. But they hope to continue traveling after the pandemic with real visits and not virtual visits.

Nevertheless, some limitations are observed on this research, which are worth mentioning. Firstly, the categories of individuals should all be taken into consideration as to have a coherent understanding of the city such as members of the public sectors and of all ages, of professional background and of several socioeconomic statuses. The second limitation is the collected sample especially when there is diversion on the level of knowledge and education. Finally, the random choice of respondents and their limited time should also be taken into account.

In the future, visitors' key features are required to be entirely explored, particularly these who are related to the environmental characteristics of a journey. An effort to continue the present study by leading additional research could be proved beneficial for the decision-makers in the tourism sector. In order to appeal customers and increase their contentment, the produced information as well as the understanding of the requested indicators are important requirements for the inspection and enhancement of the tourism offer of a place. Also, research should be undertaken systematically in order to collect statistical data on a yearly basis; data relevant to the photographic image of a destination to study its progress.

2.4 Conclusions and Recommendations

The aim of this research is to create and offer information on management and preserve and attain a growth in tourist visits in Halkidiki. The literature review revealed that photographic image is wide, vague, and challenging to outline as notions, opinions and tourists' feelings, market players and the public need to be taken into consideration. The results of this research confirm that the most important image of Halkidiki consists of its clean and sandy beaches along with natural beauty.

Both features are of major importance in view of the local market. An increase in advertising these two images by creating an agency for the Management of Tourist Destinations would create chances for management to achieve a growth in tourists.

Respecting the statements above it is recommended that:

– In order to support detailed qualities of the city, such as the natural beauty and the clean environment severe efforts should be completed. It is also significant to mention the traditional villages, cultural and archeological attractions and the gastronomy with an effort to create interest into diverse groups (visitors, tourism specialists, investors, citizens, and others).
– Attempts that can be adapted to tourist products should be created in order to facilitate the needs and desires of the sea and nature-loving tourists (use of the multiple clean and sandy beaches of unusual beauty which provide a large quantity of visual pictures, creating natural trails in the green landscape, arranging tours in traditional villages as, for example, the village of Aristoteli at Stagira and likewise tasting local gastronomy in traditional restaurants such as mount Athos eggplant salad, fresh mussels and fish, traditional pies either savory or sweet without filo, chicken with trahana, kid in the oven, kritamo, mount Athos cod, and other regional specialities).
– Opportunities should arise to inspire inventiveness and entrepreneurship among young citizens of the area that are involved and educated in Tourism.

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